



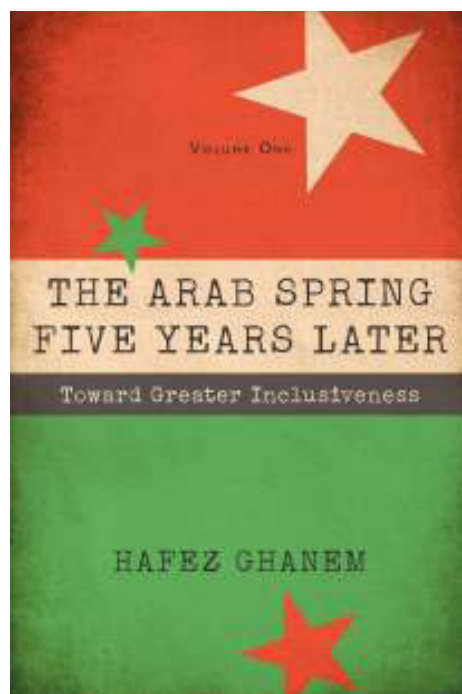
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The Arab Spring Five Years Later Toward Greater Inclusiveness (Volume 1)

by Hafez Ghanem



*Reviewed by
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Since the so-called Arab Spring began in 2011, the selection of Arab countries (re: Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Jordan, Morocco) and their international partners concentrated mostly on political and identity issues, neglecting the importance of economics, which indirectly triggered the current fluctuating situations in these countries. Following the 2011 uprisings the democratisation of Arab countries did not go as anticipated. Instead, a new phase of instability began, raising serious regional and international security concerns. *The Arab Spring Five Years Later* represents a different account for explaining the roots and outcomes of the so-called Arab Spring, which was initially surrounded by an aura of euphoria and optimism. If nothing else, the revolutions were the first step on the long journey to a new order. Now, Arab policymakers must acknowledge that the transition can be achieved only when political reform is simultaneously accompanied by economic inclusion. This is exactly what Ghanem suggests in his book – the result of a three-year academic project exploring how to achieve inclusive growth after the Arab Spring, while contributing to development and regional stability.

The book is about economics. It promotes economic growth and social justice as crucial components of successful transition. In the beginning Ghanem focuses on the discouraging results of the Arab Spring and acknowledges that the transition is particularly difficult due to the high polarisation within post-Arab Spring societies. By describing different transitional experiences in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Jordan and Morocco, he provides a context for the rest of the book and shows how too much focus on political aspects is not enough for engineering successful transitions. This point is strong and is further supported by several statistics, analyses and experiences of successfully transitioned countries world-wide throughout the book – for instance Japan, Malaysia and Indonesia, East Asian countries that have gone through similar transitions.

Arab countries experienced economic growth before the uprisings, so why were people dissatisfied with their economic situations? According to Ghanem, the reason is that the benefits of growth have not been equally distributed among the entire population. Ghanem proposes four main priorities for the Arab countries to achieve economic inclusion: building inclusive and accountable institutions, with supervision of the implementation process; supporting small and medium-size enterprises; aid lagging regions through investing in agriculture and rural development and; modernising and improving the quality of the old educational system to produce a workforce with skills demanded by the contemporary globalised labour market. Future reforms would be much easier if the old, dysfunctional system, based on generalised price subsidies, so typical of the Arab world, would be replaced by a social protection system based on targeted cash transfers, which is more efficient, fairer and much cheaper, as proven world-wide by many middle-income countries that shifted to this system (re: Brazil, Mexico). However, it is a massive change which would probably provoke even more unrest, so it will demand a lot of patience.

Nevertheless, achieving inclusive economic growth is tied not only to expanding national economies but more importantly to ensuring that the benefits reach the entire population. Consequently, Ghanem proposes steps for greater inclusion of the most excluded groups among most Arab countries – women, youth and smallholder farmers. Moreover, Ghanem makes a solid point that the Arab states need the support of the international community in their efforts. The international actors must re-examine their regional engagement and support the inclusiveness through strategic aid to the four main priority areas mentioned above.

Overall, Ghanem provides a very readable explanation of the complex reality of the failed post-Arab Spring transitions, resulting in the states' seemingly not moving towards democracy but rather slipping backwards, undermining regional and also international security through: terrorism, the refugee crisis and illegal migration. The book is a must read for anybody interested in a more in-depth analysis of the Arab uprisings and failures of the following transitions from a different – economic – perspective to expand knowledge about the complex situation and its possible solutions. The arguments here are supported by extensive statistical data and surveys conducted in the Arab world and provided mainly by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Values Survey, among others. Although the original three-year academic project aimed to advise Arab policymakers, leaders and development partners, the book is very informative even for students, scholars and curious non-professionals interested in the topic. The book offers some very strong points and the provided evidence shows how desperately those areas need reform. Without doubt, this transformation will take years, probably decades, which is what Ghanem acknowledges, but simultaneously, he suggests steps that are very clear and well-founded. Of course, whether the countries are prepared for this massive change remains a question unanswered. But that is a different task. In this one, Ghanem successfully demonstrated that political and economic inclusion are two sides of the same coin.

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