The Middle East: Questions for U.S. Policy

THE CHOICES PROGRAM
BROWN UNIVERSITY

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Introduction: What is the Middle East?

The history of the region called the Middle East is long and complex. The terms "Near East" and later "Middle East" were used by British colonial officials to describe a region to their east. This region stretched from Britain to British colonies in the "Far East," such as India and China. In the following pages, the term "Middle East" refers to the countries highlighted on the map, stretching from Egypt in the west to Iran in the east. This text does not include other North African countries in its definition of the Middle East.

The Middle East is often assumed to be a region of similar countries and people who share common politics, histories, and cultures. But actually, people across the region have diverse ethnicities, religions, languages, life experiences, and understandings of their histories. For example, Iranian society includes urban residents in Tehran, a city of fourteen million, as well as nomads who live in the desert. In Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon, large Christian populations exist alongside Muslims. The religion of Islam is understood and practiced in many ways across the region. The landscape also varies—from sparsely populated arid deserts, to vast urban metropolises, to forests, mountains, rivers, and marshes.

Variations in culture, history, and geography influence the region's societies, governments, and economies, as well as some of the tensions in the area.

What is important to know about the U.S. role in the Middle East?

For centuries, the Middle East has played an important role in international politics and U.S. foreign policy. To understand the U.S. role in the Middle East, it is important to consider a number of factors. While U.S. policy differs across countries and groups of

Ninara, CC BY 2.5.

The city of Tehran, the largest city in Iran, April 2012.

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Teacher Resource Book

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Graffiti and Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution

Objectives:

Students will: Learn more about the causes and effects of the Arab Spring protests in different countries.

Compare and contrast the Arab Spring protests in different countries.

Assess the role of graffiti and social media posts as forms of political expression in Egypt.

Required Reading:

Students should have read Part III of the reading and completed "Study Guide—Part III (TRB 34-35) or "Advanced Study Guide—Part III" (TRB-36).

Note:

This lesson requires access to the internet. Students will need to watch videos and view digital slideshows. Preview the YouTube videos to make sure they are appropriate for your classroom. Materials can be found at <www.choices.edu/middleeast>. This lesson is long and may also be run over the course of two class periods.

Videos:

"What were the effects of the 2011 Arab Revolutions?" (Bessma Momani)

"What caused the Arab Spring?" (Melani Cammett)

"Why is the graffiti important?" (Mayssun Succarie)

"What happened in Egypt on January 25, 2011?" (Sherine Hamdy)

Handouts:

"Arab Spring Protests Chart" (TRB 41-42)

"Graffiti and the Egyptian Revolution" (TRB-43)

"Social Media and the Egyptian Revolution" (TRB-44)

"Responding to Images of Graffiti" (TRB 45-46)

"Responding to Social Media Posts" (TRB 47-48)

Online Resources:

Resources about Graffiti:

Slideshow "Graffiti as Protest in Cairo"

YouTube video by the Mosireen Collective

YouTube video by Soraya Morayef

Resources about Social Media:

Slideshow "Protest Posts and Tweets"

Al Jazeera video "Tweets from Tahrir"

In the Classroom:

1. Setting the Stage—Write the following questions on the board: "What is a protest? How can protesters express their ideas?" Call on students to share their thoughts. Invite students to reflect on protests they have learned about, witnessed, or participated in. How did protesters at those demonstrations express their ideas?

Ask students what they know about the Arab Spring protests that occurred in the Middle East and North Africa beginning in 2011. Tell students that today they will learn about how the Arab Spring protests played out in different countries, focusing on the demands that protesters made and the ways protesters expressed those demands. Explain that, due to time constraints, this lesson will not go in depth into the process or aftermath of the protests, and the main part of the lesson will focus on the protests in Egypt. Also note that, while the lesson addresses a range of cases, it does not include all countries affected by the Arab Spring.

2. Comparing Arab Spring Protests in Different Countries—Distribute the handout, "Arab Spring Protests Chart." Have students read and annotate the chart, following the instructions on the handout. They will be reading the chart twice, first to understand the context in each country and then to notice similarities and differences across countries.

You may choose to have students work with a partner as they read.

Invite students to share similarities they noticed about the Arab Spring protests across different countries. Then invite them to share differences they noticed. If the conversation has not yet focused on these columns, draw students' attention to the columns entitled "What sparked the protests?" and "What did the protesters demand?" Have students name similarities and differences within these columns. Consider showing the Choices videos, "What were the effects of the 2011 Arab Revolutions?" by Professor Bessma Momani and "What caused the Arab Spring?" by Professor Melani Cammett for more on the demands of protesters before, during, and after the Arab Spring.

During this discussion, highlight the point that protesters can make demands *against* something that exists or *for* something that does not yet exist—and that often these are interconnected. Have students name examples of demands from the Arab Spring that were against something (e.g. an authoritarian ruler, unemployment) and then name something that protesters were demanding in its place (e.g. democratic government, job opportunities).

3. Examining Two Forms of Protest Expression—Tell students that they will be examining two different ways that protesters in Egypt expressed their demands during the Egyptian revolution in 2011: graffiti (or street art) and social media posts.

You may choose to split the class in half and assign one form of expression to each group. Alternatively, you may select one form at a time for the entire class to examine together. Note that students will need to interact with online resources (a slideshow and a YouTube video) in order to examine each form of expression.

Distribute one or both of the handouts, "Graffiti and the Egyptian Revolution" and "Social Media and the Egyptian Revolution." Have students follow the instructions on the handout. After reading, invite them to turn to a classmate and share two new facts they learned from this reading.

Distribute one or both of the handouts, "Responding to Images of Graffiti" and "Responding to Social Media Posts." Read the instructions on the handout(s). (Note: If students will be examining the online sources independently, explain how to access the slides and video. The social media handout includes video timecode recommendations, instructing students to watch certain segments of the video.) You may choose to have students work in pairs or small groups to respond to the questions on the handouts.

4. Class Discussion—Invite students to share their responses to the sources they examined. If the class was divided into two groups, consider having students share on one topic at a time. What stood out to them in these sources? What demands were protesters expressing? Do students think that this particular form of expression (graffiti or social media posting) is a powerful way for protesters to voice their demands? If so, what makes this form powerful or unique? Why do students think the Egyptian government has tried to limit this form of expression?

Ask students to make connections between graffiti and social media posts as forms of protest expression. What is similar about the two? What do they allow protesters to do? How did they play different roles during the Egyptian revolution? Does one have certain advantages (or limitations) that the other does not? You might close by asking students to make connections to their own experiences. Have they seen graffiti and/or social media posts that express political messages? Where and on what issues? Were these similar in any ways to the messages and demands of protesters from the Arab Spring?

Extra Challenges:

1. Think about a recent or upcoming protest event that you have participated in, heard about, or imagine occurring in the near future. Create your own graffiti art (displayed on a piece of paper, poster, or canvas) related to the demands made by protesters at this demonstration.

2. If you know of a public space near where you live that has political graffiti, go take photographs of the graffiti there. Create a slideshow or display of your photographs and write or present about the political messages expressed through this graffiti. What demands are the artists expressing? What other messages does the graffiti convey? How does the graffiti seem to allow people to communicate about these ideas in unique ways?

3. Collect a set of social media posts related to a recent protest event that you participated in or heard about. You could take screenshots of the posts and create a slideshow or print directly from a website. Analyze these posts by responding in writing to the questions: What protest demands do the posts express? What other messages do the posts send? How do the posts seem to allow people to communicate about the protest event in ways they might not have without the use of social media?

Homework:

Students should read Part IV of the reading and complete "Study Guide—Part IV" (TRB 49-50).

Arab Spring Protests Chart

Name: _____

Instructions: Read through the following chart twice. The first time, read across each row to understand each country's situation. On the second read, go down the columns to compare the situations in different countries. For each question heading, notice similarities and differences across countries. Draw arrows between countries where you notice a similarity, and underline pieces of information that stand out as unique to that country.

Country & date protests began	What government was in power before the protests began?	What sparked the protests, and how long did they last?	What did the protesters demand?	What were the results of the protests?	How did U.S. policymakers respond?
Tunisia December 2010	President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali ruled an authoritarian government for twenty-three years Known for corruption and use of force	Young street vendor set himself on fire when officials stopped him from selling vegetables. Mass demonstrations erupted in response Army sent in but refused to fire on civilians Demonstrations lasted ten days	End economic hardship End government corruption and autocratic rule	Hundreds of protesters killed January 2011, Ben Ali resigned and went into exile (later sentenced to life in prison) October 2011, first democratic elections for a parliament to draft new constitution Moderate Islamic party won more than 40 percent of the vote. Long-time dissident Moncef Marzouki elected president	Did not take sides officially Called on Tunisian government to respect human rights and protesters' right to assemble, and to begin democratic political reform
Egypt January 2011	President Hosni Mubarak ruled an authoritarian government for nearly thirty years Continued decades of emergency law, ignoring constitutional rights and freedoms	Opposition groups planned mass protest, bringing hundreds of thousands to Cairo's central square Led to eighteen days of protests by millions in Tahrir Square Army sent in but refused to fire on civilians	End police brutality End emergency law End Mubarak regime	February 2011, Mubarak transferred power to Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, who promised transition to democracy November 2011, Muslim Brotherhood won parliamentary elections. June 2012, Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohammed Morsi became president Morsi is ousted and Abdel Fattah el-Sisi becomes president in 2014	Identified Mubarak as an ally in early days of protests Later, condemned government attacks on peaceful demonstrators, called for peaceful transition of power

Name:_____

Country & date protests began	What government was in power before the protests began?	What sparked the protests, and how long did they last?	What did the protesters demand?	What were the results of the protests?	How did U.S. policymakers respond?
Yemen January 2011	President Ali Abdullah Saleh ruled for over thirty years Known for corruption and human rights abuses	Thousands from across the country with different goals joined protests Government's violent repression led to more protests and fighting between opposition groups	End economic hardship End government corruption Greater political participation for Southern Yemenis	Hundreds of protesters killed November 2011, Saleh agreed to step down Regional rivalries left country on brink of civil war. UN helped facilitate transition to democratic government. February 2012, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi became interim president In 2015, civil war erupts	During protests, maintained close relationship with Saleh, a longtime ally in fight against terrorism Later, encouraged Saleh to transfer power
Bahrain February 2011	Al-Khalifa family ruled as a monarchy since 1700s	Demonstrators began series of protests King Hamad sent forces to crush the protests, declared martial law, and conducted mass arrests Protests continued into 2014	Democratic government and greater political freedom End discrimination against Shi'i Muslims	Protests crushed with help of troops from nearby Gulf states Dozens of protesters killed, thousands arrested, some tortured International condemnation led King Hamad to set up commission to make recommendations about human rights violations. Crackdown and abuses continued	Did not publicly denounce the crackdown on protests In 2014, U.S. secretary of state expelled from Bahrain for meeting with opposition leader. U.S. suspended arms sales to Bahrain until secretary of state allowed to return
Syria March 2011	President Bashar al-Assad ruled authoritarian military regime since 2000, following his father's thirty-year rule Known for repressing political dissent	Teenagers arrested for writing revolutionary messages on a wall, sparking protests Military sent in to crush protests, which encouraged more protesters to join Opposition groups took up arms against the military, beginning a civil war	End government corruption and repression End al-Assad regime	Al-Assad regime remains in power, civil war continues Opposition groups are not united and fight each other Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) seized control of certain areas Over 300,000 Syrians have died. More than five million have left Syria	Late 2011, called on al-Assad to step down In 2012, provided aid to moderate rebel groups, used airstrikes against ISIS Since 2014, joined other world powers to broker peace talks, but fighting continues

Graffiti and the Egyptian Revolution

Instructions: Read the following text about the role of graffiti in Egypt during and after the Egyptian revolution of 2011. Underline at least two new facts you learn. Be ready to share these with a classmate.

During the Arab Spring uprisings in Egypt—often referred to as the Egyptian revolution—protesters gathered for massive demonstrations in the capital city of Cairo, calling for "bread, freedom, and social justice." Seventeen days after they began, the protests brought an end to President Hosni Mubarak's almost thirty-year regime. Although Mubarak was removed from power, the revolution continued because Egyptians did not feel that their demands had been met. Graffiti artists flocked to the streets to document the spirit, events, and hardships of this unfinished revolution. Some artists acted on their own, while others were part of artist collectives. A range of graffiti appeared, including political cartoons that mocked government officials and security forces, depictions of the names and faces of people who died in the revolution (often called "martyrs"), and slogans such as:

"Wake up, Egypt! The poor are hungry."

"Take to the streets."

"To those who sacrificed their lives for the future of a nation: a salute of glory and pride to the Martyrs of the 25 January Revolution."

Graffiti, a previously uncommon sight in Cairo, transformed blank walls into open-air galleries. Mohamed Mahmoud Street became the most popular street for graffiti since it is a short walk from Tahrir Square, the main public square where millions of people gathered to demonstrate against Mubarak's regime in early 2011. For months following the uprisings, new layers of graffiti appeared on Mohamed Mahmoud Street that critiqued military rule and the continuing lack of democracy in Egypt.

The new Egyptian government, led by Mohamed Morsi, responded to this form of protest by whitewashing the graffiti on Mohamed Mahmoud Street with paint and threatening to imprison the authors of the graffiti. Many activists refused to stop and created new graffiti over the painted walls, despite the risk of punishment by military and security officials. As Morsi consolidated his power and drew increasing criticism from Egyptians, his face became a regular image in graffiti murals.

Street art in Cairo has become less common under President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, whose military regime has cracked down on free speech by arresting journalists, street artists, and protesters who speak out against the government. Graffiti remains on some walls in Cairo, but the movement of activist-artists that grew after January 2011 is not as active.

Name:_____

Social Media and the Egyptian Revolution

Instructions: Read the following text about the role of social media in Egypt during and after the Egyptian revolution of 2011. Underline at least two new facts you learn. Be ready to share these with a classmate.

The Arab Spring is sometimes referred to as "the Facebook revolutions" or "Twitter uprisings" because of the role social media played in the protests. While social media was not the cause of the uprisings, it was a tool that helped publicize demonstrations, including to people outside the Arab world. Many activists used social media to organize and spread the word about upcoming demonstrations. More often, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube were sites of "citizen journalism" where ordinary people documented protest events as they occurred.

The text, images, and videos posted on social media expressed a range of messages. Some stated protesters' demands, some showed evidence of government forces brutally beating demonstrators, and others captured inspirational moments of resistance. In the years after the uprisings, activists used social media to publicize the stories of individuals who lost their lives in the demonstrations or who had since been imprisoned by the government.

The use of social media was especially popular in Egypt, with its large population of young people (about 60 percent of Egyptians in 2011 were under the age of thirty.) In 2008, an activist group called the April 6 Youth Movement created a Facebook page as part of its effort to support labor protests in Egypt. The page had tens of thousands of members within weeks. The April 6 Youth Movement also used Facebook and Twitter to help organize and document the Egyptian revolution in 2011. "We Are All Khaled Said" was another major Facebook page in the 2011 uprisings. Started by Wael Ghonim as a memorial to blogger Khaled Said, who was killed by Egyptian police in 2010, the page had hundreds of thousands of members by January 2011.

> ***"When I co-founded the April 6 Youth Movement to promote peaceful political activism, I believed that the most effective tools for documenting our struggle were social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter."***
>
> —Waleed Rashed, co-founder of the April 6 Youth Movement, May 2013

Activists using social media during the Arab Spring uprisings had to work against government censorship of the internet. In many countries, government officials monitored and restricted access to the internet as a way to limit the information that protesters could spread to the public. For example, days into the Egyptian revolution, the Egyptian government shut off internet and mobile phone service across the country, resulting in a blackout that lasted almost a week. Protesters often found ways to get around these restrictions, and some of Egypt's largest demonstrations happened during the blackout.

Many of the social media sites that Egyptians used during the revolution are still active today. Egyptians post on them to memorialize past protests, communicate about current issues, and express demands for change. In its efforts to repress free speech, the government of President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has taken steps to censor online news media in Egypt—restrictions that may eventually extend to social media platforms as well.

Responding to Images of Graffiti

Instructions: Look through the slideshow called "Graffiti as Protest in Cairo," which contains a collection of photographs of graffiti from Mohamed Mahmoud Street and other locations in Cairo, the capital of Egypt. Then choose one YouTube video to watch:

The first video is by the Mosireen Collective, an Egyptian activist group that created short documentaries about the revolution in Egypt using cellphone video footage from demonstrators.

The second video is by Soraya Morayef, an Egyptian journalist who compiled footage from other Egyptian journalists and filmmakers to show street art in Cairo after January 25, 2011.

After examining the slides and video, respond to the questions below. Be ready to share with your classmates.

1. What stood out to you from the graffiti in Cairo shown in the photos and the video? You could describe one image in particular or something you noticed across the images.

2. What patterns did you notice across the different images of graffiti? Were there certain symbols, colors, words, or ideas represented more than once?

3. List three protest demands that you saw represented in the graffiti shown in these sources.

Name:_____

4. Why do you think the Egyptian government covered up the graffiti with paint? Why might the Egyptian government view the graffiti as threatening?

5. How can graffiti be a powerful method of protest (a powerful way for protesters to express their opinions and demands)?

Responding to Social Media Posts

Instructions: Look through the slideshow called "Protest Posts and Tweets," which contains a collection of social media posts by Egyptians from the protests in late January 2011 as well as the following months. Then watch parts of the video "Tweets from Tahrir," created by the news source *Al Jazeera,* which profiles five Egyptian activists who tweeted during the demonstrations. (Watch the video excerpts with these timecodes: 0:00-4:05, 9:45-11:00, and 16:55-18:55.)

After examining the slides and video, respond to the questions below. Be ready to share with your classmates.

1. What stood out to you from the social media posts shown in the slides or the video? You could describe one post in particular or something you noticed across posts.

2. What patterns did you notice across the different posts? Where there certain words, phrases, or ideas expressed more than once?

3. List three protest demands that you saw represented in the social media posts.

Name:_____

4. Why do you think the Egyptian government would restrict social media and internet use? Why might the government view social media as threatening?

5. How can social media be a powerful method of protest (a powerful way for protesters to express their opinions and demands)?