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Hopes and disappointments: regime change and support for democracy after the Arab Uprisings

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ABSTRACT

What happened to citizens’ support for democracy after the Arab Uprisings? Did the support increase, stay the same, or actually decrease after all the protests, regime changes, and reforms? Which theories of citizens’ political attitudes best explain these dynamics? Analysing two waves of the Arab Barometer surveys and employing an item-response method that offers methodological improvements compared to previous studies, this article finds that support for democracy actually decreased in countries that successfully overthrew their dictators during the Uprisings. Following the arguments that emphasize the rational evaluations of citizens, it argues that in countries that had an experience with a freer political system, such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen, challenges of democratization and the poor political and economic performances of the governments left citizens disappointed. Despite the hopes that people had at the onset of the Uprisings, the disappointments generated by the unmet expectations eventually led to a decline in support for democracy.

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Introduction

After the Arab Uprisings and the fall of the dictators, how did the Arab public perceive democracy? Was there an increase in support for democracy, or was there in fact a decrease due to citizens’ disappointments with the freer and relatively more democratic political systems that ensued? In this article, we contribute to the literature on support for democracy in the Arab world1 and provide a picture of the changing post-Uprisings levels of support for democracy.

Our article makes both theoretical and methodological contributions to the topic of regime support in the Arab world. Theoretically, we argue that different trajectories that countries followed after the Uprisings led to different patterns of change in their average levels of support for democracy. We find that, while the region-wide average level of support remained the same, experience with a freer political system did not lead to a higher support for democracy among the citizens. In fact, countries that successfully
overthrew their dictators (Tunisia, Egypt, and Yemen) experienced a sharp decline in their support for democracy afterwards. Among the countries that experienced no regime change, on the other hand, support for democracy remained the same or even increased.

We argue that the high hopes for political change formed at the onset of the Uprisings and the bad experience with democracy following the regime change are two major drivers of the changing attitudes towards democracy in those countries. The decline in support for democracy in countries that experienced a regime change is due to the poor performance of the transitional governments, which led to disappointments and shaped citizens’ negative beliefs about the consequences of democracy. This suggests that support for democracy is to an extent a function of the political environment.

Methodologically, we employ an item-response model when estimating citizens’ support for democracy. This method has three advantages over the commonly used approaches. First, treating support for democracy as a latent, unobserved variable, the method better reflects findings from political behaviour studies that most citizens may not in fact have strong preferences on political issues. Second, the method gives greater weight to questions that better separate people who support and oppose democracy. Third, it estimates data from all respondents, including those who answer only a few questions, thus discarding less information.

The Arab Uprisings: contextual background and research question

Three years after the region-wide protests started, the Arab world had witnessed four authoritarian breakdowns, two democratic transitions, three civil wars, and multiple coup attempts, along with the resilience of many authoritarian regimes. Some of the hopes many had shared earlier in the Uprisings failed to materialize. Most dictators survived, and in the few countries that successfully removed their dictators, citizens were faced with the challenges of managing domestic conflicts. Unsurprisingly, the Uprisings have drawn serious scholarly attention; yet, with only a few exceptions, individual-level dynamics remain understudied. Most importantly, less is known about how the Uprisings might change citizens’ attitudes towards democracy across countries.

How did support for democracy change in each country in the years following the Uprisings? On the individual-level, several insightful studies of the post-Uprisings period on support for democracy have looked at state regulations of religion, support for sharia, and socioeconomic factors, and used simple descriptive statistics or focused on a subset of the Arab population. Robbins finds that support for democracy declined in countries like Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia that failed to make substantial democratic progress despite some initial democratic openings triggered by the mass protests. Similarly, Spierings shows that support for democracy declined in countries like Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia that failed to make substantial democratic progress despite some initial democratic openings triggered by the mass protests. We build and expand on these studies by exploring how support for democracy changed across countries based on their experiences after the Uprisings. We follow Spierings and use a variety of methodological tools to provide stronger evidence for variations between countries. In particular, we investigate how the level of support for democracy changed in the countries that experienced regime transformation in order to understand if there is a connection between regime change and regime support.
Macro- and micro-level determinants of support for democracy

The existing literature on attitudes towards political regimes proposes several macro- and micro-level explanations for why individuals support or oppose democracy. Macro-level explanations focusing on culture posit that a society’s culture or religion shapes citizens’ preferences. Classical works following this line of argument propose that Islam is incompatible with democracy. However, subsequent studies have challenged this argument as they did not find the supposed negative relationships between Islam and support for democracy or showed that the association is more complex.

The second category of macro-level explanations focuses on social capital and argues that cooperative social interactions breed trust among individuals that in turn facilitates more civic, participative, and pro-democratic orientations. In the Arab world, evidence on the role of social capital is rather mixed. Whereas some studies find a positive or varying association between attitudes towards regimes and emancipative social capital, others demonstrate that social capital in nondemocratic settings may lead to support for authoritarian rule.

The third category suggests that socioeconomic development generates values that lead to a stronger commitment to democracy. Higher levels of education, urbanization, and industrialization make people to be more appreciative of pluralism and political participation. The existing works tend to support the socioeconomic argument in the Arab world while still highlighting the nuances.

The fourth category of arguments suggest that regime type and citizens’ culture and attitudes tend to converge over time, implying that democracy leads to a more democratic values system. Studies examining support for democracy in Muslim-majority countries put different spins on this argument. Some find that people living in more democratic countries with broader religious freedoms are more supportive of democracy. Others, in contrast, argue that it is precisely because Muslim countries do not have democracy that Muslims desire democracy.

Micro-level explanations of support for democracy, on the other hand, focus on more dynamic factors, claiming that citizens’ political attitudes are shaped by their rational evaluations of political and economic performance of governments. In Muslim-majority contexts, several studies have provided evidence for the association between government performance and citizens’ trust in institutions or support for the regime.

Expectations from democracy and their impact on support for democracy

Following the logic behind micro-level explanations, we argue that citizens’ expectations of a political regime shape their support for it. Furthermore, citizens’ rational calculations based on their experiences and performance of the government play a role in the re-evaluation of such expectations. In the post-Uprisings Arab world, citizens went through a re-evaluation of their expectations of democracy based on the hopes they had formed at the onset of the Uprisings and their experiences with the political, social, and economic changes that followed the Uprisings.

Studies indicate that the Arab public evaluates democracy based on what it presents to the people. How well democracy provides political, social, and economic well-being
to the people – the potential consequences of democracy – shapes its value in the eyes of the public. For example, Benstead found in the pre-Uprisings context that if Arab citizens believe that democracy opens up political and economic opportunities, does not jeopardize their security, and preserves the authenticity of their culture, then they are likely to be supportive of a democratic regime. Similarly, Hoffman argues that members of religious groups which benefit from a prospective democratization tend to support it more. Therefore, people are more supportive of democracy if they believe that it would have positive consequences on their life.

Authoritarian breakdowns occasionally come with significant political, social, and economic transformations which can have an impact on the assessment of democracy. As Mishler and Rose observed in the context of post-Communist Europe, citizens’ support for democracy is affected by their hopes and expectations during the transition. Since transitions are uncertain, citizens’ beliefs about how capable democracy is in meeting their political, economic, cultural, and security concerns affect their support for democracy.

While insightful, these studies mainly capture the determinants of support for democracy at a specific time point and do not provide much insights into changes over time. Studies argued that citizens in transitioning contexts tend to be affected more by their perceptions of the governments’ performance. Since they have a point of comparison in the old regimes, they define their support for the new regime based on their experiences in the new context. Therefore, a regime’s performance in the early years of a transition affects individuals’ perception of what the regime can provide for them and, in return, their support for the new regime.

When faced with a new environment, citizens may update their prior beliefs or alter their prior expectations. These expectations about the environment affect their subjective evaluations of the new conditions. Faced with an objectively similar situation, an individual who has higher expectations may judge the situation to be more negative than one who has lower expectations. This perceived discrepancy between individuals’ expectations and what they receive may lead to relative deprivation and disappointments. Similarly, in the context of support for democracy in a transitioning country, high expectations about the future of the political system may lead to lower support in the absence of good performance.

Hopes and disappointments after the Uprisings and the changing levels of support

The Arab Uprisings sowed the seeds of optimism in the region about the future. As Teti, Abbott, and Cavatorta report, surveys from Egypt and Tunisia showed respondents were overwhelmingly confident that the Uprisings would bring positive consequences. Not only in these two countries, the protest movements energized the masses all over the region and created an environment of hope.

Today, we know in retrospect that the countries that moved away from an authoritarian rule actually experienced a period of instability accompanied by worsened economic, political, and security conditions. Some of the high expectations formed at the beginning of the Uprisings failed to materialize. The countries that successfully overthrew their dictators had to face the uncertainties of democratic transitions due to the poor economic and political performance of their governments. While they might no longer be authoritarian countries, they were not consolidated democracies.
either and they did not provide their citizens with a stable environment that would enable them to fully appreciate a democratic system.

Therefore, we predict that these unmet expectations produced resentments with the transitioning system and doubts about the consequences of democracy. The subsequent disappointments about what the regime change brought led to a decreasing support for democracy. Consequently, we expect that support for democracy should decrease in countries that experienced a regime change because of the poor performance of the new regimes in meeting citizens’ high expectations and because of the citizens’ increasing negative perceptions about what democracy brings. Yet, we do not expect to see such a decline in countries that did not experience a similar situation.

This is in line with the argument stating that citizens in nondemocratic nations might have idealistic perceptions and expectations of democracy.43 When these citizens, who have no experience with democracy yet have high hopes for it, encounter the reality of a transition, they may become disillusioned when their expectations are not met and alter their views of democracy negatively in accordance with that experience.

In this regard, our argument is distinct from Robbins who claims that support for democracy remained more or less stable all over the region44 and from Mazaheri and Monroe who propose that change in the support for democracy is observed specifically among a subset of the population, namely the small business owners.45 Instead, we propose that dynamics of the Uprisings and the different trajectories that the countries followed shaped the variation of support across the region. We build our argument on an insightful recent study, in which Spierings showed that raised expectations and democratic disillusionment shaped changes in the support for democracy in the Arab world.46 With a different methodological approach (see in the following section), we support most of his findings and contribute to this burgeoning literature on support for democracy after the Arab Uprisings.

**Data and methods**

We analysed two waves of the Arab Barometer (AB) surveys, each designed to be nationally representative of the voting age population in each country. Broadly speaking, Wave 2 coincided with the beginning of the Uprisings and Wave 3 was fielded after the early stages of the Uprisings had ended. Since one of our main interests is in comparing Waves 2 and 3, we focus on countries that are included in both waves. Several countries, including ones with major protests such as Libya and Morocco,47 have to be excluded from our analysis because these countries are missing from either or both of the two waves.48

Since Arab Barometer surveys did not interview the same individuals in these waves, our data are not panel data and it is not possible to capture individual-level changes using quantitative analysis. Consequently, to detect the changes in support for democracy, we carry out a series of country-level analyses.

We compared changes in support for democracy across countries and waves. Comparisons within and between countries are justified because we used country-level aggregate scores and because the surveys are nationally representative.49 We also used synthetic control method to illustrate that there is a significant difference between countries that experienced regime change and those that did not. To further test the validity of our arguments and rule out alternative explanations, we carried out additional analyses using multiple waves of the World Values Survey and the Wave 1 of Arab Barometer as well.
Dependent and independent variables

Studies analysing support for democracy have long debated how to conceptualize and measure “the concept of support”. As democracy has many layers, citizens’ support for it is also multi-faceted and difficult to measure. Surveys ask different questions about desirability, suitability, and preferability of democratic systems to capture both “diffuse” and “specific” support for democracy. As these different measures tend to produce slightly different levels of support, scholars have addressed this problem by combining several questions. As a recent example in the context of the Arab world, Teti, Abbott, and Cavatorta show the gap between different questions of support for democracy and argue that the differences should be “conceived as facets of a more complex relation to democracy”.

For our dependent variable we followed a similar approach of creating an index from multiple questions in order to capture these multiple facets. We also joined studies that treat political attitude as a latent variable, employing a Bayesian item-response method (Bayesian IRT) to produce a latent score of support for democracy. This method treats support for democracy as an unobserved trait, and this trait is what influences the individual’s responses to the questions related to different aspects of support for democracy. As such, rather than focusing on specific aspects of support such as suitability or desirability, we test for a broader notion of support for democracy. To produce the latent variable, we dichotomized five indicators of support for democracy (presented in Supplementary Materials, Table A2) and employed the 2-parameter normal ogive function. The resulting product is a score for each respondent that represents the respondent’s latent level of support for democracy.

This IRT method allows us to compare levels of support for democracy across different countries and waves. At the same time, creating an index and employing the IRT method offer three advantages relative to the more conventional method of presenting only descriptive statistics for each item.

First, by treating support for democracy as a latent variable, the method fits better with the political behaviour findings that most citizens might not have stable and consistent political attitudes. This, in turn, means that relying on a single question to infer attitudes could be problematic.

Second, the method automatically weights the questions such that greater weights are assigned to questions that better discriminate between people who strongly support and strongly reject democracy. This means that we do not need to assume that all the questions have equally strong relationships to the latent trait of support for democracy.

Third, Bayesian IRT handles sparse data well. Unlike the more traditional methods that discard respondents unless they answer the full set of questions, IRT provides an estimate of the latent support for democracy for respondents who answered at least one question. Discarded information is therefore kept to a minimum.

With these, our method diverges from the two studies that focus on a similar question of support for democracy after the Arab Uprisings. First, the IRT method provides the aforementioned improvements. Therefore, it is more justifiable to do comparisons across waves and countries. Second, unlike Robbins and Spierings, we do not rely on a single question but rather create an index of democratic support. The nuances in our findings compared to these studies, therefore, mainly originate from these methodological improvements.
In order to measure citizens’ expectations from a democratic regime, which is our independent variable of interest, we used four questions that asked respondents to evaluate economic, political, security, and cultural consequences of a democratic regime. We employed the average of these four questions as an indicator of the respondent’s perception of the consequences of democracy.

**Results: change in support for democracy after the Uprisings**

Using the support for democracy indicator we produced, we tested the country-level changes in support for democracy. Figure 1 presents how the levels of support changed between 2011 and 2013 in the countries of interest. Three patterns can be inferred from the figure:

First, across the nine countries examined, the overall level of support for democracy did not significantly change between Waves 2 and 3. Even though there seems to be a slight decline, it is not statistically significant. Second, three countries (Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen) saw their support for democracy decline within the two years after the Uprisings started. This decline does not mean that citizens in these countries do not support democracy anymore. There is still a relatively high level of support, and these countries’ average scores are still higher than some others in Wave 3 (see Figure 4). Third, the level of support for democracy either remained the same (Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon) or increased (Algeria, Palestine, and Sudan) in countries where the Uprisings did not result in a major regime change.

These findings do not conform to the macro-level determinants of support for democracy. Social capital, socioeconomic development, and political institutions, all key factors in the macro-level explanations, suggest different patterns of change (see [Figure 1. Change in country-level support for democracy (W3–W2).](#))
Supplementary Materials, Table A12). Low levels of interpersonal trust and low- to mid-income levels with slow growth, all observed across the region with minor exceptions, would predict that support for democracy would move in a similar trajectory across countries. Arguments about political institutions that suggest convergence between political system and opinion would suggest an increase in support for the countries with an experience of regime change. However, none of these patterns match our observed country-level changes.

Micro-level determinants, on the other hand, are more successful in explaining the trends in democratic support, especially in countries that experienced a transition to a more democratic regime. Egypt’s, Tunisia’s, and Yemen’s negative early experience with democracy following the authoritarian breakdowns led to disappointments and, subsequently, a decrease in support for democracy. Figure 2 illustrates the changes in the performance evaluations and perceived consequences of democracy across the countries studied.

In Egypt and Tunisia citizens’ evaluations of the economic and political performance significantly declined from 2011 to 2013. In each of these cases more than 85% of the respondents thought that their economy performed poorly and more than 75% of the respondents believed that their government’s performance was inadequate. These negative early experiences with the new regime type changed citizens’ perceptions about the consequences of democracy and, in turn, led to a decline in support for democracy in Egypt and Tunisia. Yemen exhibits neither lower performance evaluations nor more negative perceptions about consequences of democracy because of the country’s interrupted transition process. Further discussions in the following section explain these three cases in greater details.

Figure 2. Changes in the dynamic determinants (mean W3–W2).
Are the countries that experienced a regime change really distinct?

While we have shown that there are statistically significant changes in the support for democracy from 2011 to 2013, especially in the countries that experienced regime change, there needs to be a supplementary analysis to substantiate our findings. In our argument, we propose that the regime change following the Uprisings is the main factor, or the “treatment”, separating the two sets of countries. For that, our approach follows the intuition of a difference-in-difference design. In order to more formally show the impact of regime change, we employ the synthetic control method.61

We combine the three “treated” countries (Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen) into one treated unit. The other six countries that did not experience a regime change (Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan) are placed in the “donor pool” from which the synthetic control would be constructed. As predictors in the synthetic control creation, we use several country-level variables such as GDP per capita, GDP growth, unemployment rate, and population size.

Figure 3 presents the paths of the “treated” countries (solid line) and the synthetic control (dashed line). As can be seen, while the trajectory of the synthetic control is relatively flat, the trajectory of the “treated” countries has a negative slope. This provides further evidence that the “treated” countries indeed experienced a decline in their levels of support for democracy from 2011 to 2013 even when potentially relevant variables are taken into account.62

From hopes to disappointments

Why did support for democracy decline in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen between 2011 and 2013? The answer lies in the chaotic transition processes in these countries, which bred disappointments among the citizens and affected their perceptions of
the consequences of democracy. In Egypt the seeds of disappointments were sown early. Following then-president Hosni Mubarak’s departure in early 2011, the military was hesitant to leave power to elected civilian officials. The first democratic parliamentary elections took place in November 2011, but the constitutional court dissolved the assembly in June 2012 just before the presidential election. Days after that, the judicial council banned some of the top candidates from running in the presidential election.

Amidst this turmoil, Egyptians elected Mohamed Morsi from the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood as president. In November 2012 Morsi issued a decree that gave himself broad powers, inviting considerable criticism. A new constitution was ratified in December 2012 with a very low turnout (32.9%), leaving its legitimacy seriously contested. In the meantime, the GDP per capita grew less than 1% annually and unemployment remained a significant issue. Even though the Uprisings had started with slogans promising economic development, the Egyptian economy remained far from delivering the expected leap forward.

The transition process created a more open and lively political space for Egyptians. However, politics remained under the shadow of the military while the economic conditions did not improve. For the average Egyptian who could compare the new and the old, even though there was now more political freedom, the country was not much better off than in the Mubarak era. According to an Egyptian intellectual, the politicians were far from changing things in the country and the parties did not have specific agendas on what to do after reaching power.63 Had there been more time for the democracy to consolidate, the situation could have improved. However, the military took over with a coup in July 2013, ending Egypt’s short experiment with democracy. The third wave of the Arab Barometer in Egypt was fielded in the midst of this chaotic process (just three months before the coup). This lack of positive experience with democracy and the resulting disappointment explain the decline in Egyptians’ support for democracy.

The situation was not very different in Tunisia. In the first free and fair elections in October 2011 Islamist Ennahda Party won the plurality of seats. Tunisian parties had a relatively balanced distribution between Islamists and secularists in the parliament and managed to form a cross-ideological coalition government.

However, in early 2013 the Ennahda-led government experienced a crisis. The constitution writing process went into a deadlock and several opposition parties withdrew from the parliament. While the internal security forces were still repressing protests, several armed factions from Libya entered Tunisia and carried out a number of terrorist attacks. Assassinations of two secular opposition leaders in February and July 2013 exacerbated the tension. According to the prime minister of the time, Ali Laarayedh, “the security crisis transformed into a political crisis” after the terrorist attacks and assassinations.64 During this crisis, two successive governments were forced to step down. The ensuing National Dialogue process probably saved Tunisia from a potential coup, such as occurred in Egypt.

The Tunisian economy did not improve either during this period. As did many others in Tunisia, a former minister claimed that “in 2011, the economic and security situation in the country was better than in 2014”.65 While economic development was once the strong suit of the Ben Ali regime, the democratization process did not have a positive impact on the economy as the local currency lost value, investments and tourism slowed down, and inflation remained high.
A former leader of Ettakatol, the leftist member of the coalition government, argues that they should have made both political and economic reforms at the same time, stating “we focused … too much on the political side and neglected the social and economic aspects.” Tunisian citizens’ reaction reflects this frustration with the economic situation: 88% of respondents in Wave 3 thought that the economy was bad or very bad compared to 72% in Wave 2.

In 2014 Tunisia adopted a new constitution and held its second free and fair elections. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see how the country has progressed despite a two-year delay to the new constitution and all the violence. In early 2013, however, when Wave 3 of the Arab Barometer was fielded in Tunisia, this hindsight was unavailable to the respondents. It is plausible that the early disappointment with democracy exemplified by high-profile assassinations, a stagnant economy, and a government crisis affected Tunisians’ evaluation of whether democracy was indeed the best course for the country.

The situation in Yemen was worse than the situations in Egypt and Tunisia. It took longer for Yemenis to overthrow Ali Abdullah Saleh than for their Tunisian and Egyptian counterparts to oust their dictators. He was also granted immunity and chose to stay in Yemen. Unlike the other two countries, Yemen could not hold a free, democratic election since only one candidate (Abd al-Rab Mansur al-Hadi, who was Saleh’s vice president) was on the ballot for the election. While the country was going through the pains of this transitional period, violence erupted due to Saleh’s resistance to stepping down and territorial conflicts between different groups. The Yemeni survey of the AB’s Wave 3 was fielded amidst this power vacuum, armed conflict, and the absence of a strong governmental body.

Despite the decline in support for democracy, our results do not show a negative perception on government performance. Due to conditions specific to Yemen that are related to Saleh’s removal, Yemen’s transitional government had to operate under Saleh’s influence and shadow. It is possible that Saleh’s continuing influence and power might shield Hadi’s government from the citizens’ more negative evaluations. In Tunisia and Egypt, the transitional government might have to face a more critical public because the public could see that there was a clearer break as the former dictators were gone.

Why, then, support for democracy still declined in Yemen? Yemenis were likely aware that this new system was not the same autocracy as before. Due to the presence of an “election” and a relatively more open political field, they probably perceived it as, at the very least, the beginning of a democracy. For example, there is a 16-percentage point increase from 2011 to 2013 among the Yemeni respondents who thought that they were able to criticize the government freely. But this newfound freedom, as the citizens later learned, did not necessarily mean prosperity or many other good things they thought would come along with democracy. There is a significant increase among the Yemeni citizens who cite stability and foreign interference as some of the major challenges that the country was facing after the Uprisings. This shows that citizens were concerned about new challenges that came with the new system; yet, were not directly under the government’s control. Because of this partial regime change with a government under the shadow of the old guard and the emerging challenges, the citizens lost hope for reform within a unified Yemen and disillusioned with democracy while not necessarily blaming the government.
We also see the effect of these diverging experiences of three countries on the magnitudes of decline in support for democracy in Table 1. For that, we calculated Cohen’s $d$ which measures the proportion of a country’s variance in the level of support for democracy that is due to the change across waves. Among the three countries that had a regime change Tunisia reflects the largest effect size which corresponds with having the clearest break from their past regime. Yemen, on the other hand, has the smallest effect size which highlights the uniqueness of Yemen as the case with the shortest experience with democracy, that was discussed previously.

While the declines of support for democracy in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen meet our expectations, the patterns of change in other countries that did not experience a regime change are interesting as well. Since the regimes remained the same, citizens in these countries did not have an experience with democracy; hence there was no opportunity to directly evaluate the performance of a democratic regime and update their beliefs about its consequences. As the citizens did not have a window to blame democracy, we expected their overall support to be relatively stable. However, while this expectation bore out in Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon, we see increased support for democracy in Algeria, Palestine, and Sudan.

There is one plausible explanation for this finding. It is possible that the increase was driven more by an opposition to the autocratic regimes than a glowing perception of the consequences of democracy. The three countries where support for democracy did not see much change are the ones with more open authoritarian regimes. While the regimes in Lebanon and Iraq are hardly democratic, they nonetheless exhibit some electoral features of a democracy. Jordan is a liberalized autocracy and King Abdullah initiated certain reforms to protect his regime after the Uprisings. Due to the declining faith in economic effectiveness of the regime during this period, the support for democracy could have declined in Jordan as well. However, King Abdullah was quick to take action and replaced the government only two weeks after the beginning of the protests and charged the new government with the responsibility of political reforms. These features in electoral Iraq and Lebanon and liberalized Jordan may have kept support for democracy stable in these countries.

The other three countries where support for democracy increased (Algeria, Palestine, and Sudan) are full authoritarian regimes, and the people had been yearning for democratization for decades. The absence of significant reforms in Algeria, Palestine, and Sudan, might bolster citizens’ opposition to their regimes and increased their push for democratization. However, this potential explanation requires further exploration in future research.

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<th>Table 1. Magnitude of change in support for democracy.</th>
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Are the declines in support for democracy a product of a euphoria?

In our analysis comparing the levels of support between 2011 and 2013, it is possible that the results are driven by the timing of our baseline levels in Wave 2 of Arab Barometer. Particularly, the citizens might have been euphorically optimistic about democracy in the early days of the Uprisings. Therefore, the declines in support in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen between 2011 and 2013 might have been a by-product of the euphoria that the peoples had in 2011.

To address this concern, we provide two pieces of supporting evidence. First, we run the same IRT models, with the inclusion of the Wave 1 of the Arab Barometer, which was conducted in 2006 and 2007.

Figure 4 presents the levels of support for democracy in each country from our IRT models on two (left) and three (right) waves. Visually, a euphoria would be represented by an increase in support for democracy from 2006 to 2011, followed by a decline or a return to normal from 2011 to 2013. However, none of the five countries included in all three waves (Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen) nor the overall levels of support show such a pattern. Particularly for Yemen, that is the only “treated” case included in all waves, we find that support for democracy is largely the same in 2007 and 2011, only to decline in 2013, which does not conform to the euphoria hypothesis.

Our second piece of supporting evidence comes from our analysis of Waves 4, 5, and 6 of the World Values Survey (WVS), which were fielded before and after the Uprisings. We focus on one question that is common in all three waves (that having democracy is a good thing) and four countries (Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan) that are present in the all three waves of the World Values Survey and the Arab Barometer waves.

Figure 4. Analysis of Arab Barometer Waves 1, 2, and 3.
The results presented in Figure 5 show that the level of support in Iraq is virtually the same before and after the Uprisings. Algeria shows a decline; yet the pre-Uprisings data dates back to 2002, making comparison difficult. On the other hand, we see that the levels of support declined in Egypt and Jordan. The decline in the levels of support for democracy in Egypt from 2008 to 2012 closely follows the findings of our Arab Barometer analysis, hence providing further evidence for our argument. The increase in the support for democracy in Egypt that happened between 2001 and 2008 had occurred well before the Uprisings. This, in turn, serves as another evidence against the euphoria hypothesis.

As Jordan did not experience regime change, the decline in the country seems unexpected. A closer look at the timing of the surveys in Jordan, however, suggests that that is not the case. Wave 5 of the WVS in Jordan was fielded in 2007 and Wave 6 in 2014. These roughly correspond to Wave 1 and Wave 3 of the Arab Barometer, respectively. As evident in Figure 4, the decline in Jordan between Wave 1 and Wave 3 of the Arab Barometer was indeed present at the Wave 2, which was fielded in late 2010, only weeks before the Uprisings. This suggests that the decline in Jordan captured in Figure 5 likely happened before the Uprisings and does not necessarily contradict our theory. Moreover, it seems that the relatively high support in Jordan in 2007 was a result of domestic reforms that took place at the time, specifically the relative liberalization of the system.72

**Conclusion**

The present study documents both changes and stabilities in the levels of support for democracy in nine Arab countries before and after the Arab Uprisings. We find that citizens’ perceptions of the consequences of democracy are influenced by their experiences with it. In countries that successfully overthrew their dictators yet had a negative early experience with democracy, the disappointments led to a lower level of support for democracy.
Our study joins studies that aim to capture continuity and changes in the level of support for democracy after the Uprisings. While it confirms some of the earlier findings, we offer more nuanced findings for countries such as Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen, as explained in detail previously, because of the methodological improvements that we provide. While these findings primarily explain levels of support for democracy in the Arab world, they also contribute to our understanding of support for democracy in other transitional contexts. The declines we observe in Egypt, Tunisia, and to a lesser extent Yemen suggest that support for democracy in a transitional context likely changes based on citizens’ early experience with the new regime type. This underlines the importance of the performance of a transitional regime. Citizens may want democracy, but there is only so much uncertainty or chaos that they can handle. Only when they are reasonably sure that the new, more democratic regime can bring positive outcomes are they likely to maintain their support for democracy.

These findings also remind us why nostalgia can be common in transition times and can affect how citizens weigh the relative importance of order vs. the freedom ideals of democracy. Under an authoritarian regime order likely prevails at the expense of freedom, leading citizens to long for the latter and to emphasize the freedom aspect of democracy more. After the collapse of an authoritarian regime, however, as we have shown in this article through the cases of Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen, there is likely a more open and freer political climate but one that is accompanied by more chaotic social, economic, security, and political conditions. As citizens compare this new political environment to the previous one, they would find that order became a scarce resource compared to freedom, which for some could lead to a nostalgia for the old authoritarian regime and lower support for the new, more democratic regime.

Notes

2. Bock, "A Brief History of Item Theory Response.”
3. For example, see: Converse, “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics.”
4. Dictators were overthrown in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen; first democratic elections successfully took place in Tunisia and Egypt; civil wars erupted in Libya, Yemen, and Syria and coup attempts succeeded or failed in Egypt, Libya, and Yemen.
5. Hoffman and Jamal, “Religion in the Arab Spring.”
6. Driessen, “Sources of Muslim Democracy.”
11. Spierings, “Democratic Disillusionment?”
12. Inglehart and Welzel, Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy.
14. Tessler, “Islam and Democracy in the Middle East.”
15. Spierings, “The Influence of Islamic Orientations on Democratic Support.”
19. Jamal, “When Is Social Trust a Desirable Outcome?”
20. Inglehart and Welzel, Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy.
25. Maseland and van Hoorn, “Why Muslims Like Democracy yet Have so Little of It.”
26. Sarsfield and Echegaray, “Opening the Black Box.”
27. Mishler and Rose, “Five Years after the Fall”; Evans and Whitefield, “The Politics and Economics of Democratic Commitment.”
29. Jamal, “When is Social Trust a Desirable Outcome?”
31. Spierings, “Democratic Disillusionment?”; Spierings, “The Influence of Islamic Orientations on Democratic Support.” A similar utilitarian approach is used to explain civic engagement in authoritarian settings, as a potential mechanism for support for existing political systems, see: Ciftci and Bernick, “Utilitarian and Modern.”
33. Perceptions on the consequences of democracy still matter as a strong predictor for support for democracy after the Uprisings according to our replication of Benstead’s theory using our data. For more on this, see Supplementary Materials Table A1.
34. Hoffman, “Religion, Sectarianism, and Democracy.”
35. Mishler and Rose, “Trajectories of Fear and Hope.”
36. For more on citizens’ reactions to government performance in young democracies, see: Booth and Seligson, The Legitimacy Puzzle in Latin America; Sarsfield and Echegaray, “Opening the Black Box.”
37. Mishler and Rose, “Five Years after the Fall”; Magalhães, “Government Effectiveness and Support for Democracy.”
38. Arias et al., "Priors Rule".
40. Such changes, however, should revolve around an enduring pattern of support for two reasons. First, as discussed previously, while micro-level antecedents of support for democracy may be sensitive to political developments, macro-level antecedents are more stable, thus serving as a stabilizer or a brake against any enduring, dramatic change. Second, the expectations citizens have for a new system are to an extent a function of their prior experience with the old regime. This creates a connection between support for democracy before and after the transition as the latter is not independent of the former.
42. Haas and Lesch, The Arab Spring.
43. Maseland and van Hoorn, “Why Muslims Like Democracy yet Have so Little of It.”
44. Robbins, “People Still Want Democracy.”
45. Mazaheri and Monroe, “No Arab Bourgeoisie, No Democracy?”
46. Spierings, “Democratic Disillusionment?”
47. Spierings also find that Bahrain and Morocco experienced decline in their level of support, using averages of a single question from two different survey projects. We had to drop these cases as we aim to benefit from multiple questions (see the following discussion on dependent variable) and these countries are not included in both waves of the Arab Barometer. However, even if levels of support declined in Bahrain and Morocco, though it is slightly different than our explanation, this still follows the same logic about rising hopes and the subsequent disappointments that we suggest.
48. There are nine countries included in the analysis: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen. The full list of the cases and survey dates can be found in the Supplementary Materials, Table A1.
49. Further information on the aggregate scores and how it makes comparison feasible can be found in the Supplementary Materials, Figure A1.
50. Mishler and Rose, “Political Support for Incomplete Democracies.”
54. We could have potentially used World Values Surveys as part of the IRT models as well. This would increase the number of countries and data points in time that we observe. However, this would also lead to compromising on two other aspects. First, since there is only one question that is common across Arab Barometer and World Values Survey in all waves, we would have given up on the advantages that different indicators of democracy provide us. Second, even though IRT models are able to take differences across different surveys into account, focusing on one type of survey that is consistent at the beginning and the end of our time period of interest increases the accuracy of the IRT estimations. Therefore, we decided to use analysis from World Values Survey only as a supporting evidence.
55. We also estimated our supplementary regression models with more conventional dependent variables which yielded same results, see: Supplementary Materials, Table A5.
57. IRT models are estimated in a sample that includes all nine countries in both waves (18 surveys). We have also produced the variable using Likert scale variables. However, using dichotomized variables significantly increases the accuracy of item-response method. Furthermore, since most of the variables used for analysis are 4-point scale, dichotomization leaves opposers and supporters of democracy in two different categories. For more on this discussion, see the Supplementary Materials.
59. Other methods of creating an index such as addition and factor analysis yield similar results and are available in the Supplementary Materials, Appendix A1.
60. The magnitudes of change in these countries in terms of Cohen’s $d$ coefficient are .20, .50, and .10, respectively. Further information on effect size is available in the Supplementary Materials, Table A13.
61. Abadie, Diamond, and Hainmueller, “Synthetic Control Methods for Comparative Case Studies.” We would like to note that our synthetic control method is principally a back-of-the-envelope calculation of the method. We do not have extensive pre-treatment data and the number of countries in our donor pool (six countries) is very limited (as a comparison, Abadie, Diamond, and Hainmueller have 38 states in their pool). Our goal, therefore, is not to argue that the synthetic control method is applicable in cases like ours, but to show that our results are robust to the use of other statistical approaches.
62. In order to employ a form of difference-in-differences design, there needs to be two assumptions to underlie such analysis: parallel trends and no compound treatment assumptions. We discuss and provide evidence for these assumptions through a placebo test in the Supplementary Materials, Appendix A3.
64. Author’s interview with Ali Laarayedh, March 29, 2017, Tunis.
65. Author’s interview with Abderraouf Cherif, former leader MP from Machrou Tounes and the former Minister of Health, May 9, 2017, Tunis.
66. Author’s interview with Khayam Turki, former vice-secretary general of Ettakatol, April 20, 2017, Tunis.
67. Alley, “Yemen Changes Everything … And Nothing.”
68. Further discussion on the Yemeni case can be found in the Supplementary Materials.
69. Spierings, “Democratic Disillusionment?”
70. For more on potential explanations about the countries that did not experience regime change, see the Supplementary Materials.
71. Wave 4 of the World Values Survey was fielded in 2001–2004, Wave 5 in 2006–2008 and Wave 6 in 2012–2014. Another survey that could have been used is Afrobarometer. However, Afrobarometer did not survey the Arab North African nations before its Wave 5 which was in 2013. So, the available data do not capture our timeline of interest.
72. Spierings’s analysis also shows that it is an unusual spike in 2007. See: Spierings, “Democratic Disillusionment?”
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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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