THE USE AND ABUSE OF TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE NORMS IN THE WAKE OF THE ARAB SPRING

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In the wake of the Arab Spring, governments, new regimes and survivors alike, have used transitional justice norms to boost their legitimacy and cement themselves in power. This paper examines the political dynamics behind the transitional justice choices that have been made in Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. Bahrain's monarchy embraced the truth commission model to demonstrate its commitment to human rights, though the Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry has not successfully deflected attention entirely. By contrast, norms of retribution, in the form of trials and political isolation, have been prominent in Egypt and Libya. Finally, Tunisia has engaged with retributive and restorative justice norms, though in doing so in a more inclusive way, society has greater potential to actually benefit. I situate these cases within the broader cross-national transitional justice literature, specifically debates within the transitional justice impact literature. Furthermore, drawing upon the transitional justice experiences of countries in other parts of the world, I outline a series of hypotheses about how transitional justice is likely to influence nascent democratization processes in the Middle East. I conclude by offering policy recommendations regarding how retributive and restorative transitional justice measures could be utilized to better promote genuine democratization in the four countries.