



Women and the Arab Revolts

ISOBEL COLEMAN
Senior Fellow
Council on Foreign Relations

SINCE THE ARAB UPRISINGS BEGAN in Tunisia nearly a year ago, women have been on the front lines of change: protesting alongside men, blogging passionately and prolifically, covering the demonstrations as journalists and newscasters, leading public demonstrations, and launching social media campaigns. In Libya, women set up support networks to feed and clothe revolutionaries, relay information, and smuggle munitions—putting them at the center of the struggle for freedom. From Tunis and Cairo to Riyadh and Sana’a, female protesters have become the iconic image of the Arab revolutions. Their defiance has surprised many in the West who have long viewed Arab women as oppressed victims of conservative patriarchy and religion. Yet young Arab women today are significantly better educated, marry later, have fewer children, and are more likely to work outside the home than their mothers’ generation. Their demands for greater freedom have been building for years. While women’s efforts have been important to the Arab revolts, there is no guarantee that they will be able to turn their recent activism into long-term economic, social, and political gains.

215

Women’s rights in the Arab World today face several challenges, including politically empowered Islamist parties that contest existing laws on religious grounds and popular inertia against increasing women’s participation in public leadership roles. Islamist organizations like the Renaissance Party (Al-Nahda) in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt are influential players in their new political landscapes. Whether their commitment to Sharia (Islamic law) can be reconciled with women’s rights and, more broadly, human rights, will be

ISOBEL COLEMAN is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, where she directs the Civil Society, Markets, and Democracy Initiative and the Women and Foreign Policy Program. Her work focuses on the Middle East and South Asia.

Copyright © 2011 by the *Brown Journal of World Affairs*

FALL/WINTER 2011 • VOLUME XVIII, ISSUE 1





ISOBEL COLEMAN

an important determinant of how democracy and law evolve in these countries. Indeed, how effectively women's rights are incorporated into broader demands for social, economic, and political change in the Arab World will be a bellwether for the future of democracy in the region. In recent months, there have been troubling incidents that underscore both the risks inherent for women during this fluid time and the potential for backsliding in terms of women's rights.

TUNISIA: LEADING THE WAY

Tunisia led the Arab World when it overthrew its dictator, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, and remains at the forefront of protest and reform. The results of its recent elections saw Al-Nahda sweep the field on a platform that appealed to voters along religious and economic lines, while issuing assurances that it would protect women's rights. However, many secularists remain wary of Al-Nahda's moderate rhetoric, and they will closely watch its actions on women's rights in particular. Under such scrutiny, Al-Nahda is unlikely to antagonize its more progressive political partners by taking issue with women's rights, although it will undoubtedly come under some pressure from more conservative Islamist elements to do so.

216

The reality is that women's rights have been a fact of life in Tunisia for decades. Shortly after Tunisia's independence from France in 1956, President Habib Bourguiba, the country's secular authoritarian leader, pushed through a Personal Status Code that was remarkably liberal for its time. It granted divorce rights to women, abolished polygamy, set minimum marriage ages, permitted access to birth control, and provided limited access to abortion. When Ben

The reality is that women's rights have been a fact of life in Tunisia for decades.

Ali assumed power from Bourguiba in 1987, he ruled with an iron fist, but continued to advance women's rights by passing more reforms to the Personal Status Code. Over the years, Ben Ali expanded parental, divorce, and custody rights for women, strengthened laws to protect women from domestic violence, and continued to emphasize girls' education and female employment. As a result, Tunisian women today have achieved broad gains in education and have one of the highest rates of female workforce participation in the region, at close to 30 percent.¹

Cynically, Ben Ali lost no opportunity to highlight his positive track record on women's rights to assuage concerns from Western allies about Tunisia's serious human rights abuses. His regime harshly suppressed Islamist groups and

THE BROWN JOURNAL OF WORLD AFFAIRS





expressions of Islam in general (including the wearing of the headscarf) because of Islamist political opposition. He jailed and exiled numerous Islamist leaders and conveniently justified repression partly on the grounds that Islamists did not support women's rights. At the same time, the state also systematically tried to co-opt the women's rights agenda by pulling women's groups into the Union Nationale de la Femme Tunisienne under the much-hated first lady, Liela Trabelsi, or by forcing them to gain approval from the Ministry of Culture, effectively eliminating political dissidence.²

In the months since Ben Ali's ouster, various secular women's groups have held public protests in Tunis to advocate for the inclusion of women in the leadership of the interim government.³ At times, angry mobs of men have countered them with shouts and pushing, insisting that women's rights are against Islam. With Islamists actively participating in Tunisia's new political landscape, topics that had receded from public debate, like polygamy and a woman's right to work, are being discussed in the media with renewed energy. Women's rights activists complain that too few women's voices are included in these debates.⁴ They also reject criticism that the women's groups were complicit in the detested Ben Ali regime, reminding their critics that independent women's groups were as much against the regime as anyone, and that they regularly had their activities disrupted by the government.

On 23 October 2011, Tunisia held elections to select 217 members to the National Constituent Assembly (NCA) that is tasked with writing a new constitution, forming an interim government, and holding parliamentary and presidential elections. The campaign leading up to the election brought questions about the role of Islam in public life and politics again to the forefront. Secularists warned that Al-Nahda, which led the polls and won 41 percent of the seats in the NCA, would threaten the status of women, endanger Tunisia's profitable tourist industry, and stifle freedom of expression. Al-Nahda, however, carefully campaigned on a platform of economic development based on Islamic values targeting corruption and unemployment, and promised to protect the rights of women and minorities.⁵ Al-Nahda's leader, Rachid Ghannouchi, acknowledged, very practically, that women make up half the electorate and he needed their support.⁶ After the election, he gave a statement pledging his party's commitment to women's political participation.⁷ Al-Nahda also reaffirmed its pledge to focus on attracting foreign investment, improving the economy, and providing stability.⁸

Ghannouchi positions himself as an Islamic modernizer, and he has praised Turkey's political model. Al-Nahda enjoys close ties to Turkey's Justice





ISOBEL COLEMAN

and Development Party (AKP), a moderate Islamist group that was allowed to participate in politics in 2001 only after recognizing Turkey as a secular state and relinquishing ambitions to insert Islamic jurisprudence into the Turkish constitution.⁹ During a high-profile visit to Tunisia in September 2011, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan publicly advocated for a secular system, while also insisting, “Islam and democracy can exist side by side.”¹⁰

Some secular opponents continue to warn that Al-Nahda and Ghan-nouchi are more conservative than their current rhetoric reveals. Uncertainty around Al-Nahda’s positions on women’s rights, in particular, stems in part from public confusion on sensitive issues such as whether they will push for making polygamy legal.¹¹ The center-left secularist parties like the Congress for the Republic Party (CPR), whose support Al-Nahda will need to form a governing coalition, have stated that a commitment to women’s rights is critical to win women’s support.¹²

Another positive development for women is their high level of representation in the NCA. Election rules required parties to achieve parity between male and female candidates on their lists, and to alternate between men and women candidates in the list order.¹³ In effect, this served as a quota, resulting in the election of 49 women to the NCA. This has helped jump-start women’s political participation in the new Tunisia—women now represent 20 percent of the parliament—but it will take more than top-down initiatives to secure their position. Eighty-five percent of the women elected (42 out of 49) belong to Al-Nahda, and they are likely to stick to their party’s platform. Moreover, the NCA will be governed by an executive committee, which will presumably be a source of significant influence; women’s voices are not guaranteed on that committee. Women’s inclusion via the quota is, nonetheless, a welcome development. Similar proportions of women’s representation will be difficult to achieve in other countries such as Egypt, Yemen, and Libya.

EGYPT: JUST THE BEGINNING

Women’s educational, workplace, and legal gains in Egypt are more recent and less widespread than in Tunisia, and the general population is more conservative and traditional. However, human rights groups are organized and vocal; bloggers are taken seriously enough to be arrested and detained; and the press and media, though subject to some censorship, express a wide range of views, many of which are extremely critical. Massive street protests were instrumental in bringing down Mubarak’s regime and in continuing to pressure the Supreme





Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) during the transition. These are all indicators of Egypt's rich civil society; and women, some seasoned activists and others entirely new to politics, are crucial participants in all facets. Yet the inspirational images of gender solidarity in Tahrir Square in the early days of Egypt's revolution have given way to ugly episodes of targeted harassment. A hastily planned demonstration on 8 March 2011—International Women's Day—attracted a few hundred women, but was marred by angry men shoving the protesters and yelling at them to go home, saying their demands for rights are

On the political level, women have been excluded from major decision-making bodies before and after the fall of Mubarak's regime.

against Islam.¹⁴ Around the same time, the Egyptian military rounded up scores of women demonstrators and, in a show of raw intimidation, subjected many of them to virginity tests.¹⁵ On the political level, women have been excluded from major decision-making bodies before and after the fall of Mubarak's regime, and it appears that very few will win seats in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Women activists face opposition on a number of fronts. In terms of their legal status and rights, the main opposition comes from religious conservatives who consider the personal status laws, most recently reformed in 2000 and 2005, to be incongruous with Sharia. The amendments, including the right to a no-fault divorce, were approved by the International Research Center (IRC) before they were brought to parliament.¹⁶ The IRC is a branch of Al-Azhar, which has been the premier site of Sunni thought for over 1,000 years, and is one of the major institutions in Egypt that is charged with issuing *fatwas*, rulings on Islamic jurisprudence that clarify the position of Islam on contemporary issues. To secure the passage of the amendments to the personal status laws, Mubarak, who conveniently appointed the head of Al-Azhar (who remains in his position today), asked the IRC to rule on their compatibility with Sharia. The amendments were approved, but their legitimacy (along with the credibility of Al-Azhar) is hotly debated.

The suspended constitution was ambiguous in the rights it awarded to women. Article 2 states that Islam is the religion of the state and Sharia is the main source of law in Egypt. Article 11 qualifies women's equality under law with the caveat that it does not interfere with their domestic duties or with Sharia.¹⁷ In practice, the French Code is the source of civil, commercial, and criminal law in Egypt, while family law is drawn primarily from Islamic jurisprudence.¹⁸ A new constitution will be written by the parliament after elections that will be held from November to March. Meanwhile, both SCAF and Al-Azhar have





ISOBEL COLEMAN

made attempts at sketching the features of the future document, and it is likely that Sharia will continue to be the main source of law. Looking forward, the contest between the judiciary, Al-Azhar, and other religious institutions over the right to interpret Egyptian legislation should be monitored closely because the outcome will determine, to a great extent, how women will fare. Islamic law can accommodate a wide range of outcomes for women, from more liberal interpretations, as in Tunisia, to extremely stringent ones, as in Saudi Arabia.

Egypt's political equilibrium rests at a more conservative position than Tunisia's. While the Al-Nahda party considers its close relationship with the Turkish AKP a source of strength, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan received a

Clearly, reconciling women's rights with Sharia will be imperative in Egypt going forward.

cooler welcome from Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. During Erdogan's September visit to Cairo as part of his North Africa trip, he was welcomed by large crowds (he is popular for his support for Palestinian nationalism), but

his statements of support for a secular government in Egypt piqued the Brotherhood. Their spokesman Mahmoud Ghazlan reacted to Erdogan's hopes that Egypt would forgo a legal system based on Sharia by saying that secularism has a negative connotation for Egyptians.¹⁹ Various polls emphasize this point, revealing that a large majority of Egyptians believe Sharia should be "a source" or "the source" of law in the country. A Pew poll published in May 2011 found that, while a large proportion of Egyptians (71 percent) express support for democracy, a strong majority (62 percent) also believes that laws should strictly follow the teachings of the Koran, with another third (89 percent in total) believing that laws should follow the values and principles of Islam.²⁰ Clearly, reconciling women's rights with Sharia will be imperative in Egypt going forward.

Unsurprisingly, there is a diversity of opinions about how this should be accomplished; the spectrum of self-identified Islamist political groups is broad, ranging from extremely conservative Salafists to the Muslim Brotherhood to the Wasat (Middle) party, which includes Christian members. Salafist groups such as the Jamaat Islamia's Construction and Development Party are campaigning for gender segregation and the application of Islamic law to Muslims and non-Muslims alike.²¹ Some Muslim Brotherhood leaders have suggested that the party would like to see Islamic law applied to all areas of life, including a ban—that would apply to tourists—on the public consumption of alcohol and on appearing in bathing attire.²² The Freedom and Justice party, the Brotherhood's political wing, is contesting 50 percent of the seats in parliament, a larger number than they originally sought to win, and they will undoubtedly have a major hand in



shaping Egypt's new constitution.

There are other Islamist leaders who take a more moderate line while still highlighting the importance of Islam to Egyptian voters. Dr. Abdel Moneim Abou El-Fotouh, a long-time Brotherhood leader who was expelled from the organization after nominating himself for president in May, is popular among younger members. He is more supportive of women's rights, engagement with the West, and democratic reforms in governance.²³ Additionally, he and several other high-ranking members of the Muslim Brotherhood have stated their support for any Egyptian citizen—including a woman—to run for president.

One woman, Bothaina Kamel, has guaranteed that the issue of women running for president stays on the agenda by putting herself forward as a candidate. In April, Kamel, a television host, announced her candidacy on Twitter. She explains her run, saying that Egyptian women are no less qualified than their male competitors in terms of culture, experience, and capability.²⁴ A poll from the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies released in August showed that only 0.1 percent of voters intended to support her in the presidential election scheduled for next year.²⁵ Nonetheless, Kamel's long-time standing as an opposition figure within the Kefaya party, her criticism of the slow progress toward forming a government, and her insistent calls for transparency make her run for president more than symbolic, regardless of the outcome on election day.

Women's rights also face an entrenched resistance from their association with the previous regime. Opponents of the personal status laws are working to discredit them by labeling them "Suzanne's Laws," after Suzanne Mubarak, wife of the deposed president. Supporters of overturning these laws claim that they were meant to accommodate the wealthy friends of the former First Lady, and that on the whole they have caused an increase in the divorce rate in Egypt. "Suzanne's Laws" refer to changes made in 2000 to the personal status law, originally written in 1920 and 1929. These changes include allowing divorced mothers to have custody of their children until they are 15 years old (instead of 9), changing the visiting rights of the non-custodial parent (usually the father), and allowing, for the first time in Egypt, a no-fault divorce.²⁶ Before these changes, obtaining a divorce required that a woman demonstrate fault; the conditions for proving fault were so difficult to meet that very few women were successful.²⁷ *Khul'*, as the no-fault divorce is called, requires only that the woman return her dowry to her husband without having to prove harm, disabling injury, or abandonment (the conditions of fault). It still requires that the divorced father pay alimony to support his children, but not the mother,





ISOBEL COLEMAN

while they are in her care.

Women's groups, such as the Alliance for Arab Women led by Hoda Badran, and supporters of the Personal Status Code fiercely argue that the moniker "Suzanne's laws" is purposely misleading.²⁸ It is notable that, as in Tunisia, association with the First Lady has marred the reputation of the women's rights agenda, which in Egypt was dominated by the National Council on Women, under Suzanne Mubarak's direction. This was also the case for another amendment to personal status law in Egypt, which was passed as a presidential decree in 1979 and was then overturned in 1985. Known as "Jihan's Law," it granted a woman the de facto right to divorce if her husband took another wife.²⁹ After Anwar Sadat's assassination, the law, named for his wife, was annulled on a technical point.

While women's legal rights are inarguably a crucial determinant of their status, under Mubarak the rights of all Egyptians could be arbitrarily suspended or violated. There were also large shortfalls in terms of meaningful implementation. An apt example is the quota for women parliamentarians that Mubarak initiated in 2010 that reserved 12 percent of parliamentary seats for women; only members of the National Democratic Party (NDP), Mubarak's party, won them. This summer, the SCAF announced that it was eliminating this quota.³⁰ In the elections starting in November (after this article went to press), parties were required to include only one woman on their list, and not in a winning position. Al-Wafd, one of Egypt's oldest parties, listed two women in winning positions in two districts, but it is alone in this feat.³¹ No women were considered for governorships after the regime was overthrown, and the issue of whether women will be allowed to serve as judges is still undecided.³² Hostility toward female candidates further deters participation.

LIBYA

As Libyans grapple with the meaning of their recently won freedom, there is cause for concern about the future of women in this resource-rich country. The struggle to depose Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi was brutal; women played an integral role in starting and sustaining the revolt, indicating both their potential and desire to participate in their country's future. But deep divisions between secularists and Islamists are already apparent, and women's rights are emerging as a potential fault line.

Libya's revolution began on 15 February 2011 in Benghazi when female relatives of prisoners killed in a massacre at Abu Salim prison started a peaceful





protest against the regime. They were joined in subsequent days by prominent female lawyers. When Qaddafi's forces retaliated with live gunfire, the rebellion started. Female medical students cared for the wounded in hospitals; women provided shelter and food for rebel fighters, facilitated communication, and secretly moved weapons and munitions. Many of the female lawyers who first responded to the protests in Benghazi were multilingual, and eloquently made their case to the international media. Among them was Hana El-Gallal, who in March warned of the massacre in Benghazi that would take place if NATO and the UN Security Council were to allow Qaddafi's troops to reach the city.³³ Qaddafi detained hundreds of female activists at the same Abu Salim prison in the early days of the uprising; the International Criminal Court is investigating the alleged rape of hundreds of women by Qaddafi's troops throughout the conflict.³⁴

Women played an integral role in starting and sustaining the revolt.

After 42 years of repressive rule under Qaddafi, Libya now faces several deep challenges. It has no real civil society or political institutions; to build effective institutions at a national level, the transitional government needs to unify rebel militias, disarm fighters, prevent extrajudicial vengeance on regime supporters, and overcome local and tribal divisions. While both men and women are breaking into the public sphere for the first time in Libya, the distance that women must cover to gain access to political and social institutions is greater. Libya remains a very conservative society, and strong patriarchal traditions limit the mobility of women, their role in the family, and their economic opportunities. Still, women saw gains under Muammar al-Qaddafi's regime in terms of access to education, relatively high levels of labor force participation, and decreases in fertility rates. Education through the secondary school level was compulsory, benefitting women in particular. In the 2007–2008 school year, women enrolled in universities outnumbered men 101,537 to 59,179, and women's labor force participation saw modest gains, rising from 23 percent in 2007 to 25 percent in 2009.³⁵ Additionally, the fertility rate, a marker of women's health, declined to 2.6 children per woman in 2010.³⁶ With the country's relatively high standard of living, Libyan women have solid ground to stand on as they seek to solidify their access to more public political, economic, and social roles.

On paper, Libyan women under Qaddafi enjoyed a relatively progressive (for the region) set of rights. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, as the country was called under Qaddafi, did not have a constitution; instead, the legal system was based on a series of charters and declarations. The 1997 "Charter on Rights and Duties of Women in Jamahiriya Society," guaranteed equal rights for women



ISOBEL COLEMAN

and men in terms of marriage, divorce, child custody, the right to work, financial independence, and national security duties. Women were considered equal to men under the law, and women had the right to a no-fault divorce. Under the 1997 charter, polygamy was legal, but husbands needed to have their first wife's written approval presented in court before marrying a second.³⁷ Qaddafi discouraged polygamy as well, and as such, it was not widespread in Libya. In terms of other women's rights, there exists in practice a large gap between rhetoric and reality.

Women's rights in Libya will likely be complicated by tensions between Islamists and secularists. Women's rights in Libya will likely be further complicated by tensions between Islamists and secularists. Just days after the death of Qaddafi, Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, chairman of the National Transitional Council (NTC), declared Libya an "Islamic state" and said that restrictions on polygamy would be removed to conform with Sharia.³⁸

His statement drew criticism from women in Libya and concern from NATO governments that have supported the NTC. While the NTC has made numerous assertions that women's rights will be protected in the new government, this is a reminder of how easily those statements can be discarded. The country's significant financial resources make it less sensitive to the demands of outsiders and economic arguments for empowering women. With only one woman on the 45-member NTC, women are already being sidelined in the new system. Through their experiences on the front lines supporting the uprising, Libyan women have forged a strong sense of their own capacity and capability to act, but they must continue to advocate for their legal and social rights to capitalize on this moment of change.

224

YEMEN: THE LAST FRONTIER

The uprising in Yemen entered its tenth month in November, and a resolution to the political and military stalemates remains elusive. Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh has agreed to UN and Gulf initiatives that would begin the transfer of power to his vice president—but he has withdrawn support for these transition plans several times.³⁹ With violence between opponents and supporters of the regime escalating, so too does talk of civil war. Since the country's last civil war in 1994, Yemen has experienced almost continual conflict, with wide-reaching consequences for Yemeni society—particularly women.

The Yemeni government, which is the poorest in the region, spends less than two percent of GDP on health care, which is starkly reflected in its very





high maternal mortality rates.⁴⁰ In 2010, 210 of every 100,000 births resulted in the mother's death.⁴¹ High fertility rates—an average of more than five children per woman—exacerbate women's health issues.⁴² Education fares little better. Female literacy was only 40 percent in 2007, compared with 77 percent for men, with even larger gaps in rural areas.⁴³ In 2007, only 5 percent of women were enrolled in higher education, compared with 14 percent of men.⁴⁴ In the same year, women's participation in the labor force (20 percent) was less than a third that of men's (74 percent).⁴⁵ Child marriage is also common. In rural areas, girls are sometimes married as young as nine years of age for a variety of reasons, including family poverty and the prospect of being paid a dowry.

Yemeni women's legal rights are also tenuous. The 1994 constitution states that citizens are equal in rights and duties; however, this is not manifest in practice. Personal status laws and laws relating to evidence, citizenship, and the penal code differentiate between men and women to the detriment of women's equal status. Polygamy is legal. A man can unilaterally divorce his wife without court approval or witness. Women inherit half of what men do, and women are required to have a male family member's approval to obtain a passport or work identification card. For a marriage to be legal, it must be signed by the groom and the male guardian of the bride. The bride's signature is not required. There are no penalties for domestic violence in Yemen. Article 15 of the Personal Status Law permits child marriage "if there is an interest," and does not include clarification as to what that entails.⁴⁶ Although women are allowed to seek public office in Yemen, few succeed. Efforts to change the laws in women's favor, such as recent attempts to prohibit girls younger than 18 years of age from marrying, have been contested by opposition groups on religious grounds.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, women have capitalized on this moment of political unrest to call for political reform and a more prominent role for women in Yemeni society. Female protesters set up a women's tent in Sana'a at Tagheer (Change) Square, and some estimate that women make up a fifth of the protesters in Yemen.⁴⁸ In April, President Saleh tried to dampen the escalating street protests against his rule by admonishing women to stay home. He claimed that their presence in the streets, "mingling with men," was against Islam. His ploy backfired. Within hours of his speech, text messages raced around the capital demanding a "women's march" in rebuttal. The following day, 10,000 abaya-clad women, almost all wearing the face-covering niqab, marched in protest. Many of the women had never before participated

Women have capitalized on this moment of political unrest to call for political reform and a more prominent role in Yemeni society.



ISOBEL COLEMAN

in any political activities. They were there to uphold the honor of all Yemeni women. As one woman shouted into a microphone, "If Saleh read the Koran, he wouldn't have made this accusation."⁴⁹

Saleh's cynical manipulation of women (he is hardly known for his piety) crossed a line for Yemenis. During these months of protest, women have become more engaged than ever in Yemen's struggle for a better government. In October, women protested the killing of a female protester in Taiz, allegedly the first women to be killed by government forces, crowding outside of the foreign ministry to call for Saleh's ouster.⁵⁰ A week later, women gathered in Sana'a to burn their veils in order to draw attention to the brutal response of government forces to protests. The symbolic act was also apparently meant to demand support from tribal leaders who, though they oppose Saleh, have done little to protect demonstrators.⁵¹ Tawakul Karman has emerged as one of the most vocal and active leaders of the country's youth movement. She has been leading student demonstrations against Saleh's corrupt rule for more than two years. A young mother of three and a member of the Islamic Islah (Reform) party, Karman has developed a high profile in Yemeni opposition politics. Her name has even been bandied about as a possible presidential candidate to succeed Saleh (although this is highly unlikely). She was recognized with the Nobel Peace prize in 2011 for her non-violent protests against the government, another indication of the important role women have played in uprisings across the region.

The reality in Yemen is that while some educated and engaged women like Karman have taken on public leadership roles, the country's poverty and conservative cultural and religious traditions create significant barriers for average women. Protests have provided a unique and valuable venue for women to make their voices heard and their presence felt in public. However, continued fighting will only serve to undermine gains women have made in recent years. If the country falls back into civil war, education and health care will regress significantly, with severe repercussions for women in particular.

A LONG ROAD AHEAD

The events of the past year in the Middle East have not only upended the political order, but are also unleashing new social, religious, and cultural dynamics. Women have played a central role so far, but there are numerous forces that will attempt to push them to the sidelines. Previous revolutions underscore the risk for women of being disenfranchised when the dust settles. The most infamous example is the Iranian Revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini was a master of





mobilizing women. He called on them to leave the confines of their homes to support the protest movement against the Shah—an act previously considered blasphemous in traditional homes, but now legitimized by Khomeini. Yet after he took power, he wasted no time in rolling back rights for women.

Although women's rights have long been established in Egypt and Tunisia, the empowerment of conservative religious voices, long suppressed in both countries, has stimulated new debates and reinvigorated old ones. Women's rights should be seen as a litmus test for the ability of new governments to reconcile the people's demands for a central role for Islam with human rights and democracy. The stakes are high, not only for individual women, but for societies as a whole. 

NOTES

1. World Bank, *Genderstats, Middle East and North Africa: Labor Force Participation*.
2. Kristen Goulding, "Tunisia: Women's winter of discontent," *openDemocracy*, October 25, 2011.
3. Ibid.
4. Yasmine Ryan, "Tunisia: Women's rights hang in the balance," *Al-Jazeera.net*, August 20, 2011.
5. "Tunisia Poll Favourite Unveils Islamic Programme," *Agence France-Presse*, September 14, 2011.
6. Kaouthar Larbi, "Tunisia's Islamist frontrunner urges 'clean' election," *Agence France-Presse*, September 13, 2011.
7. "Tunisia's Ennahda reaffirms 'commitment to women,'" *Agence France-Presse*, October 28, 2011.
8. David Kirkpatrick, "Moderate Islamist Party Heads Toward Victory in Tunisia," *New York Times*, October 24, 2011.
9. Marc Champion and Matt Bradley, "Islamists Criticize Turkish Premier's 'Secular' Remarks," *Wall Street Journal*, September 15, 2011.
10. "Turkey's Erdogan makes case for Islam and democracy in Tunisia," *Reuters*, September 15, 2011.
11. Ryan, "Tunisia: Women's rights hang in the balance."
12. Hend Hassassi, "CPR Hints at Coalition with Ennahda, Calls for Long Duration for Constituent Assembly," *TunisiaLive.net*, October 26, 2011.
13. "Elections in Tunisia: The 2011 Constituent Assembly," International Foundation for Electoral Systems, July 2011.
14. Kristen Chick, "In Egypt's Tahrir Square, women attacked at rally on International Women's Day," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 8, 2011.
15. "Egyptian Women Protesters Forced to Take 'Virginity Tests,'" Amnesty International, March 23, 2011.
16. Reem Laila, "Controversy over 'Suzanne's laws,'" *Al-Ahram*, no. 1046.
17. "Women Demand Equality in Shaping a New Egypt," Amnesty International, October 2011.
18. For Islam as the primary source of Egyptian law, see: Amira Howeid, "Constitutional battle, take two," *Al-Ahram* (Cairo), August 18, 2011, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2011/1061/fr2.htm>; for use of the French Code, see: Amira Mashhour, "Islamic Law and Gender Equality: Could there be a Common Ground?" *Human Rights Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (2005): 578; for family law, see: Oussama Arabi, "The Dawning of the Third Millennium on Shari'a: Egypt's Law no. 1 of 2000, or Women May Divorce at Will," *Arab Law Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (2001): 8.
19. Champion and Bradley, "Islamists Criticize Turkish Premier's 'Secular' Remarks."
20. Pew Research Center, "Views of Democracy and the Role of Islam" in *Obama's Challenge in the Muslim World: Arab Spring Fails to Improve U.S. Image*, May 2011, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2011/05/17/arab-spring-fails-to-improve-us-image/4/>.





ISOBEL COLEMAN

21. "Analysis: A guide to Egypt's first post-revolution elections," *IRIN*, November 3, 2011, <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=94131>.
22. Ibid.
23. Matt Bradley, "Islamist Leader Pursues Egypt's Presidency," *Wall Street Journal*, May 13, 2011.
24. "Telecaster Bothaina Kamel decides to run for president" (Arabic), April 4, 2011, <http://www.masrawy.com/News/Arts/elcinema/2011/April/4/4415550.aspx>.
25. Mohammad Hagag, "Al-Ahram Center Releases Extensive Political Survey," *Yum7*, August 23, 2011, <http://english.youm7.com/News.asp?NewsID=343934>.
26. Laila, "Controversy over 'Suzanne's laws.'"
27. Human Rights Watch, "Divorced from Justice: Women's Unequal Access to Divorce in Egypt," December 1, 2004, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/42c3bd060.html>.
28. Safaa Abdoun, "Women's rights groups plan May 1 protest," *Daily News Egypt*, April 28, 2011.
29. Arabi, "The Dawning of the Third Millennium on Shari'a," 6.
30. "Elections in Egypt: Analysis of the 2011 Parliamentary Electoral System," International Foundation for Electoral Systems, November 1, 2011, http://www.ifes.org/Content/Publications/White-Papers/2011/-/media/Files/Publications/White%20PaperReport/2011/Analysis_of_Egypt's_2011_Parliamentary_Electoral_System.pdf.
31. Yasmine Fathi, "Will Women Make it into Egypt's Upcoming Parliament," *Al Ahram Online*, October 20, 2011.
32. Amnesty International, October 2011.
33. Hana El Gallel, "He will kill everyone. Do something. Please...," *The Independent*, March 17, 2011.
34. For detainments, see: Tracy Shelton, "Libyan Women Celebrate New Freedom," *Global Post*, September 3, 2011; for allegations of rape, see: Michelle Faul, "Hundreds of women raped by Gaddafi militia," *The Independent*, May 29, 2011.
35. For enrollment, see: Alison Pargeter, "Libya," in *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance*, ed. Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin (New York, NY: Freedom House; Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 16; for labor force participation rate, see: World Bank, *World Development Indicators (Labor Participation Rate, Female, Libya)*.
36. World Bank, *GenderStats, Health, Libya*.
37. Pargeter, "Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa."
38. Mary Beth Sheridan, "Libya Declares liberation with an Islamic tone," *Washington Post*, October 23, 2011.
39. "Breakthrough on Yemen power transfer near: EU envoy," *Reuters*, November 2, 2011.
40. "Executive Summary," Yemen Poverty Assessment, World Bank (November 2007), <http://sitere-sources.worldbank.org/INTYEMEN/Resources/Executive-Summary-English-Povertyinyemen.pdf>.
41. World Bank, *GenderStats, Health, Yemen*.
42. Ibid.
43. Elham Manea, "Yemen" in *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Progress Amid Resistance*, ed. Sanja Kelly and Julia Breslin (New York, NY: Freedom House; Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).
44. Ibid.
45. World Bank, *World Development Indicators (Labor Participation Rate, Female, Yemen)*; World Bank, *World Development Indicators (Labor Participation Rate, Male, Yemen)*.
46. Manea, "Yemen."
47. Oliver Homes, "In Yemen, women protests delay on child marriage ban," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 23, 2010.
48. "Yemen uprising binds women from many walks of life," *Associated Press*, November 6, 2011.
49. Tom Finn, "March of the Yemeni Women," *Foreign Policy*, April 16, 2011.
50. "Women march in Yemen's capital," *CNN*, October 17, 2011.
51. "Yemeni women burn traditional female veils to protest regime crackdown as clashes kill 25," *Associated Press*, October 26, 2011.



Copyright of Brown Journal of World Affairs is the property of Brown University and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.