# 'Arab Spring' and Democracy: Possibility or an Elusive Idea

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An incident on 17 December 2010 sparked off something unexpected and unanticipated and yet, a deeper look tells us that the masses had waited a long time for the moment. On this day, Mohammed Bouazizi, a Tunisian street vendor, set himself on fire in a show of public protest, perhaps as a final straw against political oppression, economic under-development and lack of opportunities for the well-educated but unemployed youth. In a region ruled by dictators, the classic conditions for revolution always existed; all that was needed was a spark.

The outcome of the protests across the region is still uncertain, but a few patterns emerge. Four dictators have been forced out from power, i.e. from Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen. People in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Morocco have been given concessions and silenced. Syria still burns in an all-out civil war, and in Bahrain, the protests were crushed prematurely by external intervention. It is important to state that, till now, democracy in its true sense hasn't arrived in the Arab world yet. It is also interesting to note that although the dictatorial regimes (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen) have been toppled, the monarchies (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco, Bahrain) have managed to survive.

In fact, far from transitioning towards democracy, the region has witnessed large-scale unrest in 2013 putting to doubts the viability of a democratic process in the region. The unrest was witnessed in most of the key countries: in Turkey where public protests over redevelopments plans for Gezi Park in Istanbul turned into mass riots; in Egypt where the democratically elected President was ousted by the army; in Libya where The Political Isolation Law [1] passed has deepened the divide in the government forcing the resignation of the President of General National Congress; or even Tunisia where killing of prominent opposition leaders has put the transition

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to democracy on hold.

In a genuine revolution, the regime disappears and a new order is ushered in. The anti-communist forces overwhelmed the East European countries in 1989 to usher in liberal democracies. Similarly, in 1979, when the Shah of Iran was overthrown, Khomeini ushered in the Islamic revolution. There is little evidence that the Arab Spring has so far resulted in such an effective change in the region. As we move towards the end of the third year of "Arab Spring", this article attempts to take stock of the progress of the Arab Spring, and examines the following questions:

- What are the historical connects with democracy in the region?;

- Has "Arab Spring" really resulted in evolution of new regimes or is it still the same order, perhaps under a new name?;

- How is the rise of political Islam in the region likely to reshape the political dynamics in the region?; and

- Finally, is there hope and space for democracy in the region?

## Historical Connects with Democracy in the Region

Arab countries and democracies have not been known to coexist. The Arabs created the Islamic state in the 7th century AD but lost control of it just two centuries later when Turks took control of the 'Abbasid caliphate' in Baghdad, beginning a millennium of rule by foreigners. The period witnessed the establishment of the Ottoman Empire, which ruled the region till the advent of the 20th century. After the World War I and the consequential collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the League of Nations drew up "mandates" for the Arab world. Each mandate was supposed to be ruled by the British or French "until such time as they are able to stand alone". The borders that we see on modern political maps of the region were drawn without regard for the wishes of the people living there, or along ethnic, geographic, or religious boundaries – they were truly arbitrary. Exiled from political control over their own lands over centuries, the Arabs found it difficult to set up well-functioning, institutionalised political systems with clear political identity. The only political identity, which they inherited, was a loose symbiosis between Islam as a belief system and the tribe as a basic unit of social organisation. Coupled with the arbitrary state boundaries, lack of expertise and experience in governance hindered the progress in these nations towards self-realisation and self-determination of the people, giving rise to

opportunity for the rise of dictators and monarchs to rule them.

The discovery of oil did not help the cause of democratic rule in the Arab world. Oil was found at Masjed Soleyman in south-western Iran on 26 May 1908; and three years later was piped down to a newly built refinery at Abadan on the Iranian side of the Shatt al-Arab. Its global importance was immediately recognised, especially in Europe, leading to a brief British-German-Turkish skirmish for control of the pipeline at the start of World War I. [2]

There were other major discoveries of oil reserves across the region after World War I. Some of the most significant discoveries were in Iraq (1927), Bahrain (1932), Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (1938), Libya (1959) and subsequently Qatar, Trucial States (UAE) and Oman. It also coincided with the creation of the independent states of Iraq and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1932 in the region, while Kuwait gained its independence in 1961.

Unfortunately, the discovery of oil and the formation of the modern states did not bring along freedom, and the rule of the people or democracy. For ease of oil exploration and extrication by the Western powers, it was found more convenient to deal with monarchs and autocrats or dictators in these countries instead of democratic leaders. Oil revenues also helped ruling monarchs and autocrats pacify religiously diverse populations and kept the dissenting voices down. The people at large remained uneducated as they were before the discovery of oil. Civil society was not allowed to flourish under strict regime controls; as a result, democracy remained a distant dream.

## Revolutions in the Region

The Arab world has had a legacy of the "revolutions from above"[3] which were experienced during the 1950s and 1960s wherein an "independent force" of high-ranking military officials and civilian bureaucrats seized power. For many years, these regimes appeared stable on the surface. This perhaps lulled the dictators into a false sense of stability in the region. Little did they realise that there could be a "revolution from below" too, which could sweep off power from under their feet and overthrow them in no time. The Arab Spring demonstrated just that.

In recent times too, within some of the nations affected by the Arab Spring, conditions of discontent were brewing up for some time. In Tunisia, presidential and parliamentary elections were held on 25 October 2009. Results indicated a substantial victory for incumbent President Zine El Abidine Ben

Ali. The elections were however, massively rigged, suppressing the alternate political movements and the people's voice.

Egypt had experienced the same in 2005. Although projected as the first multi-party elections, President Mubarak resorted to strong-arm tactics to suppress the political voices, both in the presidential election in September and the parliamentary elections in November. He won the presidential election comfortably and even managed a jail term for his nearest rival Ayman Nour. In the parliamentary elections, the banned Muslim Brotherhood, whose candidates stood as independents, won a record 87 seats in the 454 seat Assembly, almost six times the number it had before. People believed that the Muslim Brotherhood was entitled to more seats and that rigging led to them being beaten in some constituencies.

Also worth mentioning is an absolutely different social-democratic revolution that took place in Iran in 1979, which led to the overthrow of Iran's monarchy under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahalvi. The revolution ended with the replacement of the monarchy with an Islamic regime. Here too, the disenfranchised segments of the population toppled a corrupt regime, which had held sway for many years.

The presidential election of 2009 in Iran could also in a way, be accredited to the final build up to the Arab Spring. The protests by the Green Movement following the corrupt elections in June 2009, pioneering the use of social networking and information technology in generating massive public protests set a precedent and gave inspiration for the new and imaginative use of technology to trigger protests, and perhaps, paved the way for the future Arab protests.

However, the modus operandi of the "Arab Spring" revolutions was fundamentally different in character from those earlier in the region. In 2011, there was no leader or party of any significance to whip up the popular uprising. The disenchanted, poor and unemployed people who found courage in one another's acts of defiance across national boundaries triggered and sustained this uprising.

A revolution according to Kimmel,[4] occurs as the culmination of three temporal moments: the existence of *preconditions*, which include the long-term, structural shifts in the social foundations of the society, responsible for the creation of what can be defined as a "revolutionary moment." The second is the *precipitants*, which are the short-term historical events that "allow these deeply seated structural forces to emerge as politically potent and begin to mobilize potential discontents". The final moment includes the

*trigger(s)* – the immediate historical events that set the revolutionary process in motion.

Again, it is clear that Egypt witnessed these three phases. The first precondition was the existence of an authoritarian regime since the 1950s. The second long-term precondition was the demographic situation. Since 1950, Egypt's population had quadrupled[5], from 21.4 million to 83 million people. The long-term implications of this process were growing unemployment, deterioration in health and educational services and an uneven structure of society. The young and unemployed youth added to the discontent in the population. Finally, the trigger was provided by the successful revolution and overthrow of the dictator in neighbouring Tunisia.

## "Change of Regimes" or "Changes in Regimes"

The easy part may well have been the success of the people in overthrowing the dictators but the difficult part has only just started. As the people are discovering, it is indeed hard to usher in democracy in a region where political freedom had been stifled for decades and where alternates for governance have to be built from scratch. Taking a stock of transition in the region, the interesting thing to observe is that none of the countries has transitioned to democracy till now. Regimes caught by the initial onslaught of the revolutions, namely, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen had no time to react and so they were toppled resulting in "Change of regimes". But others like Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco and Kuwait intelligently carried out "Changes in regimes" by placating the population with economic subsidies as in Saudi Arabia or by carrying out superficial changes in the regimes and conducting elections as in Jordan, Kuwait or Morocco.

## Democratic Transition: The Journey So Far

Uprisings in the Arab world were about the outpouring of public frustration against a number of evils plaguing their societies, primary among them being the oppressive and restrictive nature of the regimes. Lack of opportunities, poverty, unemployment, corruption and above all lack of public freedom had reached a pinnacle in the region. Advancement in technologies elsewhere in the world and coincidental exposure to it through the internet and social media, perhaps exaggerated the deficiencies in the public life as also provided a discreet platform for them to forge together a strategy for revolt and change. The

revolts may have ushered in a change of regimes, but a deeper look indicates that democracy still remains merely a distant possibility. A short glimpse at each of the countries in transition may perhaps provide a better insight.

## Tunisia

Amongst the nations of the Arab Spring, Tunisia seemed to be way ahead of others in its march towards democratic freedom and transition. Tunisia has the advantage of being a small country with 10 million people who are well educated and largely homogeneous with long exposure to the West. Also, due to the swift manner in which Ben Ali was ousted and the neutral stance of the military, the nation and its society were not severely traumatised by bloodshed. Tunisia was thus, the first to conduct elections on 23 October 2011 for a Constituent Assembly tasked with forming an interim government and writing a constitution.

The coalition government, comprising Ennahda and two secular parties, were to remain in power until a new constitution is enacted and fresh elections held in 2013. Just when Tunisia seemed to be settling down, things turned for the worse. The assassination of two prominent opposition leaders, Chokri Belaïd on 06 February 2013 and Mohamed Brahmi on 25 July 2013 has thrown Tunisia into its worst crisis since the ouster of President Ben Ali. The government had to be dissolved and Prime Minister Hamadi Jabeli resigned on 19 February 2013 in a bid to calm the massive street protests. The Interior Minister Ali Larayedh, a hardliner from the Ennahda Party was nominated as the prime minister on 22 February 2013 who faced an uphill task to evolve consensus on the new government as well as the finalisation of the new constitution. To add to the woes, after continued sit-ins and protests, on 06 August 2013 Tunisia's constituent assembly was suspended until the government and secular opposition began talks to resolve the ongoing political crisis. The crisis as well as the attack on the US Embassy in Tunis on 14 September 2012 by the Salafists highlights the fault lines in the society as well as the vulnerability of the evolving democracy in Tunisia.

## Egypt

Post ouster of Mubarak in February 2011, Egyptians spent months debating the timing and methodology of elections and a new constitution. Political parties wanted time to organise themselves while the Muslim Brotherhood was not sure whether to enter mainstream politics or remain as a social movement. The Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF) was in no hurry to relinquish power.

Parliamentary elections were finally held in January 2012 in which the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party emerged winner with 225 seats followed by the Salafists' Al Nour Party. Presidential polls were held in May and June where the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate Mohamed Morsi emerged winner in a runoff against former Prime Minister Ahmed Shafiq. Morsi immediately set about putting things in order by reclaiming presidential powers from SCAF, overturning the controversial "Supplementary Constitutional Declaration"[6] by SCAF and ordering the parliament to reconvene (which had been dissolved under a court order in May). He even ordered retirement[7] of SCAF chief Field Marshall Tantawi and his chief of staff Lieutenant General Sami Annan on 12 August 2012.

Morsi tried consolidating power and made serious pitch for Egypt to regain its lost stature in the region. He visited Iran, China, Turkey, India and Pakistan in quick succession. He even took initiative to mediate in the Syria crisis by proposing the Quartet of Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt and was scathing in his speech at the UN General Assembly on 26 September 2012 on Israel's nuclear arsenal. Egypt was hailed as a resurgent power in the Arab world when it successfully negotiated a cease fire between Hamas and Israel on 21 November 2012. The TIME magazine included President Morsi as a candidate for the "Person of the Year" contest amongst 40 short listed prominent personalities in the world[8].

Things, however, changed for the worse when the President announced a decree on 22 November 2012 giving himself sweeping powers and immunity from legal oversight, and powers "to take any measures he sees fit in order to preserve the revolution, to preserve national unity or to safeguard national security"[9]. It sparked off protests reminiscent of protests in January 2011, which led to the ouster of President Mubarak. The opposition charged Morsi of taking first steps towards becoming a dictator. The president had to finally withdraw the decree in the face of massive public protests. The draft constitution, which has been the bone of contention was put through a national referendum in December and the results, despite low turnout, reflected that almost 60 per cent of the voters voted in its favour.

Internal problems for Egypt were not yet over. Morsi's government drew the ire of public protests due to fears of their Islamic agenda as also their inability to control the economic crisis[10] in the country. Despite this and the increasing influence of a peoples' movement by The Tamarod [Rebel], which organised anti-Morsi protests, little did Morsi imagine that he would be ousted from power. On 03 July 2013, after giving a 48 hours ultimatum, the Chief of the Armed Forces General Abdel-Fatah al-Sisi deposed Morsi from power,

appointed Adli Mansour, former head of the constitutional court as interim president. Egypt is thus, virtually back to where it started in 2011.

Egypt is slowly realising that democracy is not easy, especially in a nation where political movements have been suppressed by decades of dictatorship and where the people's sentiment can be easily swayed either way. There is clearly an ongoing underlying power struggle in the country. The rise of the Muslim Brotherhood to power had raised serious concerns amongst the liberals as well as the Salafists. The Judiciary presents another facet of power struggle wherein the higher courts are still dominated by the Mubarak era judges. Perhaps the most powerful actor in the power struggle is the armed forces. They clearly hold the cards when it comes to a crunch situation.

## Yemen

A deal brokered by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) removed President Saleh from the presidency in February 2012. The country's new president, Abd Rabboh Mansour Hadi is still coming to grips with a war torn nation. Hadi has to oversee the drafting of a new constitution, restructuring of Yemen's armed forces and the preparation of a new, genuinely multi-party election. Engaging these potential spoilers will be vital to both, President Hadi's success and Yemen's security.

President Hadi has attempted to unite the military and has started trying to build his leadership credentials by setting up a 14-member military council to reform the armed forces, which included officials who had served under Saleh as well as individuals aligned with the defected 1 Armoured Division Commander Maj Gen Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar. As a part of the GCC brokered deal, the National Dialogue Conference (NDC) commenced in Yemen on 18 March 2013. The NDC would discuss issues such as formulating the constitution, the government structure and the political system, the southern issue, the Houthis, achieving national reconciliation and transitional justice, and other social and economic issues[11]. While the NDC holds promise and perhaps is the only chance for Yemen to emerge out of its turmoil, it is too early to say whether Yemen would reap the fruits of a representative government soon.

## Syria

The Syrian crisis has been the bloodiest so far due to the government led crackdown on protests involving air strikes, artillery guns and armoured tanks. Syria has also split the international community down the middle with the US- Saudi Arabia led group on one side and the Russia-China-Iran led group

on the other.

Ever since the uprisings began in Southern city of Daraa in March 2011, all attempts have failed to end the crisis. The regime has been brutal in suppressing the revolt while the international community has been cautious in getting directly involved militarily. Despite a UN Observer Mission in April 2012, the appointment of Kofi Annan as the special envoy and his six point peace plan[12], no progress towards peace has taken place. Kofi Annan finally quit in August and was replaced by Lakhdar Brahimi, who too has painted a very grim picture of the security situation in Syria. As per the UN estimates[13] 93,000 people have been killed in Syria up to June 2013 with the toll estimated to have crossed 1,20,000 by November 2013. Millions of refugees have crossed over into Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan sparking off a humanitarian crisis.

The chemical weapons strike in the suburbs of Damascus on 21 August 2013 took the Syrian conflict to yet another level of brutality, a level, which threatened international military action on Syria. In the midst of threat of military strikes on Syria, the resolution and the Framework Agreement[14] formulated in conjunction with Russia not only prevented the military strikes but led to Syria joining the Chemical Weapons Convention and agreeing to destroy its chemical weapon arsenal. As of December 2013, the plan was underway to destroy all chemical weapons and their production facilities in Syria by mid-2014.

Russia and China have repeatedly shot down UNSC proposals on Syria. Egypt took initiative in September 2012 to form a Quartet[15] of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Egypt to find solution to the crisis but nothing has come of it. The opposition remains fragmented despite an umbrella of the National Coalition for Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces while Al Qaeda has found a new battleground in Syria. The Geneva II peace talks are now scheduled for January 2014[16] but the fault lines run deep and prospects of a peaceful resolution through Geneva II look slim. The only silver lining could be Iran's role in propping up a resolution, especially after the interim deal on its nuclear issue[17] has given boost to its position in the region.

**Libya**

Libya under Gaddafi presented a different challenge to the world as compared to Syria. Unlike Syria, here, international opinion was generally oriented towards the ouster of Gaddafi. Even the Arab League came on board to levy sanction and authorise military action. The challenge for Libya has been the transition

to post Gaddafi era. Like most other countries of the Arab Spring, there were no political institutions in Libya. One of the other big problems that has confronted the Libyans is the country's historical ethnic, tribal and regional split. While the Libyan people are almost entirely Muslim and predominantly Arab, there are several divisions among them. These include ethnic differences in the form of Berbers in the Nafusa Mountains, Tuaregs in the southwestern desert region of Fezzan and Toubou in the Cyrenaican portion of the Sahara Desert. Perhaps most prominent of these fault lines is the one that exists between the ancient regions of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica: Tripolitania, site of the capital city Tripoli on the Mediterranean coast in northwestern Libya; and Cyrenaica, which not only touches the Mediterranean but also extends into the Sahara and serves as home to what was for a time the alternate capital of Benghazi.

The Transitional National Council (TNC) was formed on 06 March 2011 under Mahmoud Jibril. The TNC governed Libya for a period of ten months, holding elections to a General National Congress on 7 July 2012, and handed over power to the newly-elected assembly on 08 August. In the elections, the liberal coalition under the National Forces Alliance (NFA), led by the interim Prime Minister, Mahmoud Jibril, won 39 out of the 80 seats reserved for political parties. The Muslim Brotherhood's Justice and Construction Party gained 17. Mustafa AG Abushagur was elected as the Prime Minister on 13 September, but he was soon voted out by the Parliament[18] sparking off a crisis. The killing of the US ambassador[19] on 11 September 2012 made matters worse for Libya. There were, however, welcome developments when the democratically elected General National Congress (GNC) accepted Ali Zeidan as the prime minister, and the formation of the new government was completed on 31 October 2012.

However, the government led by Zeiden has been far from stable. It is beset with deep divisions within the 200 members coming from very different backgrounds, most of whom have never been exposed to democratic politics. Moreover, the distribution of seats has sown the seeds of discontent. The oil rich region of Cyrenaica has only 60 seats as compared to the 100 seats given to the Western region of Tripolitania with the South making the balance 40 seats. The composition of the GNC too is tricky. The majority of members do not belong to the NFA.  The NFA could muster the required 80 seats only through coordination with other blocs. The interim government under the GNC has failed to deliver on its primary task, namely, the process of drafting a new constitution for the country. The Political Isolation Law passed by the

GNC on 05 May 2013[20] has further deepened the divide in the government. It bars anyone who has held a senior post under Gaddafi from being a part of the government. Following it, the President of the GNC resigned leading to the election of Nouri Abusahmain, from the minority Berber tribe on 25 June 2013. There have been calls for resignation of Prime Minister Zidan too as he was a diplomat working for the Gaddafi government before he defected in 1980.

Thus, Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen and Libya have yet to see democracy take shape in their respective countries. The internal dynamics, their economies and the new constitutions will define how successful they are in ushering in 'people's power'. Another major factor, which will define the evolution of democracy is the rise of political Islam in each of these countries and the region.

## Rise of Political Islam and the Effect on the Political Dynamics of the Region

One of the most significant take away from the Arab Spring has been the rise of Islamists. For many a decades, these movements were brutally suppressed by the dictators. They, however, continued covertly consolidating their presence as well as their public following, and kept their philosophies alive, waiting for the opportune times. It was the various Islamist movements, with their extensive social presence and organisational capacities that dominated the recent electoral fields in the region. In Tunisia and Egypt, a new Islamist elite emerged led by the Muslim Brotherhood that has a different social and ideological basis from the old, secular and oppressive regime. In Libya too, Islamists under the banner of the Muslim Brotherhood stood second in the elections.

Even in countries that have not undergone any regime change, Islamist actors appear to be major electoral forces. In Morocco, after a brief whiff of the Arab Spring, the monarchy still survives. The king has been forced to allow the Islamist Justice and Development Party (PJD) to form a new government. In Jordan, the Islamic Action Front has pressed for political reform and even raised the idea of a constitutional monarchy. Even in Kuwait, which was not directly affected by the Arab Spring, Islamist and conservative tribal candidates performed well in the parliamentary elections in February 2012.

The popular revolutions and the consequent elections have allowed Islamist parties to organise themselves into a formal political movement, which has

been the most striking domestic outcome of the Arab Spring. The positive results in their favour in all countries even belied their own expectations.

The overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood president and his interim government in Egypt may have cast a shadow, but it is unlikely that the Islamists with grass root level organisations and mass followings can yet be dismissed or ousted from the mainstream political framework.

Islamists are therefore, here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future. Being in government, bestows on them the responsibility to protect people and thus, it is likely that these movements will be forced to shun their militant attitude as well their ties with terrorist organisations like Al Qaeda. Turkey has proved that a party with a moderate Islamic ideology in a democracy can also be a successful model to study and emulate. The success of the AKP led government in winning three consecutive terms in Turkey illustrates that there cannot be only one discourse in democracy (the Western style of democracy). Religious ideology, the freedom to express religious beliefs and the use of 'soft Islam' can also be a winning formula and that a forced secular agenda curbing religious identity in the name of 'National Identity' (Kemalism) can, at times, run out of favour with the population in the long run.

### Is there Hope and Space for Democracy in the Region?

The Arab Spring threw out the dictators in the hope that the peoples' power would help these nations emerge out of the repression experienced under the autocratic regimes. Three years of journey through these uprisings have not thrown up any concrete hope of evolution of democracy in the region. In some of the nations, elections have taken place and governments sworn in, but these are interim governments tasked to merely plan and implement the roadmap for future representative democracy in the region. The rise of Islamists and their political wings have given rise to scepticism that political Islam may hijack the agenda. There is therefore the fear for democracy in the region. It is, however, necessary to examine whether democracy in the classical sense can emerge and if yes, in what manner.

Democracy has been a recent phenomenon in modern history. Although the United States, France and England adopted democratic norms in the late eighteenth century,   it was only after World War II that democracy took roots in a major way in Europe, Asia and thereafter in Africa. Democracy in modern times has been a virtue of the Industrial Revolution, which transformed

the 'ruling class and the peasants' into 'political parties and an electorate', which evolved, and the electorate progressively became aware of its rights to vote and elect representatives to the legislature. Awareness and education along with societal changes highlighted the fact that people no longer had to follow leaders blindly as a herd (as in feudal structures), but could make their own conscious decisions on and in elections, thus, evolving into modern, alert and politically active societies.

Did the Arab world benefit from this evolution? The answer is clearly no. Over decades, dictators and monarchs kept the population under tight reins, prevented the growth of political parties, and discouraged education and awareness amongst the majority population. People thus, barely moved forward from their past nomadic, feudal societies with deep-rooted tribal and ethnic loyalties towards exercising their rights for political, religious or cultural freedom. Islam was used as a tool to prevent proliferation of modern tools of technology in these countries. Restrictions on internet, television, women's education and empowerment coupled with economic appeasements and brutal suppression of any popular or political movements against the governments, kept the population ignorant of their rights and unaware of the major developments in the modern world.

Rising from such a situation, people may be asking for "peoples' power", but lack of political culture, political leadership as also awareness amongst people will be a major hindrance in democracy taking shape in the true sense. Religion exercises tremendous social control, which is presently translating into political influence. Until the time there is a deliberate break between politics and religion, it is difficult to see democracy creating space for itself in the region. It also raises a fundamental question; is Islam compatible with democracy? If political Islam is the form of democracy being advocated in the region and if Islamic laws and/or Sharia are to form a part of the governing principles of democracy, then there is likely to be very little space for people's voice and freedom of expression- a hallmark of true democracy.

But, as stated earlier, Islamists are here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future. Being in government or in opposition in a democratic milieu bestows on them the responsibility to imbibe and emulate values of consensus, accommodation and tolerance of diversity and differences. Thus, it is likely that these movements will be forced to shun their militant attitudes over time by the sheer practice of democracy. Turkey illustrates that there can be more than one discourse in democracy.

## Conclusion

The new emerging regimes and their people are realising that it was easy to throw out the old order, but the challenge is now to see that the old order doesn't resurface (maybe under a new name) or worse, a new and even more repressive political order doesn't take roots. Democracy is a long term evolving process and therefore, the people have to be patient and alert. New models for governance have to be built from scratch. This calls for skilled political leadership to guide reforms. With growing awareness and social discourse all over the world, it is difficult to imagine the return of dictators. Yet, until democracy finds space for itself, there may be periods of unrests and turbulence, but then societies do not change overnight. With trials and errors, protests and retributions, repeated dismissals of governments, parliaments and constitution, people in the region may find their own flavour of democracy.

## Notes

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