LEBANESE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

Counter Revolutions via Extremists Groups:

Tunisia vs. Syria

By

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A thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in International Affairs

School of Arts and Sciences

January 2016
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Program: International Affairs

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Dedication

To my family
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the support of many people. I am grateful to my advisor, Dr. Imad Salamey, who was very supportive and encouraging.

I am thankful for my family and friends who were always there for any help needed and, more importantly, for their moral support. I thank those who have challenged me and instigated the need to write this paper so that I can show them that I am not a quitter.
Counter Revolutions via Extremist Groups:

Tunisia and Syria

Lamia Jihad Al Masri

Abstract

The end of the year 2010 incorporated a highly significant set of events in the Middle East And North Africa (MENA) region. Islamic radical groups have capitalized on the anarchy and have managed to spread terror in more than one Arab country. As a result, the promised democratic transition of the Arab Spring has been halted and countered by radical extremism. According to Samuel Huntington, every democratic wave has its counter reverse wave. Is the sequence of events in the MENA region considered to be a form of Huntington’s reverse wave, or is the MENA region and its Islamic radicalism antithetical to democracy?

This thesis aims to draw a comparative analysis between a respectively successful transition presented by the Tunisian case study, verses a failed transition presented by the Syrian case study. The comparison is based on three levels of analysis- international community, regional powers, and local governance. The purpose of the comparison is to draw the main transitional indicators in both countries and link them to Huntington’s factors of reverse waves to be able to conclude whether Huntington’s theory of reverse waves can be applied to the MENA region.

Keywords: Arab, Spring, Tunisia, Syria, Reverse, Waves, Democracy, Radical, Islam, Moderate, Transition, MENA, Exceptionalism.
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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Arab Spring into a Jihadi Spring

The end of the year 2010 witnessed the spread of democratic movements in the Arab world known as the Arab Spring. Protests and riots have led to revolutions in five prominent Arab countries. Nevertheless, the promises of democracy and civil rights have been shattered. Five years after the start of the Arab Spring, a wave of sectarian extremism has overwhelmed liberal promises, and an Islamist ‘Jihadi Spring’ seems to have replaced that of the Arab Spring in some countries (The Economist, 2014). Extremism has capitalized on the spread of anarchy and turmoil. Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), al-Nusra Front, and other extremist groups have waged a campaign of terror against opponents while gaining control over large territories in Syria and Iraq. Many scholars have been optimistic about the Arab Spring and the snowballing effect that has followed it. However, in light of current events and political changes, such optimism has been met by an increasingly growing sentiment of pessimism. Why did the Arab Spring turn into a ‘Jihadi Spring’? What were the weaknesses or the gaps that have given extremists the opportunity to emerge? The answers to these questions as well as the relationship linking radical Islamism to change and transition in the MENA region are addressed through comparative research and analysis.
The hypothesis this thesis explores is whether the radical manifestations of Islamism imbedded in the Arab political culture is fundamentally antithetical to an Arab democracy. As a counter argument, the Arab Spring is reexamined in light of Samuel Huntington’s theory of reverse waves. The confirmation of this hypothesis or its negation offers valuable insights as to the prerequisites for genuine democratic transition in the region.

At an early stage, some scholars have homogeneously viewed the Arab Spring revolts without distinguishing between the protestors and their confronting opponents. Even though the activists shared a lot of similar ideas and tactics, the regimes they were trying to oust varied, and the contexts differed as well (Anderson, 2011). More than two hundred academic books and articles have been written about the Arab Spring; however, the writings are mostly descriptive rather than being methodical and linked to theories (Gevlin, 2012). There has been a swift shift from public unrest calling out for regime change into a rise of fanatic extremist groups. The change of events has appalled the international society and has turned the focus from the atrocities done by certain regimes onto those done by newly formed extremist groups.

The infamous ISIS has exceptionally gained power in Syria among other Arab Spring countries. Many theorists state that radical movements usually take advantage of political or social vacuum, but that is not the case in the countries where regimes have been toppled. ISIS has been able to take control over rural and urban regions of Syria, which shows their political, military and social prowess (Caris and Reynolds, 2014). They govern through religious administrative offices and service offices. The former operates on enforcing religion and managing religious courts while the latter provides
the community with humanitarian aid and key infrastructure. It is puzzling that ISIS has managed to take control over parts of Syria where the Assad regime was still in power, rather than control areas in countries where regimes have been toppled. Unfortunately, the rise of ISIS has corresponded with the collapse of the Arab Spring. The international and the regional communities altered their focus from observing the fall of some autocratic Arab regimes onto the threat of ISIS.

1.2 Syria’s Arab Spring

Tunisia and Syria are two countries that have experienced the Arab Spring but have shown disparate results. In Syria, what started out as an uprising for regime change transformed into a ‘playground’ for extremist groups. The initial protests in Syria were similar to the counterpart’s movements across the region. Activists attempted to peacefully infiltrate public areas in Syria through a civic and non-Islamist connotation. The educated middle class represented a big portion of the protestors. They were counting on an international intervention similar to what occurred in Libya (Leenders & Heydemann, 2012). The peaceful approach did not last long in Syria. The movements escalated and conflicts developed between the army and the protestors, which gave way to an ongoing civil war (Leenders & Heydemann). The Assad regime offered several concessions during different intervals; however, they were considered insignificant by the protestors. Soon enough, the regime escalated its attack against the protestors and initiated a series of governmental crackdowns. The international society has been reluctant to take aggressive action in the Syrian conflict and has offered no outright intervention to stop the atrocities committed by the Assad regime.
The conflict was militarized and factions of the Syrian Sunni oppositions were backed by extremist groups and transformed the conflict into sectarian struggle. ISIS and al-Nusra Front have recently been major actors in the Syrian conflict. ISIS has gained ground as a result of the instability and lawlessness in Syria, has been able to take possession of heavy weaponry, and is now heavily funded by local businesses and a significant portion of the oil and gas sectors of Syria and Iraq (Knights, 2014). The emergence of ISIS has been a shock to governments and peoples across the world. It has developed from a fragment that broke off from al-Qaeda; its prime goal is to take over areas in Iraq and Syria to create an Islamic Sunni state. Past Iraqi soldiers have become ISIS fighters after the fall of Saddam Hussein’s military; the 2014 estimate of ISIS according to CIA is between 20,000 and 31,500 fighters in Syria and Iraq (CNN Library, 2014). The international society’s inaction to the Assad Regime’s brutality has continued; however, once ISIS was taking over more areas in Syria and Iraq, the decision to intervene in Syria was finally taken.

1.3 Tunisia’s Arab Spring

Tunisia, the catalyst of the Arab Spring, remains the only hope for a successful democratic transition. Many scholars seek to determine what factors, at least thus far, have led to the successful transition in Tunisia from the Zine El Abidine Bin Ali autocracy to the peaceful elections that favored its moderate Islamist political party, Annahda. Is it the character and the structure of the Tunisian society or the absence of international intervention that have led to a peaceful and hopeful transition? The main reasons that have led to uprisings in Tunisia are: an authoritarian and corrupt
government, poor economic conditions and an educated population who wanted change (Hart, 2014). Ninety-eight percent of the Tunisians are Muslims and most of them are Sunni Muslims; similarly, Sunnis are the majority in Syria. Nevertheless, the moderate Islamists of Tunisia have learned the ‘art of compromise and consensus which maybe the trademark of the promising Tunisian political model’ (Gannoushi, 2014).

Annahda’s political stances are not very Islamist and they don’t consider religion to be the main infrastructure behind policy-making. Since Tunisia’s independence, during the 1950’s, leaders have been trying to secularize the country and they have excluded religion from all governmental spheres; however, the people in 2010 wanted the inclusion of pluralistic Islam in the public sphere. Tunisia was able to survive the turmoil raging around it, and it reached a national unity government. Annahda Party has proved capable of safeguarding the transition to democracy after years of exile in European capitals.

The future challenges facing the Tunisians are: its geopolitical situation bordering Libya and its poor economic condition. The international community hasn’t interfered in the Tunisian matters during the uprisings. Unlike other Arab countries, the Tunisian military has had a minor part during the upheavals and it has also had a very minimalist role in the domestic economy (Anderson, 2011).

1.4 Research Questions

This thesis aims to shed the light on the aftermath of transition in two countries that have undergone the Arab Spring revolutions. The literature encompasses a number of articles and books that cover the different modes of transition; specifically revolutions
and counter-revolutions through the analysis of Samuel Huntington’s theory of reverse waves. It also highlights the requisites for democracy to be consolidated after any transition, and how Syria and Tunisia differ in that matter. Many scholars have discussed that Islam does not tolerate democracy; however, this matter is not the case in a number of several Islamic countries.

The two main questions addressed in this thesis are as follows:

- Do the transition indicators in Tunisia and Syria coincide with Huntington’s factors of reverse waves, and how tied are they to the core theories of successful transitions?
- Is the rise of ISIS a representation of a reverse wave that Huntington discusses in his book *The Third Wave*?

These questions are addressed through a comparative analysis between Syria, a failed transition, and Tunisia, a successful transition, on three levels of analysis and linked to Huntington’s theory of reverse waves.

### 1.5 Methodology

In order to reveal characteristics of counter-wave and underlining causations as they relate to radical Islamism, a comparative research design is conducted so that the failed transition in Syria is compared to the relatively successful transition in Tunisia. Huntington’s Third Wave thesis and the qualifications for transition are incorporated in the comparative analysis in order to confirm that every attempted democratization is followed by a counter wave which, in turn, is represented by the upsurge of radical Islamism in Syria.
Even though there are various Islamist groups such as that of “Bayt Al Makdiss”, Muslim Brotherhood, ISIS, Ansar Allah, and Kataab Ahl Al Hak, the focus is primarily on ISIS, as a radical rejectionist, and Annahda Party, as a moderate Islamist group, in order to compare approaches and attitudes towards transition as established by Huntington’s thesis. Examination is based on a preliminary desk study research that relies on political statements made by “rejectionists” against transitions (qualifications established by Huntington’s categories of reverse wave).

This paper primarily tackles the cases of Syria and Tunisia in light of the Arab Spring by comparing and analyzing them through the lens of a number of possible hypotheses. Three suggested propositions affecting the sequence of events result in the emergence of sectarian extremists. The first proposition deals with local governments and powers in each country respectively. It discusses the interaction between the autocratic structures of the local regimes with internal opposition. Locally, the levels of comparison also tackle the mode of transition, the requisites of democracy and the ethnic structure in each country that leads to the emergence of a differing sectarian dynamics in the MENA region. The second proposition reflects upon the regional theories that include the regional powers; mainly Iran, Turkey and the Saudi Arabia. This section covers the struggle and the interaction of these powers to shape the region and influence it according to their own interests. The third proposition is the effect of the international crisis on the respective countries. Global governance is collapsing and new international powers are emerging. This issue is affecting the interference of external actors in regional matters which, in turn, is affecting the sequence of events. A comparative
research is drawn in order to show how the international actors have affected each case differently.

The analysis settles a variety of burning questions. First, it responds to whether the Arab Spring confirms Huntington’s propositions and his theory continues to provide a working model for democratic transition, or whether it must be revised. Second, this research reveals exceptional aspects of Islamist rejectionism and emerging sectarian dynamics that must be addressed and integrated in any theoretical proposition for change. Third, it has the prospect of shedding light on an emerging governing crisis whose tenants stretch beyond simplistic egalitarianism or majoritarianism towards an emerging communitarian governing anomaly.

The paper goes over each country separately and studies all of the variables mentioned above (levels of international intervention, levels of democracy requisites, mode of transition, regional powers, local governments, etc…), and a comparative table is formed to represent the implications of the study.

A set of preconditions are formed to show what might have led to sectarian extremism backed up by Huntington’s reverse wave factors. Radical Islamism is not the factor behind the hindrance of democracy in Arab countries; however, it is the combination of internal and external factors that lead to the failure of democracy and the attraction of radicalism as a means of protection and economic security.

1.6 Map of Thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters:
The first chapter introduces the main hypothesis under study and the research questions that are tackled. It also presents the method in which these questions are answered.

The second chapter includes supporting literature that discusses the different forms of democratic transitions, stressing on the revolutionary transitions and their counter waves through the lens of Samuel Huntington. It also includes previous writings about Islam and its compatibility with democracy in the MENA region; as well as scholarly works on the requisites needed for democracy to be consolidated after a transition.

The third chapter introduces the methodology that is used in this paper, which is a comparative analysis based on three propositions (international governance, regional power, and local stipulations), and how each is represented in both of Syria and Tunisia.

Chapter four covers the analysis that links the three variables in both countries to Huntington’s explanations behind reverse waves. This chapter employs the analysis to infer the emerging sectarian dynamics and the governance struggle in the region.

Chapter five attempts to outline the robust arguments that back the hypothesis, and it also suggests further research that reinforces the concluded hypothesis.
Chapter Two

Theoretical Analysis

2.1 Democratic Transitions

The modes of democratic transitions have been an important study among political scientists. Even after three decades of research and theory generation, there is still no consensus on how to classify countries into the different modes, the consequences of the transitions, the selection of institutional configuration, and the consolidation of democracy (Schneider, 2006). Scholars have tried to study the different modes of transition to find common results that might demonstrate the most favoring mode for the consolidation of democracy. Nevertheless, as we will later see, the mode of transition is not the only aspect that reflects the success of a transition. There are a lot of other factors that add up to the transition equation.

The main focus of this paper is to reveal the causes of reverse waves and interpret modes of counter transitions reinforced through Huntington’s theories. Each mode of transition is discussed briefly with the respective possible effects. A comparative research is drawn between Syria and Tunisia – two countries that have had a peaceful uprising, initially, but which have later demonstrated differing outcomes. Through this comparison, indicators of counter transitions are highlighted along with their underlining causes.
The literature incorporated in this paper briefly covers the different modes of democratic transitions, the backlash of democratic revolutions and the prerequisites of democracy. It also touches on democracy and Islam by stressing the fact that radical Islamism is a by-product of the reverse wave in Syria, and it does not represent the inevitable doom of the Arab countries as claimed by some scholars.

2.2 Modes of Transition

Defining ‘transition’ has been debatable among political scientists. O’Donnell and Schmitter have explained transition as the period between one political regime and another (O’Donnell & Schmitter, 1986). Nevertheless, transitions from authoritarian rule might not always lead to democracy (Karl & Schmitter, 2002). Transitions are divided upon three main stages: the first includes the dissolution of the authoritarian regime, the second tackles the installation of democracy, and the third incorporates the consolidation of democracy. O’Donnel distinguishes two periods of transition: the demise of the authoritarian regime and the transition to consolidated democracy. The first period is often recognized with the first gestures of mass mobilization through the polarization of the main political actors. The various modes of transition are distinguished through examining the political actors who instigated the transition. The strength of these actors and their level of social consolidation influence the transition (Schneider, 2006).

Karl and Schmitter classify the modes of transition into four different categories: pacts, impositions, reform, and revolution. The first two classifications are dominated by elites: pacts through compromise and impositions through unilateral force. On the other hand, reform occurs via mass mobilization without the use of force, and revolution takes
place when the masses ‘rise up in arms’ to change the regime (Karl & Schmitter). Scholars have considered ‘pacts’ as the most effective among the different forms. O’Donnell/ Schmitter define pacts as

“[…] an explicit, but not always publicly explicated or justified, agreement among a select set of actors which seeks to define (or, better, to redefine) rules governing the exercise of power in the basis of mutual guarantees for the ‘vital interest’ of those entering into it.”

This statement explains why pacts have shown to be more successful than other modes of transition. They compromise the important political actors who are dependent on each other, and they work together on agreeing on the set of adjustments that the new regime needs to deploy, as shown in Table 1 (Welsh, 1994). The negotiating actors in a pact should also include the interests of social actors who are not active in the transition. This point is important for the pact during the period of consolidating democracy. The future of democracy depends on whether all social groups are on the same page regarding the democratic process. Transitions, regardless of the mode, need to tackle various crucial matters within time constraints. The institutional arrangements and the distribution of power need to be addressed and agreed upon by the main actors so that the second phase of the transition is reinforced (Welsh, 1994).

Nonetheless, even if the actors agreed on the set of economic and political reforms, the sequence of events leading to these reforms might vary significantly. There is a high level of uncertainty concerning the process and the results. The demise of the authoritarian rule may give rise to different consequences, especially if there were signs of governmental instability, obstacles in decision-making and eruption of violent protests. Both, Syria and Tunisia, had the same mode of transition, but the outcomes
were different in each country. The mass mobilization that initiated in both countries had similar interests and needs. The primary demands were: overthrowing the autocratic regimes and the need for political and economic reform. According to a study done by Carsten Schneider in 2006, different modes of transitions may result in similar outcomes, and, sometimes, the same mode of transition may lead to differing outcomes (Schneider, 2006).

Table 1 Transition Processes in Central and Eastern Europe: Main Issues of Conflict Resolution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Reform</th>
<th>Economic Reform</th>
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<tr>
<td>-Reform of electoral system</td>
<td>-Macroeconomic stabilization (e.g., reform of monetary and fiscal policies)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Reform of structure of government (including issues of decentralization)</td>
<td>-Price reform (e.g., price liberalization, currency convertibility)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Selection of new political elite</td>
<td>-Structural reform (e.g., privatization, trade liberalization)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Development of institutions of interest articulation and interest aggregation (e.g., political parties, interest groups)</td>
<td>-Institutional reform (e.g., reform of legal and banking systems)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Constitution writing</td>
<td>-Education reform (e.g., management training)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Prosecution and purge of communist party officials and member of security apparatus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Restitution of past injustices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Reform of media sector</td>
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2.3 Requisites of Democracy

An immense fraction of recent literature covers the fundamental causes of democratic transitions that have been hard to predict by theorists (Berg, 2013). Economic inequality has been a main cause for a democratic transition as studied in comparative politics and political economy. Nevertheless, the empirical studies do not give a strong backing to the proposed relationship between economic inequality and democratization (Berg). Acemoglu and Robinson’s economic theory of democratization states that the increase of economic inequality leads to the increase in the possibility for citizen mobilization to democratize.

On the other hand, modernization theorists, such as Lipset, argue the opposite; the latter claims that economic development stimulates democratic transitions. Lipset is one of a number of scholars who try to identify the requisites of democracy. He cites Germany as an example of a country that has had a high level of education, wealth, industrialization and urbanization. These factors are considered by some to be favoring democracy; yet, Germany could not sustain democracy (Lipset, 1959). Lipset argues that ‘unique events’ in some countries might assist in either the perseverance or the collapse of democracy. Therefore, scholars have different perspectives regarding the set of requisites that favor democracy.

An essential requisite of democracy is a *culture* that accepts the democratic notions- freedom of speech, media, religion and human rights (Lipset, 1994). These notions cannot be abruptly created, and that is the reason why many past upheavals have failed to secure a democratic shift. Some of the examples of upheavals that have failed
are the French Revolution in 1789, the Russian Revolution in 1917 and most of the new states of Latin America in the 19th century. In most countries the institutionalization of democracy has occurred progressively through a give and take politics (Sklar, 1987). Moreover, as Lipset argues, the different groups in a state, whether religious, class, professional or economic, need to develop tolerance and recognize each others’ rights. The contesting factions in a society have learnt across history that they cannot eradicate a whole social group; hence, granting rights to a specific group might lessen the probability of a future upheaval against the more powerful faction (Lipset, Trow, and Coleman, 1956). Comparative politics proposes that for democracy to be institutionalized there needs to be power decentralization. In other words, democracy fits best when politics and economy are under separate management.

Another requisite that numerous political scientists have regarded as major is economy. Theorists have claimed that industrial capitalism supports and sustains democracy because it creates a middle class that can stand up against the state (Schumpeter, 1950). Other scholars as Weber, Moore, Skocpol and Berger have concluded that capitalism, even though it is not enough, is a primary condition for democracy. Nevertheless, there are some capitalist states that are not democratic (Latin America), and Waisman (1992) explains this notion by stating that a strong market economy is essential, and that private ownership of means of production is not enough. The market economy usually assists in the transformation of the class structure, and it strengthens the middle and the working classes. The working class is the faction of the society that pushes for suffrage and for accomplishing the rights of parties (Therborn, 1977). Once there is a strong market economy, the influence of nepotistic networks is
hindered and there is less opportunity for ‘rent-seeking by elites with privileged access to state power and resources’ (Lipset, 1994). Hence, the less the state has to do with the economy, the better the possibility for a stronger democracy.

The third aspect that affects democracy is religion. Economy and democratic culture are essential prerequisites for the establishment of democracy; however, religion can be a constraint. Across history, the relationships between different religious groups and democracy have not been successful. Protestantism is a religious faction that has shown better acceptance for democracy. European Protestant countries have turned into democracies on a bigger scale than Catholic countries (Huntington, 1991). In Catholic countries, the church has adhered to the state and has imposed it hierarchical structure on the state. Furthermore, Catholics are considered to be authoritarian in spiritual matters, which highly affected the state (Trudeau, 1960). On the other hand, Protestants have been more congregational, participatory and individualistic – traits that contribute to the sustenance of democracy.

Lipset (1994) also mentions Islamic countries in Central Asia, explaining that these states are farthest from democracy in comparison to past communist states. Even with the growth of capitalism and increased wealth and education, these states have not been democratized yet. Lipset argues that the cultural changes in those countries are not established yet to undertake a democratic change. This statement has been challenged by the Arab Spring upheavals which demonstrate that there are factions in those societies wanting democracy and are educated enough to request a change in the systems.
The level and the type of education in a country also have a considerable effect on the rise of democracy. When citizens have access to education and exposure to democratic notions, either through college or through basic reading and researching, they acquire a clearer consciousness of their political rights. As Bryce states, “education, if it does not make men good citizens, makes it at least easier for them to become so” (Byrce, 1912). Education strengthens the ‘culture requisite,’ and if it is faced with a weak economy and high unemployment, revolts are bound to happen (Campante & Chor, 2012).

2.4 Social Movements Vs. Democratization

Democratization theorists have allocated a minimal role to social movements and protest in the democratization process. The studies of the process of democratization started after World War II in Europe during the expansion of the USSR. The main focus of political scientists was to determine the prerequisites needed for democracy to develop and persist, as well as to define which social class has the main effect on sustaining democracy (Della Porta & Rossi, 2015).

Scholars have given more regard to the structural conditions of social classes rather than their mobilization in the process of democratization. Social movements are considered to be short-lived actors compared to institutional actors, especially during the transition and the consolidation of democracy. The social movements differ in the various stages of democratization and have different effects on the process. Some are considered ‘the underground networks of resistance,’ and they challenge internal and international
supports for the authoritarian regimes. Also, some social movements are associated with political parties and actors in democracy coalitions during the transitional phase. Nonetheless, these movements haven’t always been effective. There are numerous aspects that assist in democratization, and there needs to be a combination from above and from below. According to Pagnucco, the mode of transition, the background of the democratization process coupled with the actors involved and their “strategic interactions”, affect the type of democracy to be established (Pagnucco, 1995).

Considering that ‘social movements’ go under the categories of ‘revolutions,’ we primarily need to define the precise concept of a revolution. As Peter Calvert states in his book *Revolution and Counter-Revolution*, the French Revolution has ‘set a permanent seal on the term (Calvert, 1990). Calvert also refers to Robertson who defines revolution as ‘a violent and total change in a political system’ that changes the distribution of power and social structure. The change must be purposeful, intentional and violent, and done by a class that leads the mobilized masses against the existing regime (Robertson, 1986). However, two of the case studies that Robertson mentions – Russian and French Revolutions – do not fit the description he states. The French Revolution was not intentional, and the Russian Revolution did not lead the masses against the regime.

Other scholars have tried to define the term revolution by stating what it is not. Giddens states that a revolution is not a *coup d’état*, which only replaces one set of leaders by another (Giddens, 1989). He argues that a revolution needs to be achieved by a mass social movement with the threat or use of violence. This definition contradicts with the classification of the Russian Revolution because the latter was not a result of mass
mobilization. On the other hand, the definition classifies Hitler’s rise to power in 1933 as a revolution because he was able to reach the greater power by violence and, most importantly, by being backed up by the mass movement from the beginning (Calvert, 1990). Hence, the definition of ‘revolution’ is a broad definition that encompasses a lot of varying phenomena. There are specific characteristics that are common to the varying definitions of revolution:

- Revolution is *sudden* and it is not a gradual transformation.

- Revolution is *violent*. Even though some political systems rely on the use of force by possessing the monopoly of use of physical coercion, but revolutions’ use of coercion is essential and not a last resort.

- Revolution is *political succession* through the substitution of the present regime by another. Therefore, any failed attempt to change the regime is not considered a revolution.

- Revolution is *change*. There has not been a consensus on the set of changes that occur after a revolution which make revolution ‘an essentially contested concept’ (Gallie, 1956).

Samuel Huntington outlined two types of revolutions depending on the type of the regime in charge before the revolution. The first form is the Western revolutions (France and Russia) where the regimes are weak and traditional monarchies collapse after the slight use of force against them. After the fall of the regime, a contention occurs between the moderates and the radicals, and the result of this contention defines the scope of the change. The second form is Eastern revolutions (China and Vietnam) that occur in more
modernizing type of governments. The use of force to overthrow the regime is much higher in this form because such regimes are usually robust. Therefore, the first variable that Huntington presents is the type of regime. There is also a second variable that affects the outcome of the revolutions, and it is the type of society (Dix, 1983). Additional factors influence the process of the revolution, such as the terrain, the bordering countries and external intervention. Dix uses a simplified typology (Table 2) to show the types of revolutions. He refers to two additional types of revolutions where one has a semi-modern society and regime (Latin American Revolutions), and another in which the regime is traditional while the society is semi-modern.

Democracy and revolution are contrasted in history and political science; they are also generally considered opposed practices. As mentioned before, scholars do not regard revolutions as strong impetuses for democracy, but some revolutions are done in ‘service of a democratic impulse’ (Hutchinson & Colon-Rios, 2013). When the citizens have no political and legal means in changing the order in their country, they resort to violent and disorganized exercise of constituent power, which is presented through revolutionary conduct. This matter represents an untamed practice of the democratic instinct.
2.5 Counter Revolutions: Huntington’s Theory of Reverse Waves

The main focus of the comparative analysis is based on the backlash of revolutions and its effect on the Arab Spring. Samuel P. Huntington is the scholar who has primarily introduced the idea that democratization occurs through waves that, in turn, occur when a number of countries tend to democratize in parallel space and time – as a cluster.

When it comes to democratic transitions, he argues that “democratic regimes that last have seldom, if ever, been instituted by mass popular action. Almost always, democracy has come as much from the top down as from the bottom up; it is as likely to be the product of oligarchy as of protest against oligarchy” (Huntington, 1984). It was the lower and the middle class citizens who generated the Arab Spring upheavals. The protests have started in a peaceful manner but ended violently in most countries.

Political scientists have considered these events to be the spark of a democratic transition to end the long-ruling authoritarian regimes. Nevertheless, the positivity
shown at first has reached a halt with the emergence of extremist sectarian groups. It reminds us of Huntington’s reverse waves: overthrowing authoritarian rulers only to subsequently struggle against sectarian extremists who have risen with the spread of chaos, specifically in Syria. The applicable cliché for almost all revolutions is that every revolution has a related counterrevolution (Nafi, 2014). The upheavals in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya have succeeded in overthrowing their governments; Syria and Yemen are still trying to do the same. However, all these countries have not prepared themselves to face the counterrevolutionary waves (Nafi).

In order to study whether the Arab Spring is a representation of the development of the third wave of democratization, we should first observe Huntington’s wave theory and the factors that lead to a wave or its reverse. According to Huntington, every wave of democratization has been followed by a ‘reverse wave’. The first wave started in the 1820’s and continued for almost a century. Twenty-nine democracies have formed over the years. The corresponding reverse wave has been initiated by Mussolini’s reign over Italy in 1922, which was followed by a decrease in democracies to 12 countries by the year 1942. The second wave of democratization began after World War II, and its reverse wave followed by decreasing the democracies from 36 to 30 countries around the world (Huntington, 1991). Huntington argues that social scientists cannot give an answer to how far we are in the third wave and whether there will be a third reverse wave. Nevertheless, he states the factors that might affect the democratic expansion or contraction. The five major factors that assist in democratic expansion according to Huntington are as follows:
1) Authoritarian regimes are facing difficulty in legitimizing their rule where citizens are open to democratic values and are going through profound economic instabilities;

2) The economic advancement during the 1960s has led to the expansion of the middle classes in a lot of countries;

3) The change in the Catholic Church activities from protecting authoritarianism to opposing it;

4) Changes in the policies of external actors;

5) The snowballing effect which has occurred earlier during the third wave.

Huntington supports these factors by historical events. During the 1970s and 1980s, many Catholic countries have democratized in Europe, Central America, and South America. The European Union was a reason why Spain, Greece, and Portugal have democratized since their democratization has secured their membership to the EU. Moreover, the collapse of the Soviet Union gave the opportunity to democratize to many countries in Eastern Europe. The EU and the Soviet Union are both considered external actors that have respectively affected the democratic transitions in a number of countries. Huntington also mentions the United States’ major role in promoting democracy – which is still the case as we see in a lot of countries (Check figure 1- showing the global levels of democracy).
Scholars have challenged Huntington’s wave theory by stating that even after thirty years of the start of the third wave, Arab countries are still ruled by authoritarian regimes. In the 1970’s, some Arab countries have tried to establish major reforms in order to strengthen popular participation in governance. Egypt started the reform in 1973 and renewed its promise to reform after the assassination of Anwar Sadat. In Morocco, King Hassan II also resorted to some type of liberalization in order to prevent his demise. He allowed the participation of a few political parties and held municipal and parliamentary elections in 1976 and 1977. Likewise, Algeria, Jordan, Tunisia, and Turkey renewed their party systems and elections in 1980s. Yet, despite all the intended change that the regimes tried to perform, there was no significant liberalization in any of those countries (Lust, 2011). It is only until 2011 that Arab societies took action on the streets to cease the long period of autocracy. After the uprisings in Tunisia, scholars have rehashed the study of democratization in the Arab world. The primary impression...
on the Arab Spring was that the third democratization wave has been revived by the upheavals. The world was anxiously waiting to see the long-lived authoritarian regimes fall from their reign. The factors that support democratization waves, which Huntington discusses, can be linked to the Arab Spring upheavals. In her article, *Missing the Third Wave (2011)*, Lust states some of the reasons that have been behind the delay of the third wave of democratization in the Arab region. She argues that the fear of political Islam has been used by the authoritarian Arab regimes to crush any civil or political liberties. The 1970’s experience that the secularist democrats have had with Islamists has led the democratic civil societies to rationalize that they are better off with the enemy they knew (autocratic regime). This matter has increased the gap between Islamists and secular democrats, leaving the arena for the regime to enhance its control. The relationship between radical and moderate factions in the opposition influences the probability of a successful democratic transition. In addition, the increased strength of radical forces might result in the hindrance of transition. Lust argues that the exclusion of Islamists from the political sphere might be a reason behind their resort to militant radicalism (Lust, 2011). In 2011, the fear of Islamists did not thwart the people from revolting and starting the Arab Spring. In Egypt and Morocco, Islamists and secularists have been cooperating for a long period before the Arab Spring. The fear and uncertainty has been reduced between both groups, and this issue has been revealed in the way they joined forces to call for greater democratization during the Arab Spring upheavals.

Nevertheless, two years after the protests started, the fear of Islamic radicals, which the regimes have used for their own benefit in the past, have eventually surmounted. In
Syria, a new form of reverse wave has appeared. What is unique about Syria is that the shift is occurring from an authoritarian regime to a more extremist and authoritarian power. If we compare the reasons of reverse waves that Huntington mentions to the Syrian situation, we can actually find a lot of similarities; that is the reason why the rise of ISIS can actually be presented as a form of reverse wave. Huntington’s reasons behind reverse waves are as follows:

1) The democratic values among the elite groups and the public were not strong enough;
2) Rigorous economic downfalls deepened social conflict and opened the path for solutions that can only be imposed by authoritarian governments;
3) Social and political divisions caused by leftist governments required swift social and economic reforms;
4) The middle and upper classes’ willpower to exclude populist and lower class groups from political power;
5) The collapse of law and order (anarchy) resulting from terrorism or revolution;
6) Intervention of an external nondemocratic power;
7) “Reverse snowballing” set off by the collapse of a democratic system in another country.

The democratic values in both of Syria have not been strong since the educational system and the long period of political oppression has weakened the basis of a democratic culture. On the other hand, the Annahdha Party activists in Tunisia have gained back the democratic education during their exile in European capitals. Comparing the above
factors to the occurrences in the countries under study shows that radical Islamism is not the major factor that resulted in the failure of democratic transition; however, it is the combination of internal and external factors that hindered the creation and the sustenance of democracy. Henceforth, the beginning of the Arab Spring represents the Arab Third Wave of democratization that is directly followed by an exceptional reverse wave in Syria and Iraq – in hopes that it does not stabilize and spread to other regions.

Moreover, the number of democratic nations around the world has been declining, and many scholars are questioning if ‘democracy is in decline’. The Freedom House has been generating reports that show the level of democracy decreasing in a number of countries. Has the third reverse wave already started? After the invasion of Iraq and Russia’s return to authoritarianism, political scientists’ optimism in democracy has been decreasing. However, the recent decrease is as immense as Huntington’s reverse waves. It is rather referred to as a period of ‘stagnation’. Francis Fukuyama has mentioned in his writings that there is need for strong governance that would assist in consolidating democracy.

Hence, the failure of new democracies has been a result of ‘bad governance’ (Fukuyama et al., 2015). The failure of governance is shown is economic downfalls, weak public services, and corruption. Plattner discusses three reasons behind the decline of democracy: the first being presented by the weak economic and political performance of advanced democracies. The second is the ‘new self-confidence of some authoritarian regimes and the third is the shifting geopolitical balance between democracies and their rivals’ (Plattner, 2015). There was an increase of unemployment after the financial crisis in 2005 that has faced advanced democracies. On the other hand, economy, in countries where real democracy is still absent (as in China, Russia, Iran and Saudi Arabia) has been advancing significantly. Unfortunately, the Journal of Democracy has recently published
a series of articles concerning the resurgence of authoritarianism, which reveal cases
where authoritarian countries have been more successful in using soft power compared to
advanced democracies. The geopolitical change in the international arena has had a lot of
influence on domestic politics of small states, especially after the United States has been
in “a state of retrenchment” (Kagan, 2012). This change has been apparent through the
rise of ISIS in Syria and Iraq, and through Russia’s incursion in eastern Ukraine. These
events put the democratic ideals in a vulnerable and exposed state that might alter the
rules of the game. Nevertheless, the future of this struggle is still in the creation, which
will be a focus of study for political scientists.

2.6 Political Islam and the Arab Spring

As previously mentioned, religion can be an obstacle to the formation of democracy.
Islam and politics in the MENA have been a unique phenomenon that scholars have been
extensively studying for a long time. The use of religion for political means has been
growing even though scholars of religion and ethnicity have predicted (early mid-20th
century) that modernization through the industrial revolution and interdependence in
world economics will lead to the secularization of societies (Sisk, 1992). Nevertheless,
we can perceive during our era that societies in the MENA region have been resilient to
change. Scholars have referred to this case as the Middle East Exceptionalism (Bellin,
2004). But strangely enough, most of the autocratic countries (Syria, Egypt,
Tunisia...etc.) have suppressed the Islamic political groups and, at times, have used
violence against them. There are other countries of the MENA that used religion as their
basic legal statute (Saudi Arabia, Emirates, Qatar…etc.). In this section we only regard the role of Islam in the establishment – or combating – of democracies.

The debate on the relationship between Islam and democracy is quite controversial. According to Sisk (1992), the view on religious political action is founded on two misleading principles:

1) ‘Religion is inherently antimodern,’ and that it is always fundamentalist.

2) Because of religion’s fundamentalist characteristic, religious political action is always antidemocratic.

Religion does not always resist the rise of democracy; it can rather be a stimulant (Weber, 1905). As previously mentioned, Weber’s work has shown that some characteristics in Protestantism have had positive effects on the rise of modern capitalism. This deduction negates the first principle. On the other hand, certain English and American puritans assisted in the growth of modern democratic societies, and many American religious groups have participated in antislavery and civil rights movements. Not to forget the religiously oriented reform led by Martin Luther King, Jr. that helped improve democratic aims. These religious political actions are not antidemocratic as generally presumed (Little, 1990). Hence, the second principle is also invalid.

It is common in public discourse to use the term ‘fundamentalism’ while referring to Islam. It puts a label on the entire religious tradition; yet, the term ‘fundamentalism’ has originally appeared as a description of the state of religious believers in the 1920s in America, the ‘militantly antimodern Protestant evangelicals’ (Sisk, 1992). The term was used to denote rejection to liberalism and modern science even though those fundamentalist groups have used resources of modern science to develop a social and
political plan. According to the *Chicago Fundamentalism Project*, fundamentalism does not denote a fixed concept, and it does not always proclaim the infallibility of holy texts. It is a reactionary move concerned with basic fundamentals of a religious tradition that is devoted to absolute truth. A fundamentalist views himself as a mediator of the holy power with a force that gives life to the group (Marty, 1988). Therefore, fundamentalism should not label a whole religion, but only that specific group that has the characteristics of fundamentalism. As Sisk states, “While there may be a phenomenon which can be appropriately termed Islamic fundamentalism, all Muslims are certainly not fundamentalists” (Sisk, 1992, p.7).

In spite of the democratic prospect that the Arab Spring posed, it also presented a difficult historical episode in the course of Islamist movements. Islamists were abruptly placed into a revolutionary plot that they were not prepared for. The Islamist organizations played a minimal role in the primary mass mobilizations in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria and Libya. Initially, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt refrained from endorsing the protests scheduled for January 25, 2011 until they changed their decision three days after. Nevertheless, in Syria and Tunisia, Islamist groups have been extremely repressed, imprisoned or exiled, and it made it hard for Islamist leaders in those countries to call their supporters into the streets (Al-Arian, 2015). The opportunity for Islamists emerged after the mass mobilizations and during the political transitions in countries where the regimes fell. On the other hand, the Islamists of countries with failed transitions were represented by extremist groups that capitalized on the anarchy, such as ISIS and Al-Nusra Front in Syria.
According to Gerges, it is still early to provide a clear verdict on how Islamists will govern and whether they will show tolerance and moderation. The Islamists of Tunisia have shown to be the most moderate amongst other Islamists groups. However, as Gerges claims, a pattern can be indicated through the governance of Islamists during the past three decades. There is an obvious shift towards pragmatism, which opens the field for open-minded and reformist technocrats (Gerges, 2014). Islamists appeared to be more willing to form coalitions with ideological opponents who are non-Muslim. This has occurred in Tunisia, where the Annahda Party formed coalitions with liberals and secularists rather than joining in with highly conservative Salafis. Nevertheless, the direction of Islamists depends on the aftermath of the political struggles and on the status of the transition.

Hence, depending on the political interests, some Islamist groups are willing to enter into coalitions with liberal political groups and Western powers. The different types of political Islam will be presented in the two case studies in the following chapter. Most of the Islamists in Tunisia, represented by Annahda Part, have been showing great moderation since the start of the uprising and even after the arrival of Gannouchi. Nevertheless, most of the Islamists in Syria are showing extremism and unprecedented radicalism. Political Islam cannot be tied to conservatism only for there are Islamist groups that are politically active and they show moderation in their stances and choices. Each Islamist group that has been active in the Arab Spring countries shows a different attitude towards future governance, and this depends on the unique background and historical experiences each group has (Gerges, 2014).
2.7 Contending Waves in the Arab Spring

The literature incorporated in this chapter is used to frame and link the comparison between each country. The differing modes of transition have been generally discussed to give a glimpse of the scholarly writings on transition forms. Commonly, it has been indicated that pacts are the most favorable mode for democracy to be consolidated. Yet, a certain mode of transition might lead to different outcomes in two different countries. The same seems to have happened in Syria and Tunisia where the transition in both countries was through mass mobilization; however, the outcomes were very different. In Tunisia, the transition so far appears to be progressive compared to Syria, where the protests turned into conflicts between different factions, and radical Islamism profited from the spread of chaos.

Every transition depends on democracy requisites that might not, in turn, guarantee democracy. Scholars have tried to determine the basic pillars in a country that will insure a transition to democracy. Three main components were generally agreed upon: high levels of education, receiving culture and liberalized economy. Nevertheless, across history, some countries have had all components, but democracy has yet to be consolidated. In the following chapter, the political, economic and cultural structures of both countries are compared (local level). The comparison also tackles the regional and international spectra related to both countries to ensure the coverage of most aspects and factors that have led to the differing outcomes. The waves’ theory is employed in the analysis where the factors that Huntington stated to be behind democratization waves are found in both countries (Syria and Turkey); however, the factors behind reverse waves reflect only on the Syrian case, which helps us infer that the rise of radical Islam is a
representation of a reverse wave and the emergence of conflictual sectarian dynamics.

This inference is in contrast with the claim of numerous scholars that the Arab countries (Islamic countries) are inevitably antithetical to democracy.
Chapter Three

Case Studies: Tunisia and Syria

3.1 Overview of the Arab Spring

The year 2010 represents a new episode of the Middle East and North Africa region. Upheavals started in Tunisia, spread over other Arab countries, and the principal demand among the protesters was a swift regime change. The Arab exceptionalism has been challenged by the rapid demise of long-lived authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya. The world was shocked to see these events unravel at a fast pace, especially that political scientists were not able to predict any change in the region. On the contrary, scholars had given up on the MENA region’s capability to break the wall of authoritarianism and liberalize. As soon as the upheavals started, the hope of change has returned and scholars have referred to it as the ‘Arab Spring’. Nevertheless, spring was not the fate of all the countries. Only six Arab countries have been influenced by the snowballing effect of the upheavals, and four out of six resulted in regime change. The only country that seems to have attained a trace of democracy among them is Tunisia.
The media’s focus has primarily been on the political factors behind the upheavals. The main discussion has only tackled the political needs that have to do with the fall of the regimes and the rise of political freedom. Nevertheless, the core reasons that have led the masses to revolt are socio-economic. In an attempt to point out some common causes that have led to the Arab Spring, Hanafi mentions a number of socio-economic and demographic factors. There was a major drop in the GDP per capita (3% to less than 0.3%) in a lot of Arab states. Moreover, the percentage of unemployment was more than 10% in most countries, and it reached 13% in Tunisia. Unemployment rate was a lot higher among the educated youth (above 20%) than the average population rate (around 10%). Another factor that is discussed by Marktanner (2011) is the widespread inequality in the Arab societies; it has evidently risen since the late 1980s. Inequality was amplified after 2007, which was a turning point after the prices of food and fuel increased, making it hard to subsidize. As a result, the income inequality in the region has intensified in recent years (Hanafi, 2012).

Even though the factors that have led to the upheavals were shared among the six countries, but according to Anderson, the “patterns and the demographics of the protests varied widely” (Anderson, 2011). Also, as previously mentioned, the consequences of the mass mobilizations have been reflected differently on each country. The Arab Spring countries shared similar authoritarian and corrupt leaders that controlled the governments through corruption. The citizens’ dissatisfaction grew with time and intensified with the economic crisis and high unemployment rates. Nonetheless, each regime structure is unique in each country, which has led to the different outcomes.
In this chapter, a comparison between Tunisia and Syria is developed upon three different strata. While the protests in Tunisia were successful in ousting Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, the Syrian civilians are still facing outrageous attacks from the regime and other counterparts. The first level of comparison is based on the local arena of both countries, which tackles the regime structure and other political actors, the economy and the culture/education of the varying social classes in each country. The second basis of comparison will be grounded upon the regional power struggle between neighboring countries and their effect on Syria and Tunisia. The last field to be studied is the international power shift and how it relates differently to both countries.

3.2 The Differing Aspects of Local Governance: Tunisia & Syria

3.2.1 Bin Ali’s Regime

Tunisia represents the spark of the Arab revolutions. In December 2010, the fruit vendor, Bouazizi, set himself on fire out of desperation caused by the extreme poverty coupled with governmental corruption. This incident was the main trigger that resulted in the spread of upheavals all over Tunisia, which later replicated in other Arab countries. The Tunisian president was first to fall in response to the protests against his long autocratic rule. The Tunisian army refused to use force against the protestors and the latter have shown that peaceful protests could eventually succeed. The country possessed a number of ingredients for a successful revolution; there is a long history of political activism, a resilient civil society, a worthy portion of educated and unarmed citizens, a neutral army and its involved and practical Islamist movement. The education
system in Tunisia was considered to be one of the best among other Arab countries. The country also had the largest middle class with a very strong labor movement. However, Bin Ali’s regime was keen on curbing freedom of expression and political parties. Bin Ali’s Tunisia was a police state where the latter functioned as the regime’s primary foundation of power to suppress internal opposition. He rose to power through the internal security system although he had a military background (Lutterbeck, 2013). He took command of the internal security forces and police before he became president, which assisted him later in toppling Bourguiba. Bin Ali’s main backbone was the police force that weighed a ratio of three to four times higher officers than the most policed countries in Europe. The police was used to monitor and suppress any possible oppositional activity in the country. The police force had committed widespread exploitative arrests that made them the most hated institution in Tunisia. It was not by chance that the police’s harassment was behind Bouazizi’s self-immolation.

Ben Ali’s government had strict control over the media and suppressed freedom of expression. The communications’ infrastructure was quite developed in comparison to nearby countries; however, the citizens did not have an open access to the Internet and communications’ apparatus where the regime exercised persistent censorship. Nevertheless, under Bin Ali, elections were held regularly and the voter’s turnout increased by 12% from 1989 to 1999. In 1994, the opposition was able to enter the government for the first time in the country’s history. The ruling party still held 81% of parliament and political sphere (Table 3).
Table 3- Elections in Tunisia (1981-1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elections</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Voter turnout</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Results (Govt seats)</th>
<th>Opp. seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>Multiparty (Islamists)</td>
<td>All seats</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Single candidate</td>
<td>Bin Ali (99%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>Multiparty (no Islamists)</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Single candidate</td>
<td>Bin Ali (99%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>Multiparty (no Islamists)</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parliamentary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple candidates</td>
<td>Bin Ali (99.4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Even though past elections have shown some improvement in the voter’s turnout and that there was small room for handpicked opposition, democracy was still deficient in Tunisia. Two reasons hindering democracy in Tunisia were argued to be nationalism and pragmatism (Sadiki, 2002). The regime used nationalism as a pretext to assure political uniformity. Hence, political plurality was inhibited through labeling the opposition with anti-nationalist forces (*khawarij*). The government had co-opted leftists, human rights activists and intellectuals who lack autonomous resources. Bin Ali used the quota system in the elections to make sure that the secular and trivial political parties are enlisted under ‘loyal opposition’ category. Yet, there had been a certain vocalized opposition through regime opponents. Monsef al-Marzouki, a leading human rights activist, was able to express his anti-regime views but suffered from regime harassment, which had him lose his professorship of medicine and his passport. Other opposition groups included Gannushi (the leader of Annahda Party), Tunisian Communist Workers’ Party and the Tunisian Human Rights League. The biggest threat to the regime was the Islamists (Annahda Party) whose members faced severe crackdown by being watched...
and harassed and sometimes banned from traveling (Human Rights Watch, 2010). The regime was cautious in the ways it oppressed civil groups in order not to face international criticism. The government passed associations law that limited the activity of all risky civil society groups. The regime was able to suppress serious attempts from opposition groups until it was faced with a unique event (Bouazizi’s self-immolation) that led to its fall.

### 3.2.2 Tunisia’s Economy Pre-Arab Spring

The second variable to be studied on the local arena is the economy. Tunisia’s major social welfare initiative (National Security Fund) had been controlled and taken over by the regime since 1990s. There was a huge inequality between the rural and the urban areas where the highly urbanized regions witnessed the bigger part of the country’s economic growth, but the rural western regions were left behind. The youth from the rural regions often migrate to the cities in search of jobs; however, they end up with low-paying and aggravating jobs. The educated portion of the youth encounter tougher times finding adequate jobs, and they usually end up unemployed (and hence increasing the unemployment rate). A number of reasons behind this economic inequality include the inadequate government investment, scarcity of natural resources, distribution of land, and the insufficient access to financial resources.

Three months before the start of the upheavals in Tunisia, the IMF published a report on Tunisia stating that the government had endured the global financial crisis that had struck the demand in the country’s major export market. Surprisingly enough, the
growth still reached 4.5 percent, and its debt-to-GDP ratio (43%) was almost half that of France (IMF, 2010). The report also mentions that there needs to be an increase in the sources of growth to decrease unemployment, which had been at a rate of 13.3, close to that of southern Europe. Considering Tunisia’s high level of poverty and instability, it was still considered as an economic success story and referred to as the ‘economic miracle’ (World Economic Forum, 2010). Nevertheless, the Tunisians were getting tired of the economic situation and bureaucracy they were facing. Institutions were highly corrupt, and underpaid civil servants used to take advantage of any chance they would get to receive a bribe (Noueihed & Warren, 2012).

By 2010, the illiteracy rate in Tunisia had dropped to 22 percent but the number of educated-unemployed youth doubled over the past ten years (Table 4). Oddly, the more educated the individual is the higher possibility for him/her to end up jobless. Most of the unemployed youth came from the interior and southern parts of Tunisia where the uprising started; the government has long been biased towards the coastal cities. In contrast to the IMF and the WEF reports, Tunisians perceived an increase in corruption and economic inequality during the last three years (before the mobilizations).

**Table 4- Unemployment in Tunisia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Higher Education</th>
<th>Secondary</th>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grand Tunis</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
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<td>22.9</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>9.2</td>
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Source: National Institute of Statistics - Tunisia (INS)
3.2.3 Tunisia’s Islamists and Secular Society

After twenty-one years of exile, the leader of Annahda Party, Rachid Ghannouchi returned to his homeland overwhelmed by the crowds that waited to greet him. Men dressed in western outfits and women with headscarves were gathered in the parking and lobby of the airport. Simultaneously, a group of secularist and feminist activists were protesting against what they dreaded would be the consequence of Gannouchi’s return: the Islamization of Tunisia. They voiced their fears by yelling statements like ‘No Islamism, no theocracy, no sharia and no stupidity’. They did not want Gannouchi’s return to resemble that of Iran’s Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Nevertheless, the crowds waiting Gannouchi outnumbered those of the secularists’. The former tried to show a moderate representation of Islamists by holding banners saying ‘Do not fear Islam’ and ‘No to extremism’ (Noueihid, 2011). Annahda members showed a great deal of organization and politeness, something that was not expected from a group that was suppressed or exiled since the 1980s. The party appeared to be the most popular and organized political force in the North African country, gaining 41.7 percent of the seats of the Tunisian assembly responsible for rewriting the constitution. The secular parties that ran for elections were not as organized and mature. Instead of joining their efforts and uniting, they quarreled over who should lead the electoral list. The difference lied in the fact that secularist parties have suffered for a longer period under the rule of Bin Ali while most of Annahda members were in exile and received foreign support and financial aid (Bahloul, 2011).
The Tunisian population is mostly Sunni Muslims with weak tribal loyalties, a less diverse population compared to Lebanon or Iraq (Noueihid & Warren, 2012). Yet, since independence, there has always been an internal argument about the role of religion in politics. This reality was reflected through the fear of the secularists groups in Tunisia after Bin Ali’s departure. However, what gives Tunisia a better position in comparison to other Arab countries is that its secular tradition is highly robust and was able to win 60 percent of the seats in the constituent assembly even without a single leading party. Let’s not forget the actions of Bourguiba who introduced Personal Status Code, abolishing polygamy and giving women rights in marriage and divorce. He also gave women the right to vote for the first time in municipal elections (1957).

A lot of the progressive reforms introduced during Bourguiba’s rule were considered revolutionary. Many secular Tunisians today are a result of those reforms and they fear that Islamists take over. Ghannouchi was keen on silencing the fears of secularists, and his party did not run a candidate for the presidential election as a reassurance that they do not plan on declaring an Islamic state. They did not call for the abolishment of any of the past reforms or the liberal customs, and Ghannouchi stated that Annahda supports the creation of a pluralistic and democratic civil state. Nevertheless, secularists are still reluctant towards Annahda’s real intentions because they believe what Annahda states publicly is different from their real beliefs. Since the revolution, other Islamic groups have been surfacing on the Tunisian political sphere; some of them are Salafists that call for strict Islamic rule and, for the first time, women in niqab and men with long beards and short jalabiya robes are being spotted occasionally. Moreover, a number of attacks on outspoken secularists have been made
by Salfists. An extremist Islamist group \textit{(Hizb al-Tahrir)} has been calling for the revival of the Islamic caliphate, but the government denied it a party license.

\subsection*{3.2.4 Bashar’s Syria}

The Arab Spring had enraged an unprecedented internal conflict, which resulted in the death of numerous civilians and displacement of around 4.3 million refugees. It is considered the ‘world’s largest humanitarian crisis since World War II’ (ECHO, 2015). The focus of this part is on the national political arena and actions of the regime before and during the conflict. The structure of the Syrian political regimes has been unchangeable since 1970s. The regime has long considered the middle class its only political competitor and possible alternative; therefore, the regime believes that it is important to neutralize the middle class and remove it from politics to guarantee the stability of the regime. The regime compensates the middle class economically and tries to grant it some authority through the state, making sure that they don’t establish an independent political role. Specifically after the death of Hafez al-Assad, the regime has used the economy to increase their social base by developing the interaction between the authority and Syrian bourgeoisie. This relation has formed a strong form of monopoly over the national resources and the main businesses in the country (Kilo, 2011). Hence, the regime has created a structure to control all social classes and to pacify any intended political repercussion. The Ba’ath regime has sustained its control employing three rudiments: the military-security complex, the Ba’ath party apparatus, and the Alawite elite. The security apparatus has the major role in forcefully silencing any social movement or change.
Following the formation of this structure between the regime and the Syrian bourgeoisies (referred to as the Chinese model), the Syrian public sphere started to display constant demands for reform, and, for the first time, during the Ba’ath rule, those asking for reforms were united. This coincided with the death of the President of the Republic and the suicide of the Minister of the Interior in 2005. The regime, then, promised to take a set of reforms that were not implemented later. Tensions started to increase, and many scholars were awaiting an eruption in Syria during that period especially after the emergence of the information on revolution among the Syrian youth -which happen to represent 79% of the society (Kilo, 2011). Most of the Syrian youth had obtained adequate levels of education and could not find job opportunities and cannot even express themselves without being restricted by the security apparatus.

3.2.5 Syria’s Economic Reform under Bashar

The ‘Chinese model’ adopted by Bashar liberalized the Syrian economy and ensured the regime’s control. He consulted western-educated technocrats to achieve the economic reform. Five years after Bashar’s rule, private banks and insurance companies were introduced in Syria after a long shut off. In 2009, the Syrian stock exchange started trading and was regarded as a success. Import taxes and trade limitations were lessened, which obviously changed the Syrian market into a more liberalized one with a lot of international shops and products. These reforms assisted in developing the tourism sector that provided 13 percent of the jobs in Syria by 2010. The real estate business flourished as well especially after the influx of Iraqi migrants. Property prices were
increasing with the high demand, which opened the door for wealthy investors and businessmen.

Nevertheless, the development resulting from the reform has advantaged the nouveau riche elite who have strong relations with the regime. Most of the leading business families are related in one form or another to the Assad family- they encompass the urban Sunni population and Bashar’s Alawite inner circle (Kilo, 2011). These elites have benefited most from the liberalization, and they did not try to conceal their wealth. On the other hand, the people outside the monopoly formed by Bashar’s clique were left behind and local business owners suffered from the introduction of international companies. The rural areas were neglected and the gaps between the urban and the rural living standards widened. The average spending of a household in Damascus spent an amount of $773 per month compared to a sum of $439 spent by a household from a rural area (Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Bashar’s relations with the rural areas were not strong compared to that of his father who used to redistribute land from wealthy families to peasants. In addition, the market reform has only focused on the cities and the service industries. By doing so, the regime ruined its relations with its ‘primary human political base’ (Kilo).

3.2.6 Islamism in Syria after the Arab Spring

The majority of the Syrian population compromises the Sunni sect (74%) and the minorities in the country are divided among Shiites (13%), Christians (10%) and Druze (3%). The ethnic and religious minorities have been loyal to the regime out of fear of the
Sunni majority that is believed to bring political Islam if it ever takes control. During the year 2001, Syria was slightly affected by the trend of ‘re-Islamisation’ that has been observed in the MENA. Islamic practices have intensified in the region after the fall of Baghdad and it was alleged that some Syrians have partaken in the urban violence in Iraq. Since the formation of the state of Syria, Islamic conservatism has been silenced by the socio-political system of the Ba’ath Party, which was secular and contributed to secular reform. Even though the regime was authoritarian, liberal and progressive ideologies surfaced during the 1960s and 1970s. During that period, the Muslim Brotherhood represented political Islam. Clashes between the latter and the authorities surged and ended up by prohibiting the Muslim Brotherhood. The government established a law forbidding anyone from becoming a member of the Muslim Brotherhood; violating this law leads to a death sentence.

Late 1980s, the regime began introducing religious terminology in its political dialogue after the Muslim Brotherhood showed some reforms and after the failure of the Arab Nationalist ideologies. During that period, a re-Islamization of the society started to occur, more mosques were built and an increasing number of veiled women appeared on the Syrian lands. A number of Syrian intellectuals have stated that Syrian Muslims do not approve of violence, and that they can partake in future democracy (Ghalioun & Kilo, 2009). Nevertheless, religious practices, in the cultural and social scopes, have increased after the 1990s, which intensified the fear among minorities, especially during the crisis in Iraq (Kawakibi, 2007). The regime has lessened its surveillance grip on small mosques and Islamic classes that were used as brainwashing sites impelling women on wearing veils. The judicial system was also supporting Islamic ideas wherein
a judge condemned a man who smoked in front of a shop during Ramadan in 2004. All these occurrences were considered new changes in Syria during the 2000s.

The Syrian uprising started as a popular resistance against the authoritarian rule without any religious affiliation. But after the conflicts with the regime started to escalate and spread in a lot of regions of Syria, radical Islamist dynamic started to arise within the opposition. Groups of Salafi-jihadists have been expanding in Syria with the support of foreign fighters that have connections with al-Qaeda and other groups (O’bagy, 2012). These groups cannot appear out of the blue, they must have been present in the Syrian sphere before the uprisings, and it has been claimed that the Syrian government has sponsored them in the last three decades. The regime’s intelligence apparatus had strong ties with these groups and had facilitated past jihadist activities. As soon as the upheavals started, crushing the protestors preoccupied the Syrian security apparatus, which overlooked the more lethal enemy, the Jihadists. A huge fragment of the protesters compromises Sunni activists who wish to create political Islamism reform. A number of Islamist groups have emerged after the classes started between the regime and the protestors. This issue has led to the radicalization of the Syrian opposition and has increased the hesitation of any external intervention.

In 2013, the Islamic State troops started operating in Syrian territories after having started in Iraq. The following year, they were able to win back areas in northern Syria and they also reached east in Dayr az Zawr, which is an area rich in oil and gas resources. ISIS has controlled the oilfields and profited from selling oil and gas to the
Syrian government. These revenues have assisted ISIS in detaching from the Iraqi al-Qaeda and become an independent entity that pays high salaries to its fighters. ISIS also governed the areas they controlled and demanded taxes from local populations; they also took percentage of the humanitarian funds that reached their area of control (Blanchard, et al., 2014). ISIS has established a holistic system of governance in northeastern Syria, al-Raqqa, and it includes religious, educational, judicial, security and infrastructure projects (Caris, & Reynolds, 2014).

On the other hand, al-Nusra Front has appeared to establish a methodology derived from al-Qaeda’s social integration by fighting along the Syrian opposition and trying to create credibility among the Syrian populace. Al-Nusra Front worked on forming social integration instead of pursuing physical control of Syrian territory. A union between ISIS and al-Nusra Front failed after the former’s severe battles against activists and rebel groups during the fall of 2013. Al-Nusra Front had the priority of fighting against the Syrian regime, which was not demonstrated by ISIS. During this period, other oppositional and religious groups were marginalized. ISIS seeks to initiate religious outreach, in a form of Da’wa to Islam (the call), before entering an area. They perform Quranic recitations and religious discourses to inform the people about ISIS beliefs. They also provide food and drink to the dwellers of that certain area to show some type of unthreatening appearance. They plan on building robust governance in the areas they take control of by targeting education, judicial systems, strong security, repaired infrastructure and an independent economy (Caris, & Reynolds, 2014). So far, ISIS has been successful in deepening its control over their occupied areas.
3.3 The Geopolitics of Tunisia and Syria

The geopolitical structure of Tunisia and Syria vary extensively. Syria embodies an enormous rivalry among regional and international powers, unlike Tunisia that is less affected by the international power struggle. Tunisia is a relatively small country with inadequate natural resources and military competency. Its bordering countries are quite volatile, and if its borders were poorly managed, Tunisia’s internal security might worsen. Libya, which is considered a substantial economic partner, represents the major challenge for Tunisia’s foreign policy. Libya signifies the principal basis of informal cross border trade, which comprises 40% of Tunisia’s GDP. After Libya’s civil war, a huge number of Libyans moved to Tunisia for safety. The conflict in Libya presents a major threat to Tunisia’s economy and security. In late 2014, Tunisia enforced an exit tax on foreigners, which led Libya to impose its own tax with double the amount, knowing that there are thousands of Tunisians who still work in Libya. Activists and merchants protested against these impositions, and they closed the borders in Ras Jedir. Tunisia faced a security threat from Libyan’s extremist groups who were able to attack the Bardo Museum in Tunisia. The only way to manage this threat is to peacefully secure their borders and eschew from interfering in Libyan affairs. On the other hand, Tunisia’s relation with Algeria, which is the wealthiest bordering country, has positively developed in facing the security threats from terrorist activities. Algeria has always represented a balance in face of the Libyan hegemony during Qaddafi’s rule; and especially at this point in time, Tunisia needs to strengthen its relationship with Libya, which is performing counterterrorism cross-border operations. Other Arab countries, such as U.A.E and Egypt, tried to have Tunisia agree with them on external intervention
in Libya; however, Tunisia took a stand with Algeria that represented a security advantage. This move signified a shy away from the Saudi Arabia/Egypt/UAE axis, but it didn’t mean that Tunisia’s relations with those countries were shut down. On the contrary, Saudi Arabia and Egypt have welcomed the Tunisian president (Caid Essebsi) several times in 2014. Tunisia also continues with its efforts in keeping a good relation with UAE, which represents a means for Tunisia to repel pressure from USA and Europe’s calling for economic and political reform. Tunisia will need international support from democratic rich countries to balance its economy and support its security against terrorism (Cherif, 2015). Europe has been a prominent foundation for Tunisia’s economy and security; any new government in Tunisia will need to hold on tight to this type of relationship. Around eighty percent of Tunisia’s trade occurs with Western European countries, and 10% of Tunisians live and work in Europe.

Moreover, Europeans can deter any trial from Algeria to throttle Tunisia. France was Tunisia’s guardian in the past, but after 2011, Tunisia’s relations with other European countries have been strengthened. Italy will seek Tunisia as a partner in Northern Africa in place of Libya. Tunisia can make use of Italy’s maritime capabilities, and probably update its own navy and get Italy’s support in controlling illegal maritime immigration. Germany can assist in strengthening Tunisia’s democracy and build economic ties. The only relationship that Tunisia needs to work on is its relationship with the USA. Tunisia already made attempts to strengthen its ties with USA by appointing a Prime Minister who is educated in the US, and taking into account the US request of including Annahda Party in the government. Tunisia is keen on including
democratic reforms and war on terror in its discourse with the USA. In turn, Tunisia will receive US support while asking for loans from international institutions, and the US will reinforce Tunisia’s army in face of the terrorist threat from Libya and Algeria (Cherif, 2015).

The situation in Syria takes us to a more escalated and complicated arena. Syria has strong ties with Iran and Russia, and it borders Iraq and Turkey. Any reader who is interested in politics can perceive the extreme intensity in the Syrian geopolitics. Syria has always played a significant role in the region. The invasion of Iraq has put Syria in a delicate situation; it tried to counter al-Qaeda, which in effect might have helped in stabilizing Iraq, and, at the same time, it had to balance its relationship with Iran. At that time, Syria was split between two major powers, Iran and the US. The former has been a strong ally and a major weapons’ exporter to Syria. But the direct effects of the Iraqi invasion appeared to be positive. Syria outlived a threat of regime change in 2003 and 2006 (after the assassination of the Lebanese Prime Minister and the Lebanese-Israeli war). Syria has always used its ‘jihadi-card’ in face of regional and international powers. Before the US entered Iraq, Syria was supporting Saddam’s regime and keeping the foreign jihadists from entering Iraq from Syria. This matter made Syria a target for the US before 2003; however, after the US invasion of Iraq, Washington feared further escalation if Syria let more jihadists in Iraq. Accordingly, the US changed its stance towards Syria, and Syria gained a major status as a playmaker in the region. During that time, Syria’s relation with the Saudi Arabia had curdled, which gave time for the Turkish/Saudi tie to become stronger. However, Syria was facing an upsurge in Iraqi
refugees, internal frustration because of the one-sided economy, increasing Kurdish nationalism, and a decline in oil output (Simon, 2009).

In 2007, the Syrian regime has crushed a number of human rights activists groups regardless of the US demands for tolerance. The former Vice President, Khaddam, was verbally attacking Bashar and his regime and calling out for popular mobilization. Simultaneously, Syria was facing a massive Iraqi refugee influx because of Syria’s lenient entry policy. Even with the support of international organizations, the government was burdened with very high costs; Syrian infrastructure and resources were being depleted and the local economy was greatly affected (Naylor, 2007). Local Syrian population was getting fed-up with all the challenges they had to face because of refugees (rise in prices and in crimes). Kurdish nationalism was revived in Syria after the Iraqi invasion. It led to clashes between the Syrian security forces and Kurdish activists in Syria. Moreover, Syria had a lot of economic interest in Iraq, specifically in the oil market. Nonetheless, Iran and Turkey had more leverage in Iraq after 2003, which further affected the Syrian economy.

Syria’s relation with Washington worsened after the revival of US sanctions on Syria because the regime was continuing its support for terrorism and involvement in Lebanon. In 2005, the US started supporting Syrian opposition groups and began to meet with representatives of these groups. Consequently, the Bush administration provided the Syrian civil society with 5 million dollars. In response, the regime intensified its attack on local opposition and civil society (Simon, 2009).
3.4 External Intervention and Power Struggle

The external intervention in Syria and Tunisia was not direct during the uprisings. In Tunisia, the swift fall of Bin Ali’s regime did not put pressure on the international community to interfere. Moreover, the snowballing effect that led to the turmoil in Libya and Egypt had lessened the focus on Tunisia. On the other hand, the intervention in Syria was highly needed, but the strong ties that the regime had with Russia and Iran left the rest of the world reluctant to intervene. Knowing that Syria represents a strategic ally in the region, both of Iran and Russia supported the Syrian government with arms and ammunition. Iran also provided Syrian troops with advisors and gave Hezbollah the green light to fight along the Syrian army and against the opposition (Baumann, & et al., 2012). Russia had posed a threat to NATO by deploying naval vessels in Syrian waters. China and Russia also opposed the trials done by the US and France to establish a UN Security Council resolution on Syria. Intervention posed a great threat to NATO and the European Union. The only way they were able to set a stance is by putting sanctions on Syria and by supporting the opposition from afar. Nevertheless, the rise of ISIS and jihadist groups inside Syria changed the status quo.

The Syrian crisis represents a “proxy war” between Russia and Turkey; the former being a UN Security Council member and a primary support for the Assad regime, and the latter is a major regional power that backs up the Syrian opposition. Both countries intervened in Syria logistically and militarily (Akturk, 2014). Nevertheless, the Syrian crisis does not only resemble a Russian-Turkish proxy war, it also includes other international players. This crisis displays a series of interconnected regional and international wars in the context of struggle over influence and domination.
beyond Syria. It is also accompanied with deep sectarian clashes in an unprecedented era of chaos in the Arab world and a shift in world order. During the past four years, the world has observed an American hesitation coupled with Russian confidence in advancement. Recently, Russia’s intervention has been direct through the use of its air force to attack ISIS and other opposition groups, without regarding any international accord (Abou Diab, 2015). The unfolding of external intervention is yet to show in the coming period; until then, the situation will continue to be utterly delicate.

After discussing the major variables in each country separately, the following chapter sets the analysis by linking the literature in Chapter Two with the variables. The main factors behind reverse waves, which Huntington discusses, are outlined in the Syrian crisis; as for Tunisia, its aspects that support the rise of democracy are to be drawn.
Chapter Four
Factors of Reverse Waves and Successful Transitions

4.1 Mode of Transition of Tunisia & Syria

The first roots of the transition started in Tunisia after Bouazizi’s self-immolation. The mode of transition goes under the category of revolutions because there was a sudden mass mobilization all over the country. The same happened in Syria, but it was through the snowballing effect rather than a result of a single event. In both countries, the mode of transition was considered to be through a revolution. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the literature, many scholars agree on the fact that a same mode of transition does not lead to the same result, which is shown in both countries. The revolution in Tunisia was successful compared to the Syrian case. The demands done by the protestors in Syria and Tunisia were the same: the overthrowing of the government and a call for democracy and a better economy. However, the protests in Tunisia took a more spontaneous form as compared to Syria because they erupted right after Bouazizi’s event. In Syria, the activists had more time to prepare while watching other Arab countries’ upheavals, and the regime had time, as well, to take the needed precautions for a predictable turmoil. This notion allows us to infer that sometimes an abrupt change in the status quo might assist in the political change. It is also mentioned
in the definition of a revolution that the upheaval needs to be sudden, as is reflected by the Tunisian experience.

On the other hand, scholars also stressed the need for the opposition groups to agree on the set of reforms they need to present within a time constraint. Neither in Tunisia nor in Syria did the opposition prepare well before protesting. Democratization theorists discuss this aspect by giving a minimal role for mass mobilization in the process of democratization. Scholars also stated that a revolution needs to include the threat of use of violence. In Tunisia, the upheavals were rather peaceful and the protesters did not demonstrate violence. This fact sets back the debate over the true definition of a revolution. Whereas in Syria, the regime blamed some protestors for being violent and instilling terror; the violence erupted during the early phase of the upheavals, and it escalated, leading to a civil war, as claimed by some.

The four aspects of a revolution as mentioned in the literature part are: sudden, violent, political succession, and change. If we try to link these aspects to Tunisia, the only aspect that does not apply is violence. The other factors, however, were present, and so far the change has shown to be successful. As for Syria, the only present factor was violence, which certainly appears to have a very adverse effect on the result.

4.2 The Allocation of the Requisites

Though the debate on what requisites a country should possess to be able to democratize is not absolutely settled, there are still a number of characteristics that are considered ground foundations for the establishment of democracy. The primary factor
that is discussed is the economic condition in a country before the induction of
democracy. Economic inequality was present in both countries; there was a very high
percentage of unemployment especially among the youth. In past decades, the education
in the Arab countries has developed and the percentage of educated citizens has
increased in comparison to the past. However, the economy was not capable of
providing job markets to the considerable number of graduates. The unemployment rate
in Tunisia was higher than that of Syria. Regardless of which was higher, the
unemployment rate was considered to be an aspect found in all the Arab countries that
got through uprisings after 2010 (Campante & Chor, 2012). This issue shows that
economic inequality is a prerequisite for a demand for change and probably revolution.
However, as Lipset and other modernization theorists argue, economic inequality might
not help in the democratization process. They assert that a strong and developed
economy is needed for democracy to be established. The economies of Tunisia and Syria
are both weak. Even with the liberalization that Syria underwent after Bashar, it only
benefited a small elite group who had strong ties with the regime. The same goes for
Tunisia where the Trabulsi family had gained most from Tunisia’s largest businesses
(Trabulsi family are the relatives of Bin Ali’s wife). Thus, by comparing both countries,
we find that the economic factor is very similar in both.

Culture is another factor that scholars consider to be one of the requisites for
democracy. The democratic culture is usually represented by freedom of speech, free
media and human rights. The regimes of Syria and Tunisia have been strict with those
types of freedoms. Both regimes have history in restricting the media and curtailing
human rights; many activists have been imprisoned or exiled from their respective
countries. The human rights aspect of culture is very important as it encompasses various types of freedoms. When a group of people suffers from autocracy for a long period of time, a rapid attainment of freedom might backfire on them. This point is where the strength of reform comes in to enhance the effectiveness of the newly achieved freedom. In Tunisia, the activists appeared to be ready for the change and high maturity has been shown in the way both sides of the society (the Islamists and the secularists) have been able to cope together and relieve each other’s fears. Nevertheless, the oppositional groups in Syria were quite divided and uncoordinated. The regime was able to instill terror and expand the rebellion’s disorganization (Jenkins, 2014). Syrian oppositional groups were not able to merge together under one national strategy. They only operated via a ‘guerilla campaign’ trying to fight back the regime’s security apparatus. However, that does not mean that the blame is on them, for the Assad regime has been known for its harsh and devastating techniques; this time it took the regime longer to silence the uproar because of the involvement of terrorists groups who were previously sustained by the regime itself.

The third element of democracy requisites that is discussed in the literature chapter is religion. This factor has the biggest influence in both countries. Even though the Sunnis are the majority in both countries, but the Syrian population has a fraction of other sectarian and religious minorities. In Tunisia, the only challenge is between the Islamists main party (Annahda) and the secularists groups in the country. So far, this challenge has been pacified by the moderation that was shown by Annahda Party. On the other hand, Islamists in Syria have shown an unprecedented extremism which hindered
the possibility for minorities to join in the upheavals. This aspect is further analyzed in the part where Huntington’s propositions are analyzed.

4.3 Huntington’s Manifestation in Syria and Tunisia

As previously discussed, Samuel Huntington has a lot of input on the backlash of revolutions and factors behind democratic waves. After considering the main variables in the cases of Syria and Tunisia, we can now form a link between the variable in each case and Huntington’s prepositions. The start of the Arab Spring first gives an impression that Huntington’s third wave is being revived. However, upon taking a closer look on the democratic shifts in the international arena and the backlash of the revolution in Syria, one can infer that the wave is certainly not democratic yet.

In Tunisia, the revolution has been quite successful thus far, and the regime change has been easy compared to Syria’s case. Huntington’s account on the effect of mass mobilization is contested through the Tunisian experience. He argues that most of the democratic governments have been established from top to bottom rather from bottom to top, disregarding any ability for the masses to be able to cause any democratic shift. In Tunisia, the masses caused the change, not the governmental institutions. Yet, there are other aspects of the Tunisian case that aided in the change. These aspects can be linked to Huntington’s factors behind the democratic wave. Tunisia only relates to two out of three from Huntington’s factors behind democratic waves; the first is that:

- Authoritarian regimes are facing difficulty in legitimizing their rule where citizens are open to democratic values and are going through profound economic instabilities.
The Tunisian population has been widely exposed to the advancement in technology and the people have always been open to advanced democratic cultures from Europe. Both factions of the Tunisian population, the Islamists and the secularists, have shared the European moderation experience through living in Europe and receiving a lot of tourists in their homeland.

The second complying factor is: - The economic advancement during the 1960s has led to the expansion of the middle classes in a number of countries;

The Tunisian middle class has represented the masses that rose against the regime. The Tunisian middle class was established through hard work compared to other Arab oil-exporting countries. However, the Assad regime in Syria was keen on crushing the middle class and making sure that it is kept under his control.

4.4 Reverse Wave in the MENA

Reverse waves are expressed through the decline in freedom, human rights and peace. The two examined cases represent a country in the Middle East and another in North Africa. The primary is showing a lot of factors that show a reverse wave that is growing in the Middle East. Below, Huntington’s factors of reverse wave are stated with reference to Syria. These cases can also be linked to other countries in the Middle East, especially Iraq. Since the invasion of Iraq, terrorism has spread in the region, and an extended war has been taking place between different armed factions. The same has been occurring in Syria after 2012. There is a massive rise of terrorist groups that are disguised by radical Islamic parties, which want to establish an Islamic Empire in the
region. There is no sign of peace in the near future. On the contrary, it seems that extremism is spreading wider that the region itself.

Huntington’s factors behind reverse waves are the main inferences that can be made after studying the Syrian crisis. We start by stating the first factor mentioned by Huntington: -the democratic values among the elite groups and the public were not strong enough. The Assad rule in Syria has managed to abash democratic values among Syrians by incorporating its intelligence in every town in Syria. The population in Syria is used to sabotaging freedoms by being an extension of the government. This point needs further study in the field of social psychology. Moreover, the way the Syrian opposition was not able to merge into one strong group shows how the society is fractured. The Syrian society has not been as exposed as the Tunisian society is. In Tunisia, Bourguiba’s very modern reforms have continued throughout the past decades, making the society more exposed to cultural liberalization instead of conservatism. This matter has given rise to a secular society in Tunisia; one which holds on tight to these modern reforms that include the Personal Status Code that abolishes polygamy and that gives women marital rights. Tunisians are used to these forms of rights; that’s why the Islamists have not try to meddle with them yet, for they know that the Tunisian society is deeply accustomed to such civil rights.

Neither Hafiz nor Bashar had introduced modern reforms as those of Bourguiba’s. The society in Syria was never subjected to such modern modifications. Plus, the regime has overlooked the conservatism that was found in almost all Syrian rural areas. The revival of Islamic traditions that took place a decade ago was accepted by the regime without being limited or at least controlled. Even though the Ba’ath Party is a secular party and
the Assad family is from the Alawite sect, the reforms that the Ba’ath Party established still had to do more with the economy rather than the society.

The second factor for reverse waves discussed by Huntington is: rigorous economic downfalls deepened social conflict and opened the path for solutions that can only be imposed by authoritarian governments. The economic downfalls were present in both of Syria and Tunisia; however, the length of the crisis in Syria has put more stress on the society and deepened the economic struggle. The humanitarian support was not strong enough and sometimes it did not reach all the areas. This gap was filled by the extremists groups, whether al-Nusra Front or ISIS. Both groups were able to financially support their followers. As previously mentioned, when ISIS takes control over a specific area, it forms a separate state with all the needed institutions. ISIS here represents the substitute of an authoritarian government, which seeks to establish strict control and, in return, provides the adherents with basic services as humanitarian aid, bakeries, water and electricity (Caris & Reynolds, 2014). These aspects also touch on Huntington’s third factor, which states: social and political divisions caused by leftist governments required swift social and economic reforms. ISIS was able to provide the swift social and economic reforms, which are quite autocratic, but they deliver the basic needs for their followers.

In Tunisia, the short time span between the regime fall and the establishment of the constituent assembly was not enough for a third party to interfere and fill the gap. Moreover, after the fall of Bin Ali, there was no social conflict in Tunisia. Both forms of the opposition were in consent about the following steps to take, making it easier to go forward.
The fifth and sixth factors that Huntington discusses state that the revolution leaves behind a state of anarchy in the country and gives way for an external nondemocratic power to fill this gap. This concept is exactly replicated in the Syrian case. The upheavals turned into an armed conflict between different factions of the society. Early during the upheavals, the main actors were the Syrian protestors, who represent the educated middle class youth, and their families. But shortly after, the regime started to instill terror through its armed militias (al-shabiha), which led some opposition to react violently as well. During this unprecedented anarchy, strong extremist groups started to emerge. ISIS was also able to come in through the borders since the Syrian army was focused on the protesters and internal security. All these factors coincide with Huntington’s propositions about reverse waves, which show that the crisis in Syria does represent an example of a reverse wave.

Another differing factor between Syria and Tunisia is the intervention of the army. As stated in the methodology part, Bin Ali’s primary support in the country was the security apparatus. When the upheavals started, the army took a neutral side and they did not stop or attack the protestors; however, the Syrian regime’s primary apparatus was the army. The latter had spread in all Syrian regions where protests took place. They initiated the attacks against the activists first in Damascus and then in Dar’a (Noueihe & Warren, 2012). This aspect has affected the flow of events in each country differently.
**Table 5: Resulting Factors of Reverse Waves**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Syria</th>
<th>Tunisia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Democratic values</strong></td>
<td>-There has been no sign of democratic values except during the primary protests. Assad’s regime has crushed any form of cultural or political reform</td>
<td>-Political factions have shown great understanding of their political freedom and they showed great organization. Bourguiba’s cultural reforms were reflected in high acceptance of secularism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Economic Downfalls</strong></td>
<td>-Halted foreign investment -Closure of a lot of businesses -The Syrian Central Bank reserve dropped to $2 billion by the end of 2012; it was $18 billion at the beginning of the conflict (Syrian Center for Policy Research, 2013) -Unemployment rate 40% by the year 2014 (CIA, 2015)</td>
<td>-Improvement in budget deficit by 2.1% from 2013 to 2014 (World Bank, 2015) -Production declines and commercial services decline (World Bank) -Unemployment rate still high (15.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Social and political divisions</strong></td>
<td>-Weak opposition led to diverging factions -Social divisions reflected through different extremists groups</td>
<td>-Highly organized opposition -Islamists show moderation and acceptance of opposing groups -Post-Bin Ali elections were held successfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Middle and upper classes excluding the populist classes from power</strong></td>
<td>-The Assad regime was keen on crushing the middle class and the upper classes maintain their control</td>
<td>-Middle and populist classes were able to overthrow Bin Ali -Constituent Assembly was formed from all classes without any exclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Rise of terrorism after the collapse of law and order</strong></td>
<td>-Numerous terrorist groups were formed after the upheavals (ISIS, Nusra Front, Soqour al-Sham, Umma Brigade...etc)</td>
<td>-Minor influx of terrorism from Libya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Intervention of external nondemocratic powers</strong></td>
<td>-Intervention of a number of nondemocratic countries and extremists groups (Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Arab Gulf...etc)</td>
<td>-No intervention was presented. European countries showed their support for reform. Tunisia forms relations with Algeria to secure borders with Libya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7. Reverse snowballing</strong></td>
<td>-Needs further research</td>
<td>-Needs further research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10. Existence of peace</strong></td>
<td>-War between numerous factions</td>
<td>-Peace is sustained</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5 Emerging Sectarian Dynamics

Unfortunately, the Syrian crisis is also a result of regional sectarian struggle. The past decade has been reverberating with deep sectarian mayhem between Sunnis and Shiites. The invasion of Iraq and the Lebanese 2006 war have amplified the Shiite-Sunni identities in the region. After the fall of Saddam, Sunni extremist groups have tried to conquer parts of the country by attacking any other faction they face. On the other hand, the 2006 war between Israel and Lebanon was initiated and fought by Hezbollah, which is a Shiite party. Both groups have connections with regional powers presented by Saudi Arabia and Iran respectively. The former is a Sunni based country, which is a major support for all Sunnis in the region. Iran is the Shiite basis, which also supports all the Shiites in the region. The Syrian regime was involved in both sides: first, it reinforced terrorist groups on its land to use it as a threat in the face of the international community. It also supported Hezbollah by being the middleman between Iran and Lebanon. Hezbollah has depended on the Syrian government’s ability to send weapons from Iran to Lebanon without being obstructed. As a result, Iran has been backing the Assad regime to keep its interests in the region stable. Iran uses the strong presence of Hezbollah in Lebanon to intimidate Israel and, thus, to send a message to USA. Moreover, the Syrian foreign affairs in the last ten years have taken a turn from balancing the relations between USA/Europe and Iran/Russia. The regime has disregarded most of the calls for non-involvement from the international community, and it focused on its relations with Iran and Russia. Recently, Russia has been playing a major role in the Syrian crisis, and it is on the edge of confrontation with Turkey, which is also a major power in the region.
Regional powers have been active in the Syrian crisis so that they can secure their interests in the region. Nevertheless, these interests are translated into sectarian rhetoric and violence. The intervention in Syria has a lot of differing actors that are regional and international. It will be difficult, at this stage, to withdraw from the region without securing their interests. The Assad regime had the leading role in creating these sectarian clashes. The regimes’ policies have been pro-Alawite. Most of the high ranks in Syrian security apparatus are led by Alawites. The regime has always manipulated the minorities by employing the threat of the Sunni majority. Simultaneously, the regime has been engaging in deliberate radicalization of the Sunnis. The polarization between Sunnis and Alawites has surfaced and intensified with sectarian extensions in the region.

The extremist groups have capitalized on the Syrian Sunni hatred towards the regime and the Alawite sect. Such groups were able to attract fighters from all Sunni regions in Syria and from other countries as well. ISIS was able to build an army of more than 22,000 fighters from Syria, Iraq, Europe and the USA (Sedgwick, 2015). It makes use of the Internet and social media to reach out as wide as possible and to spread its propaganda. An immense number of ISIS fighters are highly educated and disaffected youth who were able to view the savage activities that ISIS spreads on its social media. When it first started spreading, ISIS depended on funding from the Arabian Gulf, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. However, after they were able to take control over resourceful territories, they have become self-sustaining. The Syrian government buys oil from ISIS through the black market (Sedgwick).

On the other hand, Iran has been backing up the Alawites in Syria, and it has also sent Shiite volunteers to fight along the regime’s army. Hezbollah would have never
entered Syrian territories to fight against the opposition if it weren’t under Iran’s consent and instructions. The Supreme Leader Khamenei regarded the Arab Spring as a “natural continuation of the Iranian revolution of 1979” (Alfoneh, 2011). This statement shows that Iranians viewed the Arab Spring as an Islamic revival rather than a democratic revolution.

The external interventions of regional and international powers have intensified the sectarian struggle in the region. Each sectarian group is getting support from its respective ally by receiving money or weaponry. Nevertheless, these extremist groups have been able to place threats on Western countries, such as what happened on November 13th, 2016 in Paris. These tragic events might change the international world order and affect more than the region.

All the factors of a reverse wave are being presented in Syria, which is a Middle Eastern country facing external interventions from authoritarian governments. The radical Islamist groups are representing the reverse wave in the MENA. Nevertheless, democracy is decline in other parts of the world as well because of the change in international power structure. More dictatorships are being able to control international politics without direct repercussions.
Chapter Five

Conclusion

5.1 Discussion of Findings

As stated by the French political thinker, Alexis de Tocqueville, “In a revolution, as in a novel, the most difficult part to invent is the end.” (1866). The Arab Spring began in late 2010, but the world is still facing the effects of its upheavals. Tunisia was the first country whose population rose against its authoritarian regime, and a couple of months after the series of protests in the country, Bin Ali stepped down from his realm. Nonetheless, the ripples that affected other countries are still active and are reaching farther from the region. The primary reflections on the Arab Spring were quite positive. Most politicians and social scientists regarded it as the period when the ‘Middle East exceptionalism’ will banish. However, they did not anticipate what was yet to come. The series of counter-revolutions that have spread in more than one country reflect upon Huntington’s reverse wave theory. The third democratic wave that started 30 years ago has not affected the Middle East and North Africa; however, the third reverse wave might be starting to emerge from the region, specifically from the Middle East. The listed factors of reverse waves can be also linked to other Middle Eastern countries.

No one was able to predict any change in the region. Instead, political scientists were busy trying to analyze the reasons why democracy is not flourishing in the Arab world. The uprisings in Tunisia quickly spread across the North African and Middle Eastern countries, causing a lot of uproar in the cities, and even in the rural areas. The protestors in each country shared similar demands, ones which called for regime change and reform. They also had in
common the agony resulting from the continuous autocracy and inequality of the long-lasting authoritarian regimes. Nevertheless, each regime reacted differently to the protestors. As Anderson argues, each regime is unique, and we cannot consider that the activists are facing the same opponent (Anderson, 2011). Protestors depended on the use of social media as a catalyst and a forum to share their experience and as a means of communication during the uprisings. The media assisted in the snowballing effect. Citizens in other authoritarian countries were able to observe what was happening, and it gave them the incentive to start their own revolution. Unfortunately, activists did not consider the fact that each country has its own geopolitical situation. Even the protestors were of different demographics; in Tunisia, the upheavals started in the rural areas and moved towards the cities, but Egyptian protestors were from the urban and cosmopolitan areas (Anderson). Moreover, the activists couldn’t rely on the international community’s intervention because interests differ from country to another.

Syria and Tunisia were chosen as the two case studies because they represent a grand failure and a probably success respectively. The comparison between both countries shows the main aspects that have led to the wide variance shown by the two experiences. It was obvious that what started as a revolution in both countries had different results. The mode of transition depends on specific requisites that cannot be guaranteed in a country. The economic situation in Tunisia and Syria comprised high levels of inequalities between different factions in the country. Most of the wealth was divided among the elites of the countries and the people who had strong ties with the regime. The Makhlouf family in Syria was a replicate of the Trabulsi family in Tunisia. Both regimes have managed to ignore the rural parts of the countries, disregarding the demands of their dwellers. The youth of the rural areas were getting more and more qualified and educated, but they were jobless. Unemployment in both countries was
staggering high, and the cities were getting flooded with numbers of unemployed educated youth. Nevertheless, the regimes were not coping with the distress that was increasing with time. The security apparatus in Tunisia was always taking advantages of the poor. On the other hand, it was the Syrian army that has used and is still abusing its citizens. Yet, these similarities between Syria and Tunisia were not enough to ensure a similar outcome.

Both countries incorporated groups of Islamists, but their nature differed. After the regime’s fall in Tunisia, the leader of Annahda Party, Gannouchi, arrived to the country from exile. Numerous followers awaited his arrival, which at first posed a threat to the secular groups of Tunisia. However, Annahda members were keen on pacifying the fears of their fellow activists. Gannouchi appeared to be more moderate than expected. Until now, the Tunisian Islamists are not trying to Islamize the country in any way. They are showing that Islamists can be politically active under a democratic system. Conversely, the upsurge of radical Islamism in Syria shows a totally different experience. The Assad regimes have history in supporting terrorist groups and in using them as a threat in the region. Shortly after the upheavals in Syria escalated into violent confrontations between the army and the protestors, radical Islamic groups started to emerge and gain grounds of the unprecedented chaos. The location of Syria had a lot to add to the equation. Firstly, the sectarian struggle that has been going on for the past decade in the region gave an incentive for marginalized Sunnis of Syria to rise in the face of the regime. Extremist groups that were primarily viewed as opposition got support from regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, Arab Gulf and Turkey. On the other hand, the regime was getting support from Iran and Russia: two dictatorships that are gaining more grounds in the international society. The Freedom House reports have been showing a decline in democracy in a lot of countries. Huntington is able to provide factors of reverse waves, which coincide with the rise of radical
Islamism in Syria and the region. However, he is not able to state when the third reverse wave would start. Many scholars are analyzing the regression of democracy. Strong democratic governments are finding difficulty in providing good economic standards for their citizens. Unemployment is a major issue in a lot of European countries, and educated youth are suffering from the consequences of their governmental incapability. Radical groups are providing the needs for their followers and gaining grounds. Islam is not radical. ISIS and other formations are abusing religious courses to terrorize weak-minded followers. Extremism in Syria has been instilled by the regime itself with the support of its allies. The sectarian dynamics in the region is representing a proxy war between regional and international powers and the recent events are demonstrating this proposition. Huntington’s reverse wave theory might have already started.

With all the chaos occurring, Tunisia is the last hope for the region. The geopolitical situation in Tunisia has been of great aid to the sequence of events. Political reforms have already been established in Tunisia since 2011, and the National Constituent Assembly has incorporated the major political players there. A new institution was adopted in 2014, which was followed by parliamentary and presidential elections. Economic reforms have not been implemented yet; the successive governments are focused on the political transition and the internal security of the country. The new government will need to concentrate on developing its economy to avoid any security relapse.

5.2 Research Limitations

The cases under study are facing recent developments and changes; hence, the analysis might be challenged with the future course of events. Up until now, Tunisia is viewed as a
success and an addition to the Islamic democratic states. Nevertheless, the coming years might alter the governance, and Annahda Party might take a different stance as the events unfold in the MENA. A more detailed research that incorporates additional Islamic countries that are successful democracies is needed to support the main hypothesis of this paper. Moreover, the reverse wave theory can also be examined through the inclusion of powerful authoritarian states that are developing and controlling the international arena. Democracy has always been a contested notion, and as the recent political events are unfolding, we might witness a new form of governance. The coming years will demonstrate whether Huntington’s theory is to be proved or refuted. Islamism can be further studied and analyzed upon recent manifestations, but that matter will need to be presented through a more thorough and extensive research.

The findings in this paper only tackle two countries, one in the Middle East and another in North Africa. In future research, more Middle Eastern countries need to be analyzed and the level of democracy in each country should be examined. Reverse waves are illustrated through negative shifts in political freedom, human rights and peace. As reported by the Freedom House, democracy is in decline and more countries are becoming more authoritarian. To confirm the reverse wave theory upon the MENA, more countries need to be included in future research and the factors showing a decline in democracy need to be pointed out in each country.
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