

**The effects of the Middle East protests:
A West African perspective**

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The Programme is directly linked to Oxford University's Department of Politics and International Relations and Centre for International Studies. It serves as an interdisciplinary umbrella within Oxford drawing together members of the Departments of Economics, Law and Development Studies working on these issues and linking them to an international research network. The Programme has been made possible through the generous support of Old Members of University College.

Dr Oussenil Ily

Dr. Oussenil Ily is an Oxford-Princeton Global Leaders Fellow at GEG. His research focuses on trade remedies, especially on how to strengthen African countries' capacity in the use of trade defence instruments.

Oussenil holds a PhD in International Trade Law from Geneva University and a Master in Public Law from the University of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. He worked, among other things, as a research assistant for Professor Gabrielle Marceau and for the Graduate Institute in Geneva, from 2009 to 2010. Furthermore, he has been an intern and a consultant for the UN (Legal Affairs, Codification Division) and a PhD visiting researcher at the WTO Secretariat.

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Dr Omobolaji Olarinmoye

Dr Omobolaji Olarinmoye is an Oxford-Princeton Global Leaders Fellow at GEG. His areas of specialization are: comparative politics; African politics/ Nigerian government and politics; social science research training management in Africa; south-south research training in social sciences; development studies and peacekeeping and post conflict peace-building. Before joining GEG, Dr Olarinmoye was programme coordinator with the South-South Research Exchange Programme on History of Development; SEPHIS in the office of the Executive Secretary; CODESRIA Secretariat Dakar; and programmes manager in the Training, Grants and Fellowship programme of CODESRIA with specific responsibility for Africa Capacity Building Foundation funded programmes. He was lecturer in Comparative Politics at the Department of Political Science, Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State, Nigeria (2006-2007), Cadbury Fellow at the Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham (2006), SEPHIS Doctoral Fellow at the Center for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, India (2004) and Programme on Ethnic and Federal Studies doctoral fellow at the Department of Political Science, University of Ibadan (2004-2005)

Nigerian and political scientist, Dr Olarinmoye holds a doctorate in Comparative Politics from the University of Ibadan (2007), an M. Phil/D.E.A in African Politics from the Institut d' études Politique /Centre d' études d' Afrique Noire, Bordeaux (2001), an M.sc (1998) and B.sc (1996) in Political Science from University of Ibadan. Dr Olarinmoye's doctorate thesis on the *Politics of Ethnic Mobilization Amongst the Yoruba of South-western Nigeria* was awarded the first Oyeleye Oyediran Best Thesis Prize in Nigerian Politics and Government from the Department of Political Science University of Ibadan (2007). His M.Phil/ D.E.A dissertation titled *Programme RECAMP: La Nouvelle Politique de Coopération Militaire Française en Afrique Noire* focused on France's Post-Cold War Military Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa.

He has also been a recipient of international awards such as Mineral Economics and Management Society /Thomas Torries Research Paper Award, April 2008 (Paper title: *Politics does Matter: The Nigerian State & Oil (resource) Curse*); Letter of Commendation for

Academic Excellence from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academics, University of Ibadan, March 2006; the Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE), University of Oxford research grant (2006); Commended Paper, International Sociological Association, December 2005; Institut Français de Recherche en Afrique doctoral fieldwork research grant (2004); and Government of France Scholarship for Postgraduate Studies in France, April.2000 -Sept.2001

At GEG, Dr Olarinmoye works on *Accountability in International Development: A Study of Faith-based Development Organisations in Nigeria*. He speaks and understands French, English and Yoruba.

Assessing the Broader Implications of the Middle East Protests: A West African Perspective

First it was Tunisia. Then Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Bahrain, Yemen, Syria and now Libya. Civil unrest has gripped Middle Eastern and North African states – many of which have been under authoritarian rule for decades. Yet while domestic in nature, the implications of these protests extend beyond state boundaries. Here, GEG Global Leaders Fellows Dr. Ousseni Illy (Burkina Faso) and Dr. Omobolaji Olarinmoye (Nigeria) reflect on the effects of the recent uprisings on their respective home countries in what is the first instalment of a GEG commentary series on the Middle East uprisings.

Burkina Faso

Several days ago, in the western part of the country, a high school student died following alleged ill-treatment by local police. The students there had taken to the streets to claim justice, and the movement was starting to spread throughout the country as students in other locales began to do the same. The government, which is usually not very keen on responding to protests (except for when cracking down), quickly reacted by dismissing the local governor and arresting the policemen supposedly involved in the killing. This, in view to prevent the further diffusion of the protests and to keep them from turning into political demands. Political demands were actually already starting to be made, with some protesters overtly calling for the departure of the president, Blaise Compaoré, who has been in office for 24 years.

These developments are a direct effect of the events in the Middle East. Most long-standing African leaders are now on their guard, as they are fearful that what happened to Ben Ali and Mubarak (and what may perhaps happen to Ghaddafi) might happen to them. Many long-ruling leaders are now trying to change their governing behaviors and ‘respond to the peoples’ demands,’ but it remains to be seen if that will save them.

- *Dr. Ousseni Illy, Oxford, March 2011*

Nigeria

The impact of the popular revolts in the Middle East and North Africa on Nigerian politics can be seen in the nature of the comments and reactions to the passage of two legislative bills, the “Freedom of Information Bill (FOI)” and the “Minimum Wage Bill” by the Nigerian National Assembly in February 2011. Support for the bills was couched in terms of the necessity to prevent popular uprisings similar to those in the Middle East and North Africa in Nigeria. It was therefore argued that passage of the FOI was “an indication that the House of Representatives was sensitive to the yearnings and aspirations of the people” and a “necessary tool needed to guarantee transparency and accountability in public office”ⁱ. The new minimum wage of 18,000Naira would, it was further claimed, “alleviate the sufferings of Nigerian workers” and that “Nigerian workers deserved it if you look at the wastage of government”ⁱⁱ.

The importance of the passage of the bills and, by extension, the impact of the popular revolts in the Middle East and North Africa on Nigerian politics, is further amplified by the fact they together supply politicians with ammunition in the run-up to the April 2011 elections. The failure to pass the FOI bill by previous national assemblies, dominated by the ruling People Democratic Party, has been described by the leading opposition party candidate, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu of the Action Congress of Nigeria, as “treason against the people of Nigeria by the ruling People Democratic Party government, despite its two-thirds majority in both chambers of the National Assembly”ⁱⁱⁱ. President Goodluck Jonathan’s swift denunciation of negative commentary given by his adviser, Mohammed Abba-aji, on the passage of the FOI bill further underscores the currently tense political situation. The president claimed that “Abba-aji did not convey the President’s opinion as he was not in a position to speak for the President”^{iv}

The fact that passage of the two bills – which had been stalled in the National Assembly for ages – came in the wake of the popular revolts in the Middle East and North Africa, and that presidential candidates in the run-up to the April 2011 election now manipulate passage of the bills in their quest for electoral success, are both reflections of the considerable impact of the revolts in the Middle East and North Africa on Nigerian politics.

ⁱ Senate Passes New Minimum Wage Bill-Effective January 2011. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201102230353.html> Accessed on 09-03-11

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Ribadu Chides N’Assembly over FOI Bill <http://www.punchng.com/Articl.aspx?theartic=Art20110207420631> accessed on 09-03-11; Non-passage of FOI Bill is Treason against Nigerians-Ribadu http://elombah.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5216:non-passage-of-foi-bill-is-treason-against-nigerians-ribadu&catid=1:latest-news&Itemid=67. Accessed on 09-03-11

^{iv} House Passes Freedom of Information Bill. <http://allafrica.com/stories/201102250011.html>. Accessed on 09-03-11



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