

What are the implications of the ‘Arab Spring’ for the theory and practice of peacebuilding?

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The ‘Arab Spring’ was not the result of successful peacebuilding efforts over many years by Western NGOs and governments. Mohammed Bouazizi, a Tunisian vegetable seller, set himself on fire on 17 December 2010, prompting waves of protests in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya which swept away the old authoritarian regimes and despots.

Peace builders did not anticipate the revolutions in Maghreb in this form and were taken aback by their momentum and intensity.

The paper explores what the theory and practice of peacebuilding can learn from the events of the ‘Arab Spring’.

It focuses chiefly on the actors’ understanding which underlies (Western-dominated) peacebuilding activities, the chosen strategies, and the implicit theories of social change.

The paper highlights the extent to which the events of the ‘Arab Spring’ are a cautionary reminder to us and to peace builders to remain open to the complex realities on the ground and to rethink our assumptions about social change, violence and democracy.

The material is based on analyses of local and international news coverage, both online and in the print media, and on the current debates within the peacebuilding community.