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# DEMOCRATIC ATTEMPTS IN TUNISIA AND EGYPT AFTER ARAB SPRING: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

## Ekrem OK\*

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Summary: It was believed that Democracy and the Middle East two foreign words to each other, and that is the region's ill fortune. However, recent years witnessed an objection to this so-called fate: The Arab Spring. This spring led to some mobilisation and raised hopes towards democracy for the region to a certain extent. Hopes for democratisation increased with the resignation of long-terms authoritarian leaders. After the 2013 military coup ends hopes for Egypt, it seems that Tunisia is the only successful case left in the region. This study's central question is that although the entire process moved similarly, why the democratisation process was failed in Egypt while it was successful in Tunisia. This study detects four factors that have a significant influence on the difference in democratic attempts of Egypt and Tunisia. i) The first is the nature of the Islamist group in each country, Ennahda in Tunisia and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. ii) The second is the Militaries' nature in both countries. iii) The third is regarding the nature of the population, social construction. iv) The last is about the importance of both countries in the international area.

Keywords: Arap Spring, Democratisation, Egypt, Tunisia

# ARAP BAHARI SONRASINDA TUNUS VE MISIR'DA DEMOKRATİK ATILIMLAR: KARŞILAŞTIRMALI BİR YAKLAŞIM

Öz: Birçokları Demokrasi ve Ortadoğu'nun birbirine yabancı iki kelime olduğuna ve bunun bölgenin kaderi olduğuna inanmaktadır. Fakat son yıllar bu sözde kadere bir itiraza tanıklık etmiştir. Arap Baharı olarak adlandırılan bu itiraz bölge için demokrasiye yönelik hareketleri ve beklentileri bir dereceye kadar artırmıştır. Bu isyanlar sonucunda uzun yıllardır yönetimde olan otoriter liderlerin istifa etmesi demokratikleşme umutları daha da artmıştır. Fakat 2013 yılında Mısır'da gerçekleşen askeri darbeden sonra, Arap baharının ardından demokratikleşme süreci başarılı olarak görülebilecek yalnızca Tunus kalmıştır. Bu anlamda, bu çalışmanın ana amacı tüm süreçler benzer ilerlemesine rağmen, demokratikleşme sürecinin Tunus'ta başarılı olup Mısır'da başarısız olma sebeplerini ortaya koymaktır. İnceleme sonucunda bu çalışma bu iki ülkenin demokratikleşme süreçlerinin farklılaşmasına yol açan dört faktör tespit etmiştir: i) Birincisi ülkelerdeki iktidara gelen İslami gruplar arasındaki farklılıklar, Mısır'da Müslüman Kardeşler, Tunus'ta Elnahda. ii) İkinci faktör iki ülkenin ordularının yapısındaki farklılıklar. iii) Üçüncü faktör iki ülkenin nüfusu ve sosyal yapısındaki farklılıklar. iv) ve son olarak iki ülkenin uluslararası önemindeki farklılıklar.

Anahtar kelimeler: Arap Baharı, Demokratikleşme, Mısır, Tunus

<sup>\*</sup> Lecturer, Agri Ibrahim Cecen University, ekremok.erz@gmail.com



#### Introduction

It was believed that Democracy and the Middle East two foreign words to each other. Egypt and Tunisia, which were part of the Ottoman Empire until the 20th century, did not establish democracy until decolonisation. However, independence did not accompany democracy; even after independence, authoritarian leaders ruled them long. Furthermore, It was believed that this is the ill fortune of the region. Nonetheless, developments in the last decades seem to an exception to this so-called fate. This so-called spring, to a certain extent, led to some mobilisation step towards democracy. Egypt and Tunisia are among the countries affected by this mobilisation. Even if Egypt's process failed with a military coup, Egypt and Tunisia are among the countries experiencing democratisation attempts in the Muslim world.

Arab Spring started with vendor Mohamed Bouazizi's self-immolation when protesting the Tunisian government for confiscating his handcart on 17 December 2010, and prevailed first nationwide, then across the Arab world. After this incident, protests increasingly continued and resulted in the resignation of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who left the country after resignation. This event is called as Jasmine Revolution in literature. After Ben Ali's resignation, in the first presidential election on 23 November 2014, the founder and the leader of the Nidaa Tounes political party, Mohamed Beji Caid Essebsi receiving 55.68% of the vote in the second round of voting. He inaugurated on 31 December 2014.

This protest wave started in Tunisia sparked to masses in many other countries. While in countries like Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Iraq, Lebanon, and Morocco, it led to small protest, in countries like Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, Algeria, Jordan and Yemen, it led to massive protests, riots and armed conflicts. In Egypt, one of the countries with massive protest, Hosni Mubarak, ruler of Egypt for decades, also resigned due to protest like Tunisia.

Just like in Tunisia, after Mubarak's resignation, the first presidential election was held on 30 June 2012 and Mohammed Morsi elected as president. However, this time, in contrast to Tunisia, on 3 July 2013, the elected government was dismissed by a military coup led by General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi. Furthermore, the military government harshly suppressed the anti-coup demonstrations. That was the separation point of the Tunisian and Egyptian process.

It will be much better to settle what kind of term can be used when explaining what happened in those countries: Revolution or just uprising? Although some sources use the word "revolution" for what happened in these countries, this study believes that this word is not proper. In these countries, these "revolutions" did not result in radical changes. Besides, the "revolutionaries" could not seize control of the country. There was only one similarity which is overthrowing the ruler. However, this is not enough alone to call these incidents a revolution.

This study agrees with sociologist Josip Zupanov's view that revolution is a sudden, radical, and absolute break out of the status quo. According to him, after the revolution, everything, even time, starts all over again (Županov, 2002 as cited in; Zgurić, 2012: 419). Besides, The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences defines the revolution as "an attempt to make a radical change in the system of government" (Sills, 1968: 501). Therefore, this study will regard the incidents that happened in those countries as an uprising

By comparing the democratisation initiatives of two Arab Spring countries, Tunisia and Egypt, this study tries to explain the difference in their process and the main reasons underlying Tunisia's success and Egypt's failure. So, the main question of this study is why the democratisation process in Egypt was interrupted? On the other hand, as a sub-question, why did the same process succeed in Tunisia? The study's scope in each case is limited from democratic attempts after the Arab Spring to the date of the military coup in Egypt; in other words, between 2011 and 2013. However, to grasp better this period, this study also briefly examines the pre-Arab Spring period.

In the first section, this study will examine situations in Tunisia and Egypt before the Arab Spring. In the second section, the study will analyse the process of uprisings in both countries and the dismissal of former leaders. In the third section, the study will evaluate the post-Arab Spring democratic attempts in both countries. The study will examine the 2013 Egyptian military coup that put an end to attempts in the following section. In the last section, this study will compare both countries' democratisation process in lieu of a conclusion.

# 1. Pre-Arab Spring Political Situations in Tunisia and Egypt.

The period between 1975 and 2000 witnessed dramatic changes in the world scene. In this period, the number of countries ranked as free in Freedom House increased from 44 to 89. Furthermore, the number of nations ruled by the authoritarian leader or dictatorship declined exceedingly (Puddington, 2011: 14). Nevertheless, it seems that even this democratisation period was not strong enough to mobilise Arab countries in the Middle East. According to Puddington (2011: 15), before the Arab Spring, the Middle East was maybe the only region stand off the issues like elections, human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of belief, minority rights and gender issues et cetera. According to Freedom House's The Annual Survey of Political Rights & Civil Liberties in 2010 (Freedom House, 2010: 207, 669), Egypt and Tunisia were amongst the countries that Not Free, while Israel was the only country to rank as free in Middle East. These figures are even more interesting when considering the population.

Puddington (2011: 15, 16) also states that those countries are also notorious in indicators such as elections, rule of laws, freedom of press association, minority rights, fighting against corruption. The average length of governing in the Middle East before the Arab spring was over sixteen years. The rulers in these countries commonly have domination over the whole country. Besides, they do not have any check and balance mechanism. For example, currently, the House of Saud has ruled Saudi Arabia for 89 years. The House of Al Said has ruled Oman for nearly three centuries. The Alaouite family has ruled Morocco for almost four centuries. The Assad family has reigned Syria since 1971. Besides, the Qaddafi family ruled Libya from 1969 to 2011. Hosni Mubarak ruled Egypt from 1981 to 2011, and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali ruled Tunisia from 1987 to 2011 (Laz, 2014: 43). As can be seen from all the precedents, the leaders in the Middle East, rule their countries with an iron fist for long times. Moreover, while the citizens in these countries do not have a high welfare level, they can be ruled by leaders with a considerable fortune. So, it is not surprising to see wealthy Middle East politicians on the "World's Richest Politicians" lists.

On the background of the Arab spring, it is noteworthy that Arab rebel leaders had a significant effect on mobilising mass for these "corrupt" leader. Influenced by modernist Islamic thinkers' views, these Arab rebellion leaders also had contact with the Europeans. In the 1980s, those leaders started to organise mass in countries like Syria, Jordan and Egypt. Moreover, these groups started to clash with ruling regimes in these countries. For example, the Muslim Brotherhood declared war against the ruling Ba'ath party in Syria, Islamist movements in Algeria clashed with Algerian armed forces. The Arabic leaders' general responses to these groups forbid them from participating in the political arena. For example, in Egypt, the Mubarak regime banned the MB and their key leaders either assassinated or executed (Laz, 2014: 45).

In Tunisia, Ben Ali's family was extraordinarily personalist and corrupt. As WikiLeaks revealed, according to the 2006 report of the US ambassador to Tunisia, more than half of Tunisia's commercial elites had some connection with Ben Ali's family. This network was famous in-country, and Tunisian called it "The Family". Even if this high corruption, Tunisian institution were comparatively healthier than Egypt (Anderson, 2011: 3). It is not wrong to assess that the way of rising economically in Tunisia was to have contact with Ben Ali's inner circle.

Egypt also had similar problems with Tunisia. The Mubarak administration has become incompetent in providing even essential public services. Moreover, the Mubarak government's indifference to rising unemployment, poverty. Corruption allegations also made people very angry. This anger even deepened with the growing unjustifiable enrichment of the elites connected to Mubarak's son and successor, Gamal Mubarak. Teachers received meagre salary; therefore, public education is poor, and teachers had to additional work to survive. Bribery in public offices was also another evident problem(Anderson, 2011: 4,5).

Moreover, in Egypt, unlike other Middle Eastern counties, there was no hereditary succession system before Mubarak. Egypt did not have a ruler family or dynasty like The Alaouite family in Morocco, The Assad family in Syria, the Qaddafi family in Libya, and the House of Saud in Saudi Arabia. However, Mubarak set up such a succession system, and his son Gamal Mubarak was supposed to be the next president after him (Zgurić, 2012: 421).

According to Moghadam (2013: 398, 399), some exogenous and endogenous factors enabled the emergence of demonstration in both countries. Endogenous factors include the rise in the educated middle class, high corruption and unemployment level, high cost of living, human rights violations, and a rise in access to the internet. Exogenous factors include global neoliberal policy framework and Wikileaks papers about the corruption of the rulers' family.

# 2. Uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt

With a famous incident, the self-immolation of vendor Mohamed Bouazizi when protesting the Tunisian government for confiscating his handcart on 17 December 2010, the uprising began in Tunisia, and the wave of the revolt spread across most of the Arabic country. However, the region was no stranger to this kind of protests. In other words, the uprising is not a new phenomenon in the region. In retrospect, Tunisia, Egypt and Libya witnessed many protests similar to the recent one.

When the protest intensified, Ennahda leaders in Tunisia met to discuss possible action plans. After discussion, Ennahda leadership decided to keep a low profile and stay in the background during the uprising for two risks. First, they did not want the protests to be associated with any political group. They feared that their participation in the protests would undermine the protests' firm and well-attended nature. Second, they did not want the international community to draw their support. They feared that their involvement in the protests would make the international community think that it would be another Iranian revolution. Only the lower level Ennahda activist took part in the protests. However, when it became clear that Ben Ali was losing his power, they thought it was time to change plans. Ennahda leadership met again, and by shifting their strategy, they decided that senior member of Ennahda must now attend the protest. Ennahda's feature as the largest group that suffered from the Ben Ali government's pressure and anger gave it some degree of legitimacy in the public eye (Wolf, 2017: 130-132). Due to this reason, their subsequent participation in protest did not yield any negative consequences. When the protests reached their peak, Ben Ali left the country, and Saudi Arabia officially announced hosting Ben Ali and his family (Rifai, 2011).

In Egypt, one month after Mohammad Bouazizi's self-immolation, thousands of protesters gathered in Tahrir Square, in Cairo, on 25 January 2011. The protests were slightly free of violence. They first demanded the resignation of thirty years of Egypt's rulers, Hosni Mubarak. The protesters did not leave the streets after Husni Mubarak's resignation because they thought the root of the problem was not leadership but the system. Thus, they demanded reforms on many political and economic issues. At this stage, the Egyptian Armed Forces got involved in the process, dissolved the parliament and the Egyptian constitution and announced that it would be a transitional administration until an elected government and promised to hold a free and fair election (Jamal & Kensicki, 2016: 197; Spierings, 2011: 5, 6)

At the beginning of the protests, the MB, like Ennahda, preferred to wait cautiously. Therefore, they deliberately limited their visibility and did not involve much in the protests. They remained calm until the right time to engage in the political arena when it is clear that Mubarak loses his power. Moreover, in this sense, according to Laz (2014: 48), the MB was the beneficiary of the revolution.

## 3. Democratic attempts after Arab Spring

After Ben Ali's fled to Saudi Arabia, Ennahda received its party licence to contest the upcoming elections. On 23 October 2011, Tunisian people could get the opportunity to vote for their ruler in the first free election in Tunisia's history. Besides, Tunisia is the first country to hold an election after the Arab Spring protests (Schemm, 2011). Many parties had the chance to contest this election. Ennahda was the first party, won more than 41% of the vote, securing 90 seats in the 217-member parliament (BBC, 2011). Spierings (2011: 19) states that many people in Tunisia fear Ennahda wants to turn the country into an Islamic state and do not have the basic principles of democracy. However, despite this fear, Ennahda achieved to have the majority.

Although Ennahda gained the majority, they could not obtain the absolute majority needed to form a government alone. For this reason, they had to cooperate with the opposition. As a result, Ennahda formed a coalition government knowns as Troika with representatives from

Congress for the Republic (CPR with 8.7 per cent of the vote) and Democratic Forum for Labour and Liberties (Ettakatol with 7 per cent). With their focus on religious identity and cultural authenticity, Ennahda emphasised addressing problems in economics and the legal system and healing sufferer from the Ben Ali government (Wolf, 2017: 133-134).

Even though civil right got worsened in Egypt, there was a relative increase in Tunisia. For example, there had been a remarkable increase in civic engagement. There were three thousand associations before the uprisings, and they all in one type; charity. However, this number reached seventeen thousand in 2016. Fourteen thousand associations of all kind were established between 2011-2016 (Della Porta, 2016: 313).

In Egypt, a run-off election was held in 2012, the first on May 23-24 and the second on June 16-17. As a result, Mohammed Morsi, the Muslim Brotherhood candidate, won the election with 51,73 per cent and registered in Egyptian history as the first elected president. And Egypt's military rulers officially accepted these results (Mors et al., 2012; *Muslim Brotherhood-backed candidate Morsi wins Egyptian presidential election*, 2012).

However, after taking office as the first elected president of Egypt, Morsi followed a different path than expected. Morsi's policy path disappointed optimists about Egypt's democratisation process. Instead of addressing political and economic issues that are urgent need, Morsi preferred to consolidate his power in the government and bureaucracy. Although Morsi promised common sense, in other words, he promised to consult with other parties when he takes a decision; he made all the decisions alone after the election. Moreover, Mursi appointed MB members for key government positions and very few Egyptian Christians for high-ranking positions. He also did not keep his promise to appoint Christian Vice President. Many non-Islamist nominees to the assembly resigned, raged by what they saw as wasting of the country's opportunity to national unity. However, on the other hand, MB defended these policies by arguing they acted within the law (Maogoto & Coleman, 2014: 111,112)

Morsi's constitution was another controversial issue, especially for seculars and nonmuslim. However, as a matter of fact, it would not be wrong to say that these arguments were unfounded. According to Maogoto & Coleman (2014: 113,114), the rule of law, separation of powers, individual freedoms and trial by civilian courts were all contained in the constitution. Only seven of the 136 articles of the constitution had a religious reference, also of the seven articles, two articles were about to protect religious freedoms. Perhaps the most controversial one was article 2, which states, "Islam is the state's religion and Arabic is its official language. The principles of Islamic law (sharia) form the main source of legislation" (The New Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt, 2012: Article 2).

Nevertheless, this article is also familiar to the Egyptians. It was literally the same as article 2 of the 1971 constitution (*Constitution of the Arab Republic of Egypt 1971*, 1971: Article 2). In this sense, it may be possible to accuse Morsi of not being a reformer. Morsi was also accused of conducting a discriminatory policy, primarily ideological and sectarian. According to Laz (2014: 48), Morsi's contradiction with moderates Islamist and opposition allowed the Egyptian Army to take leadership from him.

# 4. End of the hopes: 2013 Military Coup

At the beginning of the Arab Spring, the political climate raised optimism on Egypt's democratisation. This optimistic climate lasted until the 2013 Military coup led by General Abdel Fattah Al Sisi. Although the Mursi Administration disappointed the optimists a bit, it was still remarkable to have an elected government. However, after the military coup, it would not be wrong to say that Egypt completely put an end to this optimism and wasted their chance of putting the country on the road to democracy. After the coup, the country turned back to the old days, even to a much fiercer version.

Della Porta (2016: 311)'s interview with a member of the Al Dustour party and political activist can give us an opinion on how aggressive the new military administration is:

"The state is breaking [freedom] every day, the text about human rights was never put into action, people are arrested for trivial reasons, like for walking by a demonstration. One of my brother's colleagues was arrested for having an electrical circuit on the subway. He was carrying a backpack full of school stuff when police stopped and searched him. They found just school stuff, like a notebook, a computer, and a small electron circuit for a project he was doing. He was arrested because they claimed he was planning a bombing to support the Muslim Brotherhood, even though he is Christian. He was put in custody for three days... And we are just expected to live this and take sides either with the state or the Muslim Brotherhood. We are living our worst nightmare."

According to (Laz (2014: 48,49), the new military administration restored the old Mubarak order. The coup over Muhammad Morsi resurrected the Mubarak era's main elements, like the secret police, and reinstated the Mubarek era's generals. Moreover, this new military administration banned The MB and declared it as a terrorist organisation. The new military administration under General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi violently crushed the MB and liberal secular opposition. More than 2500 civilian killed, and nearly 16000 citizens jailed.

## Comparison and final remarks.

Regarding the questions above, this study concluded that there are four remarkable distinctness between Egypt's and Tunisia's process. The first reason is the nature of the Islamist group in each country, MB in Egypt and Ennahda in Tunisia. On the one hand, Elnahda was moderate to the oppositions, inclined to share authority and tried to handle problems with common sense. On the other hand, MB was indifferent to other groups and tried to address issues alone. Ennahda gave priority to the country's real issues, such as the economy and law, which were among the real reasons for the uprising. In contrast, the MB preferred to focus on political and ideological issues, such as consolidating their power. As Zakaria (2014) says in his Washington Post column: "Its Islamists were the good guys, the exception to the rule that Islamists are theocrats whose commitment to democracy extends only so far as one man, one vote, one time."

The second reason is about the nature of the militaries of both countries. The Egyptian Army have a more influential and respected role in political and economic life than Tunisian Army. According to Moghadam (2013: 401), the Egyptian Army has an enormous budget and also many financial enterprises. It operates like a state within the state. Moreover, the reason for Mubarak's defeat is not the power of protesters but the Army's decision to abandon Mubarak.

Nevertheless, these were not even half of the Egyptian Army's power. The Army has also hospitals, factories, and resorts to run and the capacity to build roads, produce cement and even cars. The Army employs tens of thousands of civilians in addition to almost half a million soldiers. Nearly every family has a connection with the Military (*The Arab spring: made in Tunisia, broken in Egypt*, 2014). Therefore, this shows us the significance of the Army in society.

The Egyptian Army is also one of the most honoured institutions for Egyptians. Besides, it is a leading economic and political actor who has been a part of the rule (Laz, 2014: 48). It has remained near every president's authority since Gamal Abdel Nasser, the second President of Egypt (*The Arab spring: made in Tunisia, broken in Egypt*, 2014). The Egyptian Army has increased its power and authority in times of political crisis. For example, after Mubarak's resignation, the Army broadened its domination in the country. This was partly because of the characteristics of the generals. The Egyptian Army was led by powerful and influential generals who are veteran of the 1967 and 1973 Israel-Arab War (Anderson, 2011: 4).

However, on the Tunisian side, the Tunisian Army had little involvement in politics and economics. Tunisian Military played a less significant role in Arab Uprising or former revolts. This is partly because of the fact that the Tunisian Army does not have enough war experience. It has never engaged in combat before. Therefore, it did not have a chance to dominate government affairs. The Tunisian Army did not participate in the process even in the transition period after the resignation of President Ben Ali (Anderson, 2011: 3).

The third reason is regard to the nature of the population, in other words, social structure. There are fundamental differences between the social construction of Tunisia and Egypt. For example, according to Anderson (2011: 3), Tunisia has had the best education system, the largest middle class, and the most robust organised labour movement in the Arab world for many years. Even if under authoritarian leaders like Ben Ali and Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia had enjoyed social cohesion, a well-functioning welfare system and expanding civil society. Besides, many human rights organisations, feminist organisations, activist associations are also active in Tunisia. Compared to other Middle East and North Africa countries, Tunisian women have a much higher share in employment and the parliament (Moghadam, 2013: 399, 400).

Unlike Tunisia, Egypt's positions on these issues are very conservative. For example, Between 1995 and 2010, women held only 2% of the Egyptian parliament seat. Besides, men had a privileged position in family law (Moghadam, 2013: 401). According to the Global Gender Gap Report published annually since 2006 by the World Economic Forum to measure gender equality (See Table 1), the gender equality rate in Tunisia is much better than in Egypt even before the Arab Spring. Moreover, Egypt can reach Tunisia's 2006 level in 2020.

Countries / Years	2006	2008	2010	2011	2014	2016	2018	2020
Egypt	0.5786	0.5832	0.5899	0.5933	0.6064	0.614	0.614	0.629
Tunisia	0.6288	0.6295	0.6266	0.6255	0.6272	0.636	0.648	0.644

**Table 1:** *Gender Equality Rate between Egypt and Tunisia*\*

Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2006-2020, https://www.weforum.org/reports#filter

The fourth reason is about the importance of the countries in the International Area. Tunisia and Egypt do not have the same value in world politics, especially the Arab world. Zakaria (2014) describes Egypt as the largest and most influential country in the Arab world. Egypt has increased its influence in the Arab world since its leading role in the Arab Israel Wars. Due to this importance, the government's characteristics in Egypt concern not only the Egyptian people but also the other Arap countries.

In the last months of the Morsi period, there were calls for the take out Morsi from both the Gulf countries and the elites within Egypt. These calls also strengthened Sisi's hand. In an interview with Chotiner (2018), David D. Kirkpatrick, an expert on Egypt and international correspondent for the New York Times stated as follows:

"I think that's when it began. I'm not sure we're going to find a single moment, but if you look at it from Sisi's point of view, during those final months, the Persian Gulf states were saying, "Please take out Morsi, we've got a lot of money and we'll bankroll this thing if you do." The liberals inside Egypt were so afraid of the Islamists, they were saying, "Please take out Morsi, we will help justify this to the world and call it a revolution if you do." The businessmen of the old elite inside Egypt were saying, "We feel like our livelihoods are at stake here. Our enterprises are at stake here. We think you should take out Morsi."

After the hopes of democratisation that grew with the Arab spring, it seems that Tunisia is the only successful case in the region (Della Porta, 2016: 342). However, although Egypt's process was not successful, it is possible to suppose that these experiences make many contributions to Egypt's democratic culture. For example, the Arab uprising showed politicians that Egypt and Tunisia's people preferred democratic rule and accountability over authoritarianism and corruption. Moreover, it shows that if the people in the region are suppressed too much, they may revolt. It also contributed to the strengthening of civil society. The number of blogs, newspaper, independent commentators raised in both countries (Puddington, 2011: 17-19). Although the democratisation process failed in Egypt, the Arab uprising left permanent marks on Egyptian political history.

<sup>\*</sup> scores are between 0 and 1.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazarlar, çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan eder.

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