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Globalization Democracy and the Arab Spring in Libya

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of globalization on democracy and democratization in post-Arab Spring Libya. While the 2011 uprising was fueled by aspirations for political freedom, justice, and inclusive governance, it ultimately resulted in state collapse, militia dominance, and prolonged instability. Using qualitative content analysis based on secondary data—including academic literature, policy documents, and media reports—the study critically investigates how global forces shaped both the revolutionary moment and the trajectory of Libya’s failed democratic transition. Anchored in Structural Realism and Democratic Transition Theory, the paper argues that Libya’s democratization crisis reflects both internal institutional fragility and external geopolitical contradictions. Specifically, it demonstrates how international interventions promoted regime change without ensuring the foundational support necessary for democratic consolidation. The findings reveal that fragmented political authority, weak institutions, and the strategic interests of global and regional actors obstructed the development of an inclusive political order. The study contributes to the scholarship on post-conflict democratization by emphasizing the limits of externally driven transitions in fragile states. It recommends an institutionally grounded, context-sensitive approach to democratization that prioritizes local ownership and long-term governance development. Libya’s experience offers a critical case for understanding the paradoxes of globalization and the contested outcomes of democracy promotion in the Global South.

Keywords: Globalization, Democracy, Democratization, Libya, Post-Arab Spring, Structural Realism

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Introduction

The Arab Spring was one of the most significant episodes of mass political upheaval in the 21st century. Beginning in Tunisia in late 2010 and rapidly spreading across the Middle East and North Africa, the uprisings were driven by a blend of domestic grievances and transnational influences—many shaped by globalization and the global diffusion of democratic ideals (Ajibade-Samuel & Akeem, 2016). In Libya, what began as peaceful protests against authoritarian repression soon escalated into armed conflict, culminating in the NATO-backed ouster and assassination of Muammar Gaddafi (Apuuli, 2021). At the time, this external intervention was hailed as a step toward democracy, justified under the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) framework (Lumeno, 2025). Yet, more than a decade later, Libya has become a fractured and volatile state—lacking both democratic legitimacy and institutional coherence (Saidin & Storm, 2024).

This study seeks to explain the failure of democratization in post-Gaddafi Libya, focusing on how globalization, external intervention, and weak domestic institutions interacted to undermine the country's political transition. While the globalization of democracy has often been presented as a normative ideal, it has also functioned as a vehicle for advancing the strategic and economic interests of dominant global powers (Terry, 2015). Libya's case exemplifies this duality: democratic rhetoric and media-fueled mobilization coexisted with realpolitik considerations such as oil access, regional security, and the reshaping of Mediterranean influence (Akinola, 2015). As Salam (2015) observe, the absence of sustained post-intervention support for institutional development exposed the limitations of global democracy promotion.

Despite the role of global networks in facilitating the uprising, Libya lacked the political infrastructure necessary to absorb and institutionalize the changes that followed. The country's transitional authorities were weak, state institutions underdeveloped and political authority fragmented along tribal and regional lines (Badi, 2021). Social media activism and international recognition, while pivotal in ousting Gaddafi, did little to guide the reconstruction of governance. The result was a contested and chaotic post-conflict environment, dominated by militias, rival governments, and foreign proxies (Ajibade-Samuel & Akeem, 2016). These developments highlight the disconnect between regime change and democratic state-building—a gap that has been largely neglected in mainstream democracy promotion narratives.

Theoretically, this study draws on Structural Realism and Democratic Transition Theory. Structural Realism explains how the anarchic nature of the international system and the pursuit of power by states shaped the strategic calculations surrounding Libya's intervention and its aftermath (Terry, 2015; Archibugi & Cellini, 2017). In contrast, Democratic Transition Theory explores how Libya's internal weaknesses—lack of elite consensus, fragile institutions, and absence of a national identity—impeded democratic consolidation (Sawani, 2020; Delirpoor, 2020). Together, these perspectives help situate Libya's failed democratization within both international and domestic power asymmetries.

By analyzing Libya's post-2011 trajectory through this dual lens, the study contributes to scholarly debates on regime change, democratization, and global interventionism. It argues that democratic failure in Libya was not merely the product of internal disorder, but of externally induced rupture unaccompanied by adequate institutional support. The paper underscores that in fragile post-authoritarian contexts, the globalization of democratic ideals—without corresponding local capacity and inclusive political frameworks—can provoke instability rather than democratization.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the widespread optimism that followed the 2011 Arab Spring, Libya's post-Gaddafi transition has become a textbook case of democratization failure. The uprising, initially framed around democratic ideals—popular sovereignty, justice, and human rights—resulted instead in a fragmented state plagued by competing governments, militia rule, and institutional collapse (Badi, 2021; Capasso, 2020). While numerous studies have analyzed the causes of the Arab Spring (Abushouk, 2016; Barakat & Fakih, 2021; Csicsmann & Rozsa, 2022) and the immediate aftermath of regime change in Libya (Basic, 2015; Erdag, 2017; Sawani, 2020), there remains a significant gap in understanding why democratization in Libya failed so profoundly despite intense international involvement and global discourses on democracy promotion.

Scholars such as Carati. (2017) have argued that NATO's intervention in Libya was shaped more by Western strategic interests than by humanitarian or democratic imperatives. Ajibade-Samuel and Akeem (2016) similarly highlight the influence of globalized media and diplomatic pressures in catalyzing the uprising, but they also point to the absence of long-term structural support after Gaddafi's fall. While these works engage either the geopolitical or communicative dimensions of the Arab Spring, they do not fully explore the contradictions

between globalization's promise of democratization and its practical outcomes in fragile post-authoritarian states like Libya. Furthermore, many assessments treat Libya's instability either as a domestic failure or a result of flawed foreign policy, without analyzing how these factors jointly contributed to the democratic deficit (Zambakari, 2016; Lumeno, 2025; Capasso, 2020).

This study responds to this gap by investigating the intersection of globalization, democracy, and democratization in post-Arab Spring Libya. It argues that Libya's failed transition cannot be explained by internal factors alone but must also be situated within broader global power asymmetries and structural contradictions (Adler & Poulliot, 2014; Selmi, 2025). By integrating Structural Realism and Democratic Transition Theory, this research problematizes the assumption that external democratization efforts, even when couched in humanitarian language, are neutral or universally beneficial. The Libyan case demonstrates the limits of externally driven democratic transitions in the absence of local institutional development, inclusive governance, and sustained peacebuilding support (Zanotta, 2021; Wamulume et al., 2022). This study thus contributes to ongoing debates in international relations and democratization studies by offering an analysis that links global structures to national outcomes in post-conflict transitions.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design aimed at critically analyzing the intersection of globalization, democracy, and democratization in post-Arab Spring Libya. It relies entirely on secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy briefs, official reports from international organizations, and media commentaries. The materials were selected based on their relevance to Libya's post-2011 political transition, global democratic discourses, and foreign intervention in the Arab Spring.

The primary method of data analysis employed is qualitative content analysis. This method enables the researcher to interpret and systematically categorize textual data in order to identify themes, patterns, and contradictions relevant to the study's central research questions. Through this approach, the study examines how narratives of democratization are framed in global discourse, how they were applied to the Libyan case, and how domestic and international factors contributed to the observed democratic deficit.

Content analysis is particularly appropriate for this research because it allows for the critical interrogation of how democracy-promotion, globalization, and external

interventions are articulated in texts, policies, and scholarly debates. It also helps reveal the structural and ideological tensions embedded in Libya's post-conflict transition. Theoretical framing is grounded in World-Systems Theory and Democratic Transition Theory, which guide the coding and interpretation of textual data to assess how global systemic forces and domestic institutional realities intersected to shape Libya's failed democratization process.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding the failure of democratization in post-Arab Spring Libya requires a theoretical framework that captures both the external strategic interests that shaped the country's revolution and the internal institutional weaknesses that undermined its transition. To this end, this study adopts Structural Realism and Democratic Transition Theory as complementary analytical lenses.

Structural Realism, also known as neorealism, emphasizes the anarchic nature of the international system, where states act primarily in pursuit of survival, power, and national interest (Lechner, 2017). In this context, Libya's experience during and after the Arab Spring can be understood not merely as a spontaneous democratic uprising, but as a moment when Western powers intervened strategically to reshape regional balances of power (Falk, 2016). The 2011 NATO-led intervention, legitimized under the United Nations' Responsibility to Protect (R2P), was framed as a humanitarian mission but was deeply tied to Western geopolitical and economic interests, particularly access to oil and influence in the Mediterranean (Akinola, 2015). Structural realism thus helps explain the motivations behind foreign involvement and the limited commitment to long-term stability and institution-building after Gaddafi's removal.

While realism accounts for the external drivers, Democratic Transition Theory helps explain why democratization failed internally. This theory posits that successful transitions from authoritarianism to democracy require a combination of institutional capacity, elite consensus, civil society engagement, and a supportive external environment (Ingramis, 2018). In Libya, these conditions were either weak or entirely absent (Erdag, 2017). The abrupt collapse of the Gaddafi regime left behind no coherent state apparatus, and the power vacuum was quickly filled by armed militias, regional rivalries, and fragmented governance (Ntaka & Csicsmann, 2021). Although there was international rhetorical support for democracy, there was no coordinated or sustained investment in the democratic institutions required for consolidation (Saldin & Storm, 2024).

By combining Structural Realism and Democratic Transition Theory, this study provides a dual framework that captures the intersection of international strategic behavior and domestic fragility. It argues that Libya's democratic failure was not only the result of its internal disunity, but also a product of global power dynamics in which democratization was promoted as a normative ideal but abandoned as a strategic priority once regime change was achieved (Jebnoun, 2015).

Conceptualization and Literature Review

Conceptualization

The Arab Spring marked a pivotal moment in contemporary political history, highlighting the interplay between globalization and democracy. As a transnational movement, it was not merely a series of isolated uprisings but was shaped by the forces of globalization—digital communication, international political pressure, and economic interconnectedness (Salam, 2015). The spread of democratic ideals, facilitated by global media and social networking platforms, fostered a shared sense of political urgency across North Africa and the Middle East (Ajibade & Akeem, 2016). Hence, citizens in authoritarian states, including Libya, drew inspiration from the mass mobilizations in Tunisia and Egypt, where long-standing regimes had been challenged and, in some cases, overthrown (Abushouk, 2016). This wave of protest, as opined by Grinin et al. (2019), testified to the growing influence of global democratic discourse on local political struggles. Inherently, understanding these dynamics requires clarification of key concepts central to this study.

Globalization is broadly defined as the increasing interconnection of societies worldwide. Thus, Robertson (1992), cited in Cukalevska and Dragovic (2018), describes globalization as the "compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole," emphasizing its psychological and social dimensions. Giddens (1999), cited in Hosen (2020), expands on this by defining globalization as the intensification of worldwide social relations, wherein distant localities become increasingly interconnected, and local events are influenced by global forces. Consequently, Babones and Aberg (2019) highlight deterritorialization as a key aspect of globalization, illustrating how political and economic interactions transcend traditional state boundaries. Rashid (2022) adopts a broader perspective, conceptualizing globalization as a multidimensional process encompassing economic, political, cultural, and technological flows that lead to increased interdependence and integration among different states in the international system. Papanikos (2024) further characterizes globalization as a

dynamic phenomenon marked by the expansion and acceleration of transnational exchanges, reinforcing the interconnected nature of contemporary societies. Trinidad et al. (2019) adds that globalization facilitates the diffusion of ideas, values, and practices across borders, reshaping both local and global realities.

Synthesizing these perspectives, globalization can be understood as a complex and multifaceted process that not only fosters global connectivity but also restructures political and economic interactions at both national and international levels (Ahmed & Popova, 2023). Thus, Naz and Ahmad (2018) opine that rather than viewing globalization as a monolithic process, it is best understood as a continuum influenced by varying economic, political, and technological forces. Thus, in the context of this study, globalization is examined as the transnational flow of ideas, political ideologies, and economic structures that shaped Libya's Arab Spring experience. This perspective underscores both the opportunities globalization provided in mobilizing democratic and democratization aspirations and the challenges it introduced in shaping Libya's post-revolutionary trajectory.

Democracy, on the other hand, is often associated with political participation, free and fair elections, and institutional accountability (Oser & Hooghe, 2018). Schumpeter cited in Pettit (2017) defines democracy as a system in which individuals acquire power through a competitive struggle for the people's vote, highlighting the procedural aspects of democratic governance. Dahl, on the other hand, cited in Caprioli et al. (2024), conceptualizes democracy as polyarchy, emphasizing inclusive participation and contestation, thus broadening the scope beyond mere electoral competition. Munck (2016) presents democracy as a process of public reasoning and freedom, underscoring the role of democratic deliberation in governance. Ma et al. (2023) distinguishes between procedural and substantive democracy, arguing that true democracy extends beyond elections to encompass civil liberties, accountability, and rule of law. These definitions collectively suggest that democracy is not a static concept but a multidimensional framework that integrates institutional mechanisms, participatory engagement, and fundamental rights (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2018). In the context of the Arab Spring, democracy was often framed as an aspirational ideal, yet its implementation remained fraught with structural and political challenges, particularly in Libya, where weak institutions and external interventions complicated the transition to a stable democratic system (Abushouk, 2016).

Democratization, closely linked to democracy but distinct in its procession nature, refers to the transition from authoritarian rule to a system characterized by democratic institutions, norms, and practices (Haggard & Kaufman, 2016).

Huntington (1991) cited in Adomaityte (2023) conceptualizes democratization as a process occurring in waves, marked by transitions away from non-democratic regimes and often catalyzed by both internal pressures and external influence. Carbone and Memoli (2015) further define democratization as not merely the holding of elections but the development of an entire democratic system—including political pluralism, rule of law, and a functioning civil society. Somer (2017) describe democratization as a contingent and often uncertain process shaped by elite negotiations, institutional compromises, and shifting balances of power. Poppe et al. (2019), in a more critical vein, contends that democratization is rarely linear and often hindered by superficial reforms, fragile institutions, and external interference.

Synthesizing these views, democratization can be seen as a complex and context-dependent transformation that extends beyond regime change (Asenbaum, 2018). It encompasses as posited by Kelecha (2025) the building of democratic institutions, cultivation of political culture, and the establishment of inclusive governance mechanisms capable of enduring beyond a single election cycle. In the case of Libya, democratization was expected to follow the fall of Muammar Gaddafi, driven by the widespread belief that the removal of authoritarianism would naturally lead to political openness and stability (Musa, 2024). However, as scholars such as Salam (2015) and Abushouk (2016) observe, the absence of institutional capacity, elite consensus, and coherent post-conflict planning severely undermined this transition. Moreover, the international community's focus on regime change, rather than sustained state-building, further complicated the path toward democratization (Hariyanti et al., 2024). In this study, democratization is examined not merely as a theoretical goal but as a contested and ultimately failed process in post-Arab Spring Libya, shaped by the same global forces that initially empowered the revolt.

The Arab Spring, often conceptualized as a pro-democracy movement, embodied a diverse array of political aspirations, ranging from electoral reforms to broader systemic transformations (Salam, 2015). While Blagojevic and Scekcic (2022) emphasize the role of digital mobilization and youth activism in fueling the uprisings, Byun and Hollander (2015) focus on the interplay of economic and political grievances as key drivers of dissent. Qadir and Afzak (2017) underscore the significance of transnational networks in shaping a collective political consciousness that transcended national borders. These perspectives illustrate that the Arab Spring was not merely a spontaneous eruption of dissent but rather a manifestation of deeper structural and socio-political dynamics shaped by local and global forces (Ajibade & Akeem, 2016).

In line with the foregoing, it is essential to note that globalization, democracy, democratization, and the Arab Spring are deeply interconnected. The Arab Spring was, in many ways, a manifestation of globalization, as digital platforms facilitated the rapid spread of revolutionary ideas while international actors played a role in shaping political outcomes (Salamy, 2016). Similarly, democracy and democratization, as aspirational models, were framed within a global discourse, influencing the demands of protesters and the transitional goals of post-revolution societies (Abushouk, 2016). However, the Libyan experience underscores the complexities of this interplay. While globalization empowered local actors to challenge authoritarianism, it also introduced external interventions that ultimately complicated democratic consolidation and derailed efforts at sustained democratization (Selmi, 2025). Libya's post-Arab Spring struggles thus highlight how these forces can simultaneously enable and hinder political transformation, resulting in a fragile state rather than a fully realized democracy.

Essentially, the Arab Spring, widely regarded as a pro-democracy movement, was driven by demands for political reform, social justice, and economic opportunities (Salam, 2015). In Libya, the Arab Spring initially embodied hopes for change but soon spiraled into prolonged instability (Saidin & Storm, 2024). The intersection of globalization, democracy, and democratization in Libya's Arab Spring experience thus underscores both the potential and limitations of political transformation in a globalized era. Hence, this dynamic, as opined by Barakat and Fakihi (2021), reveals the fragility of democratic transitions in post-authoritarian states.

Literature Review

The Arab Spring and its democratic ambitions have generated a significant body of scholarship across international relations, political science, and Middle Eastern studies. A broad consensus exists that the uprisings across North Africa and the Middle East were catalyzed by longstanding grievances around governance, economic exclusion, and state repression (Byun & Hollander, 2015; Badi, 2021). These grievances were further compounded by entrenched autocratic practices, elite corruption, youth unemployment, and the failure of these states to deliver social contracts based on accountability and inclusion (Saeed, 2025). In Libya's case, these frustrations were magnified by Muammar Gaddafi's centralized authoritarian system, characterized by the suppression of opposition, dismantling of institutions, and reliance on tribal alliances (Sawani, 2020; Basic, 2015). Scholars such as Badi (2021) and Saidin & Storm (2024) emphasize that despite a brief moment of optimism following the fall of Gaddafi, Libya quickly descended

into fragmentation and armed conflict due to the absence of viable post-revolutionary governance structures.

Globalization has also emerged as a critical lens for understanding the Arab Spring, especially its influence on the diffusion of democratic ideals, protest tactics, and international responses. The role of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, as well as satellite television channels such as Al Jazeera, in shaping political consciousness and transnational solidarity among Arab youth is well documented (Salam, 2015; Ajibade-Samuel & Akeem, 2016). However, this technologically driven mobilization was often not matched by institutional support after regime collapse. Vilmer (2016) and Abubakar et al. (2021) argue that globalization contributed to both the momentum of the uprising and the fragility of the aftermath. They note that globalized networks facilitated foreign interventions, trans boundary arms flows, and elite competition, weakening state sovereignty and undermining efforts to build inclusive post-revolutionary institutions. Additionally, Trinidad et al. (2019) caution against celebrating the democratizing potential of globalization without addressing the socio-political asymmetries it often reinforces.

Another strand of literature has interrogated the role of international democracy promotion and foreign intervention. Proponents argue that humanitarian interventions—such as those in Kosovo and Sierra Leone—have in some instances helped prevent atrocities and enabled state transitions. However, critics like Zambakari (2016), Lumeno (2025), and Archibugi & Cellini (2017) contend that democracy promotion has often been inconsistent and selective, shaped more by geopolitical interests than normative commitments. Libya, they argue, exemplifies the pitfalls of externally enforced regime change. While NATO’s 2011 intervention succeeded in removing Gaddafi, it failed to lay the groundwork for post-conflict reconstruction. Unlike the protracted interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, Libya was subject to a “light footprint” strategy that ignored local complexities and institutional voids (Fernandez, 2023). Melcangi & Mezran (2022) and Mabea (2023) further stress that international actors lacked a coherent roadmap for democratization, resulting in prolonged conflict, fragmented legitimacy, and proxy warfare.

The literature also reflects a growing recognition that democratization in post-Arab Spring societies has been uneven and contingent. While countries like Tunisia made modest democratic gains, others like Libya, Syria, and Yemen fell into protracted crises. Sawani (2018) and Delirpoor (2020) highlight the role of internal variables such as elite fragmentation, institutional erosion, and regional cleavages in stalling democratic consolidation. These domestic weaknesses, they argue, were

exacerbated—not resolved—by external interventions. The failure of Libya’s transitional governance structures, from the National Transitional Council (NTC) to subsequent rival parliaments, illustrates how rushed elections and donor-driven governance models were unsuited to Libya’s sociopolitical realities (Mezran, 2018; Ezugwu et al., 2023).

Despite this growing literature, few studies offer a combined analysis of Libya’s failed democratization through both an international and domestic lens. Most accounts treat the country’s collapse as either a case of internal dysfunction or as the outcome of foreign intervention, without bridging the two. Capasso (2020) and Barltrop (2019) engage with the political economy of oil and geopolitical rivalries, yet rarely frame these in terms of democratization theory. Similarly, while some scholarship has addressed the role of UN peace initiatives and the Berlin process, there is little integration of theoretical frameworks such as Structural Realism or Democratic Transition Theory to systematically assess the failures of globalized democracy-building.

Gap in the Literature

This study identifies a gap in the intersectional analysis of globalization, democracy, and democratization in post-Arab Spring Libya. While existing literature has adequately addressed the causes of the Libyan uprising and the role of external intervention in Gaddafi’s removal, few studies explicitly connect these to the country’s democratization failure. There is insufficient exploration of how global norms, strategic interests, and institutional fragility jointly disrupted Libya’s transition. By integrating insights from Structural Realism and Democratic Transition Theory, this study offers a dual-level analysis that situates Libya’s democratization not only within its internal weaknesses but also within the broader international system. It contributes to the literature by highlighting the paradoxes of globalization-driven regime change and drawing attention to the structural and strategic impediments to democratization in fragile post-authoritarian contexts.

Empirical Review

Pre-Arab Spring Libya: Political Order and Authoritarian Stability

Before the Arab Spring, Libya stood out as one of Africa’s wealthiest nations, buoyed by its vast oil reserves and a state-driven economic model that prioritized social welfare (Elwerfelli, 2016). Under Muammar Gaddafi, who ruled from 1969 until 2011, Libya maintained relative political stability, albeit under an authoritarian system that suppressed opposition (Randall, 2015). Gaddafi’s

governance, shaped by his ideological vision outlined in *The Green Book*, blended socialism with a form of direct popular rule that sought to minimize conventional state structures (Basic, 2015). This system, while ensuring centralized control, also created a paradoxical political environment where stability coexisted with repression (Sawani, 2020). Economically, Libya benefited immensely from oil revenues, which funded large-scale infrastructure projects, subsidized essential commodities, and maintained one of the highest living standards in Africa (Etelewi, 2015). However, this wealth was unevenly distributed, and the absence of institutionalized governance structures meant that the country's stability was largely dependent on Gaddafi's control rather than a sustainable political framework (Musa, 2024).

Essentially, Libya's oil wealth was the cornerstone of its economic success. As a member of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Libya possessed some of the largest proven oil reserves in Africa, which accounted for nearly 95% of its export earnings and over half of its GDP (Elwerfelli, 2016). This revenue stream, as opined by Sawani (2020), allowed the state to invest in ambitious development projects, including housing, healthcare, and education. Under Gaddafi, Libya implemented a socialist-inspired economic model that emphasized state ownership of key industries while simultaneously discouraging private enterprise (Yahaya, 2019). The government provided free healthcare and education, and Libyans enjoyed one of the highest per capita incomes on the continent (Nkapnwo, 2015). Hence, Elwerfelli (2016) observes that by regional standards, the country had impressive human development indicators, with low poverty rates and widespread access to basic services. However, economic mismanagement, corruption, and an overreliance on oil made Libya vulnerable to economic shocks (Etelawi, 2015).

Politically, Libya's stability rested on an unconventional system that rejected traditional governance structures. Gaddafi dismantled parliamentary institutions and replaced them with a complex system of popular committees and revolutionary councils (Sawani, 2020). In theory, this was meant to create a form of direct democracy where citizens governed themselves through local assemblies (Yoo, 2024). In practice, however, real power remained concentrated in Gaddafi's inner circle, and political dissent was systematically suppressed (Yahaya, 2019). Opposition parties were banned, and political activists faced severe persecution. Despite this authoritarian framework, Libya avoided the large-scale civil conflicts that plagued many of its neighbors. Gaddafi's security apparatus, including a well-funded military and intelligence network, ensured compliance, while his ability to co-opt tribal leaders helped maintain order (Alfasi, 2017). His regime also

projected an image of pan-African leadership, using oil wealth to finance continental initiatives and mediate regional conflicts (Suhfree, 2019).

Socially, Libya experienced relative cohesion, though tensions simmered beneath the surface. The government invested heavily in social programs, and the literacy rate improved significantly under Gaddafi's rule (Randall, 2015). Women had greater access to education and employment compared to many other Arab states, and the government promoted policies aimed at modernizing society (Yahaya, 2019). However, political and economic power remained concentrated in specific elite groups, particularly those aligned with Gaddafi's tribal and regional affiliations. Ethnic minorities, such as the Berbers, faced systemic marginalization, and any form of identity-based political expression was prohibited (Ontiri, 2023). Additionally, while Libya avoided the extreme poverty found in other parts of Africa, economic benefits were not evenly distributed, leading to growing frustration among certain segments of the population (Capasso, 2020).

Despite these contradictions, Libya before the Arab Spring was often perceived as a relatively stable and prosperous state, especially when compared to other countries in the region. This perception, however, obscured underlying grievances that would later fuel the uprising (Saidin & Storm, 2024). Hence Badi (2021) noted that Gaddafi's centralized nature of governance, the suppression of political freedoms, and the dependence on oil revenue without institutionalized economic structures created a fragile stability—one that unraveled quickly when confronted with mass protests and external pressures.

Globalization and the 2011 Uprising in Libya

The Arab Spring in Libya did not emerge in isolation; it was deeply embedded within broader processes of globalization. The role of globalization in Libya's 2011 uprising can be understood through several interrelated dynamics: the rapid flow of information and ideas, international economic influences, and direct foreign intervention (Nikfar, 2020). Unlike earlier revolts or domestic coups in Libya's political history, the Arab Spring was shaped by transnational forces that transcended national borders, amplifying both the causes and consequences of the revolution (Ajibade & Akeem, 2016). As Falk (2016) posits, globalization facilitated the diffusion of democratic aspirations, heightened economic vulnerabilities, and ultimately paved the way for international military intervention that sealed Gaddafi's fate.

One of the most significant mechanisms through which globalization influenced Libya's Arab Spring was the spread of information. The rise of digital communication platforms, particularly satellite television and social media, created unprecedented connectivity among Libyans and the wider Arab world (Ehdeed, 2019). Pan-Arab networks such as Al Jazeera played a crucial role in broadcasting the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, inspiring similar movements across the region (Shehabat, 2015). Meanwhile, platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube enabled activists to share real-time updates, organize protests, and draw international attention to human rights abuses. These tools undermined the Libyan regime's traditional control over information, as the decentralized nature of digital networks outpaced the state's censorship mechanisms (Blagojevic & Scekcic, 2022). For a society long suppressed under authoritarian rule, the exposure to global narratives of resistance served as both a mirror and a call to action (Ajibade & Akeem, 2016).

Economic globalization also played a pivotal role in laying the groundwork for the 2011 uprising. Despite Libya's immense oil wealth, globalization had intensified economic disparities. While a small elite connected to Gaddafi's inner circle benefited disproportionately, large segments of the population—especially the youth—faced unemployment, poor living standards, and economic stagnation (Elwerfelli, 2016). The global financial crisis of 2008 further exacerbated public frustration, as declining oil revenues forced the state to reduce subsidies and cut back on public expenditure (Iftikhar, 2024). Libya's limited integration into the global economy, owing to decades of sanctions and policy isolation, also left it ill-prepared to capitalize on global markets (Nephew, 2018). When Gaddafi attempted market liberalization in the early 2000s, the reforms were poorly executed, leading to the concentration of wealth in the hands of regime loyalists and increasing disillusionment among the marginalized classes (Musa, 2024).

Beyond economic and informational influences, globalization directly shaped the course of the uprising through international intervention. While revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt led to internal political transitions, Libya's movement rapidly escalated into armed conflict that attracted foreign involvement (Saidin & Storm, 2024). The United Nations Security Council, invoking humanitarian concerns, adopted Resolution 1973, authorizing a NATO-led military intervention to protect civilians. This was justified using the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm, a global doctrine promoting international action to prevent mass atrocities (Muthaura, 2024). However, as Wamulume et al. (2022) note, the intervention did more than protect civilians—it decisively tilted the balance in favor of anti-Gaddafi forces and contributed to the regime's collapse. The framing of Libya's uprising as

part of a global democratic wave illustrates how globalization was instrumental in reimagining local conflicts within broader ideological paradigms (Ajibade & Akeem, 2016).

Nonetheless, the aftermath of the intervention highlights the double-edged nature of globalization. While global institutions and military coalitions hastened Gaddafi's fall, they did not commit to post-conflict reconstruction with equal enthusiasm. As Vilmer (2016) argues, the vacuum created by the regime's collapse was not filled with international support for governance, leading instead to fragmentation and protracted instability. Abubakar et al. (2021) further contend that the same global networks that facilitated revolution enabled the proliferation of arms and foreign fighters, fueling militia expansion and civil strife. Libya's borders became porous, and Gaddafi's weapon stockpiles destabilized the Sahel, amplifying insecurity across West and Central Africa (Kwaja, 2021).

In sum, globalization played a paradoxical role in Libya's Arab Spring. It empowered citizens with the tools, information, and transnational solidarity to challenge authoritarianism. Yet it also exposed the state to external manipulation, incomplete transitions, and new vulnerabilities. As Randall (2015) notes, the failure of global actors to follow through on democratization efforts in fragile contexts like Libya reveals the limits of liberal internationalism. The Libyan case therefore underscores a critical insight: while globalization can accelerate political change, it does not guarantee institutional stability or democratic consolidation, especially in post-authoritarian states with weak governance structures.

Democratic Aspirations and Mobilization during the Arab Spring in Libya

The Arab Spring in Libya was driven by a collective yearning for democracy, human rights, and political freedom. Inspired by revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, Libyans mobilized against decades of authoritarian rule under Muammar Gaddafi, seeking to replace a highly centralized and repressive system with democratic governance (Abushouk, 2016). Initially, the uprising was fueled by popular optimism and a strong desire for change, with democracy positioned as both a goal and a symbol of national renewal. However, as the post-revolutionary period unfolded, the gap between democratic aspirations and political reality widened significantly (Saidin & Storm, 2024).

The call for democracy was at the heart of Libya's revolutionary discourse. Protesters envisioned a political system grounded in pluralism, rule of law, accountability, and citizen participation (Badi, 2021). The National Transitional

Council (NTC), which emerged during the uprising as the political face of the revolution, pledged to steer the country toward democratic governance. This included commitments to draft a new constitution, hold inclusive elections, and rebuild the state (Kashiem, 2017). The optimism reached its peak in 2012 when Libya held its first democratic elections in decades, resulting in the formation of the General National Congress (GNC). The election marked a dramatic shift from Gaddafi's legacy, with active political participation and the emergence of diverse political voices (Pack & Cook, 2015).

However, democratic consolidation quickly stalled due to structural weaknesses inherited from the Gaddafi era. The former regime had deliberately dismantled state institutions, concentrating power in informal networks loyal to Gaddafi. Consequently, Libya lacked the bureaucratic and institutional infrastructure required to implement and sustain a democratic transition (Sawani, 2020). The security sector was fragmented, with no unified military or police force. In the absence of central authority, armed militias—many of which had fought against Gaddafi—emerged as *de facto* power holders. Rather than disarming, they entrenched themselves in local power structures and resisted central governance (Badi, 2021).

Ideological divisions further hindered the transition. Libya's post-Gaddafi political landscape became polarized between Islamist and secular factions, each advancing competing visions for the country's future. Disagreements over constitutional provisions, electoral laws, and the role of religion in governance created persistent deadlock (Sawani, 2018). Delirpoor (2020) argues that the lack of a cohesive national identity and deep-seated tribal and regional rivalries exacerbated these tensions. The crisis escalated in 2014 when contested parliamentary elections led to a political schism, resulting in the formation of two rival governments: the House of Representatives (HoR) based in Tobruk and the General National Congress (GNC) operating from Tripoli (Melcangi & Mezran, 2022). This dual power structure plunged Libya into a second civil war and derailed the democratization process (Quamar, 2020).

External actors also played a divisive role. Countries that had supported the anti-Gaddafi uprising began backing different sides in the conflict. Turkey and Qatar lent support to Islamist-oriented factions, while Egypt, the UAE, and later Russia supported secular and military-aligned groups (Saeed, 2025; Zoubir, 2020). These external interventions undermined national reconciliation efforts and transformed Libya into a proxy battlefield for regional and international rivalries (Lumeno, 2025). According to Ezugwu and Kehinde (2023), the international community's

inconsistent and fragmented approach contributed to the collapse of transitional governance structures and the erosion of public trust.

Ultimately, Libya's failure to realize its democratic aspirations underscores the challenges of democratization in post-authoritarian, conflict-prone societies. The overthrow of an authoritarian leader, while symbolically powerful, did not translate into institutional reform or inclusive governance. Instead, Libya's political transition was consumed by militia rule, elite fragmentation, and foreign manipulation (Musa, 2024). The Libyan case serves as a cautionary example of how revolutions grounded in democratic ideals can falter without strong institutions, national unity, and sustained international support for democratization.

Global Interventions and Libya's Democratization Process

The trajectory of Libya's democracy after the Arab Spring was heavily shaped by global interventions, which initially facilitated regime change but later contributed to the country's prolonged instability. The international response to Libya's 2011 uprising was framed as a humanitarian mission aimed at protecting civilians and promoting democracy (Malito, 2019). However, the long-term consequences of external involvement revealed the complexities of foreign interventions in domestic political transitions (Saidin & Storm, 2024). While military action helped dismantle Gaddafi's authoritarian regime, the lack of sustained international engagement in post-conflict reconstruction left Libya without a clear path toward democratic stability (Selmi, 2025). Instead of facilitating democratic consolidation, global interventions inadvertently reinforced state fragility, enabling power struggles and prolonging Libya's political crisis (Ezugwu et al., 2023).

The first and most decisive global intervention in Libya came through the United Nations Security Council's Resolution 1973, which authorized a no-fly zone and military action to protect civilians from Gaddafi's forces (Martinsen, 2016). This resolution laid the foundation for NATO's military campaign, which played a crucial role in toppling the regime. The justification for intervention was rooted in the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, which sought to prevent mass atrocities (Wamulume et al., 2022). However, NATO's intervention went beyond protecting civilians and actively facilitated regime change, raising questions about the true motivations behind global involvement in Libya's affairs (Terry, 2015). The swift military action, combined with the absence of a comprehensive post-conflict stabilization strategy, created a power vacuum that proved detrimental to Libya's democratic aspirations (Mabera, 2023).

In the immediate aftermath of Gaddafi's fall, international actors failed to provide the necessary support for state-building efforts (Ningtyas, 2020). Unlike previous interventions where post-conflict governance structures were established—such as in Iraq and Afghanistan—Libya was largely left to manage its transition alone (Vilmer, 2016). The National Transitional Council (NTC), which had received diplomatic recognition and material support during the revolution, struggled to assert authority over the country (Fernandez, 2023). The international community's reluctance to commit to long-term reconstruction efforts resulted in Libya's rapid descent into factionalism, with various militias and political groups vying for control (Zambakari, 2016). Crucial democratization initiatives—such as electoral reforms, constitution drafting, and transitional justice mechanisms—lacked international coordination and domestic legitimacy. These efforts were often rushed, externally influenced, or obstructed by internal factions, resulting in weak implementation and declining public trust in democratic processes. The lack of a coordinated global response to Libya's post-revolution governance challenges meant that democratic institutions were unable to take root in the fragile political landscape (Basic, 2015).

As Libya's post-Arab Spring crisis deepened, foreign actors became increasingly involved in the country's internal conflicts, often exacerbating divisions rather than promoting democratic stability (Lumeno, 2025). Western nations, which had supported the revolution, largely withdrew from Libya's political process, leaving a vacuum that regional powers quickly filled. Countries such as Turkey, Qatar, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates backed rival factions, transforming Libya into a proxy battleground (Melcangi & Mezran, 2022). This external interference further fragmented Libya's political landscape, making it nearly impossible to establish a unified democratic government. Consequently, the presence of foreign mercenaries, arms transfers, and strategic alliances between local militias and international actors prolonged the conflict, ensuring that no single government could establish legitimate authority (Kasa, 2022).

Despite multiple international attempts to broker peace and facilitate a democratic transition, Libya's political crisis persisted. The United Nations played a central role in mediation efforts, sponsoring various peace talks and transitional frameworks, including the Libyan Political Agreement of 2015, which sought to unify the rival governments (Wantanabe, 2019). However, these agreements often failed to produce lasting solutions due to a combination of local resistance and external interference. The 2020 Berlin Conference, which aimed to bring together international stakeholders to de-escalate the conflict, highlighted the extent to which Libya's crisis had become a globalized conflict rather than a purely

domestic struggle (Melcangi & Mezran, 2022). While these diplomatic initiatives emphasized democratic governance, their implementation was continually undermined by competing interests both within and outside Libya (Fernandez, 2023).

Ultimately, global interventions in Libya illustrate the paradox of international involvement in democratic transitions. While external actors played a critical role in overthrowing authoritarian rule, their failure to ensure a stable political transition contributed to the very instability they had sought to prevent (Badi, 2021). Libya's post-Arab Spring democratization process is thus shaped by a series of contradictions: intervention in the name of democracy led to prolonged instability, and the absence of sustained global support enabled factionalism and conflict (Njie & Ozoral, 2022; Saidin & Storm, 2024). This contradiction reflects a broader dilemma in international politics: the promotion of democratization is often entangled with geopolitical calculations, where the legitimacy of elections and institutions is secondary to strategic alliances and military leverage. This outcome underscores the limitations of external interventions in fostering democracy, particularly in contexts where internal divisions and institutional weaknesses remain unresolved (Archibugi & Cellini, 2017).

Post-Arab Spring Libya: The Collapse of Democratization

The aftermath of the Arab Spring left Libya in a state of profound political and economic disarray. Rather than ushering in a stable democracy and economic revival, the removal of Muammar Gaddafi triggered a prolonged period of governance collapse, factional conflict, and economic deterioration (Falk, 2016; Capasso, 2020). The inability to establish effective state institutions, coupled with persistent violence and external interference, prevented Libya from achieving the stability necessary for political reconstruction, democratic development, and economic growth (Lumeno, 2025). As a result, Libya transitioned from a once relatively prosperous oil-rich state to a fragmented and unstable entity struggling with deep-rooted crises (Pedde, 2017).

One of the most significant indicators of Libya's post-Arab Spring political failure was the fragmentation of governance (Selmi, 2025). The initial optimism surrounding the formation of transitional authorities quickly faded as competing factions sought control over the country's political direction. By 2014, Libya had effectively split into two rival governments: the House of Representatives (HoR) in the east, backed by the Libyan National Army (LNA) under Khalifa Haftar, and the General National Congress (GNC) in the west, later succeeded by the UN-backed

Government of National Accord (GNA) (Mezran, 2018). This political divide not only led to administrative paralysis but also fueled military confrontations that further weakened governance structures and derailed efforts at democratization.

The lack of centralized authority created a security vacuum, which allowed numerous armed groups to emerge as power brokers. Militia factions, often organized along ideological, tribal, or regional lines, operated autonomously, challenging any attempts at national governance (Mousa, 2024). The rise of extremist groups, including ISIS, further exacerbated Libya's instability, as the country became a battleground for both domestic and foreign actors (Lumeno, 2025). Repeated international mediation efforts, such as the Skhirat Agreement of 2015 and the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum of 2020, struggled to establish a unified government due to deep-seated mistrust among Libya's competing factions (Apuuli, 2021). The result was a cycle of failed agreements, continued armed conflict, and political deadlock, preventing Libya from developing sustainable governance structures essential for democratization (Kasa, 2022).

In terms of democratic consolidation, Libya's transition lacked a coherent institutional framework to translate revolutionary momentum into sustainable governance. Although elections were held in 2012 and again in 2014, both electoral cycles failed to produce lasting legitimacy due to disputes over results, weak electoral institutions, and exclusionary political practices (Mezran & Pack, 2013). The constitution-drafting process, initially launched with high expectations, was marred by political boycotts, regional divisions, and security threats that prevented consensus. As Delirpoor (2020) notes, Libya's democratization stalled not only due to the absence of institutions but also because of the lack of inclusive dialogue among key stakeholders. Civic engagement, once vibrant during the revolution, was gradually replaced by public disillusionment as warlords and external actors sidelined democratic actors. The persistent lack of a legitimate national authority undermined public trust in the democratization process, while successive transitional frameworks failed to include women, minorities, and youth in meaningful ways (Ezugwu & Kehinde, 2023). Ultimately, the collapse of democratization was not only institutional but societal, as the window of democratic opportunity closed under the weight of violence, exclusion, and fragmented sovereignty.

Economically, Libya suffered a dramatic decline following Gaddafi's fall, primarily due to the collapse of state institutions and the disruption of oil production (Capasso, 2020). As an oil-dependent economy, Libya's stability had been closely tied to its ability to export crude oil, which accounted for more than

90% of government revenue (Elwerfelli, 2016). However, post-Arab Spring conflicts led to the frequent shutdown of oil fields and export terminals, as rival factions sought control over the country's most valuable resource (Pedde, 2017). The National Oil Corporation (NOC) struggled to maintain production amid attacks on energy infrastructure, blockades, and competing claims over oil revenues by rival governments (Barltrop, 2019). The economic impact of these disruptions was devastating, as Libya experienced soaring inflation, currency devaluation, and widespread unemployment (Njie, 2022).

The breakdown of economic governance further deepened Libya's crisis. Corruption and mismanagement plagued the country's financial institutions, with different factions controlling parallel banking systems (Romanet, 2019). The lack of a unified central government meant that economic policies were inconsistent, leading to shortages of basic goods and services (Capasso, 2020). Libya's banking system also suffered from a severe liquidity crisis, making it difficult for citizens to access cash, while public sector wages became increasingly difficult to pay (Sawani, 2018). The humanitarian consequences of economic collapse were severe, with millions of Libyans facing deteriorating living conditions, lack of healthcare services, and displacement due to ongoing violence (Ifedi & Ezechi, 2019).

Libya's post-Arab Spring trajectory underscores the profound challenges of state-building in the aftermath of authoritarian collapse. The absence of strong institutions, the prevalence of militia rule, and the politicization of economic resources turned Libya into a failed state despite its immense wealth and strategic importance (Musa, 2024). While international actors intermittently attempted to broker peace and facilitate governance structures, their efforts were frequently undermined by competing interests and Libya's entrenched internal divisions (Kasa, 2022). Consequently, instead of emerging as a model of democratic transition, Libya became a cautionary example of how revolution can lead to prolonged instability and the collapse of democratization when state institutions are weak and external interventions fail to provide long-term solutions.

Conclusion

The Libyan experience after the Arab Spring reveals the complex and contradictory interplay between globalization, democracy, and democratization. This study set out to examine how global forces, particularly digital communication, international norms, and foreign interventions, influenced the course of Libya's revolution and its attempted transition to democracy. It found

that while globalization enabled the dissemination of democratic ideals and facilitated regime change (Ajibade & Akeem, 2016; Nikfar, 2020), it also accelerated state fragmentation, undermined national sovereignty, and disrupted institution-building in a fragile post-authoritarian environment (Vilmer, 2016; Selmi, 2025). The failure to develop cohesive democratic structures and the persistence of factionalism and external meddling explain Libya's stalled democratization (Badi, 2021; Njie & Ozoral, 2022).

In addressing these dynamics, this study contributes to the scholarly discourse on post-Arab Spring transitions by interrogating the assumption that external democratization efforts—whether through soft power or military intervention—necessarily produce stable democratic outcomes. It aligns with critical literature that questions the liberal peacebuilding paradigm (Archibugi & Cellini, 2017; Lumeno, 2025) and highlights the need for indigenous, institution-focused approaches. The Libyan case, as analyzed here, offers a cautionary perspective that enriches ongoing debates about the role of global actors in state-building and the limitations of externally driven democratic transitions in politically fragmented and institutionally weak contexts (Saidin & Storm, 2024; Zambakari, 2016).

Ultimately, Libya's post-Gaddafi trajectory illustrates that democratization is not a guaranteed outcome of revolution or regime collapse. Without inclusive political processes, institutional resilience, and strategic international support focused on governance rather than regime change (Ezugwu & Kehinde, 2023; Fernandez, 2023), democratization is likely to fail. The findings of this study therefore underscore the importance of sequencing, legitimacy, and capacity in any democratic transition—especially in societies emerging from prolonged authoritarianism and conflict (Sawani, 2020; Musa, 2024).

Recommendations

To reverse Libya's democratic decline and rebuild a viable state, policy responses must be rooted in the country's unique historical, institutional, and socio-political realities. First, Libya's path to stability requires the establishment of a legitimate and inclusive political framework. The competing governments and fragmented authority that emerged after Gaddafi's fall have undermined national unity (Selmi, 2025; Mezran, 2018). A national reconciliation process—led by Libyan actors but supported by neutral international facilitators—should prioritize dialogue among rival factions, marginalized communities, and civil society actors. This process must culminate in a constitutional convention and elections underpinned by an inclusive and credible legal framework (Zambakari, 2016).

Second, democratization cannot proceed without a comprehensive reform of the security sector. The proliferation of militias, enabled by the absence of a national army, has weakened governance and perpetuated violence (Badi, 2021). A robust disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) program should be implemented in tandem with the rebuilding of national security institutions based on professional, accountable, and civilian oversight (Musa, 2024). This also requires stronger border control mechanisms to stem the inflow of arms and external actors (Lumeno, 2025).

Third, Libya's economic reconstruction must be strategically linked to political stabilization. Oil remains the country's economic backbone, but its politicization has deepened factional conflict (Barltrop, 2019). The National Oil Corporation should be protected from political interference and placed under transparent regulatory oversight to ensure equitable distribution of revenues (Capasso, 2020). Moreover, efforts should be made to diversify the economy—particularly through investment in agriculture, education, and local enterprise—to reduce dependence on hydrocarbons and generate employment for Libya's youth (Njie, 2022).

Fourth, international engagement must shift from military-driven interventionism to institution-building and democratic capacity development. The inconsistency and factional bias of foreign actors have exacerbated Libya's divisions (Ezugwu & Kehinde, 2023). A new international consensus—centered on neutrality, long-term technical support, and the promotion of democratic norms—is necessary (Saeed, 2025). Regional organizations such as the African Union and Arab League should be more actively engaged to mediate conflict in ways that reflect local realities (Wantanabe, 2019; Archibugi & Cellini, 2017).

Finally, addressing Libya's humanitarian crisis is fundamental to restoring state legitimacy. Years of conflict have displaced millions, strained public services, and fostered widespread poverty (Ifedi & Ezechi, 2019). Humanitarian responses must be integrated into long-term development planning. Strengthening institutions in health, education, and infrastructure—particularly in neglected regions—will improve public trust in governance and lay the groundwork for sustainable democratization (Fernandez, 2023).

These recommendations underscore the need for a coordinated, multi-level strategy that balances political dialogue, institutional reform, economic renewal, and responsible international partnership. Without such a strategy, Libya risks remaining trapped in a cycle of instability where the promise of democracy is perpetually deferred.

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