CONNECTIONS

www.kettering.org   2014

Civic Renewal ›

Civic Engagement ›

Capacity Building ›

Civic Education ›

Deliberative Democracy ›
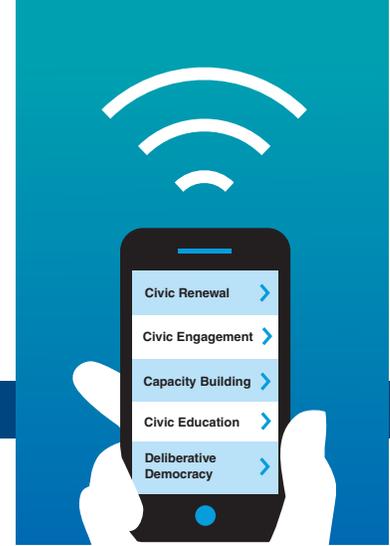
TAKING STOCK OF THE CIVIC ARENA

Developing Materials for Deliberative Forums

by Brad Rourke

When citizens deliberate together about important issues, they can reach decisions and take action together on problems that confront them. An issue framework, or issue guide, is intended to support deliberation, as people wrestle with options, face trade-offs, and make decisions about how to act. *Developing Materials for Deliberative Forums* describes ways to approach naming and framing issues for public deliberation with the aim of creating an issue guide suitable to use in deliberative, public forums.

Kettering Foundation | 2014
FREE • 31 pages • ISBN 978-0-923993-58-0

▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ ▶ To download this FREE publication, visit **www.kettering.org**.

CONNECTIONS

CONTENTS

Democracy
in the
Balance

The Complex Dynamics of the Arab World Make Outcomes Far from Certain

Ziad Majed

The Arab Network for the Study of Democracy, founded in July 2007, gathers researchers and civil society activists from Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Tunisia, and Yemen. After working for three years on deliberative democracy forums, the network started in early 2011 publishing papers and studies on Arab revolutions and is currently preparing for a regional conference in Tunisia to assess four years of political transitions and conflicts in different Arab countries.

It is difficult to draw definitive conclusions when it comes to the Arab revolutions. First, although there are many similarities in their causes and their slogans, the revolutions differ in their paths, their temporary outcomes, and in the specifics of the driving political and social forces behind them. Second, the immediate and direct effects of the revolutions (and counterrevolutions) are as yet unfinished, while the indirect effects will remain influential for years to come.

Still, we can probably identify conclusions on three different levels, almost four years after the start of the transformative movement in Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen, and subsequent interactions with some of the social movements in Jordan, Morocco, and other nations.

The First Level:
What Prompted Millions of People to Launch Massive Uprisings and Revolutions in the Past Four Years?

There are numerous factors that can be studied by sociologists, political scientists, and economists, including those related to the predominance of authoritarianism, coupled with corruption that in the past decade rose to the level of debauchery and became a provocation to citizens. The popular outrage pushed them up to and beyond their limits, breaking the spell of complacency and quietude.

Rising literacy rates and levels of education in Arab societies lead to a new generation with the necessary tools of rebellion against systems to which their people (like their parents) had surrendered. The tools of these rebellions included both connections and communication with the world through the Internet as well as a growing sense of individual identity that awakened self-consciousness and dignity.

Additionally there are the effects associated with economic changes in the last two decades, which marginalized the agricultural and industrial sectors and polarized the workforce in favor of new service and commercial sectors. These changes may be necessary to keep pace with global economic developments, but they have been insufficient to create plentiful job opportunities or to extend benefits that compensate for the losses of the families previously involved in traditional sectors.

The Arab world has also witnessed demographic shifts generally over the last two decades, in terms of the slowdown of population growth, declining fertility rates, and a rising age of marriage. This has meant more space for the new generation to become politically active, unhampered by the premature and heavy social burdens to the same extent that earlier generations had been weighed down.

The expansion of cities and residential areas to allow immediate geographic contiguity between human blocs has meant the sharing of spatial characteristics, even if the people come from different backgrounds or origins.

And social networking sites have made possible the expansion of Internet-based networks in the region (and steadily increased the number of users), making access to media and information nearly boundless and enabling citizens to engage in dialogue and construct political stances together. As soon as the revolutions began, the difference between the virtual world and the real world became minimal. The virtual itself turned into a means of real mobilization, a space to meet and rise up, allowing all kinds of creativity. Social networks enabled the public expression of accumulated frustrations on one hand and the yearned for freedom and dignity on the other.

The Second Level: What Did the Revolutions Accomplish?

Since the recent revolutions, many Arab societies have regained their relationship to politics and to political time, and citizens both as individuals and groups have regained in more than one country their rights of expression. This is something that most Arabs have not seen since the 1960s.

The media, citizen activism, statements by intellectuals, questions from politicians (including elected officials), social networking sites, and political talk shows have all begun to participate in monitoring and following political life, statements, and actions and to encourage the formation of public opinion and a new relationship to politics. None of this sort of accountability was allowed under one-party regimes, a controlled or directed media, and rubber-stamp parliaments.

Equally important are the return of free elections and the return of competition between different political powers. The Tunisia example shows a revival of political competitiveness that—if firmly established—can by itself be a model in the region.

The Third Level: The Most Prominent Challenges Facing Most Arab States Today

As is confirmed day after day, these significant changes do not negate the incredible number of difficulties and challenges that continue to hinder democratic transformation in the various Arab cases and threaten to make it extremely costly on more than one level. These countries face five main challenges:

Rising literacy rates and levels of education in Arab societies lead to a new generation with the necessary tools of rebellion against systems to which their people (like their parents) had surrendered. The tools of these rebellions included both connections and communication with the world through the Internet as well as a growing sense of individual identity that awakened self-consciousness and dignity.

1) Violence, Counterrevolutions, and Military Struggles

In Syria, the intensity of the repression by the regime and of the fighting has reached an unprecedented level of barbarism. With hundreds of thousands of people killed and millions displaced, the political transition appears impossible without an international peace plan.

In Libya and Yemen, struggles for power erupted between different political and tribal forces, and new authorities appear so far incapable of reaching compromises and power sharing formulas.

As for Egypt, the army—with the support of many sectors of the society—

Ultimately, the Arab world today seems to be in the midst of a thorny path, where problems emerge and are compounded. While new struggles continue to arise out of the transformations, so do relative successes and achievements.

led a military coup against the elected Muslim Brotherhood government, and imposed "anti-terrorist laws" in an attempt to restrict gained political freedoms. Future developments will show whether new political dynamics will emerge and allow for next elections in the country to create a new balance of power.

2) The Adaptation of the Currents of Political Islam to the Parameters of Democracy

For the first time since the emergence of Islamic political parties in the first half of the 20th century, some of them have come to power through the ballot box, such as in Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt (until the coup). This poses major challenges, including 1) the capacity of these Islamic parties to deal with the messiness of everyday politics in isolation from the "sacred" and 2) the test of the abilities of the secular forces to both deal with these parties and impose a balance of power that allows Islamic parties to test their programs in power while respecting democratic principles. The issue of "political Islam" and democratic transition is an open question. While the Egyptian scenario appears to be a failure, the Tunisian one is seen as a relative success. This Islamist-secular coexistence will be tested in November 2014 elections.

3) The Building of Democratic Institutions

One of the most prominent challenges in Arab countries today is building democratic institutions in accordance with key principles: separation of powers, independence of the judiciary, and professionalization of the police and security services, as well as making the military subject to elected civilian authorities.

Of course, all of this is easier said than done. There is no doubt that dealing with institutional difficulties like those connected with reforming public and municipal administrations and services will be time consuming and demand experience that is lacking or limited on the ground today.

4) Economic Growth

In societies distinguished by their need to create hundreds of thousands of jobs each year to absorb the influx of new job seekers, focusing on reforming economic policies, organizing productive sectors, and confronting high rates of unemployment should be of a high degree of importance. Because it is difficult to discuss the major changes needed without taking into account the regional and international contexts, it can be said that developing new bases for economic cooperation among the Arab countries on the one hand, and between near and far states on the other, is the great challenge now and in the future.

5) Human Rights and Equality

The Arab revolutions have been characterized by the wide participation of women and civil society activists, as well as by slogans calling for freedom and both individual and collective dignity. However, the translation of slogans and aspirations into lived reality is another matter and remains a stumbling block. The ongoing challenges to draft legislation and move toward practices that accord rights to women, guarantee equality of citizens before the law, and protect human rights according to international conventions have been exponentially difficult as a result of the long-extant problems and obstacles accumulated over a lengthy period, in addition to the dominating patriarchal structures.

Hard Transitions

Ultimately, the Arab world today seems to be in the midst of a thorny path, where problems emerge and are compounded. While new struggles continue to arise out of the transformations, so do relative successes and achievements.

It is likely that the coming months and years will witness shifts that reflect the emerging balances of power in most of these countries. At the same time, developments in the region as a whole will lead to new, further changes and challenges. But these coming transformations await a more detailed assessment and additional conclusions at a later date.

Ziad Majed is the coordinator of the Arab Network for the Study of Democracy. He can be reached at zmajed@aup.fr. This article is adapted from "Preliminary Conclusions: What Are the Challenges after the Revolution?" in The Arab Spring: Revolutions for Deliverance from Authoritarianism, Case Studies, *edited by Hassan Krayem, translated by Jeffrey D. Reger (The Arab Network for the Study of Democracy, 2014).*