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L'Afrique et les défis du XXIème siècle
Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty First Century
A África e os desafios do Século XXI

إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين

Directions of Democratic Contagion in Africa: Democratic Revolutions
in North Africa and the Possibility of Going South

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Abstract

By The first month of the first year of this decade there were several clear signs of great political transformation in North Africa. Such major transformations are not new in Africa as most of Sub-Sahara African states witnessed similar experience in the early 1990s. Although this experience was an ideal case study for democratic contagion in sub-Saharan Africa, it failed completely to cross the Sahara to transfer democratic contagion to the north. The failure of the first democratic wave in Africa to cover the whole continent raises questions about the future of the second new wave. In order to answer these questions this study compares between the two democratic waves, and recognizes international and continental changes between 1990 and 2011, finally it assess democratic contagion possibilities for the new wave through monitoring internal political developments in several sub-Saharan states since February 2011.

According to Samuel P. Huntington democratic diffusion, domino effect, snowball effect and democratic contagion are synonyms, but last is the most suitable concept to deal with the divergent results of democratization in Africa. Democratic contagion explains both the success and failure of democratization through differentiation between cases that received the contagion and others that acquired immunity from democracy. By applying the concept on democratization wave in Africa in 1990s, it's easy to determine that democratic contagion has excluded North African state asserting "Arab Exceptionalism" statement. Many reasons derived from the nature of this democratic wave explains why North African states was protected from democratization, some of these reasons were:

1. Small states like Benin, São Tomé and Príncipe, Cape Verde, and Gabon came in the forefront of African states that adopted major democratic reforms.
2. Democratization was far from affecting continental poles like Nigeria and South Africa, because both states were busy of ending exceptional circumstances (military rule & apartheid regime). This factor combined with the first obscured the "Model State" mechanism of democratic contagion.
3. There was considerable impact for regional and cultural privacy. Democratic contagion was more likely to happen in French speaking and/or west African states. Only four of twenty three states adopted multiparty system between 1989 and 1991 came from out of west Africa and were not speaking French (Mozambique, Zambia, Angola and Ethiopia).

All other states were either west African or French Speaking, while seventeen States were Both.

4. Neutralizing geographic neighborhood effect as Sahel zone states had the precedence of democratic recession. Military coups overthrew two elected presidents in Gambia (1994) and Niger (1996).
5. The divergent outcomes of democratic transition. Along with African states that undertook genuine reforms, many other African states managed to avoid profound change by manipulating democratic transition. Military rulers have been elected as civilian presidents in Mauritania, Guinea-Bissau, Ghana and Central Africa. Old single party has won legislative elections in Guinea, Chad, Burkina Faso and Cameroon. Moreover, Pre-transition presidents' sons came to power after their fathers' death in Togo and Gabon.

Besides the nature of democratic contagion in early 1990s in Africa, North African states "Immunity" appeared as a very significant reason. Former Egyptian president Anwar Al-Sadat introduced multiparty system in 1977, but only one party gained majority in eight legislative elections took place from 1979 to 2010, and the one and only presidential election in 2005. The same also happened in Tunisia which abandoned single party system in 1983 and Algeria since 1989. Declaring reforms in relatively early time - comparing to Sub-Saharan states - enabled North African States to avoid real democratic transition consequences which suppose several procedures including devolution of power.

Given Democratic contagion failed to cross the Sahara from south to north in early 1990s, analysts can easily predict another failure after twenty years when democratic contagion tried to cross the Sahara in the other direction. --Several changes took place in this period paved the way to anticipate possible success of the contagion in its second wave in Africa. Democratic transition seemed to be more substantive in sub-Saharan Africa after ten years of introducing multiparty system. Presidents like Mathieu Kérékou in Benin, Hastings Banda in Malawi and Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia have lost elections. Finally, it became more possible to talk about Sub-Saharan democratic model that could inspire the neighbors. There were similar changes on the continental level as Pan-African relations witnessed great enhancements through establishment of African union which revived relation between North Africa and sub-Saharan

Africa. Another change intensified economic and cultural exchange between the two parts of the continent was the prosperity of regional organization, some of these organizations gathered members from northern and southern Africa like COMESA and Community of Sahel-Saharan States.

New democratic wave in 2011 has two patent characteristics; first, it demonstrates the people power to change and to direct political actions with no interference from intermediate institutions like political parties or interest groups. Second, the increasing demands that not be satisfied by constitutional amendments or institutional reform, the obvious goal is to change the head of state and substitute the whole political regime. According to these features democratic contagion has numerous evidences in 2011. Details of political protests swept through sub-Saharan African states early this year shows how it has been affected by North African model especially by the icon of *Tahrir square* of Cairo. Just in eight months, the two features appeared with no significant differences in Uganda, Mauritania, Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Central African Republic. "Egyptian Style Protests" seems to be the most feasible mechanism to push democratic reforms forward all over the continent.

In conclusion, it's too early to allege recognizing a new pattern of democratic contagion in Africa. All evidences still primeval, the emerging democratic experience in North Africa could fail completely, or end as just reformist protests. Even if there will be a successful democratic contagion from north to south, several questions will be raised about its consequences for state building process in Africa, and how suitable is democratization agenda for African State needs. Finally, sub-Saharan States ability to be affected by the contagion varies from one state to another. It's more likely to happen where devolution of power is slow or totally absent. Economic and social problems like poverty, high food prices and unemployment have a doubtless role as a catalyst for the new democratic contagion.