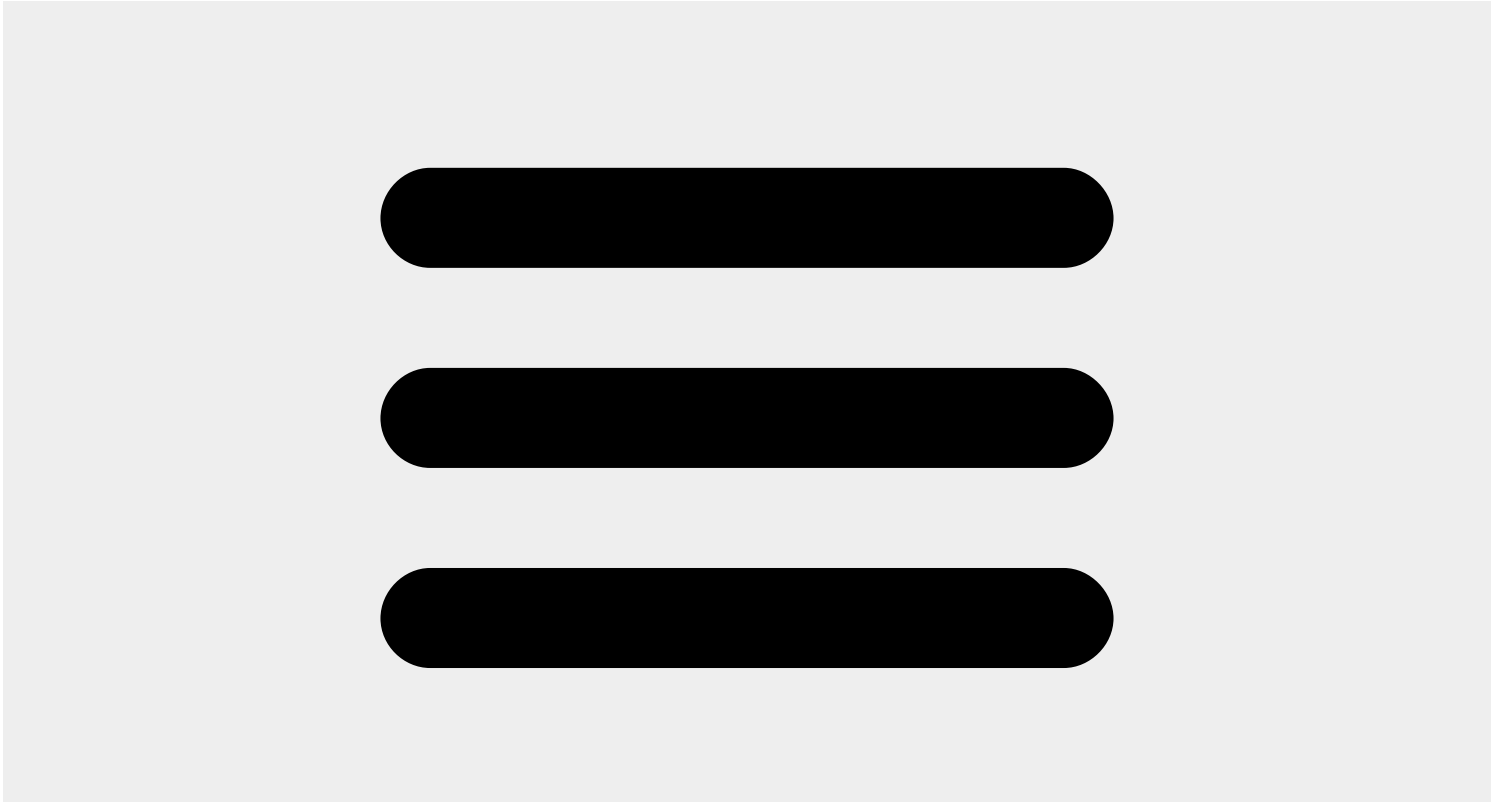
THE "DEMOCRACY GAP" IN ARAB STATES

Posted on April 1, 2022 by Marina Tovar



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Diamond (2010) and Kepel (2020) have examined the extent to which external support for Arab regimes can explain both the "democracy gap" in Arab countries and the emergence of the "Arab spring." At first glance, the explanations about the democracy gap that is present in the Arab regimes involve either **religion or culture**. Nevertheless, Diamond and Kepel argue that this direction is not the correct one and acknowledge that it is precisely **external factors in the region and its impact on internal politics** that have created this democracy gap and initiated the emergence of the Arab Spring.

Firstly, Diamond argues that despite the fact that national or regional GDP might appear to be high, the internal distributions are not egalitarian and thus "*fail to develop organic expectations for accountability*" (Diamond, 2010). Furthermore, the economic framework and its **structural character** create the absence of democracy, particularly in oil-producing countries. Moreover, Diamond argues that there are **two pillars** that perpetuate the survival of the autocratic

states, i.e. the "*mukhabarat*" the apparatus of coercion of the state (the police) and the **mechanisms of representation** – which are limited and often are non-existent.

Acknowledging that the Arab States have an unequal economic structure, what allows survival is the fact that they all have similar mechanisms and a standard "*regime type.*" In fact, most of the countries present in the area **reinforce this model and support each other's governmental practices.** Not only that, but another two external factors clearly perpetuate this according to Diamond. These are, on the one hand, the **Arab-Israeli conflict,** which allows the citizens from other Arab countries to focus on what happens abroad and not realize what happens inside their borders. On the other hand, and in line with the aforementioned, it is precisely the **Arab States themselves** that are a *"reinforcing legitimation of their regime types and methods*" (Diamond, 2010). Unfortunately, this has translated into the lack of diffusion of democracy into and across the region.

On top of that, it is believed that the **concept of democracy** that was promoted during the "Arab spring," greatly connects with the "*democracy gap*" in the sense that the advocates believed that it runs "*counter to the Islamist cannon*" (Kepel, 2020) where traditionally the possibility of democracy based on popular sovereignty was **inexistent**. Thus, the fact that there has been an absence of the spread of democracy in the region, together with governmental repression and the **lack of political accountability** in every country and these practices being reinforced by other nations in the region, that had led to the rise of the "Arab Spring" movement.

Kepel argues that once **the Arab Spring** rose and the citizens "*collaborated in pulling down the regime*" (Kepel, 2020) and coupled with weak internal social dynamics, this eventually led to the preliminary victory of the movement. Nevertheless, again the "unification factor" that legitimizes the regime type observed in the region resulted in a considerable number of these regimes deciding to *"engage the revolutionary forces politically, financially or militarily to either support or repress them* " (Kepel, 2020).

Finally, the coordination, on the one hand, the development of **regime type, political mechanisms** that either loosen or strengthen to "regulate" the internal politics and, on the other hand, the fact that there are **no democracies consolidated** in the Arab region, makes the likelihood of the appearance of democracy very low. Not only that, but the most relevant factor to take into account relies on how **the respective Arab state agrees to repress or support them** in order to make sure that their "*authoritarian regime types*" survive. The existence of the "*democracy gap*" should now better explain the need for and the emergence of the "Arab Spring" movement.

Bibliography

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