

No democracy without women's rights: study

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Why did the Arab spring fail? Despite a number of revolutions in the Arab world, in the end only Tunisia emerged as a functioning democracy. Results from an interdisciplinary research project at the University of Gothenburg indicate that the problem might be traced partially to the lack of women's civil rights in the region.

A new study published in the *European Journal of Political Research* discusses the importance of women's rights for countries to become democratic. The researchers used a dataset developed by V-Dem, a research institution cohosted by the University of Gothenburg (Sweden) and the University of Notre Dame (USA). The dataset includes the state of democracy in 177 countries over the years 1900 to 2012.

The study demonstrates that countries do not become fully democratic without political and social rights for women. This is particularly true for the Arab Spring countries, where the failure to foster women's rights compromised any attempt at democratic governance in the area.

According to Professor Staffan Lindberg, director of the V-Dem Institute, the result is important because it shows that democratic development is not gender blind: societies transitioning from authoritarian regimes strongly need women in order to develop functioning democratic governments.

Consistent pattern

The study revealed that [civil rights](#) for both men and women - rights to

own property, freedom of speech and movement, and freedom from forced labor - were always present at a high level before constitutional rights were implemented. This pattern can be observed in almost all cases of successful democratization from 1900 onward in the 177 countries investigated.

"Our results clearly indicate the importance of women's civil rights, because women's rights increase the costs of authoritarian repression and enable women to organize in democratization movements. Without these basic rights, no country has managed to democratize fully," says Yi-Ting Wang, the lead author of the study.

The only country that is different in this regard is Tunisia, whose progressive president Habib Bourbuiba implemented several basic rights for [women](#) already when the country gained independence in the 1950s. Consequently, the only country that made a successful transition to democracy during the Arab spring was Tunisia.

Inspired by evolutionary biology

The international team of scholars used a novel methodological approach inspired by [evolutionary biology](#).

"We strongly believe in methodologies inspired by natural sciences. In fact, we think that this cross-disciplinary approach will help us, as political scientists, to better understand democratic transitions and other phenomena in the future", says Staffan Lindberg.

More information: YI-TING WANG et al. Women's rights in democratic transitions: A global sequence analysis, 1900-2012, *European Journal of Political Research* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/1475-6765.12201](https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12201)

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