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Abstract

The Arab Spring uprisings that swept across the Middle East and North Africa saw mass movements and demonstrations become an important part of toppling authoritarian governments. The active engagement of ordinary citizens in the uprisings was clearly evident and it challenged perceptions of democracy in the contemporary international system. South Africa's struggle against the apartheid government was also characterised by active citizen engagement, which looked to implement a people-centred form of democracy in the post-apartheid era. Using discourse analysis, this research report seeks to understand South Africa's response to the revolutionary uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, and in doing so, assess the conception of democracy at work in South Africa's foreign policy. The theory of radical democracy is used as a guide to understand the people-centred form of democracy that emerged in the Arab Spring and South African liberation movements. Neoliberalism challenges forms of radical democracy and this challenge is assessed in South Africa's post-apartheid democracy and foreign policy. South Africa's response to the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt reveal the diminishing influence of radical democracy in its foreign policy, which has broader implications for the kind of democracy that South Africa supports in the international system.