



Arab Spring Reforms Remain Ineffectual Due to Lack of Economic Freedom





Despite the promise of the Arab Spring, most nations in the region have failed to reform their economies, largely leaving elite privilege in place. You can read more in this new essay, *Institutions and Economic, Political, and Civil Liberty in the Arab World*,  which spotlights Arab countries and the need for increased economic freedom and free market reform that will enable citizens to make their own economic decisions outside the influence of government or crony capitalist elites.

Denial of economic freedom helped launch the Arab spring—it began in Tunisia when a vegetable and fruit seller set himself on fire to protest police bullying in the public market. His freedom to sell his wares was repeatedly denied, yet restrictions on economic freedom still plague the region.

Much of the population in the region believes the Arab world underwent significant “neoliberal” free market reforms in the first decade of this century, a perception reinforced by praise from international institutions.

Yet, according to policy data, crony capitalism, disguised as reform, marked the period, with ruling families in countries such as Tunisia and Egypt grabbing state assets under the guise of privatization.

This period of phony crony reform is a huge impediment to future reform because many citizens believe free markets have been tried and failed.

Free market reform is vital to the success of the Arab Spring. If the old economic structures remain in place, the elite will, for their own benefit, maintain the power to deny opportunity to the people.

Charles Roffy



Despite large-scale protests, no new economic vision emerged from the Arab Spring

While protesters in many countries demanded civil freedoms, democracy and an end to elite privilege, no new economic vision for the region emerged from the Arab Spring. And many protesters are simply pining for the unproductive government jobs they had heretofore been denied.

Nonetheless, there are signs of progress in Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia, where

economic and political reforms are underway. But obviously, the region faces other obstacles to economic progress, including the limited economic role of women and the waves of violence (and resulting refugee crisis) sweeping through countries such as Iraq and Syria.

While the situation in parts of the Arab world remains bleak, economic freedom is a vital component in the region's overall recovery. ■

Fred McMahon is a Fraser Institute Resident Fellow and holder of the Dr. Michael A. Walker Research Chair in Economic Freedom. He manages the Economic Freedom of the World Project at the Fraser Institute.

