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## ARAB SPRING AND ITS ROLE IN THE STRUGGLE FOR CITIZENSHIP: AN ANALYSIS

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*The academic scholarship on understanding Arab Spring and its role in constructing citizenship has been little. In this context, the paper will endeavor to study the Arab Spring in the light of its contribution to the civic empowerment of the Arab world. The argument is that one of the most effective ways to understand political contestation in the Middle East is through the lens of citizenship. Ultimately, politics revolves around the scope, nature, and depth of citizenship. This has become even more evident since citizenship rights have emerged as the primary concern in the region during the past three decades due to the enormous political expansion. A new social contract based on rights is the only way to fill the void left by the breakdown of the authoritarian bargaining contract. This paper will analyze how this Nahda (Renaissance) played its part in the debate of citizenship in the Arab world and how the debate of citizenship evolved during the Arab Spring and afterward. The paper has theoretically and analytically found that the Arab Spring was the immediate outcome of various factors particularly the long-overdue demand for citizenship rights in the contemporary political landscape.*

**Keywords:** *Al-Nahda, Muwātana, 14<sup>th</sup> February Revolution, clientelism, authoritarianism, Jasmine Revolution.*

### 1. Introduction

The Arab Spring, which began in Tunisia in December 2010 with the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, was a series of anti-government protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions across the Arab world. This event catalyzed nationwide protests in Tunisia, leading to the ousting of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011. Inspired by Tunisia's success, similar movements erupted in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain, where citizens sought political reform, social justice, and economic opportunities (Anderson 2011: 2). In Egypt, mass protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square led to resignation of President Hosni Mubarak in February 2011 after 30 years in power (Ottaway

Recommended citation: Ul Islam N., Hussain Sh. Arab Spring and Its Role in the Struggle for Citizenship: An Analysis. *Journal of Globalization Studies*, Vol. 16 No. 1, May 2025, pp. 127–146. DOI: 10.30884/jogs/2025.01.09.

2020). Libya experienced a violent civil war, resulting in the overthrow and death of Muammar Gaddafi in October 2011. In Syria, peaceful demonstrations escalated into a prolonged and brutal civil war involving regional and international actors (Heydemann 1999: 5).

The Arab Spring was driven by widespread grievances, including political repression, lack of freedoms, corruption, economic hardships, and social inequalities. Influenced by Western models of citizenship and democracy, protesters sought systems that would respect human rights and provide better governance (Lynch 2012: 31). The movement underscored the universal desire for dignity, freedom, and justice, and highlighting the interconnectedness of global political aspirations.

The Arab Spring protests spread quickly because young people in Egypt, Libya, Syria, and other countries realised that they were in an undignified stage of adolescence and that they had the right to demand access to jobs, education, and marriage for all Arab youth (Mulderig 2011:1). Women were portrayed as objects of struggle and deprivation of citizenship rights in art on walls and streets throughout the Arab world, such as graffiti art usually depicting 'the girl in the blue bra' (Suzee in the City 2013). The Egyptian Samira Ibrahim, one of the *Time Magazine's* 100 most influential women of 2011, was an outspoken critic of the alleged virginity tests of the female protesters during the revolution. The uprisings have played a great role in the debate for citizenship regardless of gender, race, color, or religion. It has been argued that the uprisings were meant to highlight the women's struggle against their second-class citizenship status (Al-Maliki 2012). The revolution brought about havoc in people's lives, and civil wars in countries like Syria resulted in the sea of refugees from Syria to other Arab countries and the Western world and providing necessities of life to them became the talk of the town and eventually led to the new conception of citizenship (UNHCR 2024). Human rights organisations have also highlighted the human rights abuses during the Arab Spring (HRW 2013). The refugee crises in the Arab world not only appeal to stopping their discrimination and exploitation but also make sure that political reforms and actions are taken to 'Restoring Citizenship' (Long 2011: 232). The refugees themselves were seen as the main propagandists or actors of citizenship in the Arab world (Isin 2009: 370). The upheavals did in fact prompt a transformation in the understanding of citizenship and subsequent developments in Egypt and Tunisia in Early 2011. A new political subjectivity was sought after and displayed by the individuals who seized the public arena in 2011 (Challand 2013: 193). When anti-dictatorial and anti-neoliberal protests were taking place, representing the local aspirations and conditions, there was a 'Fanonian moment,' where it was possible to both envisage and observe an emerging new horizon (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2019). Images, phrases, and gestures crossed national and cultural boundaries during this probably unique time, making the world seem flattened (Kaplan and Levy 2017: 4). In looking at the civic engagements and actions of young people, women, and refugees, two arguments can be made: first, that these oppressed groups are contesting notions of citizenship and demanding their rights, and second, that notions of civil society are inherently being contested (Kiwani 2015: 130).

## 2. Research Methodology

The research involves studying historical records and citizenship changes during the Arab Spring, comparing experiences and legal frameworks across Middle Eastern coun-

tries. It also includes analyzing media and public discourse on citizenship trends and shifts, all grounded in relevant theoretical frameworks while addressing limitations and triangulating findings.

#### *Literature Review*

The Arab Spring, a series of anti-government uprisings across the Arab world that began in late 2010, has been the subject of extensive scholarly analysis. The literature on the Arab Spring can be broadly categorized into several key areas: origins and causes, the role of social media, political outcomes, socio-economic impacts, and regional variations. Scholars generally agree that political repression, economic stagnation, and social grievances fueled the Arab Spring. James Gelvin (2012) emphasizes the importance of these long-standing issues. Gelvin argues that the uprisings resulted from decades of authoritarian rule and economic hardships. The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia is often cited as the immediate catalyst, sparking widespread protests that quickly spread to other countries. The role of social media in the Arab Spring has been a significant focus of research. Philip Howard and Muzammil Hussain (2013) suggest that platforms like Facebook and Twitter were instrumental in mobilizing protesters and disseminating information. They argue that social media allowed for rapid communication and coordination, which were crucial in sustaining the momentum of the uprisings. Zeynep Tufekci (2017) adds that social media not only facilitated the organization of protests but also played a role in shaping public opinion and international awareness.

The political outcomes of the Arab Spring have been mixed and are extensively debated. Marc Lynch (2012) notes that while some countries, like Tunisia, have made significant strides toward democratic governance, others, such as Syria and Libya, have descended into protracted conflict and civil war. Lisa Anderson (2011) explores the varied trajectories of the uprisings, emphasizing the importance of historical and institutional contexts in shaping outcomes. She argues that differences in state structures, the role of the military, and external interventions have led to divergent paths in the post-Arab Spring period. The socio-economic impacts of the Arab Spring are another critical area of study. Authors like Ishac Diwan (2014) examine how the uprisings have affected economic conditions in the region. Diwan argues that while the immediate economic consequences were often negative, including disruptions to trade and tourism, there is potential for long-term economic reform driven by demands for greater transparency and accountability. The literature also addresses the continuing challenges of unemployment, inequality, and economic recovery in post-Arab Spring societies. The Arab Spring did not unfold uniformly across the region, and scholars have examined the reasons for these variations. Eva Bellin (2002) explores why some countries experienced significant upheaval while others did not. Bellin (2012) highlights the role of state capacity and the loyalty of security forces, arguing that countries with stronger, more cohesive security apparatuses were better able to suppress uprisings and emphasizes the role of external actors and geopolitical considerations in shaping the course of events in different countries. Although the above works do discuss Arab Spring, the discussion on the issue of citizenship has not been discussed separately and in detail. Therefore, the current paper will be an endeavor to discuss in detail the Arab Spring and its relevance to the debate of citizenship.

### 3. Middle East: An Overview

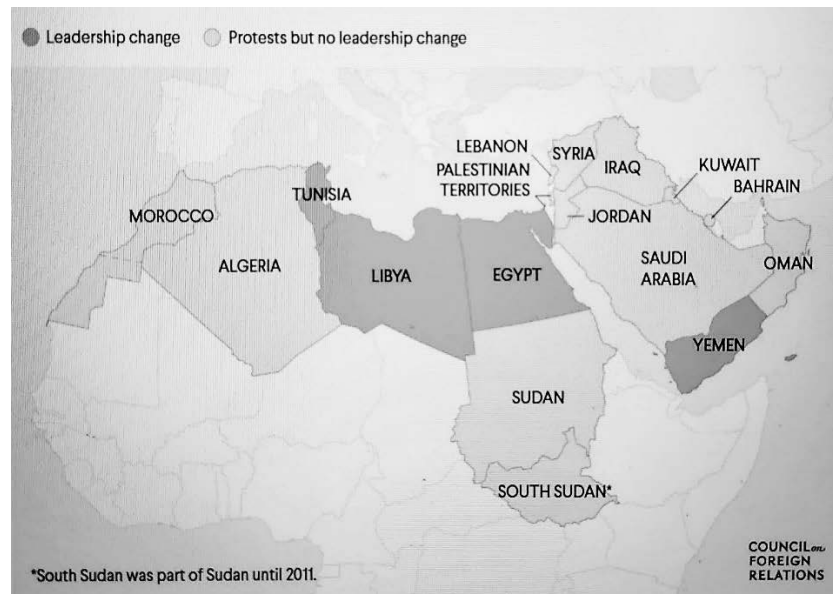
The Middle East, encompassing parts of Western Asia and North Africa, is historically significant as the birthplace of early civilizations like the Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians (Lewis 1995: 22). Major countries in the Middle East include Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. The region is known for its diverse cultures, languages, and religions, including Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. In the twelfth century, it was dominated by Muslim empires stretching from Iran to Spain, with cities such as Baghdad, Cairo, Istanbul, and Córdoba becoming centers of learning and culture. The Ottoman Empire, emerging in the thirteenth century, controlled much of the region and beyond for centuries, leaving a lasting legacy (Frankopan 2004). In the twentieth century, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire due to various reasons, particularly dissatisfaction caused by the new political and economic ideals from the West was a turning point in the history of Islam and Muslims (Ergil and Rhodes 1975: 57). The disintegration paved the way for already dissatisfied territories like Egypt to rise to the occasion and fight for new independent nation-states on the footprints of Western nation-states (Alexander and Bassiouny 2014: 5-6). Therefore, the new debate and discourse of nation-states began and the wave of nationalism being alien to Islam in its purest form, swept the Muslim world, particularly the Middle East. The wave was welcomed in the Middle East and people from all communities fought together to achieve independence from the Ottoman Empire and ultimately against the colonial powers (Goldschmidt and Davidson 2010: 177–185).

The Middle East has experienced numerous conflicts, including the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Gulf Wars, and the Arab Spring, which have shaped its modern political landscape. The discovery of oil transformed the economies of many Middle Eastern countries, while the region's modern history has been marked by conflicts such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Gulf Wars. Today, the Middle East remains a region of political instability, economic disparity, and rapid social change, but it continues to hold profound cultural and historical significance globally. The establishment of oil-producing states in the Middle East has significantly influenced both regional and global dynamics. Oil serves as a crucial geopolitical tool, affecting alliances, conflicts, and foreign policies (Yergin 1991: 178). Countries dependent on oil imports form strategic alliances with oil producers, while competition over oil resources has fueled regional conflicts. Organizations like OPEC, dominated by Middle Eastern nations, play a key role in regulating global oil prices, impacting economies worldwide (Maugeri 2006: 9). Domestically, reliance on oil revenues has shaped the political landscape of these countries, often leading to the rise of authoritarian regimes and political instability. Oil wealth enables governments to maintain power through patronage and suppress dissent, reducing pressure for democratic reforms. However, dependence on oil makes these economies vulnerable to price fluctuations, leading to economic instability and social unrest. Examples include Saudi Arabia's use of oil wealth for regional influence and social stability, and Iran's funding of military activities, while economic sanctions on its oil sector have caused internal challenges (Adil 2023: 05). The 2011 Arab uprisings took scholars of authoritarianism in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) by surprise, as citizens across the region mobilized against long-standing authoritarian regimes. These widespread protests disrupted the political order that had dominated the

region for decades, prompting a reconsideration of the established frameworks used to understand governance and political stability in the MENA region (Josua and Edel 2021: 586).

#### 4. Arab Spring: An Overview

The Arab Spring refers to a series of pro-democracy uprisings and protests that spread across the Arab world beginning in late 2010. These movements aimed to challenge authoritarian regimes, demand political reform, and seek greater social justice. Sparked by the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia, the protests quickly spread to countries like Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain (Young and Leszczynski 2020).



**Fig. 1. Map of the Arab Spring**

Source: Council of Foreign Relations (Robinson and Merrow 2020).

The Arab Spring is marked by its calls for democratic governance, human rights, and socio-economic reforms, and it highlighted widespread grievances against political repression, corruption, and economic hardships (Kitchen 2012: 5). It refers to a series of anti-government protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions that took place in the early 2010s in several countries in North Africa and West Asia. The Renaissance (*Al Nahda*) brought about mixed changes in the mixed legacy ranging from the democratic transition in Tunisia to protracted civil wars in Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. One of the major reasons for the outburst of the Arab Spring was the alienation of the youth by defining them as a problematic category. The struggle was thus for taking into youth as consideration for being constructive. They were being denied their adulthood through lack of opportunities in education, and unemployment (Kiwan 2015: 131).

The role of economic disparity and poor living conditions played its role in the evolution of the Arab Spring (Kiwan 2015: 132). The curtailment of citizenship rights and the lack of basic facilities in educational, social, political, and economic fields led to

dissatisfaction and anger against the ruling regimes. The crackdown on activists and the killing of some prominent personalities added fuel to the fire. Under the Mubarak regime (1981–2011), the relationship between the state and the subjects was fundamentally broken. Under Hosni Mubarak's rule, Egypt experienced significant political repression, widespread corruption, and economic hardship, which led to a fundamental breakdown in the relationship between the state and its citizens (Lynch 2012: 67–68). The regime to force legitimacy, brought amendments to the constitution, further paving the way for citizenship as the basis for rights and liberties. The concept of citizenship remained dysfunctional with hardly any concrete efforts to guarantee equal rights to all and right to life and protection to minorities (Heydemann and Leenders 2013: 6–7).

Egypt's revolution, which broke out just eleven days later, was prompted by the overthrow of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali's government on January 14, 2011. Pro-democracy activists needed only eighteen days in Egypt, a nation of 85 million people, to overthrow the ruler, as opposed to twenty-eight days in Tunisia, a nation of 10 million people. Under these circumstances, civil unrest in the shape of protests and civil wars broke out in Egypt on Jan 25, 2011 (Aljazeera 2016). On February 11, Hosni Mubarak was driven into an embarrassing resignation. Many dictators were terrified by the overthrow of Mubarak after twenty-nine years in power and the overthrow of Ben Ali after twenty-three years in power. Events spurred uprisings in Syria, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, and other countries, as well as protests in Algeria, Morocco, Jordan, Oman, and other countries (Esposito, Sonn, and Voll 2016: 209).

Discrimination and marginalisation of the women in the Egyptian society was also the issue which ultimately led to the revolt against the ruling regime of Egypt. They were absent from the political sphere along with other sectors of life. After the 2011 elections, the Supreme Council of armed forces started preparations for the redrafting of the constitution through the declaration of Article 60. The idea of '*citizenship*' is pervasive in general. About 40 times throughout the text, the phrase is used in various ways. In Article 6, for instance, the political system of Egypt is described as being based on the principles of democracy, and consultation, citizenship (under which all citizens are equal in rights and public duties), political and multiparty pluralism, the peaceful transfer of power, the separation and balance of powers, the rule of law, and respect for human rights and freedoms. Egyptian civilization is linked in the prologue to '*citizenship*, equality, and non-discrimination. These definitions are precisely what civil society organisations would have offered. This is not by chance; it is the outcome of civil society's deliberate and persistent efforts (Esposito, Sonn, and Voll 2016: 12). The progress from the earlier constitutions on the evolution and development of citizenship was seen in the texts of the new constitution which frequently referred to citizens eventually becoming a stepping stone for the development of the principle of equal citizenship. The assertion of equality and non-discrimination were stressed in the new constitution framed after the revolution of 2011. The constitution declares

'All citizens are equal before the Law. They are equal in rights, freedoms and general duties, without discrimination based on religion, belief, sex, origin, race, color, language, disability, social class, political or geographic affiliation or any other reason'. (SSCHR 2012)

#### 4.1. Conceptual Framework on Citizenship in the Middle East

Citizenship in the Middle East is a multifaceted concept deeply rooted in the region's complex historical, social, and political landscapes. Historically, modern nation-state boundaries did not define citizenship in the pre-modern Middle East. Instead, identities and allegiances were often based on tribal affiliations, religious communities, and local loyalties. The Ottoman Empire, which controlled much of the region until the early twentieth century, implemented the millet system, categorizing its subjects primarily by religious affiliation and granting various degrees of autonomy to different religious communities. This system laid the groundwork for how citizenship and identity would later evolve in the region (Scott 2010: 33).

The colonial era introduced significant changes to citizenship in the Middle East. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent establishment of colonial mandates by European powers imposed Western-style nation-state boundaries and governance structures. This period saw the introduction of new concepts of citizenship and national identity, often manipulated by colonial powers to maintain control. The artificial boundaries drawn by colonial administrators did not always align with the region's complex ethnic and religious makeup, leading to lasting tensions and divisions. These colonial legacies have continued to influence the political and social fabric of the Middle East (Gelvin 2020: 10). Following World War II, many Middle Eastern countries gained independence and began the process of forming their national identities. During this post-independence period, citizenship was often defined by the new nation-states in terms of legal status, rights, and duties within the framework of the state. However, these definitions were heavily influenced by the need to unify diverse populations under a single national identity and the ongoing impact of colonial legacies. The formation of national identities was further complicated by the presence of various ethnic and religious groups, each with its own distinct identity and history (Hourani 1991: 444–445).

The legal and political dimensions of citizenship in the Middle East are crucial to understanding its contemporary manifestations. Citizenship involves the rights and responsibilities conferred upon individuals by the state, which have been shaped by colonial legacies, national unity efforts, and varying degrees of authoritarian governance. In many cases, citizenship laws have been used as tools by governments to enforce loyalty to the regime and marginalize dissenting groups. This has resulted in a political landscape where citizenship is often conditional on political loyalty, and opposition groups may face exclusion and repression. Ethnic and religious identities play a significant role in the conceptualization of citizenship in the Middle East. The region's populations are diverse, including Arabs, Kurds, Persians, Turks, and various religious communities such as Muslims (both Sunni and Shia), Christians, and Jews. These identities often intersect with national identities, leading to varying degrees of inclusion or exclusion within the framework of citizenship. The complex interplay between these identities can sometimes lead to tensions and conflicts, as different groups vie for recognition and rights within the state (Makdisi 2000: 13–14 and 39–45).

Gender also significantly impacts the concept of citizenship in the Middle East. Women's rights and roles have evolved differently across the region, influenced by cultural, religious, and legal factors. In many Middle Eastern countries, women's citizenship rights have been restricted compared to men, affecting their legal status, political participation, and access to resources. These gender disparities reflect broader social

and political inequalities that continue to shape the region's development (Joseph 2000). Economic factors are integral to understanding citizenship in the Middle East. The distribution of resources, particularly oil wealth, has influenced citizenship policies and practices. Rentier states, which derive a significant portion of their revenue from natural resources, often use economic incentives to secure the loyalty of their citizens while limiting political freedoms. This economic model has led to a political landscape where economic benefits are used to maintain social order and political stability, but also where economic dependency on oil revenues makes these states vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices (Beblawi 1987: 383).

Contemporary challenges further complicate the concept of citizenship in the Middle East. Ongoing political instability and conflict have profound implications for citizenship. Wars, uprisings, and external interventions have disrupted traditional notions of citizenship and created large populations of refugees and internally displaced persons. These crises challenge the ability of states to provide for and protect their citizens (Chatty 2010: 46–47). Additionally, many Middle Eastern countries continue to grapple with authoritarian governance, which affects the practice of citizenship. Efforts at political reform and democratization have varied across the region, with some countries experiencing significant changes while others maintain strict control over their populations. Globalization and migration also influence citizenship in the Middle East. The movement of people within and outside the region, whether for economic, educational, or safety reasons, complicates traditional notions of citizenship and national identity. Diasporic communities and transnational connections challenge the exclusivity of state-based citizenship and introduce new dynamics to the understanding of belonging and identity (Anderson 1991: 262). These contemporary issues highlight the ongoing evolution and complexity of citizenship in the Middle East.

#### *4.2. Struggle for Citizenship Rights*

The relationship between the state and its citizens in the Middle East varies widely, influenced by legal frameworks, political systems, cultural and historical contexts, and economic conditions. In more autocratic regimes like Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, citizens are often seen as subjects, while countries like Lebanon and Tunisia allow for more active participation (Al-Rasheed 2010: 44). Legal frameworks define rights and responsibilities, but enforcement is inconsistent, with states like Egypt curtailing civil liberties despite constitutional guarantees. Political upheavals, social movements, economic conditions, and technological advances can shift the state's view of its relationship with citizens. Shifts in the state's view of its relationship with citizens often occur due to political changes, social movements, economic conditions, and technological advances. Political upheavals like the Arab Spring have significantly impacted state-citizen relationships in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, highlighting demands for greater political freedom and economic opportunity (Lynch 2012: 222–223). Social movements and activism, such as Iran's Green Movement in 2009, have also driven changes in state policies, though they often face severe repression (Milani 2010: 2). Economic factors, such as fluctuating oil prices, can lead to changes in the provision of social services and subsidies, prompting unrest and calls for political change, as seen in Algeria (Lowi 2009). Technological advances, particularly the rise of social media, have transformed how states interact with citizens, enabling greater citizen mobilization and political activism despite increased surveillance and propaganda (Howard and



Hussain 2013: 15). States have duties to protect rights, provide public goods, offer welfare and economic support, ensure justice and rule of law, and facilitate participation in governance. However, the fulfilment of these duties varies, with oil-rich countries like Saudi Arabia providing extensive welfare, while conflict-affected countries like Yemen struggle with basic services (World Bank 2019). Overall, the state-citizen relationship in the Middle East is dynamic and continually evolving, shaped by a complex interplay of internal and external factors.

The Middle East saw a wave of protests and demonstrations, coupled with violence and resistance against the dictatorial and unpopular governments. The social protests were aimed at promoting democratic values and ensuring equality. These protests were anti-capitalist and anti-establishment (Isin and Nyers 2014: 24). It soon became evident that the popular revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt were a significant catalyst and source of hope and inspiration for the social movement that erupted across the globe in 2011. When this occurred, it also became more evident that the Arab Spring was about overthrowing the old autocratic regimes from within (Armbrust 2011). The event of Mohamed Bouazizi, a vendor setting himself on fire due to the humiliating behaviour of the municipal authorities worked as adding fuel to the fire and engulfed Tunisia with widespread protests (Isin and Nyers 2014: 25). The protests engulfed the whole of Middle East and culminated in toppling the existing governments and uncertainty prevailed in all quarters. After the protests, the people did not aim to revive the old or classical institutions but they searched for inspiration from outside and dreamed for new political framework whereby the interests of the citizens remained visible in the public sphere (Isin and Nyers 2014: 26). The struggle for citizenship seemed to have grown to change the balance of power between the citizens and the state.

The multifaceted nature of uprisings can be best understood through the prism of the concept of citizenship. The term itself has been used by the participants in the struggle. The prerequisite for the mobilisation of the poor for the movement of gaining citizenship rights is their understanding of the benefits and rights associated with citizenship (Menza 2021: 1). There remains a challenge until now to analyse this transition of movements associated with citizenship rights or non-citizenship debate (Meijer 2014: 2). The major factor responsible for the struggle for citizenship rights in the uprisings in the Middle East was the extensive political control of the political heads over the masses. This resulted in discontent and disbelief in the masses coupled with the increasing perception and belief in the citizenship rights enjoyed in other parts of the world, particularly in the West.

The Arab Spring was influenced by various Western models of citizenship, each contributing to the broader aspirations for democratic reform, social justice, and human rights. These movements drew on the principles of liberal democracy, republicanism, social democracy, and human rights discourse, reflecting a complex interplay of local and global influences. Protesters across the Arab world sought to establish political systems that respect individual freedoms, ensure accountable governance, and promote socio-economic justice. The pervasive influence of these Western models underscores the universal appeal of democratic ideals and the enduring quest for dignity and freedom. Liberal democracy emphasizes individual rights, freedom of expression, electoral democracy, and the rule of law. Many Arab Spring protesters were inspired by these principles, seeking to replace authoritarian regimes with systems that respect individual

freedoms and ensure fair political representation. For instance, the movements in Tunisia and Egypt highlighted the desire for democratic reforms and the establishment of democratic institutions (Anderson 2011: 2–7).

Republicanism focuses on civic participation, public virtue, and opposition to corruption. The Arab Spring movements reflected republican ideals by calling for accountable governance and active citizen participation. Protesters demanded transparency and the eradication of corrupt practices, reflecting a desire for a more participatory and virtuous political system (Aouragh and Hamouchene 2022: 54). Social democracy combines democratic governance with a focus on social justice, welfare policies, and economic equality. Many protesters demanded not only political reforms but also socioeconomic rights and better living conditions. The call for economic justice and equitable distribution of wealth was particularly strong in countries with significant economic disparities and high unemployment rates (Anderson 2011: 8–10). The slogan ‘Bread, freedom, social justice’ encapsulates the fundamental demands of the Revolution, symbolizing the people's desire for basic necessities, individual liberties, and fair societal treatment. It became a unifying call that brought together diverse political groups and participants during the protests (Sobhy 2024: 13). The human rights discourse emphasizes universal rights and freedoms as outlined by international agreements and conventions. The demand for basic human rights, such as freedom from torture, freedom of speech, and assembly, was central to many of the Arab Spring movements. This emphasis on human rights resonated with global norms and garnered international support for the protests (Heydemann and Leenders 2013: 144).

Citizenship rights have evolved in the Middle East, but a number of factors have also worked against them. These include the colonial and later authoritarian states, as well as the entrenched and pervasive patronage and clientelism system. Even though rights can also be asserted through patronage systems, these systems generally operate against them (Meijer 2014: 3). Apart from the privileged class (*Al-Khassa*) who enjoyed the highest grade of rights in the classical Middle Eastern empires, the common people were either called the *Ra'aya* (Flock) or the *Amma* (Public) having no specific privileges. There was a transition from the multireligious and multilingual empire adhering to different forms of citizenship to a homogeneous nation-state having common citizenship to all citizens with equal rights. This process of transition was necessitated by the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent establishment of colonial states like Algeria (1830–1870), Egypt (1882), Tunisia (1883), and Morocco (1912) (Meijer 2014: 4).

Since the ‘*Jasmine Revolution*’ in 2011, Tunisia has made significant strides toward democracy and, so far, has managed to escape the violent anarchy or authoritarian revival seen in other ‘Arab Spring’ nations. Apart from the right to vote and other fundamental rights, Tunisia's distinctive feature in the Arab world is the legal and socioeconomic status of women. *Al Nahda* held a sizable majority of the seats in the elected body that created the constitution (Dunn 1996). But many of its provisions and the way it is framed could be seen as victories for secularist parties or pragmatists inside *Al-Nahda*. Shari‘ah or Islamic law is not mentioned, as an alternative, Article 2 declares that ‘*Tunisia is a civil state based on citizenship, the will of the people, and the supremacy of law,*’ and Article 3 declares that ‘*the people are sovereign and the source of au-*

thority, which is exercised through the people's representatives and by referendum' (Arieff and Humud 2015: 4).

After the First World War, nationalism grew in popularity, but politics was still restricted to the fight for independence and national cohesion. For instance, the prominent Egyptian nationalist *Wafd party* (1919) and the *Destour* (1920) in Tunisia attempted to monopolize power while speaking on behalf of the people, rejecting pluralism and denouncing the phrase 'party system' (*hizbiyya*) as fostering national division (*Fitnah*) (Fabien 2013). This inclination toward totalization is reflected in the term citizenship (*Muwātana*). The word *Muwātana* 'Citizenship' has come to limelight recently; its origin is from the root word 'Watan' meaning homeland or a place which is a permanent habitat for human beings, and the term '*Mawātin*' refers to the place where human beings or creatures live. The nation (*al-Watan*), a group, and a community (*Jamā'ah*) were more important than the individual with rights known as the citizen (*Mawātin*) (Abdul-Hay 2018: 112). The emphasis on civil and political rights equality with Europeans during this time, including colonists in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, and the elimination of extraterritorial rights were the two main areas of focus in terms of rights. Although the specific rights of minorities were denied throughout the unification process, it was inclusive of all populations and minorities (including Jews in Morocco and Tunisia, Copts in Egypt, Berbers in Morocco and Algeria, and Kurds in Iraq and Syria). Social rights were included into the nationalist movement via the inclusion and mobilization of the lower classes. Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt all saw the establishment of trade unions (in the 1930s) (Meijer 2014: 4).

Trade unions played a crucial role in the Arab Spring, acting as catalysts and providing organizational support to the uprisings. In Tunisia, the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT) was pivotal, using its extensive network to organize protests and strikes that led to the ousting of President Ben Ali (Yousfi 2021: 5). In Egypt, the newly established Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU) mobilized workers and organized strikes, especially in key sectors like textiles and transport, which sustained the momentum of the revolution (Sharkawy and Agati 2021: 62). Libya's trade unions were less influential due to suppression under Gaddafi, but existing unions and informal worker networks still participated in the protests (Bellin 2012: 130). In Yemen, unions like the Yemeni Teachers Syndicate joined the protests, emphasizing economic grievances and political reform and it continues to do. In Bahrain, the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (GFBTU) organized strikes and demonstrations despite severe state repression (BCHR 2021). Overall, trade unions across the Arab world provided crucial organizational capabilities, leadership, and legitimacy to the protest movements, highlighting economic grievances and fostering broader participation in the uprisings.

The liberal intelligentsia in Tunisia, Egypt and Iraq soon realised after the protests that the citizens shall be given all social, economic and political rights, due to the authoritarian nature of the governance and socio-political changes in west. The struggle for nation-state formation in the Middle East has been closely linked with the quest for citizenship rights. The formation of nation-states often entailed defining who belonged to the nation, which in turn influenced the granting of citizenship and associated rights. In the post-Ottoman period, new nation-states emerged, and the process of state-building involved efforts to establish a national identity and governance structures that

included legal definitions of citizenship (Gelvin 2012). These definitions were crucial for determining who could participate in political life, access state services, and benefit from economic opportunities. The Arab Spring uprisings further highlighted the link between the struggle for nation-state and citizenship rights, as protesters across the region demanded not only political change but also social justice and full citizenship rights. The movement emphasized the need for inclusive governance that respects the rights of all citizens, underscoring the connection between national identity and citizenship (Beinin and Vairel 2013: 5). The 1980s oil crisis declined the legitimacy of the state and in response to this situation, the people came into the streets, beginning with the 'bread riots' and culminating in the emergence of citizenship rights with people demanding their civil, political, and social rights. In the Middle East, conceptions of citizenship and rights were expanding. This not only posed challenges to the state but also made it difficult to reach a new consensus on which to base new community arising out of the Renaissance. The citizen-state interactions in these nations had fallen apart during the Arab upheavals due to their extreme divergence and frequent contradictions (Beinin and Vairel 2013: 6).

A large portion of the population migrated to the Western world for enjoyment rights which were denied in their respective states. Migration to the Western world from the Middle East is significantly driven by authoritarianism and the denial of rights. Political repression, such as censorship, imprisonment of dissidents, and suppression of free speech, is common in authoritarian regimes like Syria and Egypt (Heydemann 2013: 71). Many movements and political parties have now a shared understanding of the concepts of citizen (*Mawātin*) and citizenship (*Muwātana*). Liberal Islamists have agreed to equal rights for women and minorities (like Copts). The idea of a contract (*'aqd*) between the citizen and the state has also become the cornerstone of political change. The Muslim Brotherhood agreed in 1995 that the *Ummah* (Muslim Community) was the ultimate source of authority and that the people should rule themselves. The movements like that of the Muslim Brotherhood (Egypt), *Al-Nahda* (Tunisia), Justice and Development Party (Morocco), and the Islamic Action Front (Jordan) created a separate 'parallel Islamic sector' that provided an alternative society based on 'commitment' (*iltizam*) and solidarity and saw the public activity as a personal obligation (*fard 'ayn*). They turned the demobilised, inactive citizen into a dedicated, active Muslim (*al-muslim al-multazim*) (Meijer 2014: 7). Wide-ranging citizen initiatives, fully autonomous of the government, such as 'citizen councils' (*lijan al-muwantinin*) or 'coordinating committees' (*al-lijan al-tansiqiyya*) in Morocco, have been a feature of the uprisings (*Ibid.*).

Before being elected as President of Egypt, Mohamed Morsi made several key pledges focused on the rule of law. He promised to ensure the independence of the judiciary, free from executive interference (Brownlee, Masoud, and Reynolds 2013: 150). Morsi committed to protecting human rights and civil liberties, including freedom of expression, assembly, and association, and ending practices like arbitrary detention and torture. He vowed to tackle government corruption through increased transparency and accountability (Kirkpatrick 2013: 175). Morsi also pledged comprehensive legal reforms to modernize Egypt's legal framework in line with democratic principles. Additionally, he emphasized social justice, promoting economic fairness and equal opportunities for all citizens (El-Ghobashy 2012: 45). The republican system of governance, the

constitution, social fairness, and the dignity of all Egyptians were among the pledges made by Morsi. In addition to having complete access to school and employment, women would not be compelled to adhere to an Islamic dress code in public (Esposito, Sonn, and Voll 2016: 218). However, the opposition and the Morsi administration failed to agree on a shared agenda for economic growth, employment, citizenship equality, political and religious plurality, stability and security, and the rights of women and minorities to freedom of expression, assembly, and religion, ultimately leading towards the downfall. Morsi failed to adequately and convincingly show that '*the new Egypt*' was a contemporary, inclusive of all religions, and a nation-state where everyone enjoyed full citizenship. It opened itself up to opposition accusations that, despite some 'cosmetic changes,' it was still a 'Muslim Brotherhood government' since it was not inclusive enough in terms of diverse representation in its appointments and policies (Esposito, Sonn, and Voll 2016: 223).

The success of the Islamist parties in Tunisia, Egypt, and Morocco in the elections that followed the Arab uprisings, as well as the crucial role they played in Syria, Libya, and Yemen, have elevated political Islam to the fore of academic discussion (Hamid 2011: 42). A new arrangement or organisation of authority and personal freedom is referred to as 'political modernity (Lazreg 2021: 2). Despite having a brief period of power before being overthrown in a coup d'état in 2013, Egypt's Freedom and Justice Party (The political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood) expressed its support for electoral democracy and a modern civil state, as well as its willingness to uphold freedom, human rights, and gender equality (European Parliament 2012: 5). Although the FJP initially attempted to project an appreciation for the principles of democracy, political pluralism, and civil rights in Egypt, it was unable to do so. The Brotherhood has expressed ambiguous and conflicted opinions in its rhetoric regarding the political and citizenship rights of women and non-Muslims. The Brotherhood has been slower to fully embrace the equality of all citizens before the law regardless of religion, sex, and ethnicity than the Ennahda party and the impact of its leaders' experiences seeking asylum in secular European countries on their ideological moderation (Lazreg 2021: 14). The Muslim Brotherhood's rhetoric and behaviour toward Christian Copts created concerns about its adherence to the principles of civil rights and equality for all citizens, much like it did with the topic of women's rights.

In addition to liberalism, democracy has played a significant role in political modernity. In a nutshell, the idea represents a dedication to self-determination, individual liberty, citizenship, and democracy. Since the authoritarian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was overthrown in January 2011, which is widely regarded as the start of the Arab Spring, Tunisia has successfully established a functioning democracy and taken a number of helpful actions to advance human rights in the nation, including the drafting of the progressive 2014 Constitution. The enactment of a bill making racial discrimination illegal in October 2018 was one of several legislative reforms that followed to protect the country's minorities from discrimination. Many religious communities still struggle with the repercussions of years of prejudice despite these hopeful advancements. Although the Constitution guarantees the freedom of religion, only the Christian and Jewish groups are currently recognised as minorities in practice. Other unrecognised groups, like the *Bahā'is*, have considerable constraints on their right to freely practice their religion (Encyclopaedia Iranica 1988). The punishment of Tunisians who

choose to become Christians or identify as atheists continues to be based on pre-revolutionary laws on apostasy. Since the revolution, Tunisia has made strides thanks to a rising appreciation for minorities, women, and other groups, as well as a desire to create a platform where these voices can openly speak their concerns. To fully achieve equality for all -people and complete the nation's extraordinary transition to a vibrant, inclusive democracy, however, considerable work still has to be done (Quattrini 2018: 2).

The legal system in Tunisia has also been consolidated and official records like birth, marriage, and death certificates no longer include details regarding a person's religion as they do in certain other nations in the region, such as Egypt. The Constitution's final draught was published in 2014 following the revolution of 2011 and the elections for the Constituent Assembly. The outcome of extensive talks between more liberal and conservative factions, this constitution is extremely progressive and upholds all fundamental freedoms and rights. While Tunisia is said to be 'a civil state built on citizenship, the will of the people, and the supremacy of law,' the underlying conflict between religion and secularism can be seen in the country's history (Lazreg 2021: 8). In terms of women's rights, Tunisia is widely regarded as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region's most developed nation. A significant development in this area, particularly in terms of family law, was the 1956 Tunisian Code of Personal Status, which outlawed polygamy, removed the husband's power to reject his wife, and permitted women to apply for divorce. Since 1957, women have been entitled to vote as well (Lazreg 2021: 9). The evolution brought about radical changes, particularly in Tunisia where the New Constitution of 2014 became a landmark achievement as far as granting citizenship rights is concerned. as granted. The constitution guarantees key civil, political, and cultural rights (Amara 2014).

The figurehead of this movement of citizenship rights was Rachid al-Ghannouchi, who is credited for heading the *Nahda* movement in Tunisia for bringing changes and installing a democratic setup. While emphasising the importance of freedom and rights, he argues that it is not suitable for Islamists and Muslims in general worry that freedom would undermine Islam. Islam would be most at risk if there were no liberties and not enough protections for everyone's social, religious, and political rights, as well as their freedom of expression and travel (Al-Ghannouchi 2013). The leadership of Ennahda made the decision to separate the political and religious aspects of the party during the Party Congress in May 2016. Rached Ghannouchi, the head of *Al-Nahda*, stated in an interview that the party was 'leaving political Islam and joining democratic Islam', therefore for Ghannouchi, Tunisia was no longer claiming to represent political Islam, but representing democratic Islam (Bobin 2016). The congress's final statement emphasises that *Al-Nahda* has to shed its dual character as a party and a movement and has transformed into a national democratic political party with an Islamic focus that is open to all Tunisian men and women. It is placed in the middle of the political spectrum and gives social justice and national development issues top attention. The dedication of *Al-Nahda* to a civil state exposes its normalisation with the deep state and opposes traditional Islamist ambitions to enforce Shari'ah (Islamic law). Alternatively, it assimilated into the state it had been resisting for years (from the Habib Bourguiba era to Ben Ali). In conclusion, Al-Nahda's selection of a Tunisian Jew named Simon Salama as its candidate for the 2018 municipal elections was a clear indication of its more tolerant and new approach to religious minorities. Yet the Islamist-led administration in the Muslim

Brotherhood government did not ensure minorities' protection, inclusion in politics, or equal rights. The renowned scholars Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Rached al-Ghannouchi have been strongly advocating citizenship as the centre stage on which the relations should be established between the Government and the inhabitants (Vericat 2017: 9).

The Muslim Brotherhood government under Muhammad Mursi was expected to be a model of governance in the Muslim world, but it failed to deliver particularly on the human rights front. In the first address to his countrymen, apart from laying emphasis on national unity and democracy, identified them as '*Ashirati* (My Clan) instead of *Muwātinun* (Citizens) which led to outrage among the civil society in Egypt and in a way paved the way for more efforts to be done for availing *Muwātana* (Citizenship) status (Morsi 2012). Among the demands put forward by the group 'Youth of 14<sup>th</sup> February Revolution,' it was demanded that a national commission shall be formed to investigate the allegations of naturalization done for political purposes. Further, it was demanded that the citizenship of all those residing in Bahrain shall be immediately revoked who had acquired it contrary to the laws of the land. On 1 March 2011, *Al-Wefaq*, the group representing the demonstration in Bahrain, issued a statement calling for the establishment of a civil State, wherein equality of all Bahrainis is ensured and there shall be no discrimination between the Shias and the Sunnis. It vehemently opposed any solution which satisfies the demands of one group and rejects others. Bahrain like other Arab countries also witnessed protest and demonstrations in February-March 2011, emulating the protests of Tunisia and Egypt. The protesters beginning with social media activities gather under the group 'The Youth of February 14<sup>th</sup> Revolution' and framed number of steps and demands necessary to be taken for the overall development and advancement of Bahrain. It aspired that all Bahrainis should live in harmony and tolerance and dignity of all Bahrainis shall be respected. Similarly, in the demonstrations held on 6 March 2011, it was reiterated that the purpose of demonstrations is to establish a polity that will ensure that the rights of all citizens are respected on the basis of equality. In the post 9/11 era, the Western governments along with international organizations and NGO's have played a great role in the awakening and promotion of the citizenship debate in the Arab world. The process of civic participation includes both the voting rights as well as the socio-economic and political campaigns (Report of Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry 2011).

## 5. Conclusion

The Arab Spring played an important role in challenging the traditional conceptions of citizenship. The relative deprivation of the youth from the political and civic affairs enraged them and they showed their frustration through protests and struggle for attaining citizenship rights. The young have played a great role in the process of reconstruction and reshaping of citizenship through their participation in protests against the ruling regimes. Despite oppressive authoritarian governments and a gloomy assessment of human rights abuses in the backdrop of the Arab upheavals, all three groups – women, youth, and refugees – demonstrated agency and took various actions to establish themselves politically. They played a great role in pressuring the ruling regimes to make the citizenship rights available to them without any discrimination.

There was a visible change in the Arab world particularly in the political, social, and economic perspectives. The rallies involved a remarkably diverse group of partici-

pants, ranging from NGO leaders and labour unions to lone activists, artists, first-time protesters, and the common man and woman on the street. However inclusive attracting individuals from all social strata, both men, women, Syrians, Palestinians, Lebanese, Tunisians, Egyptians, Bahrainis, and migratory workers, social, gendered, and legal issues were the subject of public emotional debate. In conclusion, the Arab Spring was a period of identity crisis brought on by the advancing imperial powers, and religious and secular intellectuals in the Arab and Muslim countries sought ways to oppose this dominance while maintaining the urge to participate in modernity through culturally genuine procedures.

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