

## **CITIZEN REVOLUTION IN TUNISIA AND REGIONAL CONTAGION: LESSONS FOR SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The citizen revolution in Tunisia played a significant role in the changing pattern of politics in North Africa. This article contends that the paternalistic, autocratic and undemocratic nature of North African leaders was responsible for the poor quality and maldistribution of resources among citizens. The revolution which began in Tunisia with a suicide, spread through the region as experienced in Egypt, Algeria and Libya. Across the region, the revolution was inspired by the same social and economic factors, including high unemployment, poverty, decline in real indicators of development and state repression of the opposition. Using the frustration - aggression theory, the paper posits that relative deprivation is a background factor for citizen revolution. Thus, individuals with high expectations are more likely to become frustrated when experiencing hardship and such feelings can drive individuals to address their grievances. Applied to sub-Saharan Africa, the revolution portends a reoccurrence of such phenomenon. This is because authoritarianism, sit-tight governments, succession crisis, corruption and economic inequalities are common endemic problems in the region. The paper concludes that urgent political and economic reforms within the context of good governance will be an antidote for citizen revolution in the current global order.

**Keywords:** Revolution, Poverty, Authoritarianism, Relative Deprivation, State Repression, Good governance.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Revolutions have occurred throughout human history, particularly during times of strong population expansion and rapid economic change (Goldstone, 1993:320). However, modern revolution, establish a new, just social order, usually is traced to the *French Revolution* of 1789. But the *American Revolution*, begun in 1776, provides an alternate, albeit less appreciated, model of modern revolution. The American and French Revolutions, among the most important political events of the modern age, influenced the destiny of generations to come. Both revolutions championed profoundly important political changes that ultimately were animated by visions of a new kind of political order (Magstadt, 2004:438). Other revolutions include: the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Chinese Revolution of 1927, the Iranian and Nicaraguan Revolutions of 1979 and the 1986 People Power Revolution in the Philippines. Apart from the Russian and the Chinese Revolutions, the other

revolutions from 1980s saw multi-class coalitions topple seemingly powerful regimes amidst popular demonstrations and mass strikes in non-violent revolutions.

The recent citizen revolution in Tunisia constitutes a landmark experience in the history of Arab government and politics. Apart from the fact that the revolution posed a new threat to the stability of the Arab countries, it also signified serious warning to Sub-Saharan African states. To be sure, the wind of revolution is blowing across North Africa, from Tunisia to Egypt, Algeria and Libya. The revolution was driven by social and economic factors including high youth unemployment, a booming birth rate, exploding food prices, and political repression. The uprising in Tunisia opened the eyes of people living in North Africa for toppling inefficient and corrupt governments. However, the same disease is in all African countries.

Although they have different degrees, it is the same dictatorship, lack of democracy, lack of freedom, restrictions on civil society and political clientelism. It is imperative to note that Tunisia's economy was growing rapidly through tourism for which it is known. Thus, Tunisia before the revolution was governed by a strong state with strong social policy and also maintaining a level of public social spending by redistribution of income. But the reverse side of the coin is a repressive and controlling welfare state, not based on recognition and exercise of social rights but on social favours monopolized by the party state. Tunisia is an exemplary case of a system where social policy is at the same time the vehicle of social improvement and the instrument of political despotism (Karshenas & Moghadam, 2005:74).

The thrust of this paper is to examine revolution in Tunisia and its contagion to some countries in North Africa. In virtually all of Africa today, the "state" is under threat, faced as it were with the retreat of its own citizens and communities, withdrawing to create space for their own self-empowerment beyond the reach of any centralized governmental authority (Adekanye, 2007:33). To be sure, states in Sub-Saharan Africa came to independence with hardly any discernible vision of development and no agenda for its realization. The absence of sustainable development affected Sub-Saharan African states to discharge most of their basic social and economic functions. Specifically, the paper offers African leaders some useful lessons which they can learn from the Tunisian revolution. This is because the events of the past few years in Sub-Saharan Africa can be seen as a sign for possible citizen revolution. Put differently, what obtains in Tunisia is replicated in Sub-Saharan Africa.

### **REVOLUTION: A CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL DISCOURSE**

Revolutions have occurred through human history and vary widely in terms of methods, duration, and motivating ideology. However, scholarly debates about what does and does not constitute a revolution center on several issues. A revolution is a fundamental change in power organizational structures that takes place in a relatively short period of time. When the existing structure of power is overthrown, leading to a long-term reconstruction of the political, social and economic order, we can speak of a revolution (Hague & Harrop, 2004:137).

Essentially, the word revolution is employed to denote a change in socio-political institutions. Skocpol defines revolution as rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structure; and they are accompanied, and in part carried through, by

class-based revolts from below (Skocpol, 1979:4). On the other hand, Godwin gives two definitions of a revolution. A broad one, where revolution is:

any and in all instance in which a state or political regime is overthrown and thereby transformed by a popular movement in an irregular, extra constitutional and/ or violent fashion (Godwin, 2001:9).

And a narrow one, in which:

revolutions entail not only mass mobilization and regime change, but also more or less rapid and fundamental social, economic and /or cultural change, during or soon after the struggle for state power (Godwin, 2001:9).

In the same vein, Goldstone sees revolution as an effort to transform the political institutions and the justifications for political authority in society, accompanied by formal or informal mass mobilization and non institutionalized actions that undermine authorities (Goldstone, 2011). This definition fits this study in the sense that the Tunisian revolution was a mass mobilization process.

More importantly, just as we have many definitions of revolution, so also there are many theories of revolution. However, political and socio-economic revolutions have been studied in many Social Sciences, particularly Sociology, Psychology, Political Science and History. From the sociological perspective, functionalist theorist saw society as a system in equilibrium between various resources, demands and sub-systems. (political, cultural etc). Although the sociological scholars differed in their definitions of what cause disequilibrium, there is agreement that it is a state of severe disequilibrium that is responsible for revolution.

From Political Science, scholars utilized pluralist theories to explain revolution. Those theories see events as outcome of power struggle between competing interest groups. In such a model, revolution happen when two or more groups cannot come to terms within a normal decision making process traditional for a given political system, and simultaneously have enough resources to employ force in pursuing their goals (Huntington, 1968).

The psychological perspective followed theories of cognitive psychology and frustration – aggression theory and saw the cause of revolution in the state of mind of the masses. While they varied in their approach as to what exactly causes the people to revolt, they agree that the primary cause of revolution is widespread frustration with existing socio- political situations. To be sure, the social psychological theory focuses on individual motivations rather than social groups. It seeks to answer such questions as: What inspires people to participate in revolutionary activity? Why do some people sometimes feel so strongly about politics that they are willing to give time, energy and ultimately their lives to achieve change (Hague & Harrop, 2004:137).

Consequently, this paper adopts the social – psychological theory for the cause of revolution as experienced in Tunisia and other parts of the region. Implicit in the theory is that relative deprivation breeds a sense of resentment which contributes to

political discontent. Gurr (1980) argued that relative deprivation was the key to revolution. For Gurr, political instability only results from deprivation when combined with a belief that conditions are worse than they could and should be. What matters is not absolute deprivation, a condition which often breeds resigned passivity, but relative deprivations: a sense that rewards fall below expectations or entitlement. Thus, when relative deprivation is widespread, instability can result. In the same vein, relative deprivation is certainly a background factor in many revolutions.

### **HISTORY OF TUNISIA: AN OVERVIEW**

Tunisia is the eastern most of the three Arab states that constitute the Maghreb and the western most region of the Muslim world, the other two being Algeria and Morocco. Its landmass is equivalent to that of England and Wales, but its population is only six million souls who live mainly along the 800 miles of Mediterranean coastal plain ([www.Sefarad.org/publication](http://www.Sefarad.org/publication)). Its first modern leader, President Habib Bourguiba brought to the office hard-won political experience, after many decades of service among the leadership of the independence movement. On 20 March 1956, France organized Tunisian independence. In April 1956, Habib Bourguiba formed the first government of independent Tunisia, and on 25 July 1957, the Constituent Assembly, having established a republic and transformed itself into a legislative assembly, elected Bourguiba chief of state.

From independence, Tunisian economic policy had been primarily to promote light industry and tourism, and develop its phosphate deposits. The major sector remained agriculture with small forms prevailing, but did not produce well. In the 1970s, the economy of Tunisia expanded at a very agreeable rate. Oil was discovered, and tourism continued. In the 1980s, the economy performed poorly. In 1983 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forced government to raise the price of bread and semolina, causing severe hardship and protest riots (David, 1986). In this situation, the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI) under Rashid al Ghannushi provided popular leadership. Civil disturbances, including those by the Islamist, were repressed by government security forces.

Political repression in Tunisia was the hallmark of events under Bourguiba. He dealt with labour agitation for wage increases by jailing their leaders. He turned on many of his former political associates, including his wife and son, while blocking two legal opposition parties from taking part in elections ([www.nationsencyclopedia.com/africa/tunisia-history](http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/africa/tunisia-history)). However, during Bourguiba years in office, his accomplishments included: a law reform, economic policies which detoured briefly in a socialist direction, a moderate but steady improvement in standard of living, and a foreign policy which retained an independent approach while maintaining trade and economic connections to the West. Thus, Habib Bourguiba dominated Tunisian government until his removal in 1987.

### **TUNISIA UNDER BEN ALI**

Ben Ali was the Minister of interior under Bouguiba. He was later named Prime Minister in September 1987. Six weeks later, Ben Ali seized power, ousting Bourguiba. Ben Ali assumed the presidency, promising political liberalization. Almost 2,500 political prisoners were released and the special state security courts were abolished. The following year, Tunisia's constitution was revived, ending the presidency for life and permitting the chief executive three, five-year terms.

In the same vein, elections were advanced from 1991 and Ben Ali ran unopposed. In July 1998 Ben Ali announced his plans to contest the presidential elections scheduled for October 1999. Two other candidates, Mohamed Belhaj Amor of the Party of People's Unity (PUP) and Abderrahmane Tilli of the Unionist Democratic Union (UDU) also announced their candidacy. The parliament had again been enlarged to 182 members, with 34 seats guaranteed to the opposition ([www.nationsencyclopedia.com/africa/tunisia-history](http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/africa/tunisia-history)). In the 1999 elections Ben Ali received 99.4% of the votes, with Amor receiving 0.3% and Tilli 0.2% ([www.nationsencyclopedia.com/africa/tunisia-history](http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/africa/tunisia-history)). Under Ben Ali, a referendum was held on 26 May 2002, in which voters overwhelmingly approved a series of constitutional amendments that would make a marked change in the country's political structure. They included: additional guarantees regarding the pre-trial and preventive custody of defendants; the creation of a second legislative body, the elimination of presidential term limits, along with the setting of a maximum age ceiling of 75 years for a presidential candidate; and the consecration of the importance of human rights, solidarity, mutual help, and tolerance as values enshrined in the constitution ([www.nationsencyclopedia.com/africa/tunisia-history](http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/africa/tunisia-history)). In addition, Ben Ali announced a series of electoral reform measures in November 2002, which in addition to the "Chamber of Councilors" approved by the May referendum, included provisions to further guarantee the fairness of voters registration and election process, and provisions to reduce the minimum requirement for campaign financing and reimbursement by the state. He also called on radio and television operators to provide wider coverage of opposition parties and non-governmental organizations, and introduced a bill that would guarantee Citizens' privacy and protection of personal data.

Quite obviously, Ben Ali championed economic reforms that strengthened Tunisia's economy and increased foreign investment. Since Ali ascended to the office of president, Tunisia's per capita GDP has more than tripled from \$1, 201 in 1986 to \$3, 786 in 2008 ([www.data.un.org/data.aspx?q=Tunisia](http://www.data.un.org/data.aspx?q=Tunisia)). Although, growth in 2002 slowed to a 15-year low of 1.9% due to drought and lackluster tourism, better conditions after 2003 have helped push growth to about 5% of GDP. A report published in July 2010 listed Tunisia as one of the African "lions" and indicated that the eight African lions account for 70 percent of the continent's gross domestic product ([www.bcg.com/documents](http://www.bcg.com/documents)). Even more pertinent is the fact that Tunisia was rated first in Africa and 32<sup>nd</sup> globally out of 139 countries within the context of stable increase in GDP as conducted by Davos World Economic (Global Competitiveness Index, 2010).

However, very little of the vast wealth of Tunisia benefit the masses; who remain poor. Tunisia suffers high unemployment, especially among the youth. In fact, the failure of Ben Ali's government to redistribute the wealth of the country, and tackle the vast income disparity between the poor and the emerging rich political oligarchy, laid the foundation for the citizen revolution in Tunisia.

### **CITIZEN REVOLUTION IN TUNISIA: EXPLAINING THE PHENOMENON**

The citizen revolution in Tunisia started over unemployment, food inflation, corruption, freedom of speech and poor living conditions. The protest started on December 17, 2010, after a Tunisian young citizen called Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire over his unemployment status. Bouazizi had graduated from high school in the small town of Sidi Bouzid in central

Tunisia, and after several years of unsuccessful struggle to find a job, he had taken to the streets with a wheelbarrow to sell fruits. His grievance was that the police prevented him from selling vegetables without a permit, a means he thought could earn him a living in the absence of better employable jobs (Newswatch, 2011:32). But when the police trashed his wheelbarrow in December 2010 the humiliation proved too much. In this context, Bouazizi sat down in front of the mayor's office with a can of lighter fluid and set fire to himself. It was an extraordinary personal act that represented the collective rage of the Tunisian population and would prove the catalyst for historic and wide sweeping changes (BBC Focus on Africa, 2011:14).

It is important to note that there are around 10 million people in Tunisia and over half of them under the age of 25 (BBC Focus on Africa, 2011:14). Despite having one of the most developed educational systems in North Africa, unemployment is over 30 percent and even university graduates struggle to find work. This unemployment predicament led the Tunisian youths to engage in risk adventure in search of jobs in Europe. Every year, thousands of young people try to cross the Mediterranean to southern Europe in pursuit of better life. Even in the aftermath of the uprising nearly 5000 young Tunisians, among them secondary school students, arrived on the Italian Island, Lampedusa (BBC Focus on Africa, 2011:14).

Similarly, what happened to Bouazizi resonated with many young unemployed men and women. Thus, citizens' discontent spilled over into outrage at his death and the system that caused it. The unrest grew over several weeks as the protesters demanded a change in government for its inability to find solution to the increasing unemployment problems, rising food prices and corruption in the country.

The 23 year rule of Ben Ali was not only corrupt, but also authoritarian and repressive in nature. Ben Ali's dictatorial attitudes led to his political domination, based on electoral fraud. To the extent that his last five- year mandate in an election held on October 25, 2009, earned him 85 percent of the votes. His closest rival, Mohamed Boucihiba, got 5 percent (The Nation, 2011:13). Under Ben Ali, Tunisia was probably the United States' strongest ally in the region in the war against terror. European tourists flocked to its shores, but behind the façade of a peaceful resort, torture, oppression, censorship and corruption were deeply ingrained in the system.

Essentially, the internet played a significant role in what was referred to as the *Jasmine revolution*. This is because the internet subverted the state-controlled communications channels and allowing ordinary citizens to organize themselves. Thus, expression and aspirations for social and economic justice, the end of corruption, freedom of expression and political participation were spread across the country via the internet. Even the media reported that Ben Ali's second wife, Leila Trabelsi engaged herself in ostentatious lifestyle. Ben Ali and his family were accused of accumulating wealth at the people's expense. True, the Tunisian economy has fallen on hard times, but though the country resented the expression perpetrated by Ben Ali they understood that their tourism-dependent economy could not be insulated from the global recession of the past few years. However, their anger and pains were exacerbated by police brutality, first family corruption and indifference of the President (The Nation, 2011:72).

While the Tunisians were demonstrating, Ben Ali tried to hang on, addressing the nation on state television and promising major reforms including 300,000 jobs. But it was too little far too late and this failed to quell the tide of protest. When support from the armed forces finally ebbed away, Ben Ali decided to leave the country. Thus, the young men and women behind the *Jasmine revolution* succeeded in forcing Ben Ali into exile in Saudi Arabia on Friday, January 14, 2011 after 23 years in office. Before Ben Ali left the country, he dissolved the existing government and parliament. The power vacuum created by the exist of Ben Ali did not last long. Mohammed Ghannouchi, former Prime Minister, took over as the head of an Interim National Government few hours after Ali left the country with his family. In his attempt to convince the protesting masses that his administration was sincere about his promise to restore democracy in the country, Ghannouchi constituted a national unity government which included members of the opposition political party, the General Union of Tunisian Workers, UGTT and the ruling party, the Constitutional Democratic Rally, RCD (Newswatch, 2011: 34).

### **TUNISIAN REVOLUTION AND REGIONAL CONTAGION**

Two days after the collapse of the Ben Ali government in Tunisia, a similar and bloodier mass revolt erupted in Egypt. The protest began on 25 January 2011 and ran for eighteen days. The revolution in Egypt happened for two separate reasons. Firstly it was the classic product of the political, economic and social grievances of the people. The second reason was the generation gap between the rulers and the youths. The age gap and the inability of the system to listen to the youth and incorporate their concerns, appeared to make a mockery of most of the people.

In fact, disgruntled Egyptians drew inspiration from the Tunisian uprising that led to President Ben Ali fleeing the country. Tunisia was not growing as vigorously as Egypt, but there too a corrupt old order had opened up, and the resulting ferment proved too much for President Hosni Mubarak to handle. Some 40% of Egyptians still live on less than \$2 a day.

Similarly, the political atmosphere has not been favourable to the majority of Egyptians. Mubarak was repeatedly re-elected as president in sham elections in which the opposition parties were either banned, as the Moslem Brotherhood was, or their leaders jailed (Fafowora, 2011:64). Egypt was becoming more prosperous but was rocked by mass unemployment and massive public corruption. As Fafowara rightly observed:

The poverty rate had increased in Egypt from 39% to 45% under Mubarak. The gains of the economy had simply been appropriated by the oligarch leaving millions of uneducated Egyptians in penury and abject poverty. Repeated promises by Mubarak to introduce the much needed political and economic reforms had not materialized, leading to widespread frustration in the country and the consequent mass revolt (Fafowora, 2011:64).

In addition, President Mubarak's apparent plan to foist upon the Egyptians his son Gamal as their next ruler triggered mass discontent. Even more pertinent is the dismay over police cruelty, which had risen under Mubarak especially after an incident in June 2010 when plain clothes agents in Alexandria beat to death a young internet aficionado, Khaled Said, spawning a facebook campaign that prompted silent vigils across the country (The Economist, 2011:23).

Similarly, the Facebook page for solidarity with Mr. Said, the victim of police brutality, was what drew the widest audience for the mass revolt in Egypt which was held on January 25, 2011. As in Tunisia, Mubarak's regime appeared paralysed at

first. Mubarak responded solely through security measures, such as cutting of mobile phones, text-message service and the internet. By the time Mr. Mubarak decided to speak, three days later, it seemed too late to turn the tide. Although, Mubarak tried as much as possible to hold on to power, his army intervention with the command promising not to use force on protesters gave the Egyptian protesters the opportunity to continue in their demonstrations.

Consequently, Mubarak ceded all presidential powers to Vice President Omar Suleiman on 11 February, 2011 but announced that he would remain as president, wanting to finish his term. However, protests continued the next day before which Suleiman announced that Mubarak had resigned from the presidency and transferred all power to the Armed Forces of Egypt.

**Figure 1: Map of North Africa**





The events in both Tunisia and Egypt had a spiral influence on Libya, Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania, Sudan and Djibouti. Although, other Arab countries such as Yemen, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait witnessed similar revolts, the focus of this paper is mainly within the sphere of North Africa (See figure 1). One of the reasons why the unrest in Tunisia and Egypt echoes resoundingly across North Africa had been the personalization of leadership. Most of the other countries there, whether monarchies or republics, also have structures that seem increasingly anomalous in the modern world. Since the 1950s the Arab social order has been run by paternalist strongmen, bolstered by strong security forces and loyalist business grandees. Those below have been marginalized from politics, except as masses to be roused for some cause, or as a rabble with which to frighten a narrow and fragile bourgeoisie. They have been treated as subjects, rather than citizens.

**Table 1: Summary of Protests by Country in North Africa (2010 – 2011)**

Country	Date started	Types of protest	Outcome
Tunisia	18 December, 2010	Mohamed Bouazizi's immolation, Nationwide protest; occupation of public spaces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ousting of President Ben Ali.</li> <li>• Resignation of minister of Ghannouchi.</li> <li>• Release of political prisoners.</li> <li>• Dissolution of the political police and the former ruling party.</li> </ul>
Algeria	28 December 2010	Self immolations; major protests; riots, road blockings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lifting of 19-year old state of emergency.</li> </ul>
Libya	13 January 2011	Nationwide protests; armed revolt; occupation of cities by opposition forces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opposition force seizes control of numerous Libyan cities.</li> <li>• Formation of Benghazi-based national transitional council.</li> </ul>
Mauritania	17 January 2011	Self-immolation, protests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State repression.</li> <li>• Opposition condemned the ruling government.</li> </ul>
Sudan	17 January 2011	Minor protests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• President Bashir will not seek another term in 2015.</li> </ul>
Egypt	25 January 2011	Self-immolations; Nationwide protests; Occupation of public Spaces; attacks on Official buildings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ousting of President Hosni Mubarak.</li> <li>• Assumption of power by the army.</li> <li>• Suspension of the constitutions and dissolution of the parliament.</li> <li>• Resignation of Prime Minister Ahmed.</li> </ul>
Djibouti	28 January 2011	Major protests; occupation of public spaces.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protest Leaders were arrested.</li> </ul>
Morocco	30 January 2011	Self-immolation: minor protests, attacks on public properties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political concessions by King Mohammed VI.</li> <li>• Referendum on constitution reform.</li> </ul>

**Source: compiled by the author from various internet materials**

From Table 1, there is clear evidence that some variations exist in the nature, causes and outcome of the protests. However, with the exception of Mauritania, every leader in the table falls within the committee of dictators. The most obvious dictator is Colonel Muammar Gaddafi who has ruled Libya for 42 years. Anti-government protests in Libya started on 15 February 2011. By 18 February, most of Benghazi, the country's second largest city, was controlled by the opposition. Despite the widespread of the protest to the capital Tripoli, Gaddafi was still clinging to power. It was estimated that at least 6,000 had been killed since the violence began. The rising death toll had drawn international condemnation, with several Libyan diplomats resigning and calling for the regime to be dismantled. In the same vein, an interim government in opposition to

Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's continued rule was established in Benghazi on 26 February 2011 amidst ongoing efforts by demonstrators and rebel forces to wrest control of Tripoli from the Jamahiriya ([www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article/libya](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article/libya)).

In the Libyan case, the European Union sent troops to the besieged Libyan city of Misurata to protect aid deliveries as requested by the United Nations. Also, rebels and residents of Misurata, facing an increasingly desperate humanitarian and regular bombardment by governments' forces appealed to NATO to send in ground troops to protect humanitarian and relief deliveries through the port. Consequently, NATO launched air strikes against Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's command and control centres in Libya in order to protect aid deliveries to the civilian population. However, Gaddafi authoritarian rule came to an end on October 20, 2011, when he was brutally murdered by rebel forces.

More importantly, the protests have shared techniques of civil resistance in sustained campaigns involving strikes, demonstrations, marches and rallies, as well as the use of social media such as *facebook* and *twitter* to organize, communicate, and raise awareness in the face of attempts at state repression and internet censorship. The unrest also shares a common sensibility – the rising attestations of a younger generation that sees global change on the internet and has momentarily lost its fear of corrupt autocratic leaders (Ignatius, 2011:64).

#### **LESSONS FOR SUB- SAHARAN AFRICA**

The revolutions in North Africa portend a warning to sit- tight leaders in Sub- Saharan African states. In the last three decades, only a few countries, such as Senegal, Benin, Ghana, Mauritius and Bostwana, permitted competing political parties and some civil society organizations to function. This has been compounded with the problem of dynastic rule. In countries like Togo, Gabon, and Democratic Republic of Congo, to mention a few the seat of power has been bequeathed to the next generation in the family trees. It is evident that Eyadema of Togo ruled for 38 years and was succeeded by his son Faure Eyadema, Omar Bongo ruled for 42 years and was succeeded by his son Ali Bongo Ondimba and Joseph Kabila of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) succeeded his father Laurent Kabila. In the three cases, protesters against this unholy retention of power in Togo, Gabon and DRC were massacred by the military who usually owe allegiance not to the countries concerned but to African leaders who have constituted themselves and their families into royalties or aristocracy of sorts (Albert, 2011:13).

Essentially, there are many differences as there are parallels to draw between the situations in North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. But given the scale and importance of recent events it is worth considering some of those countries (See figure 2). On the face of it Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Swaziland, Angola and others are also ruled by presidents or monarchs – autocrats in some eyes – who have been in place for a long time (BBC Focus on Africa, 2011:18). But the lack of popular checks on leaders' decisions contributed to abuses of power by individuals and institutions, onerous despotic regimes, the violation of human rights and widespread corruption.

Figure 2: Map of Sub-Saharan Africa



**Table 2: Long Serving Political Leaders in Sub –Saharan Africa**

Country	Ruler	Years Spent in Office
Angola	Jose Santos	33
Burkina Fasso	Blaise Compaore	25
Cameroon	Paul Biya	31
Equatorial Guinea	Nguema Mbasogo	33
Gambia	Yahya Jammeh	18
Swaziland	Mswati II	25
Uganda	Yoweri Museveni	26
Zimbabwe	Robert Mugabe	32

**Source: Compiled by the Author**

In table 2, the least years spent by an African leader of the south of the Sahara is 18 years. Some countries not listed in the table had their leaders spending roughly 10 years in office. In the early 1990s, popular protests against systems that excluded the majority of citizens from the political process reached their height. Many took to the streets to demand a right to be heard, to have free and fair elections and to have open public institutions. They called for radical changes in the basic style of governance.

A number of countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, Mali and Benin had undergone a regime change through elections. Thus, presidential term limits are respected, and so is freedom of the press. Human rights violations have become less common and political parties and civil society organizations are involved in daily debates on policy options. But in other countries elections are not always free, fair or transparent. Majority parties have used their control of government resources to bias the electoral process in their favour, and some elected presidents have unilaterally modified constitutions to try to prolong their stay in office. Press freedoms and civil society activities are frequently under threat. Even though the scope of African citizen's representation in public institutions has widened, the degree of their real influence over these institutions is often limited. Access to justice is frequently expensive for majority, and police and armed forces are sometimes the worst human rights abusers. The greatest threats to good governance today come from corruption, violence and poverty, all of which undermine transparency, security, participation and fundamental human rights (Africa Renewal, 2010; 22).

Because of their lack of altruism and penchants for neopatrimonialism and clientelism, many Africans were left out of governance and this motivated many to turn away from the state which has betrayed them and return to their traditional roots of consensual democracy, within smaller communities (Ayittey, 2005:236). The resultant effect has been identity politics which threatened the political stability of the continent.

Against this backdrop, Sub-Saharan Africa must learn some lessons from Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions. In Tunisia and Egypt, the educated youth were in the vanguard of the demonstrations. The direction Sub-Saharan Africa chooses within the context of authoritarian style of leadership could have a similar influence. Thus, in Sub-Saharan Africa a largely youthful population have different outlook to that of their leadership. To be sure, with increasing numbers of unemployed youth whiling away hours at home, they could become potent revolutionary force.

However, some people have said a revolutionary convulsion of such cannot happen in Sub-Saharan Africa given the ethno-diversity of nations. This is far from the truth in the sense that series of the protest has once engulfed some of the countries where electoral fraud had come to play. Typical examples are found in Zimbabwe, Kenya and Gabon. Even in Nigeria, we can recall the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) riots of 1990, “The Alli Must Go” eruptions of 1978, the June 12 crises of 1993, the post election violence that erupted in the aftermath of the 2011 presidential result in the northern part of the country and the fuel subsidy protest of January 2012. The reason for such insurrection can be located within the angle of poverty and frustration among the jobless youths.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the crises that emerged in the early 1980s resulted from the contradictions built into the post-colonial production process. Following the imposition of SAP in Africa in the 1980s most African governments were faced with the worsening of structural crises, increasing debts, poor macro-economic performance, collapse of education and health care systems and the inability to meet the basic social needs of the population (Olukoshi, 1993, Adejumo, 1994). However, in order to reverse the phenomenon of citizen revolution in Sub-Saharan Africa, there is the need to strengthen governance not only to improve political participation, but also to improve economic performance.

In December 2008, IMF warned that violent protest could break out in countries world-wide if the financial system is not restructured to benefit everyone rather than a small elite. This prediction has come into reality as witnessed in North Africa. In this context, revolution is the festival of the oppressed and Sub-Saharan Africa must learn from Egypt and Tunisia. This is because citizen revolution is universal.

There is the notion of technology and its power to engineer change. Internet connections may be slow in many Sub-Saharan African countries but people are becoming adapted at using mobile phones to spread news. For instance, in Nigeria’s just concluded general elections, phones were used to inform elections monitors of attempts to rig the vote at polling units. In addition, events concerning the elections were posted via **FACEBOOK and TWITTER**, in order to raise awareness in the face of attempts to rig election. This technological device can be used to mobilize citizen for mass protest and this has implication for regional stability and socio-economic development.

The other lesson for Sub-Saharan Africa is that bad culture of non-performance and sit-tight syndrome to loot nation’s resources should be eradicated. African leaders should remember that power lies with the followership, while the leaders are there to co-ordinate resources. Also, state repression on the citizen should be minimized. This is because the experience in Tunisia and Egypt where the armed forces soften their mind on citizen clampdown can be replicated in Sub-Saharan Africa.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyze how authoritarian governments can be brought down through peaceful determined mass uprisings. Specifically, the citizen revolution in Tunisia which later spread to Egypt, Libya, Algeria and some countries in North Africa is an indication that power belong to the ruled not the ruler. The politics and government of North Africa is complex, but the underlying factors for citizen revolution are the grinding poverty and authoritarianism of their leaders. Given the extra ordinary repression and human rights abuses experienced in North Africa for the past two decades, it is imperative to know that people-power driven revolutions is inevitable.

Although the patterns of North African protests varied, there is a clear youth conscience in relation to freedom, justice and equity. This has manifested in the growing power of technology. With technology youths of today can mobilize themselves and sack oppressed regimes through non-violent means. For example, the use of **FACEBOOK** and **TWITTER** played a significant role in the successful mass protests in Tunisia and Egypt.

Can such revolution occur in Sub-Saharan Africa? This is a complex question which needs a subjective answer. However, in any society where natural resources are squandered by the ruling elites and majority of citizens are wallowing in abject poverty, the seed of mass protest is inevitable. This however, has implication for sustainable development. It has been observed that sustainable development implies three primary factors of economic, social and environment. The adherents of sustainable development argue that development means providing people with the tools and knowledge to be able to meet their basic needs in a sustainable way. It means improving agricultural practices in order to feed families; improving literacy, schooling; and basic knowledge of hygiene, health care, and family planning; using technologies that are compatible with the level of education, local infrastructure, and labour force. The reverse is the case in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Sub Saharan Africa, sit-tight governments are common, mass corruption, mismanagement, misappropriation, graft and social and economic inequalities are growing. In order to reverse citizen revolution in Sub-Saharan Africa, their leaders should embark on political and economic reforms within the context of good governance.

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