# POLITICAL SCIENCE UNDERGRADUATE REVIEW

VOL. 1 ARTICLE 9 Fall 2016

# The Arab Springs: A Comparison of the Uprisings in Libya & Syria in 2011

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The Arab Springs is known as "a revolutionary wave of demonstrations, protests, riots, protracted civil wars and other forms of opposition (both violent and non-violent) in the Arab territories" (Elfaith. 2015, 121). Starting in Tunisia on December 18, 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi a street vendor, set himself on fire after being harassed by municipal police officials. Bouazizi's act of self-immolation sparked international attention, leading Tunisia into a revolution. After being in power for 23 years as Tunisia's President, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali stepped down and fled to Saudi Arabia (Bunton 2013, 16). Tunisia's revolution led both the Arab and non-Arab world to witness "spontaneous explosions of protests, [revolutions] and popular political upheaval" in countries such as Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Morocco, Lebanon, Algeria, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Sudan and Mauritania (Ismael and Ismael 2013, 229). The high levels of political corruption, economic hardships and the desire for a free democratic government all inspired the citizens of these countries to take action against their governments.

The uprisings in Libya and Syria sparked massive worldwide attention. In February 2011, anti-government protests, movements and demonstrations spread all across of Libya in order to end Muammar Gaddafi's long-term reign. Gaddafi's forces began to use violence and other repressive tactics in order to stop protests and demonstrations from occurring, in the process killing the lives of many. However, rebel forces formed all over Libya in order to stop Gaddafi's suppression. Shortly after, NATO intervened, with all 28 member states collectively working together in order take down Gaddafi's regime (BBC 2013).

In Syria, "the uprisings against Bashar al-Assad's dictatorial regime started midway in March 2011" (Gelvin 2012, 72). Syrian citizens were dissatisfied with the Al-Assad's 48-year regime because no other political parties besides his was permitted to run in elections (Gelvin 2012, 72). In addition, Syria was under a state of emergency from 1993 up until 2011, which is when the uprisings began (Gelvin 2012, 72). Al-Assad not keen to give up his authority, began to use "brutal military force against his own people to suppress their demands for democratization" (Gelvin 2012, 72). The rise of rebel groups broke out against

Al-Assad causing the situation in Syria to further deteriorate. As of March 2016, more than 250,000 Syrian lives have been lost and more than 11 million Syrians have been displaced (BBC 2016). With many Syrians seeking asylum in Europe, the Middle East and Canada. The international community has yet to find a plausible solution to Syria's situation.

The political uprisings in both countries progressed into revolutions and gradually, they transitioned into civil wars: the ongoing 2011 Syrian civil war and the 2011 Libyan civil war. However, Libya's civil war was a success compared to Syria's current, ongoing civil war. This is because Gaddafi, the authoritarian leader that caused Libya's deterioration was removed from power. In 2012, reports illustrated that a French secret service man infiltrated the National Transnational Council's rebel group and was responsible for Gaddafi's death (Telegraph 2012). Unfortunately, Al-Assad still remains in power despite the citizens' wishes of a new body of government, causing Syria to further demolish. Despite the similarities present in both countries civil wars, this paper will argue that Libya's 2011 civil war was a success compared to Syria's ongoing civil war because of the international community's intervention in Libya and not in Syria. This paper will begin by discussing the similarities that led both countries to experience civil wars such as popular discontent, the high levels of state repression and the occupation of the major rebel forces; the *Thuwar* in Libya and the Free Syrian Army in Syria. This paper will then transition to assess the causation that led both countries to experience different political outcomes by examining the different ethnic and religious groups that each authoritarian leader favored, as well as the role of the United Nations and the rest of the international community in both countries. Lastly, this paper will explain why the role of the United Nations and the rest of the international community contributed to the success of Libya's 2011 civil war and not Syria's which is ultimately why they present different political outcomes.

# Methodology

In order to provide an effective comparison of the cases of Libya and Syria, I will be using the most-similar-systems design (MSS). Most-similar-systems is a research design that compares two or more cases that present similar dimensions but have distinct political outcomes (Dickovick and Eastwood 2015, 15). I will be using this research design because Libya and Syria present many similar factors that caused both countries to experience civil wars. For instance, the citizens of Libya and Syria were completely dissatisfied with their governments because of their desire for a democracy. As well as, the economic hardships and political corruption present in both countries. Additionally, both authoritarian leaders used high levels of state repression to stop protest movements and demonstrations. Lastly, both countries were occupied by rebel groups who opposed the authoritarian regimes. However, what is remarkable, is that despite their similarities, the cases present diverse political outcomes. Gaddafi was removed from power, whereas Al-Assad still remains. Certain factors may have led both these countries to experience different outcomes such as, Gaddafi and Al-Assad favored different ethnic and religious sects. Al-Assad favoured the Alawites, a Shia Muslim group. Whereas Gaddafi favoured his tribe the Qadhadhfa as well as, many other tribes that were loyal to him. This may be one of the underlying factors that caused the fall of Gaddafi's regime and the resilience of al-Assad's regime. Or, NATO's intervention in Libya and not in Syria may have contributed to the fall of Libya's

authoritarian regime. The following similarities and differing outcomes will be evaluated below.

# **Popular Dissatisfaction**

According to Kamal Eldin Saleh, the uprisings that took place in many Arab countries were caused by a mixture of the following factors: economic deterioration and political corruption leading citizens to desire a democratic government (2013, 187). This theory can be applied to the situations in Syria and Libya because, prior to the revolution both countries suffered from economic hardship. In addition, the upper-class elite were the ones that controlled and influenced the authoritarian regimes as well as the rest of society. The 40-year rule of Gaddafi and the 48-year rule of the Al-Assad family caused the citizens of both countries to desire a democracy in which they can choose other political parties as their body of government. Since 1972, Libyan political parties were banned from running in elections (Schiller 2009, 163). However, Syria was under a state of emergency from 1993 until 2011 (Gelvin 2012, 72). A state of emergency which gave Al-Assad's Ba'ath party complete authority all over Syria not allowing any other party to come into power.

Furthermore, most of Libya's economic growth is generated from the oil and gas sector. In 2006, Gaddafi set up a 'sovereign wealth fund,' a state owned account of money in which was used to invest in Libya's financial assets, since Libya was experiencing a budget surplus of 70 million dollars (Guo and Stradiotto 2014, 103). Gaddafi placed the money into the 'sovereign wealth fund,' to use for "personal enhancement" (Guo and Stradiotto 2014, 103). The money was spent on his family and tribe in Sirte, as well as his government and military officials. In addition, to create "contracts with international companies" that would operate under his command (Guo and Stradiotto 2014, 103). The unequal distribution of wealth illustrates how corrupted Libya's government is. Depending from which tribe a citizen originates from, plays an important role in how much money he or she will receive. Those from Gaddafi's tribe received more money than other tribes. However, those acquainted with Gaddafi received "employment and advancement in security force" (Guo and Stradiotto 2014, 103). Correspondingly, the political corruption in Syria was just as extreme. The highly ranked political and military positions were given to individuals from the Makhlouf and Shaleesh families because they had family relations to Al-Assad (Darwisheh 2014, 13). For example, Al-Assad's cousin Rami Makhlouf, controlled 60% of Syria's economy, owning economic assets in "telecommunications, oil and gas, construction, banking, insurance, airlines and retail" (World Time 2012). Unfortunately, this one example of the many political and military positions Al-Assad gave to his family members.

Moreover, Libya was experiencing high rates of unemployment and economic hardship. In 2011, prior to the revolution, approximately one-third of the Libyan population was unemployed as well as 50% of the educated youth could not find any jobs (Guo and Stradiotto 2014, 103). This ultimately sparked high levels of displeasure among the Libyan population, as the "government was unable to create jobs or provide economic improvements" (Guo and Stradiotto 2014, 103). Similarly, Syria experienced high levels of unemployment and economic hardship as well. Between 2006 till 2010 farmers faced high

severity of droughts. Approximately 75% of farmers were unable to produce crops as well as 80% of the farmers in Syria had lost their livestock (The Washington Post 2013). With the Al-Assad regime's failed response, approximately 1.3-1.4 million Syrian farmers moved into cities because how harshly severe their lands were damaged (Guo and Stradiotto 2014, 108). After the 2006 droughts and prior to the uprisings, 30% of Syria's population lived under the poverty line as well as approximately 11% of the population lived under "subsistence level," the inability to support oneself with a basic income (Guo and Stradiotto 2014, 108). Additionally, in the beginning of 2011, the exportation of oil decreased from 380,000 barrels per day to 200,000 (The Economist 2013). The citizens of Libya and Syria both exhibited high levels of dissatisfaction with their governments because of the political corruption and economic hardships which led them to want a democratic government in which the will of the people truly matters.

# **State Repression**

According to Maria Jousa and Mirjam Edel, the use of repression is a strategy that regimes use in order to achieve any goal they set, regardless of how much harm it may create towards their citizens (2015, 291). For leaders, the preservation of power and maintenance of political authority is important, therefore they engage in repressive strategies (Jousa and Edel 2015, 291). During the Arab Spring, different levels of repression were present in the Arab countries. Libya and Syria, exhibited high levels of political repression, as both leaders repressed their citizens through the use of violence and the censorship of media. This strategy was used by Gaddafi and al-Assad to immobilize protesters and rebel groups from coming together to take down both their regimes. Since the uprisings in both countries evolved into civil wars, Gaddafi and Al-Assad sought the use of repressive strategies as ultimately the only way to maintain the survival of their existing authorities (Jousa and Edel 2015, 289).

In Libya, Gaddafi's forces were heavily armed, able to massacre many citizens. Since 2005, Britain has sold Gaddafi 120 million-euro worth of weapons. As well as, Russia supplied Gaddafi with "2,000 tanks, 2,000 armored fighting vehicles, 350 artillery weapons, dozens of ships and fleets of aircraft" (The Guardian 2011). According to the report of the International Commission of Inquiry, "Gaddafi dispatched the head of military intelligence, and mobilized [his] forces in Benghazi to swiftly suppress the protests with brute force" (Bassiouni 2013, 150). As well as in June 2011, documents were found in the city of Misrata containing orders from Gaddafi to his generals to "unleash torture and arrest those who have torn the country apart" (The Guardian 2011). In other words, Gaddafi wanted to suppress or even kill the rebel forces and citizens who were revolting against him. In addition, Gaddafi "ordered his army to inflict starvation on every man, woman and child in Misrata" (The Guardian 2011). Similarly, the authoritarian regime in Syria was willing to use lethal force against its citizens. Al-Assad's regime used "traditional security operations" which are the "monitoring and arrest of activists either by intimidating them or torturing them" (Guo and Stradiotto 2014, 57). As well as, Al-Assad deployed soldiers and heavy artillery that used airstrikes, missiles and cluster bombs in order to stop the protests and anti-government demonstrations (Guo and Stradiotto 2014, 57). In March 2011, the police took the streets shooting at innocent civilians, killing 20 people in the process for

protesting against Al-Assad in the city of Daraa (Al Jazeera 2011). In August 2013, more than hundreds of people were killed because of Al-Assad's forces firing rockets filled with Sarin, a chemical generally used in weapons of mass destructions (BBC 2015). As of August 2015, more than 250,000 Syrians have been killed (BBC 2016). Furthermore, Russia and Syria have a strong bilateral relationship. Since 2011, Russia has been providing Al-Assad military aid such as "28 fighter jets, 14 helicopters, dozens of tanks, anti-aircraft missile systems and about 2000 troops into north-western Syria" (Sydney Morning Herald 2015). In addition, Iran has also played a role in funding Al-Assad militarily by providing "ammunition crates full of mortar shells" such as bombs and other explosives (BBC 2016).

Besides the use of violence, another way in which both authoritarian regimes repressed their citizens is by the censorship of media. Social media had played a significant role in giving individuals "a space to express their dissatisfactions, to increase solidarity around a common cause, and to organize themselves" (Davison 2015, 4). As well as many protesters use social media in order to show the uprisings to those who live outside of Libya and Syria. It is a means of attracting international attention. When violent protests broke out all over the cities of Libya on February 17, 2011, Gaddafi's regime "intentionally cut Internet connectivity across of Libya for 48 hours" specifically shutting off the internet sites Al-Jazeera, Facebook and Twitter (Stottlemyre and Stottlemyre 2012, 26). In addition, many cellphone and Arab news satellite telecoms were jammed (Reuters 2011). Furthermore, foreign journalists were subjected to harsh treatment by Gaddafi forces. Many journalists were taken blindfolded to undisclosed locations as well as some "have been held overnight, physically assaulted by militia or threatened with loaded weapons" (The Guardian 2011). Reporting from Libya became very difficult, as most media reports were censored and scripted to illustrate pro-Gaddafi demonstrations. Therefore, the citizens of Libya relied heavily upon Facebook and Twitter to show the world what was truly going on. The internet connection was not fully back online until August 2011, six months after the blackout (BBC 2011). Moreover, Al-Assad's regime in 2012, "shutdown the internet, crippled phone networks, cutting voice and web communications all across Syria". (The Guardian 2012). This tactic was used to stop all protestors and rebel forces from communicating and mobilizing with one another (The Guardian 2012). Furthermore, many foreign journalists in Syria were taken hostage when reporting about the horrendous situation of the ongoing conflict. For example, Mohammed Al-Harrari a journalist, was arrested after giving an interview for Al-Jazeera about the situation in Daraa (Reporters Without Borders 2012). As well as many journalists were forced to give fabricated media reports that cover up all of Al-Assad's crimes (Reporters Without Borders 2012). Additionally, Al-Assad's regime "arbitrarily arrested and tortured activists, writers, and journalists who have reported on or expressed support for the anti-government protests. detaining at least seven local and international journalists since protests began" (Human Rights Watch 2011). Both authoritarian leaders were willing to take extreme measures in order to stop the political uprisings.

## **Occupation by Rebel Forces**

With the continuous uprisings transitioning into a civil war in Libya, rebel groups began to form against Gaddafi forces in order to eliminate the authoritarian regime.

Although there were various rebel groups formed against Gaddafi, the most significant group of rebels were known as the *Thuwar* or "revolutionaries" (Gelvin 2012, 84). The Thuwar, were under a governing body that formed against Gaddafi's forces. The governing revolutionary body was established on February 2011 in the city Benghazi called the National Transnational Council (NTC) (Gelvin 2012, 85). The NTC aimed to "maintain order, organize rudimentary services and defense, gain international support, claim Gaddafi's overseas assets, and sell the national patrimony oil" (Glevin 2012, 85). The NTC become recognized by "France, Gambia, Italy, Jordan, Kuwait, Maldives and Qatar as Libya's legitimate interim governing body and the UN General assembly followed suit in September 2011" (Bassiouni 2013, 143). In order to stop Gaddafi's regime, the Thuwar "relied primarily on weapons and vehicles taken from Gaddafi forces, such as aK-47 rifles, rocket propelled grenades and anti-aircraft machine guns mounted on pick-up trucks" (Bassiouni 2013, 147). In addition, the *Thuwar* forces creatively constructed worn out equipment into weapons of combat such as "modifying pickup trucks into armored vehicles, and constructing portable launchers for old Russian air-to-surface missiles" (Bassiouni 2013. 147).

Similarly, with the continuous uprisings transitioning into a civil war in Syria, rebel groups formed against Al-Assad. However, a major rebel group that formed against Al-Assad is the Free Syrian Army (FSA), which consisted of defected Syrian Armed Force officers, local and international volunteers. The FSA formed a base in Turkey under Colonel Riad Al-Asaad. Although the FSA is not recognized as legitimate by the international community, they did receive military training from the U.S foreign intelligence service. Throughout 2013, the CIA trained, armed and guided fighters as the size of the FSA grew from 10,000 men to 60,000 men dispersed all over Syria (International Business Times 2015). In 2014, the FSA collaborated with Christian rebels and together formed the Syriac Military Council in order to fight ISIS and Al-Assad's regime (International Business Times 2015). In order to take down Al-Assad, rebel groups were willing to work together. Both countries exhibited the occupation of major rebel forces in order to take down the authoritarian regimes.

#### **Different Outcomes**

Despite their similarities, Libya and Syria both present different political outcomes. In order to assess the reasoning behind this, there are certain factors that need to be examined. In Libya and Syria both authoritarian figures favored specific ethnic and religious sects. With groups loyal to their regimes, Gaddafi and Al-Assad had the ability to maintain the survival of their authority as these groups are willing to go to extreme lengths to support them. However, the favoritism of ethnic and religious sects differed in both countries. In addition, the role of the international community differed in both countries.

# **Ethnic & Religious Favoritism**

Gaddafi was from a town called Sirte that is located in Western Libya. Unlike most Arab countries, Libya's balance of power was in the hands many tribes and clans, not its security forces. Under Gaddafi's rule, military positions were filled up with his own

tribesmen family members (Silverman 2012, 30). For example, Gaddafi's nephew, General Al-Damm "held important positions [such] as the commander of the Tobruk military region" (Taylor 2014, 163). As well as, Gaddafi's tribe the Qadhadhfa held high ranking positions in Libya's secret services and military such as the Central Military Region in Sirte, the Southern Military Region in Sabha and the Military Region of Tobruk (Taylor 2014, 164). However, since the *Qadhadhfa* was a small tribe, Gaddafi favored other tribes such as the Warfalla tribe and the Magharaha tribe due to their location in the country, and their large population size (Taylor 2014, 164). These tribes occupied lower positions such as armed force positions, air force positions and military administrative positions. For their loyalty, Gaddafi promised them luxurious social services, money, as well as employment promotion (Taylor 2014, 164). In 2011, when the uprisings broke out, these tribes especially the Qadhadhfa remained loyal to Gaddafi aiding him in repressing those who defied the regime. However, in 2011 during the civil war, the Warfalla, a major lovalist tribe to Gaddafi joined the National Transnational Council that defied Gaddafi (Christian Science Monitor 2011). Favoritism in Syria differed, as Al-Assad favored certain religious sects over others. Syria is made of various religious sects such as the "Sunnis and Alawites, Christians, Druze, Kurds and other minorities" (Silverman 2012, 35). The Alwaite, who made up only 12% of Syria's population, dominated in the Al-Assad family regime holding high ranking positions in military and security forces (Silverman 2012, 35). In order to receive the loyalty of the Druze and Christian sects, Al-Assad offered them protection and freedom to practice their beliefs (The Globe & Mail 2011). The Alwaite, Druze and Christians supported aA-Assad since the beginning of the uprisings. However, dissent slowly arose from the Druze and Christian minorities as many Christians collaborated with the FSA against Al-Assad's regime (The Globe & Mail 2011). In addition, speculations have arisen as of 2016 that the Alwaite sect is slowly "dissociating itself from al-Assad's leadership (Telegraph 2016).

According to Ranj Alaaldin, the ultimate causation of the downfall of Gaddafi's regime is the alliance of other tribal groups with the *Warfalla* tribe (Telegraph 2011). However, this argument can be repelled because the *Qadhadhfa*, the *Magharaha* and numerous other tribes remained loyal to Gaddafi until his death. Additionally, when Gaddafi seen some of his support beginning to diminish, he recruited African mercenaries, mostly from Chad and Niger, "to carry out atrocities against unarmed civilian protesters" (BBC 2011). In addition, this argument cannot be applied to al-Assad's resilient regime because although some religious sects began to oppose him, Russia and Iran are still supplying him military and at any moment they can send troops over. Therefore, this argument can be repelled in terms of Libya's 2011 civil war being a success compared to Syria's.

# **Role of the International Community**

With the escalation in violence and the heavy losses of casualties in Libya, the international community intervened. In February 2011, the United Nations Security Council passed resolution 1970 condemning Gaddafi's forces against civilian protesters. Resolution 1970 "imposed an arms embargo and other restrictions on travel, [as well as freezing] Libyan assets, and referring the situation to the International Criminal Court"

(Garwood-Gowers 2013, 602). Gaddafi's regime ignored this resolution, invoking the United Nations Security Council to pass resolution 1973 in March 2011. Resolution 1973 required the "immediate establishment of a ceasefire, a complete end to violence and all attacks against, and abuses of civilians" (the Guardian 2011). It also established an arms embargo, a no-fly zone list over Libya, banning any member of Gaddafi's regime from travelling as well as further freezing any financial or economic assets of anyone who is associated with Gaddafi (The Guardian 2011). All 28 member-states of NATO agreed to collectively work together to bring down Gaddafi's regime. NATO went into Libya with "dozens of ships and hundreds of airplanes and commenced military operations" as well as "surveillance, and reconnaissance assets to monitor Qaddafi's forces" (The New York Times 2011). In October 2011, when Gaddafi was executed by a French secret service agent, NATO terminated its mission in Libya.

On the other hand, the international community has "responded to the Syrian regime's crackdown on the uprising with far less resolution than it showed in the case of Libya" (Guo and Stradiotto 2014, 115). In 2011, the UN Security Council imposed sanctions and then authorized military intervention against Gaddafi's regime in Libya, but did nothing in Syria (Guo and Stradiotto 2014, 115). Finally, in May 2011, the European Union and the United States "imposed sanctions against Al-Assad in response to his brutal crackdown on pro-democracy protests" (The Guardian 2011). In addition, the EU placed a travel ban and froze the assets of 13 senior Syrian officials that are associated with Al-Assad (The Guardian 2011). However, the UN Security Council in 2012 did somewhat intervene by implementing resolution 2043 which consisted of the "deployment of 300 unarmed military observers, including an appropriate civilian component and air transportation assets, to monitor a cessation of armed violence" (United Nations 2012). Unfortunately, the UN Security Council's intervention was not militarily or effective. Why did the UN mandate a NATO-led intervention in Libya and not in Syria? In order for UN mandate to pass, the UN Security Council's five permanent members must agree. Both Russia and China have vetoed against any proposed mandates that would allow military intervention in Syria. (The Journal 2012). Russia has extremely close relations with the Al-Assad regime, funding him militarily, where as China perceived intervention as "disrespecting the sovereignty and international integrity of Syria" (United Nations 2011).

The UN's mandate for NATO's intervention in Libya was the ultimate cause of the fall of Gaddafi's regime, making Libya's 2011 civil war more successful than Syria's. NATO was able to locate Gaddafi's base in Sirte and through the use of airstrikes, ships and aircrafts, NATO deteriorated Gaddafi's regime. Once Gaddafi's base was known, rebel units of the NTC as well as British and French forces began to infiltrate Gaddafi's base with the use of tanks, heavy artillery and rocket launchers, attacking all those who were in support of Gaddafi. Gaddafi's reign came to an end when a French secret service man disguised himself as a rebel killing Gaddafi. On the other hand, the reason why Al-Assad still maintains power and Syria is still experiencing its civil war, is because of Russia and China veto very UN mandate that wishes to authorize military intervention. This ultimately is why Libya's political outcome differs from Syria's.

#### Conclusion

This paper examined the similarities present between both countries 2011 civil wars. The high levels of discontent and state repression as well as the occupation of many rebel forces that formed in order to overthrow the Gaddafi and Al-Assad regime. This paper also assessed what contributed to both countries having distinct political outcomes by examining the differing ethnic and religious favoritism present by both regimes as well as the role of the international community. Lastly, this paper concluded that the UN's mandate of NATO's intervention is what caused Libya's 2011 civil war to be a success compared to Syria which is why they both have different political outcomes.

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