

From Tahrir to Independence Square:  
The Evolution of Digitally Mediated Protest Movements 2009 – 2013

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **From Tahrir to Independence Square: The Evolution of Digitally Mediated Protest Movements 2009 – 2013**

Nathan Beriro

The surge in mass protest movements against authoritarian regimes around the world is raising questions about the reasons, motives and timing of such risky political activity. The hailing of social media as an enabler for contentious political action raises questions regarding the political impact of these new technologies, and how they may play a role in fomenting mass protests. A process-tracing analysis of four major protest movements will serve to examine the structural qualities of social media, and whether their particular use by activists and disgruntled publics is helping to spur mass disobedience and protest activity. The movements in Egypt in 2011, Iran in 2009, Turkey in 2013 and Ukraine in 2013 will serve to infer a broadly generalizable theory about social media's role in contentious political activity and mass movements.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Evelyn Benayoun, for her unwavering support, and for her personal commitment to giving her son the confidence and opportunity to pursue his dreams.

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Patiently endured so long as it seemed beyond redress, a grievance comes to appear intolerable once the possibility of removing it crosses men's minds.<sup>1</sup>

## 1) INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the Internet in political affairs has altered the relationship between citizens and their government by creating a space for users to challenge media censorship, organize activist action and disseminate contentious political opinions. In recent years speculation regarding the role played by new communications platforms such as Facebook and Twitter during episodes of contentious action has occasionally overshadowed the role played by the actual protesters who risked their lives in the name of ideals such as freedom and democracy. Most notably, the Arab Spring of 2011 engendered a wave of speculation and scholarly research regarding the role of social networks in fomenting and maintaining revolutions that led to the eventual toppling of long established dictatorships. Such is the focus on these sites that Iran's 2009 upheaval has been dubbed a 'Twitter Revolution', and the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 a 'Facebook Revolution.' These monikers suggest that social networking may have played a defining role in the upheavals, even bearing the brunt of the responsibility for instigating and sustaining the revolts. Despite celebrations of the "emancipatory power of communication technologies," little is known about how new media reshape contemporary political movements and affect the size, duration and frequency of protest activity.<sup>2</sup> Moreover Iran's 2009 post-electoral upheaval failed in bringing about regime change or even a vote recount. This - coupled to the fact that successful revolutions have taken

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<sup>1</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* (1856), trans. Stuart Gilbert (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955), 177.

<sup>2</sup> Paulo Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*, (Pluto Press: London, 2012): 2.

place long before the advent of social media - begs the question: What is the role of social media in fomenting popular upheaval?

### **1.1) PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The revolutionary fervor that has gripped populations living under authoritarian regimes is the result of complex factors binding politics, economics, religion and technology. The questions of why these revolutions occurred will be pondered and debated by social scientists for years to come and is not within the scope of this thesis. The question that does arise in the aftermath of recent events is:

**What is the role played by political social networking in the lead-up to, and during episodes of contentious political action, and do social networks help activists mobilize mass protest movements?**

I will seek to answer this question by studying the different ways in which social media are used to mobilize and organize protest movements, analyzing events on the ground during recent episodes of mass protest in order to understand whether we can derive theoretical insight into the politics of social movements and revolutions. In order to answer the question, I will analyze four different cases that may allow me to develop a parsimonious theory with large explanatory power. In this respect I will focus specifically on the real-world impact of social media on contentious political behavior and will identify candidate conditions required for social media to have such an impact, allowing the theory to gain “prescriptive richness” and to lead to “tangible policy recommendations” if tested empirically.<sup>3</sup> In order to develop this theory I will use an

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997): 21.

inductive process, looking for causal relationships between phenomena that occurred prior to and during episodes of mass protest in Cairo in 2011, Tehran in 2009, Istanbul in 2013, and Kiev in 2013.

## **1.2) TERMS**

Before proceeding, I will define ‘social media’, and provide an example of its use over the course of the popular revolution that shook Egypt in early 2011. This will serve to shed some light on what is meant by the term ‘political social networking.’ Social media are an integral part of the “new media” landscape, which is composed primarily of “Internet-based communication technologies and methods that most people can readily differentiate from ‘old’ media.”<sup>4</sup> Often labeled Web 2.0, these new media “generally involve user-generated content, interactivity, and dissemination through networks.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Social Media**

Social Media are a “group of Internet- based applications that build on the foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation, exchange of user- generated content.”<sup>6</sup> The most popular social media sites are user-generated content communities such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, which “in addition to text-based communication, enable the sharing of pictures, videos, and other forms of media.”<sup>7</sup> These online communities are

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<sup>4</sup> Sean Aday, Henry Farrell, Mark Lynch, John Sides, John Kelly and Ethan Zuckerman. “Blogs and Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics.” *Peaceworks* 65, (Washington DC: US Institute of Peace, 2011): 28.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Andreas M. Kaplan and Michael Haenlein, “Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media,” *Business Horizons* 53, (2010): 61.

<sup>7</sup> Kaplan and Haenlein, “Users of the world, unite!” 62.

increasingly employed by social movements throughout the world to share politically contentious information and foment popular upheaval against established authorities. In order to better describe how activists and protest communities used these tools, I will first provide a brief overview of their structural features.

## **Facebook**

Facebook is a social networking interface that allows people to communicate with acquaintances, “friends, family and coworkers.”<sup>8</sup> The company facilitates “the sharing of information” through a website and mobile applications that create digital versions of “people’s real world social connections.”<sup>9</sup> Anyone can sign up for Facebook and interact with the people they know by simply ‘adding’ them to their friend list. Facebook also allows users to “form groups” where they may “speak freely to one another” through the exchange of public messages, photographs, pamphlets and video.<sup>10</sup> While some users choose to exert a certain level of control over the visibility of their personal content and friend lists, others create pages and groups that are freely accessible and visible to anyone using the application. As of December 2013, the site had 1.23 billion “monthly active users,” with “approximately 81% of [the] daily active users ... outside the U.S. and Canada.”<sup>11</sup> According to Facebook, in 2013, over “945 million monthly active users” used Facebook on mobile products.<sup>12</sup>

## **Twitter**

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<sup>8</sup> “About Facebook,” *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/peering/>.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Samanth M. Shapiro, “Revolution, Facebook Style,” *The New York Times*, January 22, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> “Newsroom,” *Facebook*, <https://newsroom.fb.com/key-Facts>.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

Twitter describes itself as “a real-time information network that connects you to the latest stories, ideas, opinions and news about what you find interesting.”<sup>13</sup> Twitter allows users to send out messages - called ‘tweets’ – of up to 140 characters. Users can follow one another by simply clicking on a ‘follow’ function, which will make them recipients of all of the messages posted by the users they follow. Users can also communicate by creating and searching for hashtags such as #egypt. Hashtags are key words created by users preceded by a # symbol, denoting a term that has gained following and importance. At the time of writing, Twitter had “230 million active users,” posting “an average of 500 million Tweets every day.”<sup>14</sup>

## **Youtube**

YouTube “allows billions of people to discover, watch and share originally-created videos,” and acts as a “distribution platform for original video content creators.”<sup>15</sup>

YouTube enables people to upload, share and promote video content on YouTube.com.

Videos can subsequently be embedded and broadcast “across the Internet through websites, mobile devices, blogs, and email.”<sup>16</sup> Youtube videos have a comment section where users may express political views, comments and opinions.

## **Political social networking**

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<sup>13</sup> “About Twitter,” *Twitter*, <http://twitter.com/about/>.

<sup>14</sup> “Who’s on Twitter?” *Twitter*, <https://business.twitter.com/whos-twitter>.

<sup>15</sup> “About Youtube,” *Youtube*, <https://www.youtube.com/yt/about/>.

<sup>16</sup> Youtube,” *Mashable.com*. <http://mashable.com/category/youtube/>.

Political social networking occurs when one or more of these online services are used to generate awareness, conversation, or propaganda regarding grievances and political issues that have achieved salience amongst activists. Social media are particularly useful for activist communities who wish to disseminate their ideas to a broader public, because they allow users to react and respond to the information, hence engaging in digitally mediated conversations which they can diffuse across their own personal networks. BBC journalist Paul Mason summarizes the functionalities of social media and how they are used by contemporary activists:

Facebook is used to form groups, covert and overt—in order to establish those strong but flexible connections. Twitter is used for real-time organization and news dissemination, bypassing the cumbersome ‘newsgathering’ operations of the mainstream media. YouTube and the Twitter-linked photographic sites— Yfrog, Flickr and Twitpic—are used to provide instant evidence of the claims being made.<sup>17</sup>

### **1.3) IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY**

Recent events suggest that social media enhances the ability of repressed peoples to communicate and organize dissent quickly and effectively, helping them overturn regimes long perceived to be unshakable. The 2011 revolution in Egypt and the 2009 upheaval in Iran are potent examples of the internet’s role in “empowering a range of non-state actors in ways that challenge all governments’ relationships with their citizens.”<sup>18</sup> Yet despite the occurrence of a ‘Twitter revolution’ and a ‘Facebook revolution,’ “policymakers and scholars know very little about whether and how new media affect contentious politics.”<sup>19</sup> Aggregation of data regarding the use social media

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Mason, “Global unrest: how the revolution went viral,” *The Guardian*, January 3, 2012. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/03/how-the-revolution-went-viral>

<sup>18</sup> Rebecca Mackinnon, “Internet Freedom’ in the Age of Assange,” *Foreign Policy*, Feb. 11, 2011. [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/17/internet\\_freedom\\_in\\_the\\_age\\_of\\_assange](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/17/internet_freedom_in_the_age_of_assange).

<sup>19</sup> Sean Aday et al. “Blogs and Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics,” 3.

during the revolutionary upheavals that occurred in Egypt and Tunisia in 2010-2011 does show that social media can be used effectively to connect and coordinate diverse groups and individuals in favor of targeted political activism, however the question of ‘how’ they do so remains unanswered.<sup>20</sup> Initial analyses of the Egyptian uprising point to the likelihood that digital tools allow dissidents to bypass conventional media and create “freedom memes,” that “spread ideas about liberty and revolution to a surprisingly large number of people.”<sup>21</sup> These findings are in tune with former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s “One Internet” speech, given in January 2010, in which she “articulated a powerful vision of the Internet as promoting freedom and global political transformation and rewriting the rules of political engagement and action.”<sup>22</sup> Following the Egyptian revolution of 2011, “the emergence of a ‘Facebook revolution’ was read as a confirmation of the good work done by the US State department and its ‘internet freedom’ agenda. Topping the wave of self-congratulation in June 2011, Alec Ross, Hillary Clinton’s senior adviser, called the internet the ‘Che Guevara of the twenty-first century.’”<sup>23</sup> Clinton’s view falls in line with a determinist analysis of technological innovation, which points to technology’s positive role in promoting activism and protest movements, and in spreading democratic ideals under autocratic regimes. However, the picture is much more complex than it appears. The Iranian upheaval of 2009 failed to achieve its goals despite broad use of social media. Social media even became an impediment to the activists as it allowed the government to target and imprison specific

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<sup>20</sup> Lead researcher Philip N. Howard and his team at the Project on Information Technology and Political Islam recently published a working paper entitled “Opening Closed Regimes: What was the role of Social Media during the Arab Spring” in which they analyze tens of thousands of blog entries, twitter data entries and viral videos on Youtube, and analyzed the structure of the Egyptian political web.

<sup>21</sup> Howard, “Opening Closed Regimes,” 3.

<sup>22</sup> Sean Aday et al. “Blogs and Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics,” 7.

<sup>23</sup> Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, 6.

dissidents, tracking them down long after the revolution had been crushed. Moreover, 2011 is not the first occurrence of sudden regime change instigated by popular revolt. Eastern Europeans lived through a similar period of upheaval whereby six states of the former USSR disbanded from the union and named their own national leaders in the space of one year in 1989, all without the help of social media. Hence the importance of asking: What is social media's role in the creation and mobilization of mass protest movements? Implied in this question is the fact that the size of a protest movement increases the likelihood of affecting change in political structures in that they force leaders to react, either by force or through acquiescence to demands. Both outcomes invariably change the relationship of citizens to the state. Hence, formulating a theory about the perceived causal relation between the occurrence of political social networking and the variable incidence of large democracy movements is important because it may help explain the sudden upsurge in the occurrence of mass protests in recent years, and may help predict how populations living under authoritarian rule may use these new technological tools and resources during future upheavals.

## **2) LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1) OVERVIEW**

The impact of new media on the incidence of mass protest movements under authoritarian regimes is best understood through the frameworks of social movements and resource mobilization theory. These theoretical schools seek to understand why, when and how do people mobilize, and what factors – structural, psychological or material motivates participation in movement. Though these frameworks were developed before

the advent of social media, they will serve to establish the parameters within which specific technological innovations such as the internet and social media may spur popular participation in contentious activity. Starting in the 1990s, social movement theory combined the approaches previously developed by “structuralist and subjectivist scholars,” to develop a new model that “shows the tight fit between subjective perceptions of opportunities, and the structure of opportunities.”<sup>24</sup> In their seminal work on the topic, McCarthy and Zald define a social movement as “a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society.”<sup>25</sup> The actions taken by the aggrieved population affect other segments of the population as “actors respond to what others have done,” and as these groups interact “they build into the broad phenomena we collect under the label ‘social movement.’”<sup>26</sup> Regarding protest action, Doug McAdam argues that the “structure of political opportunities” and “organizational strength” are its “two major determinants.”<sup>27</sup> According to McAdam, these opportunities “will vary greatly over time” and “it is these variations that are held to be related to the ebb and flow of movement activity.”<sup>28</sup> Citing McAdam, Kurzman writes “the crucial point ... is that the political system can be more open or less open to challenge at different times.”<sup>29</sup>

However “structural conditions ... do not automatically translate into protest: They are

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Kurzman, “Structural Opportunity And Perceived Opportunity In Social-Movement Theory: The Iranian Revolution Of 1979,” *American Sociological Review* 61 (1996): 153.

<sup>25</sup> John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, “Social Movements: A Partial Theory,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 82 (1977): 1217.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel J Myers and Pamela Oliver, “Diffusion Models of Cycles of Protest as a Theory of Social Movements,” Paper prepared for presentation at the session on “Describing, Analyzing and Theorizing Social Movements” of Research Committee 48, Social Movements, Collective Action, and Social Change, at the *Congress of the International Sociological Association*, Montreal, July 30, 1998. [www.nd.edu/~dmyers/cbsm/vol3/olmy.pdf](http://www.nd.edu/~dmyers/cbsm/vol3/olmy.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> Kurzman, “Structural Opportunity And Perceived Opportunity In Social-Movement Theory,” 153.

<sup>28</sup> In Kurzman, “Structural Opportunity And Perceived Opportunity In Social-Movement Theory,” 153.

<sup>29</sup> Kurzman, “Structural Opportunity And Perceived Opportunity In Social-Movement Theory,” 153-154.

rather are mediated by ‘cognitive liberation,’ an oppressed people's ability to break out of pessimistic and quiescent patterns of thought and begin to do something about their situation.”<sup>30</sup> In 1996, McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald, developed “a framework intended to explain social movements’ emergence, development and outcomes by addressing three interrelated factors: mobilizing structures, opportunity structures and framing processes.”<sup>31</sup> According to R. Kelly Garrett,

Mobilizing structures refer to the mechanisms that enable individuals to organize and engage in collective action, including social structures and tactical repertoires... Opportunity structures refer to conditions in the environment that favor social movement activity ... Framing processes are strategic attempts to craft, disseminate and contest the language and narratives used to describe a movement.<sup>32</sup>

Social media may represent a crucial adjunct to all of these factors because it reveals the constant existence of activists which Sidney Tarrow calls “early risers”, who initiate protest activity “by making opportunities visible that had not been evident, and their actions may change the structure of opportunities.”<sup>33</sup> The organizing, dissemination and coordination made available by social media effectively give early risers unprecedented means to get their message across to a broad spectrum of potential activists. In order to further explore social media’s role in the processes defined in McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald’s framework, I will discuss recent literature for clues as to how social media may impact mobilizing structures, opportunity structures and framing processes.

## **2.2) MOBILIZATION STRUCTURES**

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<sup>30</sup> Kurzman, “Structural Opportunity And Perceived Opportunity In Social-Movement Theory,” 154.

<sup>31</sup> In R. Kelly Garrett, “Protest in an Information Society: A Review of the Literature on Social Movements and the New ICTs,” *Information, Communication and Society* 9 (2006): 203.

<sup>32</sup> Garrett, “Protest in an Information Society,” 203-204.

<sup>33</sup> Kurzman, “Structural Opportunity And Perceived Opportunity In Social-Movement Theory,” 154.

In 2006, Garrett updated McCarthy's definition so as to apply it to an information society. Garrett divides 'mobilization structures' into three categories defined as 'participation levels', 'contentious activity' and 'organizational issues.'<sup>34</sup>

### **2.2.1) Participation Levels**

Empirical studies conducted by Klandermans in 1984 and Karl-Dieter Opp in 1988 find a correlation "between the expected numerical strength of a protest movement and the likelihood of participation."<sup>35</sup> Moreover, scholars have long hypothesized that computer-mediated communications would reduce "the transaction costs associated with organizing, thereby facilitating collective political action."<sup>36</sup> After analyzing six social movement case studies, Mark Bonchek found that the internet "reduces communication, coordination, and information costs, facilitating collective action by making it easier for groups to form, improving group's efficiency at providing collective goods, increasing the benefits from group membership, and promoting group retention through more informed decision-making."<sup>37</sup> Looking into the impact of specific social media networks, Feezell, Conroy and Guerrero find that participation "in online political groups strongly predicts offline political participation by engaging members online."<sup>38</sup> Khamis and Vaughn find that during the Egyptian protests of January 2011, Facebook's "largest impact was in the mobilization of protesters. In fact, it could be said that the Egyptian revolution witnessed

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<sup>34</sup> Garrett, "Protest in an Information Society," 206.

<sup>35</sup> Kurzman, "Structural Opportunity And Perceived Opportunity In Social-Movement Theory," 155.

<sup>36</sup> In Mark S. Bonchek, "Grassroots in Cyberspace: Using Computer Networks to Facilitate Political Participation," *The Political Participation Project, MIT Artificial Intelligence Laboratory*. Paper presented at the 53rd Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, (Chicago, IL), 1.

<sup>37</sup> Bonchek, "Grassroots in Cyberspace."

<sup>38</sup> Jessica Feezell, Meredith Conroy, and Mario Guerrero. "Facebook is ... Fostering Political Engagement: A Study of Online Social Networking Groups and Offline Participation." Paper prepared for the *American Political Science Association*, (Toronto, 2009).

the first incident of the politicization of Facebook on a grand scale to orchestrate major reform and drastic change.”<sup>39</sup> One explanation of the Facebook impact is found in Garrett’s discussion of the existence of a causal link between “technology and participation” created by “the perception among individuals that they are members of a larger community by virtue of the grievances they share.”<sup>40</sup> This argument is reinforced in Phillip N. Howard’s work on the use of new technologies in Iran’s 2009 uprising. He argues that the use of information technology in Iran “gave social movement leaders the capacity not only to reach out to sympathetic audiences overseas but also to reach two important domestic constituencies: rural, conservative voters who had few connections to the urban chaos; and the clerical establishment.”<sup>41</sup>

### **2.2.2) Contentious Activity**

Central to my research will be the concept of ‘repertoires of contention’, which was theorized and operationalized by Charles Tilly.<sup>42</sup> Charles Tilly describes repertoires of contention as “the whole set of means a group has for making claims of different kinds on different individuals or groups.”<sup>43</sup> The concept provides a framework for examining the development of tactics within social movements because it helps describe “the ways in which people act together in pursuit of shared interests (...) by identifying limited set of

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<sup>39</sup> Khamis and Vaughn, “Cyberactivism in the Egyptian Revolution.”

<sup>40</sup> Garrett, “Protest in an Information Society,” 207.

<sup>41</sup> Philip N. Howard. *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Information Technology and Political Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 8.

<sup>42</sup> Sidney Tarrow, “The People’s Two Rhythms: Charles Tilly and the Study of Contentious Politics. A Review Article,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 38 (1996), 592.

<sup>43</sup> Charles Tilly, *The Contentious French*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 4.

routines that are learned, shared and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choice.”<sup>44</sup> Tilly and Tarrow define the ensuing mechanisms of contention as:

- Brokerage: production of new connection between previously unconnected sites.
- Diffusion: spread of a form of contention, an issue, or a way of framing it from one site to another.
- Coordinated action: two or more actors’ engagement in mutual signaling and parallel making of claims on the same subject.<sup>45</sup>

Tarrow posits that innovation in forms of contention can be understood through two contrasting frameworks, “‘innovation at the margins’ and ‘moments of madness.’”<sup>46</sup>

According to Brent Rolfe, “these approaches suggest that innovation emerges from creativity around existing repertoires, or from large leaps of creativity during times of crisis.”<sup>47</sup> Repertoires therefore “evolve by absorbing those innovations that are most successful, and rejecting those that are not.”<sup>48</sup> Social media may have a direct impact on repertoires of contention because they allow actors to “mobilize rapidly and engage in swarm-like challenges, taking simultaneous action on multiple fronts, and in multiple ways.”<sup>49</sup> These new protest tactics have been increasingly employed in recent episodes of street-based contention, and include such tactics as instant gatherings public squares, dissemination of photographic, audio and video evidence of corruption and police brutality, and the emotionalizing of injustices through dedicated Facebook, Twitter and Youtube pages. Howard finds that social media has been “crucial for the organization of radical youth movements and the use of new protest tactics that undermine authoritarian

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<sup>44</sup> In Sidney Tarrow, Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 30.

<sup>45</sup> Tilly and Tarrow, *Contentious Politics*, 31.

<sup>46</sup> In Brent Rolfe, “Building an Electronic Repertoire of Contention,” *Social Movement Studies* 4 (May, 2005): 67.

<sup>47</sup> Rolfe, “Building an Electronic Repertoire of Contention,” 67.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Garrett, “Protest in an Information Society,” 213.

regimes.”<sup>50</sup> Hence blogs, Twitter and Facebook may enable activists to engage in new forms of contentious activity not only because information regarding popular grievances and protest activity can now travel faster and further than ever before, but also because it travels across bridges of strong (friends) and weak (acquaintances) ties. This phenomena was exhibited during the Egyptian revolts of 2011 when networks with little in common - young, educated, urban elites, labor unions, and the Muslim Brotherhood - took to coordinating tactics and protest activity.

### **2.2.3) Organizational Issues**

Whereas protest activity was once driven through the limited scope of diffusion of close acquaintances, social media may help alleviate the organizational issues that affect contentious activity by spreading personal networks across traditional bridges such as class, occupation, or geographic distance. In his work on networks and the strength of weak ties (acquaintances as opposed to close friends and family), Mark Granovetter argues that

individuals with few weak ties will be deprived of information from distant parts of the social system and will be confined to the provincial news and views of their close friends ... such individuals may be difficult to organize or integrate into political movements of any kind, since membership in movements or goal-oriented organizations typically results from being recruited by friends.<sup>51</sup>

Charlie Beckett similarly finds that “‘weak ties’ have the practical benefit of spreading information, of making people feel part of something. It gives them a sense of solidarity

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<sup>50</sup> Howard, “*The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*,” 155.

<sup>51</sup> Mark Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited,” *Sociological Theory* 1 (1983), 202.

and for some, the ‘permission’ to go further.”<sup>52</sup> Hence, “by reducing communication costs and enabling easy linkages across diverse organizations, the Internet may facilitate network-building based on affinities or relatively loose identifications.”<sup>53</sup> Today, Facebook and other social media are increasingly changing the density of weak ties that any one individual can possess, thus enlarging personal networks, and bridging gaps between pre-existing networks. Granovetter argues “while members of one or two cliques may be efficiently recruited, the problem is that, without weak ties, any momentum generated in this way does not spread beyond the clique.”<sup>54</sup> The strength of social media with regards to contentious activity is therefore that they enable communication between users, who may then link with other users, allowing individuals to transmit their ideas and images to large numbers of acquaintances and even strangers.<sup>55</sup> Writing about the Arab world, Khamis and Vaughan write “it is safe to say that one of the most important avenues through which public opinion trends and public spheres are both shaped, as well as reflected (...) is the Internet.”<sup>56</sup> A recent study by Zhuo, Wellman, and Yu has demonstrated that whereas “strong ties convinced friends and family to join” the Egyptian protest movement, “the more abundant and diverse ties found on social media bridged communities and spread the news widely even in the face of government

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<sup>52</sup> Charlie Beckett, “How weak ties can lead to real revolutions,” *Polis Blog*, January 15, 2011. <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2011/01/15/how-weak-ties-can-lead-to-real-revolutions/>.

<sup>53</sup> W. Lance Bennett, “Communicating Global Activism: Some Strengths and Vulnerabilities of Networked Politics,” in *Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens and Social Movements*. Wim van de Donk, Brian D. Loader, Paul G. Nixon, and Dieter Rucht, eds. (London: Routledge).

<sup>54</sup> Granovetter, “The Strength of Weak Ties,” 202.

<sup>55</sup> Facebook, Twitter and Youtube allow users to seamlessly share posts across all three platforms. For example, a user posting a link on Twitter to a video on Youtube, can have that link automatically appear on their Facebook wall for others to watch and share. Once this cycle is started, posts or videos can “go viral” within hours as countless numbers of people can create links to that video through their Twitter and Facebook pages.

<sup>56</sup> Khamis and Vaughn, “Cyberactivism in the Egyptian Revolution.”

manipulation of mass media and shutdown of the internet.”<sup>57</sup> Howard’s analysis of the Egyptian uprising similarly concludes “it is clear that the ability to produce and consume political content, independent of social elites, is important because the public sense of shared grievances and potential for change can develop rapidly.”<sup>58</sup>

### **2.3) OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES**

In 1994, Tim Kuran’s research showed that “mass discontent” does not “necessarily generate a popular uprising against the political status quo.”<sup>59</sup> Instead, it is the sudden recognition that individual grievances are shared by many others that help to predict revolutions.<sup>60</sup> The public assertion of opposition is seen as an opportunity for contentious behaviour, and a “wave of mobilization can be seen as a collective response to generally expanding political opportunities in which the costs and risks of collective action are lowered and the potential gains increase.”<sup>61</sup> Sidney Tarrow finds that opportunities increase when populations are faced with situations that offend their “sense of justice” or impose “costs they cannot bear,” compelling them to react despite the risk of doing so.<sup>62</sup> In their discussion of new media in contentious politics, Aday et al. note that media systems are important in generating “political opportunity” due to their role in allowing the public to “acquire large amounts of information in real time, and to measure its

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<sup>57</sup> Zhuo, X., B. Wellman and J. Ju, “Egypt: The First Internet Revolt?” *Peacemagazine.org*. January 7, 2011. <http://www.peacemagazine.org/archive/v27n3p06.htm>.

<sup>58</sup> Phillip N. Howard, “Opening Closed Regimes: What Was the Role of Social Media During the Arab Spring?” Working Paper: *Project on Information Technology and Political Islam*, University of Washington (2011), 23.

<sup>59</sup> Timur Kuran, “Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989.” *World Politics* Vol. 44, No 1 (1991) 16.

<sup>60</sup> Timur Kuran, “Now Out of Never,” 30.

<sup>61</sup> Sidney Tarrow, “Aiming at a Moving Target: Social Science and the Recent Rebellions in Eastern Europe,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 24, (1991), 15.

<sup>62</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 71.

content rapidly and accurately.”<sup>63</sup> Examples of acquired information occur when social media helps in “publicizing splits among the ruling elite, creating lines of communication for challengers to engage segments of the elite in new ways.”<sup>64</sup> This information, once disseminated, may “change perceptions about the real distribution of opinion within a society, so that others feel safer coming forward in support of a previously taboo position once they see how many online peers share their views.”<sup>65</sup> The latter process begins when information spreads across networks and creates an “information cascade” whereby individuals “choose actions based on what they observe others doing.”<sup>66</sup> Literature on unexpected revolutions suggests that one of the major obstacles to mass protest is preference falsification: “individuals who detest the regime refrain from making their views public out of fear of either social or official sanction.”<sup>67</sup> According to Kuran, the push for revolution is concealed by those who feign sympathy for the status quo.<sup>68</sup> The increased incidence of contentious views made available through social media may therefore encourage others who privately hold contentious views to express them in public. According to Daniel Drezner, information cascades can “trigger spontaneous acts of protest,” especially since “a little bit of public information can reverse a long- standing informational cascade that contributed to citizen quiescence.”<sup>69</sup> Hence the simple act of realizing that others are experiencing the same perceptions about events, suffering the same injustice and violence, represents an opportunity that increases the likelihood that

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<sup>63</sup> Sean Aday et al. “Blogs and Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics,” 8.

<sup>64</sup> Sean Aday et al. “Blogs and Bullets: New Media in Contentious Politics,” 11.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Daniel Drezner, “Weighing the Scales: The Internet’s Effect on State-Society Relations,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 16, (2010), 40.

<sup>67</sup> Marc Lynch, “After Egypt: The Limits and Promise of Online Challenges to the Authoritarian Arab State,” *Reflections* 9, (June 2012), 304.

<sup>68</sup> Kuran, “Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989,” 23.

<sup>69</sup> Daniel Drezner. “Weighing the Scales,” 40.

citizens may join a revolution rather than simply watch it. Finally, according to Zeynep Tufekci, “the ability to ensure that their struggle and their efforts are not buried in a deep pit of censorship, the ability to continue to have an honest conversation, the ability to know that others know what one knows all combine to create a cycle furthering dissent and upheaval.”<sup>70</sup>

## **2.4) RESOURCE MOBILIZATION**

Resource-mobilization theory is a rational choice theory which focuses on activist’s material conditions and “structural factors rather than individual psychologies”<sup>71</sup> in explaining the emergence of mass protest movements. The theory considers resources such as money as the crucial factor in the emergence and success of social movements, arguing that the ability to mobilize sufficient resources is what compels individuals with grievances to take action. According to Craig Jenkins,

mobilization is the process by which a group secures collective control over the resources needed for collective action. The major issues therefore are the resources controlled by the group prior to mobilization efforts, the processes by which the group pools resources and directs these toward social change.<sup>72</sup>

The theory lends attention to factors such as “incentives, cost-reducing mechanisms or structures,”<sup>73</sup> emphasizing the dependence of social movements upon external factors such as time, money, and organizational skills. These resources are seen as critical to the

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<sup>70</sup> Zeynep Tufekci, “As Egypt shuts off the net: seven theses on dictator’s dilemma,” *Technosociology blog*, January 28, 2011, <http://technosociology.org/?p=286>.

<sup>71</sup> Pamela E. Oliver, Jorge Cadena-Roa And Kelley D. Strawn, “Emerging Trends in the Study of Protest and Social Movements,” *Research in Political Sociology* 12, (2003), 226.

<sup>72</sup> Craig Jenkins, “Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 9, (1983), 532-533.

<sup>73</sup> McCarthy and Zald, “Social Movements: A Partial Theory,” 1216.

choice of tactical action and hence to the success of social movements.<sup>74</sup> According to Oliver and Myers, if “a group has resources that permit it to engage in some actions and not others or has enough to invest some resources in procuring more, then these resources directly impact on the kinds of actions a group emits.”<sup>75</sup> The theory is therefore well suited to explaining the success of mass movements in an information society. As social media makes instantaneous communication faster and cheaper, it becomes a resource that may facilitate the flow of communications between activists, social media users, and the greater public who may be unaware that their grievances are shared by many others. In their analysis of resource mobilization efforts during the Egyptian uprising, Wiest and Eltantawy concluded that

What these activists were doing—in terms of debating, organizing, and planning—is not new in itself, but the means employed to communicate with each other and execute the revolution represents an important new resource for collective action. Social media introduced a novel resource that provided swiftness in receiving and disseminating information; helped to build and strengthen ties among activists; and increased interaction among protesters.<sup>76</sup>

Their analysis is in line with Della Porta and Mosca’s finding that Internet-based communication empowers “resource poor” actors, especially as a logistical resource offering the means for mass communication that was previously restricted by financial and spatial limitations.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Nahed Eltantawy and Julie B. Wiest, “Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Reconsidering Resource Mobilization Theory,” *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011), 1209.

<sup>75</sup> Myers and Oliver, “Diffusion Models of Cycles of Protest as a Theory of Social Movements.”

<sup>76</sup> Eltantawy and Wiest, “Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution,” 1218.

<sup>77</sup> Donatella Della Porta and Lorenzo Mosca, “Global-Net for Global Movements? A Network of Networks for a Movement of Movements,” *Journal of Public Policy* 25, (2005): 165-190.

## 2.5) FRAMING PROCESSES AND IDENTITY FORMATION

The third factor in the overall social movement framework comprises “strategic attempts to craft, disseminate, and contest the language and narratives used to describe a movement.”<sup>78</sup> Theorists such as Alberto Melucci and Ernesto Laclau have discussed the importance of identity in enabling the emergence of social movements. For Melucci “the construction of a collective identity is one of the first tasks to be dealt with during the process of mobilization, alongside the identification of an enemy, the definition of a purpose and an object at stake in the conflict. These phases entail the progressive fusion of participants into a common social body.”<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Oliver and Myers write “the shifting terms by which groups denote themselves are pointers to shifting political currents as they name and rename themselves in ongoing processes of collective identity construction.”<sup>80</sup> The ability to “foster collective identity across a dispersed population” is therefore one of the internet’s crucial benefits because it allows activists and protest leaders to mobilize large and diverse segments of populations in support of targeted collective action.<sup>81</sup> In this context, “social media have acted as a means of collective aggregation, facilitating the convergence of disparate individuals around common symbols and places, signifying their unity despite diversity.”<sup>82</sup> Khamis and Vaughn also note that social networks open new “channels for expressing consciousness and national solidarity” because they provide “a platform for ordinary citizens the opportunity to document their own version of reality.”<sup>83</sup> The ability to bypass established mass media

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<sup>78</sup> Garrett, “Protest in an Information Society,” 218.

<sup>79</sup> In Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, 41.

<sup>80</sup> Myers and Oliver, “Diffusion Models of Cycles of Protest as a Theory of Social Movements.”

<sup>81</sup> Garrett, “Protest in an Information Society,” 205.

<sup>82</sup> Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, 14.

<sup>83</sup> Khamis and Vaughn, “Cyberactivism in the Egyptian Revolution.”

outlets in the race to shape public discourse is among the most discussed changes associated with social media. In the aftermath of the Egyptian Revolution Nunns and Idle's collected tens of thousands of Tweets emitted from within Cairo during the Egyptian revolt, and found that citizen-journalists produced "accurate bites of information and a flow of videos and pictures," with the result being "like a company of artists painting a constantly updated picture of events."<sup>84</sup> In the absence of reliable coverage on state-run television and newspapers, Twitter and Facebook became an "alternative press mostly used as a type of by professional journalists, bloggers, and ordinary citizen journalists."<sup>85</sup> Such was there impact that many Egyptian journalists resigned from there posts when they understood the disconnect between the actual events and those depicted by the regime-backed media.<sup>86</sup> Even "transnational satellite TV channels like Al-Jazeera," were "influenced by information and footage coming from citizen journalists on the ground."<sup>87</sup> Philip N. Howard's study on the use of social media during the Egyptian revolution concludes "citizen-journalists who do not feel their story is being suitably told are now doing their own digital storytelling. These patterns of political expression and learning are fundamental to developing democratic discourses."<sup>88</sup> These patterns help frame, name and identify generalized beliefs within an oppressed population, and therefore constitute crucial first step for population wishing to collectively tackle the root cause of their grievances.

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<sup>84</sup> Alex Nunns and Nadia Idle, *Tweets from Tahrir: Egypt's Revolution as It Unfolded, in the Words of the People who Made It*, (New York: OR Books , 2011), 19-20.

<sup>85</sup> Khamis and Vaughn, "Cyberactivism in the Egyptian Revolution."

<sup>86</sup> Nunns and Idle, "Tweets from Tahrir," 20.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Howard, *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, 182.

### 2.5.1) Framing Consensus and Mobilization

Targeting grievances towards a specific enemy is an important precondition to the development of tactical repertoires specifically adapted to the goal being sought.<sup>89</sup> Paulo Gerbaudo argues that “the role played by identity and emotions in the process of mobilization, and their contribution in the symbolic construction of a sense of togetherness among activists, has been a highly neglected topic in social movement studies.”<sup>90</sup> The sudden spread of beliefs regarding a common enemy or grievance may therefore help explain the rush of protest activity that engenders revolutions. Social movement scholar Mario Diani emphasizes the shared identities that allow movements to transform from single issues to cross platform:

the spread of a movement usually implies that a model of participation mainly based on single-issue instrumental coalitions with fairly narrow agendas is replaced by a style of collective action based on strongly felt identities. These bind people together in a longer time perspective and assign a shared meaning to coalitions and activities that might otherwise be regarded as largely independent from each other.<sup>91</sup>

One explanation of social media’s role in abetting the spread of movements is Clay Shirky’s claim that “as a medium gets faster, it gets more emotional. We feel faster than we think.”<sup>92</sup> Twitter, he adds, is a “much more personal medium. Reading personal messages from individuals on the ground prompts a whole other sense of involvement (...) Twitter makes us empathize. It makes us part of it. Even if it’s just retweeting, you’re aiding the goal that dissidents have always sought: the awareness that the outside world is paying attention is really valuable.”<sup>93</sup> This practice was made visible during the

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<sup>89</sup> McCarthy and Zald, “Social Movements: A Partial Theory,” 1214.

<sup>90</sup> Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, 9.

<sup>91</sup> Mario Diani, “Social Movements Theory and Grassroots Coalitions in the Middle East,” 2.

<sup>92</sup> Clay Shirky, “Q&A with Clay Shirky on Twitter and Iran.” *TED Blog*, June 16 2009, [http://blog.ted.com/2009/qa\\_with\\_clay\\_sh.php](http://blog.ted.com/2009/qa_with_clay_sh.php).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

Egyptian revolution, as well as in recent events in Turkey and Ukraine, whereby social media was used to “direct people towards specific protest events,” and provided participants with “suggestions and instructions about how to act, and in the construction of an emotional narration to sustain their coming together in public space.”<sup>94</sup> As has been observed during recent protest movements, influential Facebook administrators and tweets by prominent activist have “played a crucial role in setting the scene for gatherings in public spaces, by constructing common identifications and accumulating or triggering an emotional impulse towards public assembly.”<sup>95</sup> This process is in line with Laclau and Mouffe’s theory about the “chain of equivalence.” Equivalence occurs when different political opinions and grievances are articulated together in opposition to another camp.”<sup>96</sup> During the events in Egypt, Mubarak’s autocratic regime and the police apparatus designed to maintain it, became the butt of protesters’ grievances. The protesters’ collective grievances became symbolically articulated through one central claim - the removal of Mubarak from office.

## **2.6) NETWORK THEORY**

Early theorists of digital communication focused on evaluating the relationship between resources and opportunity structures in networked environments. Researchers such as Arthur Lupia and Gisela Sin showed that weak individual commitment to political movements “may play out differently under conditions of drastically reduced communication costs,” as free-riders find it “easier to become participants in political

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<sup>94</sup> Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, 12.

<sup>95</sup> Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, 13

<sup>96</sup> Anna Marie Smith, *Laclau and Mouffe: The Radical Democratic Imaginary* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998), 89.

networks.”<sup>97</sup> In *The Wealth of Networks*, Yovhai Benkler proposes that “self-motivation rather than external incentives” pushes participation in online networks.<sup>98</sup> This process is called “peer production”, as it is “based on voluntary cooperation among participants who contribute to a mutually valued project in order to produce a public good.”<sup>99</sup> Here we think of sites such as Wikipedia, and phenomena such as open-source software, which allow users to participate in the creation, maintenance and improvement of public goods with the only reward being “personal recognition for contributions to the network,” and the “the various goods and outcomes that result from contribution.”<sup>100</sup> These sharing-based networks point to different types of social organization and association, expressed and mediated through technology. In Bennett and Segerberg’s analysis, technology enables the personalization of action frames, meaning that the act of “sharing personal calls to action and the technologies through which they spread help explain both how events are communicated to external audiences and how the action itself is organized.”<sup>101</sup> This occurs because due to “symbolic inclusiveness” of the political content expressed through new media - in the form of personalized ideas and messages - and “technological openness” of participants who feel comfortable spreading these messages throughout networks of digital connections including friends, “trusted others, and beyond”.<sup>102</sup> “In this interactive process of personalization and sharing”, write Bennett and Segerberg, “communication networks may become scaled up and stabilized through the digital

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<sup>97</sup> W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 34.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Bennett and Segerberg, *The Logic of Connective Action*, 37.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

technologies people use to share ideas and relationships with others.”<sup>103</sup> One of the important contributions of social media to this process is the instantaneous spreading of short personalized messages called memes “that travel easily across large and diverse populations” because they are “easy to imitate, adapt personally, and share broadly with others.”<sup>104</sup> Examples include the “We are the 99%” meme created following the creation of the “Occupy Wall Street” movement in 2011. The transmission of these “personal expressions across networks” may help “motivate anger or compassion among a large number of individuals,” who may subsequently become “capable of targeted action.”<sup>105</sup>

## **2.7) REGIME CHARACTERISTICS AND CAPACITY**

Apart from the social movements framework, collective action must also be analyzed through the political environment in which it occurs. The differences that separate political regimes from one country to the next affect contentious politics on two levels: governmental capacity and extent or lack of democracy.<sup>106</sup> According to Tilly and Tarrow ‘capacity’ means

the extent to which governmental action affects the character and distribution of population, activity and resources within the government’s territory. When a high-capacity government intervenes in population, activity, and resources, it makes a big difference; it raises taxes, distributes benefits, regulates traffic flows, controls the use of natural resources, and much more.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, “The Logic of Connective Action,” *Information, Communication & Society* 15, (June 2012), 746.

<sup>104</sup> Bennett and Segerberg, *The Logic of Connective Action*, 37-38.

<sup>105</sup> Bennett and Segerberg, *The Logic of Connective Action*, 41.

<sup>106</sup> Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, (Paradigm Publishers Boulder: Colorado, 2007), 55.

<sup>107</sup> Tarrow and Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, 55.

The authors further note that “very different sorts of contention prevail” depending on the nature of the regime.<sup>108</sup> High-capacity undemocratic regimes feature “both clandestine opposition and brief confrontations” that usually end in repression.<sup>109</sup> These levels of repression and brutality are often the defining factor in people’s perception of their own ability to affect change through protest movements. In reference to the Middle East, Diani notes, “strong repressive apparatuses usually discourage civic activity in the area and thus the establishment of networks beyond the boundaries of milieus which are safe in terms of the mutual trust required from their members.”<sup>110</sup> Eva Bellin further notes that the capacity of a coercive apparatus depends on the “physical wherewithal to muster the men and materiel necessary to repress.”<sup>111</sup> Moreover, “if the coercive apparatus is patrimonially organized rather than institutionalized, it is likely to be less receptive to the idea of regime change because it is more likely to be ‘ruined by reform’.”<sup>112</sup> “With its back against the wall of potential ruin”, writes Bellin, “the security elite is more inclined to repress democratic reformers.”<sup>113</sup>

### **2.7.1) Revolutions and the Coercive Apparatus**

In Eva Bellin’s discussion of Theda Skocpol’s work on revolutions, she points out that “although the intuitive prerequisite for revolution - mass disaffection from the regime in power - is a relatively common phenomenon in human experience, successful revolution

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<sup>108</sup> Tarrow and Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, 56.

<sup>109</sup> Tarrow and Tilly, *Contentious Politics*, 55.

<sup>110</sup> Diani, “Social movement theory and grassroots coalitions in the Middle-East,” 13.

<sup>111</sup> Bellin, “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarian Regimes,” *Comparative Politics* 44 (2012), 129.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

is a relatively rare event.”<sup>114</sup> The explanation that emerges from Skocpol’s work is that the occurrence of revolutions depends on “the state’s capacity to maintain a monopoly on the means of coercion.”<sup>115</sup> According to Skocpol, “if the state’s coercive apparatus remains coherent and effective, it can face down popular disaffection and survive significant illegitimacy, value incoherence, and even a pervasive sense of relative deprivation among its subjects.”<sup>116</sup> In short, writes Bellin, “the strength, coherence, and effectiveness of the state’s coercive apparatus distinguish among cases of successful revolution, revolutionary failure, and nonoccurrence.”<sup>117</sup>

## **2.8) COLLECTIVE ACTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, collective action in Middle Eastern states was rooted largely within “communities,” “neighborhoods,” and “bazaar” gatherings, “drawing upon the non-explicitly political networks and solidarities they provide.”<sup>118</sup> “The creation and maintenance of coalitions” was restricted due to “weak civil society with weak voluntary associations,” and “forms of resistance [that] that do not necessarily overlap with the political.”<sup>119</sup> Nonetheless, many “Muslim-majority/Arab countries” have gradually experienced the growth of political movements, “from trade union movements, nationalist and leftist ones, to Islamic/fundamentalist movements.”<sup>120</sup> The existence of these groups poses the challenge of understanding why wide-scale protest had not

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<sup>114</sup> Eva Bellin, “The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in Comparative Perspective,” *Comparative Politics* 36 (January 2004): 142.

<sup>115</sup> Bellin, “The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East,” 143.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Mario Diani, “Networks and Internet into Perspective,” *Swiss Political Science Review* 17 (2011), 2.

<sup>119</sup> Bellin, “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarian Regimes,” 143.

<sup>120</sup> Mohamed Ben Moussa, “From Arab Street to Social Movements: Retheorizing Collective Action and the Role of Social Media in the Arab Spring,” *Westminster Papers* 9 (April 2013): 52.

occurred before 2010. In her analysis of Middle Eastern and North African countries, Eva Bellin writes “it is not as though the region has been deprived of all democratic impulses. It has indeed experienced the fledgling emergence of civil society (human rights groups, professional associations, self-help groups), only to see most of them either repressed or corporatized by the state.”<sup>121</sup> The brutality of the coercive apparatus in many middle eastern states is seen as the main impediment to mass protest because “most people, aside from die-hard activists, are reluctant to participate in protests if they think it likely that they will get hurt or killed in the process of participating.”<sup>122</sup> However analyses of the Egyptian revolution of 2011 have pointed to a change in this cost-benefit analysis, thanks in part to the spread of internet. In their analysis, Khamis and Vaughn quote a phone interview with Adel Iskander, Adjunct faculty at Georgetown University’s Center for Contemporary Arabic Studies, who found that during the Egyptian revolution of 2011, “Facebook amplified, magnified and expedited the process of revolt, through providing unique networking opportunities. The strategic use of new media helped the revolution to snowball, through using certain strategies, maneuvers and tactics that turned small protests into a huge challenge to the regime that led to its ultimate demise.”<sup>123</sup> Whether these new trends in collective action are dependent upon social media is the central question in this paper, one I will seek to answer through the selection of cases where vast protest movements emerged after years of relative quiescence.

### **3) RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

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<sup>121</sup> Bellin, “The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East”, 142.

<sup>122</sup> Bellin, “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarian Regimes,” 137.

<sup>123</sup> Khamis and Vaughn, “Cyberactivism in the Egyptian Revolution.”

### 3.1) OVERVIEW

There are currently no established causal mechanisms through which to explain the relationship between social media use and mass mobilization in favor of reform under authoritarian regimes. Hence the theory being developed will be an inductive one based on the phenomena observed over the course of case studies that fit criteria for inferring theories. Van Evera writes that “to make a new theory we select cases where the phenomenon we seek to explain is abundant but its known causes are scarce or absent.”<sup>124</sup> My research will seek to uncover the effects of social media on contentious politics, and to infer a theory about the mechanisms that lead social media to become effective tools for fomenting, mobilizing, and organizing mass protest movements. I will follow the lead set by scholars such as Henry Farrell and Eva Bellin who suggest forgoing mono-causal relationships in favor of complex causal mechanisms “that might intervene between forms of communication such as the Internet and final political outcomes.”<sup>125</sup> In her recent analysis of events in the Middle East Eva Bellin points out that the “variable incidence of social mobilization in the region remains significantly under theorized, at least in the sense of developing parsimonious and generalizable hypotheses that account for the variation observed.”<sup>126</sup> Recent quantitative studies have concluded that the “question is not whether this or that type of media plays a major role but how that role varies over time and circumstance.”<sup>127</sup> I will therefore analyze recent protest movement in Egypt, Iran, Turkey and Ukraine, with the aim of developing a

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<sup>124</sup> Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, 22.

<sup>125</sup> Henry Farrell, “The Consequences of the Internet for Politics,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 15 (2012), 45.

<sup>126</sup> Eva Bellin, “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East,” 142.

<sup>127</sup> Gadi Wolfsfeld, Elad Segev and Tamir Sheafer, “Social Media and the Arab Spring: Politics Comes First,” *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 20 (16 January, 2013): 18.  
<http://hij.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/01/16/1940161212471716>.

theory concerning the role of social media in contentious politics and mass mobilization. To do so, I will process-trace and compare the Egyptian Revolution of 2011, the Iranian revolution of 2009, and the recent upheavals in Turkey and Ukraine in 2013/2014. The appearance of contentious political activity under regimes with different degrees of authoritarian tendency, coercive capacity, military loyalty, and public access to information will allow me to trace the sequence of events before and during episodes of upheaval in search of causal mechanisms that may allow me to compare the cases and infer a theory about the role of politically contentious social media use in fomenting mass protests. In each case, mass protests reached the highest numbers of protesters and protest sites observed in past decades, offering citizens unprecedented opportunities to engage in revolutionary activity. The abundance of available first person accounts, backed up by primary sources, journalistic reports, qualitative research make the cases of Egypt, Iran, Ukraine and Turkey, good starting points for my research. Although the cases have vastly different background condition, there are key similarities between the Egyptian, Iranian, and Turkish and Ukrainian examples – such as the swiftness of protest development, and the defiance of hundreds of thousands of protesters who took to public spaces to share their grievances in defiance of established authority – which makes these cases well suited for process-tracing analysis.

### **3.2) PROCESS-TRACING**

In order estimate the causal effects of ‘politically contentious social media use’ on the occurrence of mass protest movements, I will employ the process tracing method to uncover causal mechanisms affecting the “probability and/or value of the dependent

variable.”<sup>128</sup> Causal mechanisms are here defined as “the causal processes and intervening variables through which causal or explanatory variables produce causal effects.”<sup>129</sup> I will seek to provide a detailed account of how specific use of social media led to episodes of mass protest, “observing the apparent causal mechanisms and heuristic rendering of these mechanisms” in order to infer a hypotheses for future testing.<sup>130</sup> In their book *Contentious Politics* Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly write, “to explain contentious politics is to identify its recurrent causal mechanisms, the ways they combine, in what sequences they recur, and why different combinations and sequences...produce varying effects on the large scale.”<sup>131</sup> The authors describe the process-tracing methods as “attempts to identify the intervening causal process – the causal chain and causal mechanism – between an independent variable (or variables) and the outcome of the dependent variable.”<sup>132</sup> I have therefore selected 4 cases which meet Van Evera’s case-selection criteria: (1) “data richness”, (2) “extreme values on the dependent variable,” (3) “large within-case variance in values on the dependent variable,” (4) “divergence of the predictions made of the case by competing theories,” (5) “the resemblance of case background conditions to the conditions of current policy problems,” (6) “prototypicality of the case background conditions” (in that each individual case resembles a prototype of authoritarianism and popular grievances which may be found in other countries), (7) “appropriateness for comparison with other cases” (the cases will be compared, however they do meet the stringent requirements of the controlled

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<sup>128</sup> Andrew Bennett and Alexander L. George, “Process Tracing in Case Study Research,” Prepared for MacArthur Foundation Workshop on Case Study Methods, (October 17-19, 1997), <http://users.polisci.wisc.edu/kritzer/teaching/ps816/ProcessTracing.htm>.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 12-13.

<sup>132</sup> George and Bennet, “Process Tracing in Case Study Research.”

comparison), (8) “outlier character,” and (9) “intrinsic importance.”<sup>133</sup> Following Van Evera’s methods, my starting point for case selection was the presence of “associations between phenomena and testimony by people who directly experienced the case.”<sup>134</sup> Whereas the final political outcomes were different across each case, they all share the occurrence of unprecedented protest waves that forced regimes to react either through violent repression, negotiation or resignation. By observing each case, the background under which politically contentious activity occurred, the specific use of social media, the opportunities it may have created, and how activists responded, I will seek to uncover the process that led to episodes of mass protest and thereby infer a theory about social media’s role in inspiring protesters to take to the streets, defy repression and brutality, and act in unison in favor of a common goal.

### **3.3) CASE STUDY SELECTION**

I am choosing four different cases for process-tracing analysis, in hope that similarities will be revealed which may allow us to infer a generalizable theory. I will analyze politically contentious social media use preceding major protest movements in the case of Egypt’s 2011 revolution, Iran’s 2009 post-election protests, Turkey’s 2013 Gezi Park movement and Ukraine’s 2013 EuroMaidan movement. The regimes under which the mass protest occurred are all on different scales of the capacity-democracy model developed by Charles Tilly, and will thus allow me to compare cases where popular dissatisfaction under different types of authoritarian regimes led to similar levels of mass mobilization. While I will mention levels of Internet penetration in each case, these

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<sup>133</sup> Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, 77.

<sup>134</sup> Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, 68.

measures are not wholly relevant to my research as Bruce Etling and Robert Faris have found that “even in countries with low internet penetration rates, bloggers and online media serve as the major source of information to radio and other mainstream media, which then reach a wider audience.”<sup>135</sup> This phenomenon occurred in the cases of Egypt, Iran and Turkey, where bloggers and social media “serve as a source of ideas, discussion, and commentary not found in the traditional media.”<sup>136</sup> Moreover, as mainstream media outlets become increasingly reliant on social media for up-to-the-minute information during episodes of mass mobilization, the actual levels of use and penetration become less relevant than the ways in which social media networks are used. In order to infer a theory, I will look mainly at the actual substance of events, how they occurred, the time frames and methods used by protesters to achieve their goals. The four cases will therefore allow me to analyze the outcome of new tactics and repertoires made possible by social media, and to establish a theory that may be tested in order to expand our current understanding of contentious politics in an increasingly networked environment.

### **3.4) VARIABLES**

I define politically contentious social media use as the creation and dissemination of content challenging the established political order, and seeking to elicit coordinated protest activity against a regime. More specifically, I will analyze how social media is used to trigger conversations surrounding emotionally salient issues such as vote rigging, police brutality and corruption, and how these conversations may foment episodes of mass protest. I will seek to uncover the causal mechanisms that lead politically

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<sup>135</sup> Robert Faris and Bruce Etling, “Madison and the Smart Mob: The Promise and Limitations of the Internet for Democracy,” *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 32 (Summer 2008): 68.

<sup>136</sup> Faris and Etling, “Madison and the Smart Mob,” 72.

contentious social media use to motivate and convince individuals to join protest movement despite the possibility of harsh reprisal by authoritarian regimes. Four cases – all with different backgrounds characteristic – will serve as case studies where such use of social media occurred. It is primarily the content of politically contentious communication between activists, opposition movements and protesters, which will comprise the key indicators of my study variable. The extensive body of scholarly work reviewed in the literature review reveals a number of other variables that must be considered in any analysis of social movements attempting to dislodge authoritarian governments. Common grievances across class lines, emotional triggers, mobilizing opportunities, cost/benefit analyses favorable to protesters when considering the risk associated with challenging the regime, and finally the willingness of the coercive apparatus to respond with brutal force; these variables will all be considered as I conduct a process-tracing analysis of events. Comparing the four cases will also allow me to analyze the impact of as satellite television, which may also be used to foment protest by informing audiences about regime abuses and protest locations. The process-tracing method will serve to identify the causal mechanisms that led longstanding grievances to suddenly become crystallized into episodes of mass public protests. My dependent variable, mass public protests, is defined as spontaneous gatherings of tens of thousands of protesters willing to publicly defy a regime despite the risk of brutal repression.

### **3.5) EGYPT 2011**

I am selecting Egypt's 2011 revolution as my principal case study with an eye on comparing it to the cases of Iran, Ukraine and Turkey, in order to infer a "good theory" as

Van Evera describes it. In order to develop a new theory about the impact of political social networking on contentious politics and mass mobilization, I will start with a thorough analysis of the Egyptian revolution, tracing the process of contentious politics starting in 2005 (when protesters first made use of information technology), until the deposition of Hosni Mubarak on early 2011. I am selecting Egypt as my central case study because it is a unique outlier case in that it represents the first major protest movement in history which claims to have achieved its goal thanks in part to social media sites. Moreover the speed with which the protesters toppled Mubarak's regime of 30 years make it one of the most successful protests movements in recent history. Egypt also satisfies the criteria of having extreme values on the study variable and large within-case variance in values on study variable, both of which are desirable when inferring theories. Many recent publications reveal the details of political social networking in the lead-up to and during the events of January 2011, exploring the minutiae of protest activity on blogs and social media. Egypt is a strong case study for the purposes of this research due to the richness of data available regarding events on the ground in January and February 2011. The process of social upheaval was well documented through journalistic reports, and has been supplemented by secondary sources published since 2012 providing thorough analysis of the specific events and digital interactions that led hundreds of thousands of protesters to descend upon Tahrir Square in January 2011. Abundant testimony has been collected from people who directly experienced the revolution, most notably referenced in Philip N. Howard's and Zeynep Tufekci's research on social networks in the run-up to the ousting of Mubarak. Paulo Gerbaudo's *Tweets from The Streets* also analyses the course of events as they developed on social media, starting with the creation of the April

6<sup>th</sup> movement in 2008 through the 18-day standoff in 2011.<sup>137</sup> These texts will help reveal the details of political exchanges as they occurred on social media preceding each major protest event. Egypt also fulfills the criteria of resembling other current situations of policy concern, in that the Middle East is still rife with repressive regimes clinging to power despite the growth of vocal and determined protest movements (e.g.: Iran, Syria). Regarding the generalizability of the Egyptian example, pre-2011 Egypt can be said to have similar background conditions to other countries of the region, mainly because Mubarak's regime shared features with other high-capacity undemocratic regimes of the Middle East. The weakness of the Egypt case is that in 2010, social media use was still restricted to the urban, mostly educated elite, which brings into question the root causes of the revolution and whether it was truly a bottom-up discussion. Moreover, satellite television had much greater penetration throughout the country and the case can be made that this was the catalyst that drove the masses to support the revolution. In order to better understand social media's contribution, I will conduct a process-tracing analysis of the Egyptian case, with an eye to comparing the events in Cairo to those in Tehran's 2009 uprising, as well as to uprisings in Istanbul and Kiev in 2013.

## **4) EGYPT CASE STUDY**

### **4.1) BACKGROUND CONDITIONS**

#### **State of Emergency**

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<sup>137</sup> In "Opening Closed Regimes: What Was the Role of Social Media During the Arab Spring?" lead researcher Philip N. Howard and his team at the Project on Information Technology and Political Islam analyzed tens of thousands of blog entries, twitter data entries and viral videos on Youtube, and analyzed the structure of the Egyptian political web.

Before the integration of Internet into Egyptian society, a 30 year-old state of emergency law had allowed the Mubarak regime to muffle free speech and protest movements through police crackdowns, a network of informants, and secret information services. These policies dated back to Gamal Nasser's Free Officers' Revolt of 1952, when the regime "nationalized the press, the cinema and most publishing houses, establishing what one historian has termed 'a virtual state monopoly on culture.'"<sup>138</sup> Under Mubarak's regime, the "sociopolitical and economic climate was both stifling and depressing; presidential and parliamentary elections lacked transparency, corruption permeated all government bodies, and political conditions for Egyptian citizens were oppressive, preventing free expression, protest opportunities, and general political participation."<sup>139</sup> Freedom of association and assembly were severely curtailed, and the regime considered a public gathering of five people or more without a permit as an illegal event subject to arrest.<sup>140</sup> Mubarak's "secret police, the notorious 'mukhabarat' ... acted as a powerful deterrent for those harboring aversion towards the regime."<sup>141</sup> Gerbaudo notes "the use of torture, violence, kidnappings and sometime arbitrary killings of political opponents was common knowledge among the population," spawning a state of paranoia among segments of the population with contentious political opinions.<sup>142</sup> According to Sohair Wastamy "when opposition leaders were occasionally brave enough to hand sensitive documents to the media, it often resulted in the journalists getting thrown in prison and

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<sup>138</sup> Robyn Creswell, "Egypt: The Cultural Revolution," *The New York Times*, February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/20/books/review/Creswell-t.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>139</sup> Eltantawy and Weist, "Social Media in the Egyptian Revolution," 1211.

<sup>140</sup> Mona El-Ghobashy, "The Praxis of the Egyptian Revolution," *The Middle East Report* 41 (2011), <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer258/praxis-egyptian-revolution>.

<sup>141</sup> Gerbaudo, "Tweets and the Streets," 51.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

the newspapers shutting down.”<sup>143</sup> Such coercive measures made Egyptians reticent to take to the streets and kept large public protests at bay for the majority of Mubarak’s rule.

### **Kefaya and the Emergence of Public protest**

Succumbing to pressure by the Bush administration, the Mubarak regime planned to hold its first multiparty election in the fall 2005. A movement named ‘Kefaya’ (Enough) emerged as a reaction to President Mubarak’s planned amendment to the Egyptian constitution, which would allow him to run for an “unprecedented fifth six-year term” and the “possible succession of his son Gamal.”<sup>144</sup> Kefaya brought together intellectuals, “radicals and moderates from various ideological currents,” uniting around the goal of political change, including the protection of civil liberties, intellectual development, economic growth, and the reduction of high levels of poverty and corruption.<sup>145</sup> Initially, Kefaya was comprised of “300 intellectuals and public figures from very different backgrounds” who “issued a founding document that declare[s] their opposition to the regime and demands a real change in Egypt that purges the system of economic and political oppression.”<sup>146</sup> The majority of Kefaya’s early members were university students and young professionals, mostly “well educated, unmarried men in their early 20s with family backgrounds in the urbanized middle-classes.”<sup>147</sup> In April 2005 Kefaya

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<sup>143</sup> Sohair Wastamy, “Egyptians Find Their Power in Access to Information.” *American Libraries Magazine*, Feb 16, 2011. <http://www.americanlibrariesmagazine.org/article/egyptians-find-their-power-access-information>.

<sup>144</sup> Nadia Oweidat et al. *The Kefaya Movement: A Case Study of a Grassroots Reform Initiative*. (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corp, 2008), viii.

<sup>145</sup> Oweidat et al. *The Kefaya Movement*, 14.

<sup>146</sup> Maher Hamoud, “Editor’s letter: Egyptians between the two Gamals (3 of 5): A nation on the back burner”. *Daily News Egypt*, <http://www.dailynewsegypt.com/2013/10/31/editors-letter-egyptians-between-the-two-gamals-3-of-5-a-nation-on-the-back-burner/>.

<sup>147</sup> Henry Onodera, “The Kifaya Generation Politics Of Change Among Youth In Egypt,” *Suomen Antropologi: Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 34 (Winter 2009), 51.

began organizing peaceful through its website, asking for “new constitution, drafted by a constituent and freely elected assembly”, “the freedom to form political parties and publish papers,” and a “clean hands campaign.”<sup>148</sup> Using a strategy started during the anti-Iraq war demonstrations in 2003, organizers drew 2,000 persons to a June 2005 demonstration in Cairo by sending text messages to thousands of mobile phones, helping draw “the most organized and impressive demonstration by the reform movement to date.”<sup>149</sup> According to research conducted by the Rand National Defense Research Institute “Kefaya also advertised events in its online calendar, sent text messages to as many mobile phones as possible, emailed original members regularly, and called for support from bloggers.”<sup>150</sup> Kefaya’s adoption of blogs as a means to mobilize support for political causes indicates the expansion of repertoires of contention available to Egyptians at that time. Blogs provided a strategic platform through which to advertise messages that were likely to be censored in newspapers or on television. One such example occurred when “Kefaya was able to advertise a September 2007 rally in support of freedom of the press on the Wehda Masrya [Egyptian Unity] blog, but saw all copies of the independent newspaper Al-Karama confiscated when it advertised an anti-Mubarak rally.”<sup>151</sup> Journalist and deputy editor of *The Daily Star Egypt*, Ramia Al Malky writes “

If Kifaya has provided the political space for voices of opposition to speak out, blogs have provided the means for Kifaya’s mobilization. Not only have bloggers continued to challenge the official version of events, exposing a wide array of abuses by Egypt’s authorities and monitoring fellow activists’ lives in jail, they have also rallied other

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<sup>148</sup> Hassen Zenati, “Pro-reform movement spreads across Egypt”, *Middle East Online*, April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2004. <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=13357>.

<sup>149</sup> Amira Howeidy, “A Chronology of Dissent,” *Al-Ahram Weekly*, June 23–29, 2005, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/748/eg10.htm>.

<sup>150</sup> Oweidat et al. “The Kefaya Movement: A Case Study of a Grassroots Reform Initiative, 21.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

activists to the cause by publicizing Kifaya demonstrations often overlooked by mainstream publications.<sup>152</sup>

Following a string of small protests, violent repression soon followed and Kefaya activists began encountering an overwhelming number of security agents. Attacks on protestors by “security officers and soldiers dressed in civilian clothes became routine at Kefaya demonstrations,” and many activists “were beaten and detained without charges or trials.”<sup>153</sup> In the aftermath of these protests, bloggers began documenting physical and sexual abuse committed by state police, as well as posting videos on Youtube of uniformed officers torturing and mocking prisoners. Despite its deft use of electronic media, the movement failed to garner mass appeal within Egypt. On the day of the referendum on constitutional reform, voter turnout was low and Kefaya’s tactics would ultimately prove unable to mobilize more than a few thousand protestors to denounce the political abuses of the Egyptian state. Moreover scores of protestors were beaten, arrested and detained without trial, and Mubarak’s party kept complete control of the parliament.<sup>154</sup> One explanation is that “the more prevalent state-controlled media managed to overwhelm Kefaya’s message [...] leading Egyptian newspapers insinuated that Kefaya’s leaders were traitors who were carrying out orders from the U.S. government to undermine the stability of the country.”<sup>155</sup> In addition, Henry Farrell points out that “the identity of protestors is key—protesters who appear to be more representative of the general population provide more convincing signals of the privately

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<sup>152</sup> Rania Al-Malky, “Blogging for Reform: The Case for Egypt,” *Arab Media Society*. February 1, 2007. <http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=12>.

<sup>153</sup> Oweidat et al. “The Kefaya Movement: A Case Study of a Grassroots Reform Initiative,” 28.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Oweidat et al. “The Kefaya Movement: A Case Study of a Grassroots Reform Initiative,” x.

held preferences of the majority than unrepresentative ones.”<sup>156</sup> Composed mostly of intellectuals, left-leaning politicians and middle class youth, Kefaya lacked broad-based appeal, and was easily marginalized by the regime. A *Guardian* article dated April 7<sup>th</sup> 2008 notes that “despite some noteworthy achievements,” Kefaya remained a largely “visionary elitist movement seemingly incapable of rallying significant support on the ground.”<sup>157</sup> The fact that Kefaya represented only a small segment of the Egyptian public may be a crucial point in explaining the government’s victory over the Kefaya movement. Six years later, when tens of thousands took to the streets - including laborers, Muslim brothers, students and intellectuals - the Mubarak government was “at pains to claim that the demonstrators constituted an unrepresentative minority and that the demonstrations were being fomented by outsiders.”<sup>158</sup> The reasons for this dramatic increase in protesters willing to risk their lives to defy the regime are the central focus of this process-tracing analysis. As I follow the course of events leading to the January 2011 protests, I will point to causal mechanisms that may explain the shift in Egyptians’ outlook.

### **Kefaya’s Importance**

Despite its shortfalls, the Kefaya movement was among the first to display the regime’s unpopularity with a segment of the population, which “in turn suggested to observers that the Mubarak regime, even if it still had power, lacked popular support.”<sup>159</sup> While Kefaya’s attempts to mobilize large gatherings had failed, it had nonetheless succeeded in

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<sup>156</sup> Henry Farrell, “The Consequences of the Internet for Politics,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 15 (2012): 45.

<sup>157</sup> Jack Shenker. “Protests in the Smog,” *The Guardian*, April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2008, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2008/apr/07/protestsinthesmog>.

<sup>158</sup> Farrell, “The Consequences of the Internet for Politics,” 46.

<sup>159</sup> Farrell, “The Consequences of the Internet for Politics,” 45.

harnessing the power of the internet to bridge traditional divides within Egyptian politics. Both through blogs and through the shared experience of violent interrogation and prolonged detention, solidarity between rival political streams may have commenced under the Kefaya banner. Henri Onodera argues that “detentions in shared cells” may have “fostered new ties of friendship and solidarity between, for instance, secular-leftist activists and Muslim Brothers,”<sup>160</sup> while journalist Rania Al-Malky’s suggests that “threading stories of individual experience into a shared narrative of community experience is undoubtedly one of the potentials of blogs.”<sup>161</sup> Shared experience is arguably the most crucial element in the development of a pluralized protest movement, and analysis of developments in 2010-2011 will show that Kefaya’s early display of audacity and bravery in organizing bold action against the regime was the spark which led to the organizing of subsequent protest movements, both online and in the streets of Egypt’s major cities.

### **Labor Protests and Creation of April 6 Movement**

Parallel to the Kefaya movement, labor activism in Egypt launched numerous protests starting in 2004 as poverty levels became exacerbated by stagnant wages, and the government renewed the drive to privatize public-sector factories.<sup>162</sup> The movement created to defend workers’ rights “had gained significant concessions from the government since the first strikes in the textile sector in Mahalla al-Kubra in 2004, and had since gathered momentum and progressively extended its reach towards other

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<sup>160</sup> Henry Onodera, “The Kifaya Generation Politics Of Change Among Youth In Egypt,” 51.

<sup>161</sup> Rania Al-Malky, “Blogging for Reform: the Case of Egypt.”

<sup>162</sup> Cynthia Johnson, “Give us our daily bread: Egypt at breaking point.” *The Age*, April 7, 2008, <http://www.theage.com.au/news/world/give-us-our-daily-bread-egypt-at-breaking-point/2008/04/06/1207420196461.html>.

manufacturing sectors.”<sup>163</sup> One such example occurred in “December 2006, when workers at the giant textile factories” in the Nile Delta city of Mahalla al-Kobra “protested against the government’s failure to pay end of year bonuses, and called for the dismantling of the ETUF” (Egyptian Trade Union Federation), leading the government to rapidly restore the bonuses.<sup>164</sup> The fact that the government gave in to the workers’ demands set a new precedent across the country. While 2006 saw 222 such strikes, walkouts and protests, 2007 and 2008 saw over 700 per year.<sup>165</sup> As the 2008 economic crisis deteriorated Egypt’s fragile economy “the situation would be exacerbated by an unprecedented food crisis that led to riots and bloodshed at the bread queues caused in part by the worldwide hike in grain prices.”<sup>166</sup> Following decades of providing subsidized bread for its poorest citizens “as a component of its economic policy because it enabled millions to survive on low salaries,”<sup>167</sup> in 2008 Egypt’s “bread lines lengthened” and the “costs of non-subsidized staples soared,” encouraging many low income workers to take the streets. A national day of strikes was planned for April 6, 2008, led largely by workers from the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company in Mahalla Al-Kobra, who intended to demand an increase in monthly minimum wages.<sup>168</sup> The plight of the workers inspired a 27-year old human resources coordinator named Esraa Abdel Fattah created Facebook group dedicated to the expression solidarity with the striking workers. The group quickly grew as membership “exploded to over 70,000 in a few weeks, or almost

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<sup>163</sup> Roberto Roccu, “Divided we stand: the tragedy of Egyptian opposition,” *The Guardian*, December 28, 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/dec/28/egypt-elections-opposition>.

<sup>164</sup> Ann M. Lesch, “Concentrated Power Breeds Corruption, Repression, and Resistance.” In *Arab Spring in Egypt: Revolution and Beyond*. Eds. Baghat Korany and Rabab El-Mahdi. (New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 34.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Jack Shenker, “Protests in the Smog.”

<sup>167</sup> Cynthia Johnson. “Give us our daily bread: Egypt at breaking point.”

<sup>168</sup> Ann M. Lesch, “Concentrated Power Breeds Corruption, Repression, and Resistance.” 34.

10% of all Egyptians on Facebook at the time.”<sup>169</sup> Esraa teamed up with a civil engineer and Kefaya member named Ahmed Maher, who helped manage the Facebook page and would eventually become the leader of the blossoming April 6 movement. Composed mostly of young middle-class Cairenes and Alexandrians, the April 6 group was “initially amorphous and lacking a clear mission”, yet it “blossomed within days into something influential enough to arouse the ire of Egypt's internal security forces.”<sup>170</sup> On March 23, 2008, 300 invitations were sent out urging people to join and by the next morning “3,000 people had signed up. Invitees weren't just joining — they were recruiting everyone they knew.”<sup>171</sup> By late March 2008, only a few weeks after its creation, the Facebook page was nearing 40,000 members. A *Wired Magazine* profile describes the birth of the April 6 movement:

Participants began changing their profile pictures to the April 6 logo, which meant the logo kept popping up in the News Feed of anyone on Facebook who was connected to someone in the April 6 group. Adding to this barrage, the activists kept loading a link to the group into their Status Update fields, further flooding Egypt's Facebook universe with connections to the group and its message [...] The group's message was inclusive and earnest, factors that proved essential for amplifying interest and participation in the boycott and scattered demonstrations.<sup>172</sup>

The fact that cyber activists transformed a localized labor dispute into a call for a national strike is an important development in explaining the role social media can play in fomenting mass mobilization. The activists essentially turned the laborers grievances into “a harsh critique of the broader social and political situation of the country,”<sup>173</sup> which a

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<sup>169</sup> Albrecht Hofheinz, “Nextopia? Beyond Revolution 2.0”, *International Journal of Communication* 5 (2011), 1419.

<sup>170</sup> David Wolman, “Cairo Activists Use Facebook to Rattle Regime”, *Wired Magazine*. (October 20, 2008). [http://www.wired.com/techbiz/startups/magazine/16-11/ff\\_facebookegypt?currentPage=all](http://www.wired.com/techbiz/startups/magazine/16-11/ff_facebookegypt?currentPage=all).

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Nadine Abdalla, “Egypt’s Workers – From Protest Movement to Organized Labor,” *SWP Comments* 32, (German Institute for Peace and Security, October 2012), [http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2012C32\\_abn.pdf](http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2012C32_abn.pdf).

broad cross-section the Egyptian public could identify with. On April 6, 2008, 24,000 thousand protesters took to the streets in Mahalla, but were met by the state's security forces "who obliged the labor leaders to demobilize the workers and even cancel their strike call. Leaders who did not concede were arrested."<sup>174</sup> In Cairo, the protest in support of the workers was violently suppressed by security forces, resulting in four deaths, and 400 arrests, including Ahmed Maher, the group's founder. The fact that the Cairo event was successfully aborted by the regime led to the perception that the group had failed due to a lack of coordination on the part of the organizers. However the April 6 movement created in 2008 served to expand Egyptians' repertoire of contention through the introduction digitally mediated contention. Aware that newspapers were "monitored by the Ministry of Information," young Egyptians took to using Facebook, which proved "irresistible as a platform for social interaction and dissent."<sup>175</sup> This marked a major leap in Egyptians' ability to organize and mobilize in defense of a common cause. It improved upon Kefaya's tactics in that it included a segment of the population crucial to launching popular revolutions: the labor force. Middle-class activists now understood how the diverse ties found on social media could be used to bridge communities and "spread the news widely even in the face of government manipulation of mass media."<sup>176</sup>

A 2009 New York Times article notes,

the fact that tens of thousands of disaffected young Egyptians unhappy with their government meet online to debate and plan events is remarkable, given the context of political repression in which it is occurring [...] The movement has provided a structure for a new generation of Egyptians, who aren't part of the nation's small

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Samantha M. Shapiro, "Revolution – Facebook Style." *The New York Times*, January 22, 2009. [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/magazine/25bloggers-t.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/magazine/25bloggers-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

<sup>176</sup> Zhuo, X., B. Wellman and J. Ju. "Egypt: The First Internet Revolt?" *Peacemagazine.org*. January 7, 2011. <http://www.peacemagazine.org/archive/v27n3p06.htm>.

coterie of activists and opinion-makers, to assemble virtually and communicate freely about their grievances.

The April 6 strike was therefore a groundbreaking event because it had its roots offline “among a cohesive, organized group of laborers,” whose protest “was then vastly amplified by the Facebook activists.”<sup>177</sup> The expansion of a pre-existing protest movement through the creation of virtual group on Facebook is particularly significant as it exemplifies the type of collaborations that would become necessary to the development of future protest movements.

### **Growth of Facebook and Internet Penetration**

According to Zeynep Tufekci, “one of the most important events in the transformation of the Egyptian public sphere was the diffusion of Facebook, particularly its Arabic language service, which began in March 2009.”<sup>178</sup> Facebook was then “the third-most visited Web site in Egypt, after Google and Yahoo” with close to 1 million people using the site, “about 11 percent of the total online population.”<sup>179</sup> According to the *Arab Social Media Report*, compiled by the Dubai School of Government, in January 2011 24.26% of Egyptians had Internet access, (the figure is likely understated given Egyptian’s use of Internet cafes at that time), with a total Facebook penetration of 5.49%, and no evidence whatsoever of Internet filtering.<sup>180</sup> Access to Facebook was facilitated by the fact that the information and communication technologies sector had grown rapidly in Egypt, raising Internet penetration “from 9 per cent to 24 of per cent of households” between 2005 and

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<sup>177</sup> David Wolman, “Cairo Activists Use Facebook to Rattle Regime.”

<sup>178</sup> Zeynep Tufekci and Christopher Wilson, “Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest: Observations From Tahrir Square,” *Journal of Communication* 62 (2012): 366.

<sup>179</sup> David Wolman, “Cairo Activists Use Facebook to Rattle Regime.”

<sup>180</sup> Dubai School of Government, *Arab Social Media Report* 1, (2011), 12.

2010.<sup>181</sup> In addition, Tufekci believes that “a new system of political communication was created by the dramatic increase in citizen connectivity made possible by the explosion of steadily less expensive cellphones with video, photo, and Internet capability,” whose Egypt-wide penetration would reach 80% in 2010.<sup>182</sup> Cellphone penetration rates are relevant in this case because the revolution occurred at time when cellphones were increasingly capable of accessing the internet, allowing users to load Facebook and Twitter directly from their phones. According to Paulo Gerbaudo, the rapid growth of information and communication technologies in Egypt stems from the fact that the regime “could not effectively censor the internet without unleashing an avalanche of disapproval from its Western allies,” therefore presenting “the relative degree of online freedom enjoyed by Egyptians as proof of its agenda of political liberalization.”<sup>183</sup> However, the internet would also allow for the birth and dissemination of new opinions, which the regime could no longer suppress or co-opt.

## **4.2) THE REVOLUTION**

### **The Expansion of Online Dissent**

In June 2010, a young man named Khalid Sa‘id, from the city of Alexandria in northern Egypt was dragged out of an Internet café and “beaten to death by plainclothes police officers in broad daylight, reportedly as revenge for his posting of a video on YouTube

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<sup>181</sup> Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, 52.

<sup>182</sup> Tufekci and Wilson, “Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest,” 367.

<sup>183</sup> Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, 52.

that showed the officers splitting up the proceeds of a drug bust.”<sup>184</sup> According to Mona El-Ghobashy, “Sa‘id’s death galvanized public opinion in disgust at police predation,”<sup>185</sup> with images of his badly beaten face circulating on the internet, awakening many to the brutal reality of Mubarak’s regime. The digital networking and activism opportunities which arose online following the death of Khalid Sa‘id would come to open the flood gates for other bloggers and dissidents to join the movement. One particularly incensed Egyptian expat called Wael Ghonim - a young Google marketing director living in Dubai - soon started a Facebook group called ‘We Are All Khalid Sa‘id’. This page became the “focal point around which 470,000 ‘fans’ organized their dissidence while a YouTube video about his murder was viewed by more than 500,000 people fueling further public outrage.”<sup>186</sup> Paulo Gerbaudo’s interviews with students from Cairo Nile University confirms the impact of the ‘Khalid Sa‘id page, with many students describing it as a form of “political initiation,” claiming “that page got me into politics.”<sup>187</sup> During a talk given on the popular public lecture tour known as “Ted Talks”, Wael Ghonim recounts the events following the death of the Egyptian blogger at the hands of the police:

In a few days, tens of thousands of people there -- angry Egyptians who were asking the ministry of interior affairs, ‘Enough. Get those who killed this guy to just bring them to justice.’ But of course, they don’t listen. It was an amazing story -- how everyone started feeling the ownership. Everyone was an owner in this page. People started contributing ideas (...) it connected people from the virtual world, bringing them to the real world, sharing the same dream, the same frustration, the same anger, the same desire for freedom... People were taking shots and photos; people were reporting violations of Human Rights in Egypt; people were suggesting ideas, they were actually voting on ideas, and then they were executing the ideas; people

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<sup>184</sup> Mona El-Ghobashy, “The Praxis of the Egyptian Revolution”, *The Middle East Report* 41, (2011) <http://www.merip.org/mer/mer258/praxis-egyptian-revolution>.

<sup>185</sup> Mona El-Ghobashy, “The Praxis of the Egyptian Revolution.”

<sup>186</sup> Simon Mainwaring, “Exactly what role did social media play in the Egyptian Revolution,” *The We First Blog*, February 13, 2011. <http://simonmainwaring.com/facebook/exactly-what-role-did-social-media-play-in-the-egyptian-revolution/>.

<sup>187</sup> Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, 55.

were creating videos. Everything was done by the people to the people, and that's the power of the Internet.<sup>188</sup>

The Khalid Sa'id Facebook page is an example of the phenomena which Paulo Gerbaudo calls “emotional condensation” whereby websites, blogs or Facebook pages became “rallying points” for those seeking to express their “anger at the regime.”<sup>189</sup> According to Gerbaudo, The Khalid Sa'id Facebook page led many youths to not only feel compassion for Khaled Sa'id but also identify with him, which helped organizers condense individual grievances through an “emotional conduit” that “transformed them into political passions driving the process of mobilization.”<sup>190</sup> On the first day of the page's creation, 36,000 users joined the group, “helping it to quickly become the most popular anti-regime Facebook page.”<sup>191</sup> Gerbaudo attributes the popularity not only to Wael Ghonim's marketing skills, but also to his “ability to construct a compelling emotional conversation with the page's users.”<sup>192</sup> He employed common Egyptian dialect rather than standard Arabic and included “abundant visual materials, videos, pictures and the like capable of attracting people of low literacy skills.”<sup>193</sup> Ghonim took on the first person persona of the late Khalid Said and began answering user comments “as if he were himself Khalid speaking from the tomb,”<sup>194</sup> catalyzing a process of “emotional identification on the part of young middle-class Egyptians with someone with who they had much to share.”<sup>195</sup> In Ghonim's own words

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<sup>188</sup> Wael Ghonim. “Inside the Egyptian Revolution.” *TED Conference*, Cairo, Egypt, March 2011. [http://ted.com/-talks/wael\\_ghonim\\_inside\\_the\\_egyptian\\_revolution.html](http://ted.com/-talks/wael_ghonim_inside_the_egyptian_revolution.html).

<sup>189</sup> Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, 15.

<sup>190</sup> Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, 14.

<sup>191</sup> Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, 56.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, 57.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

The first phase was to convince people to join the page and read its posts. The second was to convince them to start interacting with the content by ‘liking’ and ‘commenting’ on it. The third was to get them to participate in the page’s online campaign and to contribute to its content themselves. The fourth and final phase would occur when people decided to take the activism onto the streets. This was my ultimate aspiration.<sup>196</sup>

The fact that Facebook became a breeding ground of opposition to the regime “was for many politically inexperienced young people proof of the fact that Mubarak’s regime was less powerful than it pretended to be,” with one student commenting “the first time I watched the Khaled Sa’id page I got a bit scared. But then I saw that they didn’t arrest the admin. And I realized that there was some safety and that we could write whatever we wanted to.”<sup>197</sup> This reveals that the Facebook page effectively created an impetus for protest spurred not only by personification of Khalid Sa’id, but also by the personalization of the contentious messages, which led thousands to engage with the page and created a sense of safety-in-numbers as hundreds of thousands of participants took to the online forum. The example is a strong indication that when Egyptians realized that a great number of their fellow citizens shared their dislike of the regime, this generated an information cascade that led to the regime’s rapid demise.

### **The Final Straw**

In the wake of the self-immolation and death of a disenfranchised Tunisian fruit vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi in December 2010, dissidents across the Muslim world recounted the event on Facebook, Twitter and Youtube, inspiring others to “organize

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<sup>196</sup> Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People Is Greater Than the People in Power: A Memoir*, (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 67.

<sup>197</sup> Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, 58.

protests, criticize their governments, and spread ideas about democracy.<sup>198</sup> Momentum grew for a demonstration to be held on the official holiday known as ‘Police Day,’ which was held every year on January 25<sup>th</sup>. With only a few days notice, people used Facebook, Twitter “and old-fashioned interpersonal or landline communication to spread calls for mass rallies” on Friday January 25, which would be referred to as the “day of rage.”<sup>199</sup> Dr. Sheila Carapico, Professor of Political Science at the University of Richmond was in Cairo as the protests broke out. In her analysis of the events she writes, “the momentum of 25 January exceeded organizers dreams ... after tens of thousands marched toward Tahrir Square that Tuesday, defying the Interior Ministry’s riot police, thousands returned on Wednesday and Thursday; hundreds never left Tahrir.”<sup>200</sup> Realizing that much of the organizing and dissemination was occurring online, “the Egyptian government shut off the Internet and mobile phone services for the entire country,” on January 28, 2011, “resulting in a blackout that lasted almost one week.”<sup>201</sup> The move backfired as “students and civil society leaders stayed connected by organizing satellite phones and dialup connections.”<sup>202</sup> This event is particularly telling because it reveals that both the regime and the protesters understood that the success of the revolution ultimately lay on the ability to organize and disseminate information online and via social media. The shutdown failed in part because it “enraged” those who had grown “accustomed to Internet and mobile phone access ... so much so that when this access was revoked [when the regime turned off the Internet during protests] they ended up

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<sup>198</sup> Howard, *Opening Closed Regimes*, 2.

<sup>199</sup> Sheila Carapico, in *Arab Spring in Egypt: Revolution and Beyond*. Eds. Baghat Korany and Rabab El-Mahdi. (New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2012), 213.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Khamis and Vaughan, “Cyberactivism in the Egyptian Revolution.”

<sup>202</sup> Howard, *Opening Closed Regimes*, 16.

flooding the streets.”<sup>203</sup> According to Khamis and Vaughan, “in the absence of the Internet, people were afraid there would be a massacre, and so they took to the streets in large numbers to protect each other. And when young activists were not able to find their friends and counterparts on Facebook, they took to Tahrir Square to meet them there.”<sup>204</sup> From this point on, those who had access to Twitter and Facebook via mobile phones continued disseminating protest tactics and live tweeting information to their networks. Twitter proved particularly useful as a tool for “citizen journalism and mobilization,” allowing users to tell their own versions of events on the ground while sending out personalized messages urging their networks to join in on the protest action.<sup>205</sup> Zhuo et al. compiled a number of tweets posted during the first episodes major episodes of upheaval. They cite tweets by ‘Yara Adel El Siwi,’ who on January 26, 2011 tweeted “You who have Twitter and Facebook workin on ur phone, use ‘em to spread words of hope. We won’t let this end here #jan25 was just the start.”<sup>206</sup> Idle and Nunns report “protesters marched through the back streets in districts like Shubra and Boulaq, gathering people as they went, all the while tweeting news of their location and progress.”<sup>207</sup> Moreover “on Twitter, images were posted showing satellite maps marked with arrows indicating where protesters could go to avoid pro-government thugs.”<sup>208</sup> During those turbulent days, Zeynep Tufekci’s team conducted a survey of approximately 1200 protesters “who had

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<sup>203</sup> Khamis and Vaughan, “Cyberactivism in the Egyptian Revolution.”

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Zhuo et al. “Egypt: The First Internet Revolt?” 7.

<sup>207</sup> Alex Nunns and Nadia Idle, *Tweets from Tahrir: Egypt's Revolution as It Unfolded, in the Words of the People who Made It*. (OR Books, New York, 2011): 31, in Khamis and Vaughan, “Cyberactivism in the Egyptian Revolution.”

<sup>208</sup> Khamis and Vaughan, “Cyberactivism in the Egyptian Revolution.”

participated in the Tahrir demonstrations as early as January 25.”<sup>209</sup> Despite the chaos under which the interviews were conducted, the team believes “that the sample was similar in demographic terms to those they had witnessed demonstrating at Tahrir Square,” and that the dataset “may be among the largest samples of protestor surveys” conducted during the most chaotic days of the revolution.<sup>210</sup> The team’s findings, arrived at “through a series of logistic regressions (...) demonstrate that participation in protests, both before and on the first day of the Tahrir Square demonstrations, was associated with particular patterns of media use.”<sup>211</sup> They write

Attending protests prior to the January uprising was associated with using print media, blogs, Facebook, and Twitter as general sources of information and, more specifically, with using print media and text messaging for information about protests. Participation in the first day of the Tahrir Square demonstrations, however, was linked to a broader and more varied pattern of media use. Those in attendance on January 25 reported using print media for general information, but not for communicating about the protests. Using satellite television as a general information source was associated with a lower likelihood of attending the first day of the protests, perhaps because other means of communication, such as social media, provided superior access to communication about the protests. Instead, those who used blogs and Twitter for both general information and for communicating about the protests were more likely to attend on the first day, as were those who used the telephone, E-mail, and Facebook to communicate about the protests.<sup>212</sup>

Philip Howard arrived at similar conclusions regarding social media’s role through analysis of the content of discussions occurring on social media, rather than direct interviews with protesters. Howard’s team analyzed over “3 million tweets, gigabytes of YouTube content and thousands of blog posts,”<sup>213</sup> concluding that “a spike in online

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<sup>209</sup>Zeynep Tufekci and Christopher Wilson, “Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest: Observations From Tahrir Square,” *Journal of Communication* 62 (2012): 367.

<sup>210</sup>Tufekci and Wilson, “Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest,” 368.

<sup>211</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup>Tufekci and Wilson, “Social Media and the Decision to Participate in Political Protest,” 375.

<sup>213</sup>In Catherine O’Donnel, “New study quantifies use of social media in Arab Spring,” *University of Washington News*, September 12, 2011. <http://www.washington.edu/news/2011/09/12/new-study-quantifies-use-of-social-media-in-arab-spring/>.

revolutionary conversations often preceded major events on the ground,”<sup>214</sup> and that “social media played a central role in shaping political debates.”<sup>215</sup> In an interview given to the University of Washington, lead researcher Philip Howard notes “our evidence suggests that social media carried a cascade of messages about freedom and democracy across North Africa and the Middle East, and helped raise expectations for the success of political uprising.”<sup>216</sup>

### **The Coercive Apparatus and Impunity**

While the swelling of the crowd in Tahrir Square was made possible by a combination of variables including social media, widespread grievances and crosscutting participation across the class and political spectrum, it is ultimately the fact that the Egyptian military refrained from attacking the protesters which allowed the protests to last and grow. While the police did at first launch violent attacks against the crowds in Tahrir, it was the military that ultimately decided whether the protesters would be shot and killed “en masse”, or whether the chaos would be tolerated. Eva Bellin raises an important point about the high level of institutionalization of Egypt’s military, entailing that it may have had more to lose in massacring civilians than in regime change. According to Bellin, patrimonial military is more likely to massacre civilians because it risks “ruin by reform,”<sup>217</sup> whereas a “lethal attack on civilians threatens to undermine a military’s institutional interest in maintaining internal coherence, discipline, and morale.”<sup>218</sup> This

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<sup>214</sup> Howard, “Opening Closed Regimes,” 23.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> In Catherine O’Donnel, “New study quantifies use of social media in Arab Spring.”

<sup>217</sup> Bellin, “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarian Regimes,” 129.

<sup>218</sup> Bellin, “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarian Regimes,” 132.

may explain why the Egyptian military initially “relied on tear gas and water cannons to disperse the protestors,”<sup>219</sup> however

by January 29 it was evident that the military had decided to focus on protecting government buildings rather than intervene against the demonstrators. On January 31 a military spokesman explicitly declared on state TV that “the military understood the legitimacy of (the protesters’) demands” and that “the armed forces will not resort to use of force against our great people.” Consequently, aside from a short two days during the first week of protest when regime-sponsored thugs violently assaulted demonstrators, a sense of impunity developed.<sup>220</sup>

According to Mona El-Ghobashy, “when Hosni Mubarak appeared on television shortly after midnight on January 29 to announce his appointment of a new government, it was the first time in his tenure that he had been summoned to the podium by popular fiat.”<sup>221</sup>

“People power” soon took over Tahrir Square, and “euphoria outweighed rational calculation of risk, cost” with thousands camping on the site day and night.<sup>222</sup> As the protests swelled, other movements opted to “join the protest initiated by the April 6 movement, including Youth for Justice and Freedom, the Popular Democratic Movement for Change (HASHD) and the NAC” (National Association for Change), as well as “political parties including the Ghad, Karama, Wafd and Democratic Front.”<sup>223</sup> On Friday February 11, “angered by Mubarak’s refusal to resign,” Egyptians responded with “their biggest demonstration yet. Ignoring fears that Mubarak might order a brutal crackdown, people of all ages and classes calmly gathered in central squares across the country and in unison demanded a change.”<sup>224</sup> That day, following nearly 4 weeks of chaos in central

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<sup>219</sup> Bellin, “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarian Regimes,” 138.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> Mona El-Ghobashy, “The Praxis of the Egyptian Revolution.”

<sup>222</sup> Bellin, “Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarian Regimes,” 141.

<sup>223</sup> Heba Afify, “Activists hope 25 January protest will be start of ‘something big’,” *Egypt Independent* January 24, 2010. <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/activists-hope-25-january-protest-will-be-start-something-big>.

<sup>224</sup> Craig Whitlock, “Mubarak steps down, prompting jubilation in Cairo streets,” *Washington Post*, February 12, 2011. [www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/11/AR2011021106711.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/11/AR2011021106711.html)

Cairo, Hosni Mubarak ceded power to a transitional council, an event which would have been unthinkable just one month prior.

#### **4.3) THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS THEORETICAL RELEVANCE**

Looking at the fate of Mubarak's regime, one may surmise that Egypt's uprising occurred not as a result of the collective will of the Egyptian people but because there was a sudden change in the balance of resources between the people and the regime.<sup>225</sup> The ability to galvanize public sentiment through social media and launch swift mass protests is precisely where the shift in favor of the revolution occurred. Whereas public protests were previously undertaken by smaller groupings such as labour unions, Muslim brothers or left-wing organization, the January 25 revolt marked a drastic change in the organizers' ability to bring together disparate groups. One explanation for the unexpected size and determination of the movement is that the development of networks of trust among participants from various socio-economic backgrounds was made possible by the broad dissemination of dissent through blogs and social media in the years leading up to revolution. Common identities were constructed online, as exemplified by the "We are all Khalid Sa'id" page, which provided a central emotional impetus for the revolution and challenged the misinformation propagated on state-owned Egyptian newspapers and television networks. Even satellite television networks, which were initially instrumental in disseminating the latest images on the ground, came to rely on social media for access to up-to-minute information. The key to understanding the effect of social media may be

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<sup>225</sup> Mona El-Ghobashy, "The Praxis of the Egyptian Revolution."

to consider the structural aspects of social networks. Social networks offer easy and affordable access to social movements by reducing the costs of mobilization and accelerating the dissemination of information. Any citizen with an Internet connection or a modern mobile phone can access Facebook or Twitter where news, ideas and debates spread rapidly. “Tweets are broadcast directly to followers and indirectly to a larger audience,”<sup>226</sup> which make them useful for gathering up-to-the-minute information which traditional media outlets may be unable or reluctant to provide. This means that users effectively create headlines for their extended networks to read and interpret, thereby creating an original narrative. In Egypt, social media enabled protesters to create a depict Mubarak’s regime as the embodiment of all of society’s ills, displacing individual grievances toward the greater goal of removing him from power. This was exemplified both in the content shared on the Khalid Sa’id facebook page and in the solidarity displayed in Tahrir Square during the protest, where the focus lay primarily on the common rejection of a corrupt dictatorship and a desire for democracy. The Egyptian Revolution of 2011 therefore marks a shift in the content of popular political expression in Egypt. Before the revolution, the dominant discourse had been imposed from the top-down, a reality exacerbated by the 30-year state of emergency imposed by the Mubarak regime following Sadat’s assassination. The balance of power shifted in favor of the protesters because they now had the means to challenge dominant discourses with their own version of reality, told from the ground up. “Access to information”, writes Sohair Wastamy, “in a country with limited resources, served as the first catalyst for the Egyptian revolution that began January 25 and resulted 18 days later in the resignation of

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<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

President Hosni Mubarak after almost 30 years in office.”<sup>227</sup> The sudden shift occurred as fear was replaced by anger and resentment at the regime. While Mubarak’s network may have been far reaching, making its way into the homes of ordinary citizens through state run media, the network of those seeking to promote counter-hegemonic discourses in Egypt became much larger and grew to include millions of like-minded citizens. As protesters seized upon the new digital resources to reorganize and disseminate the information available to them, they developed the courage to defy summary arrests and police brutality and they successfully challenged the regime by creating new narratives of liberation and freedom. This in turn fueled the protests in Tahrir Square, whereby “social media became the means of choreography of assembly, facilitating the coalescence of the cosmopolitan Facebook youth around a common identity.”<sup>228</sup> Egypt’s revolution therefore serves as a case study of social media not only allowing collective action to unfold, but also becoming a channel for the construction of the common identities essential to sparking solidarity, defiance and mass mobilization. Social media helped trigger an information cascade confirming the existence of shared-beliefs regarding the Mubarak regime among various sectors of society. Whereas the middle classes and elites are traditionally reluctant to express such dissent, Mario Diani points to “the contribution of ICT in facilitating the collective action capacity of the more advanced sectors of the urban middle classes,” which may have allowed Egyptians “to overcome the barriers (...) posed by a society fragmented through clan/religious line,” transforming previously isolated protests into a more inclusive movement.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Sohair Wastawy, “Egyptians Find Their Power in Access to Information.”

<sup>228</sup> Gerbaudo, *Tweets from the Streets*, 48.

<sup>229</sup> In Mario Diani, “Networks and Internet into Perspective,” 3.

## 5) IRAN CASE STUDY

### 5.1) Background Conditions

The current leadership in Iran came to power in 1979 following a “revolutionary struggle” that ceded the state to Islamic ideologues.<sup>230</sup> Today, the country’s conservative leadership “is tied together by strong personal bonds, shared political and economic interests, and a common strategic outlook. This leadership asserts power in the name of the Islamic Revolution’s ideology and values, and uses strong-arm tactics to intimidate its opponents.”<sup>231</sup> According to Francis Fukuyama, “the Iranian constitution is a curious hybrid of authoritarian, theocratic and democratic elements.”<sup>232</sup> It vests “sovereignty in God” and allows “popular elections for the presidency,” yet “all the democratic procedures and rights in the earlier sections of the constitution are qualified by certain powers reserved to a council of senior clerics.”<sup>233</sup> The clerics exert “control over the armed forces,” reserve the right “to declare war,” and have “appointment powers over the judiciary, heads of media, army and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.”<sup>234</sup> According to Lucan Way “the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War of 1980–88 helped to generate ideologically motivated and effective security forces including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and its paramilitary auxiliary, the Basij, which is considered one of the Islamic regime’s primary guarantors of domestic security.”<sup>235</sup> Regarding the Revolutionary Guard, Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr consider that its

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<sup>230</sup> Lucan Way, “The Lessons of 1989,” *Journal of Democracy* 22 (October, 2011), 20.

<sup>231</sup> Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, “The Conservative Consolidation in Iran,” *Survival* 47 (Summer 2005), 176.

<sup>232</sup> Francis Fukuyama, “Authoritarian Iran, Islam and the Rule of Law,” *The Wallstreet Journal*, July 27, 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052970203946904574300374086282670>.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

<sup>234</sup> Francis Fukuyama, “Authoritarian Iran, Islam and the Rule of Law.”

<sup>235</sup> Lucan Way, “The Lessons of 1989,” *Journal of Democracy* 22 (October, 2011), 20.

resources, and the privileges of its personnel, would not likely be maintained if there were to be fundamental changes in the character of the Islamic Republic [...] The Guard has viewed the expansion of civil-society activity as a potential danger in that it can override regime institutions, including the Guard, and lead to wide-scale change.<sup>236</sup>

The Guard's interest in and dedication to preserving the regime may help explain why Iran has so far survived years of international condemnation of its human rights records, and has proven resistant to calls for reform from within. "When challenged," writes Elliot Hen-Tov, "the regime can resort to the ubiquitous presence of these armed masses to intimidate or suppress opposition."<sup>237</sup> Despite the presence of an electoral system that allowed for the election of a reformist president from 1989 to 1997, "the conservatives used antidemocratic measures" to regain authority over "all branches of government," including the "presidency in 2005."<sup>238</sup> During the June 2005 election, the clerics "allowed only one explicitly reformist candidate to run against five conservatives," paving the way for the "most conservative candidate," Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to win the contest.<sup>239</sup> According to Elliot Hen-Tov, "as a former Revolutionary Guard commander and Basij militia instructor, he could rely on the Revolutionary Guards and Basij to engage in serious voter mobilization as well as outright vote rigging."<sup>240</sup> Ahmadinejad's triumph at the polls in June 2005 placed "all the organs of the Iranian state ... in the hands of conservative hardliners,"<sup>241</sup> effectively shutting out reformists from the decision making process and allowing the new president to pursue an "ideological, populist, and militarist

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<sup>236</sup> Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, "The Conservative Consolidation in Iran," 178.

<sup>237</sup> Elliot Hen-Tov, "Understanding Iran's New Authoritarianism," *The Washington Quarterly* (Winter 2006-07): 175.

<sup>238</sup> Hen-Tov, "Understanding Iran's New Authoritarianism," 164.

<sup>239</sup> Hen-Tov, "Understanding Iran's New Authoritarianism," 165.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> "Iran hardliner sweeps to victory," *BBC News*, June 25, 2005, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/4621249.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4621249.stm).

agenda.”<sup>242</sup> He subsequently “bought political support among the poor and lower middle class by increasing pensions and government workers’ wages.”<sup>243</sup> Reacting to discontent among Iran’s youth and intellectuals, Mir Hossein Mousavi, “Iran’s popular former prime minister,” announced on March 16, 2009, that he would run for president in the upcoming presidential elections.<sup>244</sup> Known as a “moderate reformist with excellent academic qualifications,” Mousavi was perceived by Iranians as a “tolerant old-hand politician who could competently direct the country in the wake of the growing international tensions of the twenty-first century.”<sup>245</sup> According to Iranian journalist Kourosh Ziabari, the “state-sponsored” pro-regime media outlets immediately “set out attacks against the reformists’ campaign,” discrediting Mousavi and depicting his followers as “impious and secular.”<sup>246</sup> In the wake of these allegations, a number of websites aligned with Mousavi began severely criticizing Ahmadinejad’s government, overshadowing the war of words that would unfold on the internet in the run-up to the election.

### **Iran Internet And Social Media Penetration**

According to Henry Jenkins, “approximately 35 percent of the Iranian population” had “Internet access in 2009,” placing Iran “well above the national average across the

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<sup>242</sup> Hen-Tov, “Understanding Iran’s New Authoritarianism,” 167.

<sup>243</sup> Robert F. Worth, “As Iran Gets Ready to Vote, Economy Dominates,” *The New York Times*, June 9, 2009. [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/10/world/middleeast/10iran.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/10/world/middleeast/10iran.html?_r=0)

<sup>244</sup> Kourosh Ziabari, “How the Mass Media Defined Iran’s Destiny,” in *Media, Power, and Politics in the Digital Age: The 2009 Presidential Uprising in Iran*, Ed. Yahya R. Kamalipour (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Little Field Publishers, 2010), 79-80.

<sup>245</sup> Kourosh Ziabari, “How the Mass Media Defined Iran’s Destiny,” 80.

<sup>246</sup> Kourosh Ziabari, “How the Mass Media Defined Iran’s Destiny,” 80-81.

Middle East.”<sup>247</sup> Moreover, “there were more than 60,000 blogs in Iran, making it one of the most active blogging communities in the world.”<sup>248</sup> Starting in “1993, when private use of modems for internet connections were permitted, internet connections went from 5000 in 1997 to 1.326.000 in 2002.”<sup>249</sup> By 2002, connections were numbered at “between 7000-8000 in Tehran alone, and this is despite the fact that the government continuously closed down Internet cafés accused of providing access to websites otherwise banned or blocked in Iran.”<sup>250</sup> The penetration rate was also accompanied by heavy censorship structures which enabled the Iranian authorities to monitor and limit web usage within the country. Undeterred by the regime’s intervention, the Internet evolved into a platform for Iranians to express political views, including dissident and counter-hegemonic speech. “Even before the elections,” writes James Jay Carafano of the Heritage Foundation, “many Iranians advocated drastic social and political change. This use of the Internet persisted despite the fact that some bloggers had been jailed and tortured.”<sup>251</sup> In a similar analysis, Ethan Zuckerman, cofounder of the Global Voices Project, writes “the country’s long history of governmental repression and tight regulation of Internet communication helped shape the savvy response among protesters.”<sup>252</sup> In order to circumvent the censors, many Iranians had learned to use proxy connections to route around blocked websites, and were adept at spreading information through blogs and social media.<sup>253</sup> In his 2009

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<sup>247</sup> Henry Jenkins, “Twitter Revolutions?” *Spreadable Media*, <http://spreadablemedia.org/essays/jenkins/#.Us7wTWQwaod>.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> Stine Nordbjaerg Christensen, *Iran: Modern Media and Electoral Authoritarianism: A study of the Use of Modern Media in the Presidential Election in June 2009*, (Centro Argentino de Estudios Internacionales: Buenos Aires, Argentina), 61.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> James Jay Carafano, “All a Twitter: How Social Networking Shaped Iran’s Election Protests,” *Backgrounder* 2300, *The Heritage Foundation*. (July 20, 2009): 5.

<sup>252</sup> In Henry Jenkins, “Twitter Revolutions?” <http://spreadablemedia.org/essays/jenkins/#.Us7wTWQwaod>.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

analysis of the Iranian uprising, Carafano explained the technical aspects of Iranians' capacity to sidestep censorship,

The Iranian government censors the Internet with software that blocks access to forbidden Web sites or Internet Protocol (IP) address. Social applications like Twitter, however, are not tied to a particular Web site. Even if access to the Twitter site is restricted, users may, for example, access Twitter through other services, such as Twitterfall, which may not have been blocked by the Iranian government. Another means for bypassing government is data routing to a computer that acts as a proxy server. These servers employ IP addresses that are not on the government's forbidden list; the servers then route the information to other Web sites, even those on the government's restricted list.<sup>254</sup>

Thanks to these ploys, technologically savvy Iranians possessed what Ethan Zuckerman describes as the "'latent capacity' of citizens, suggesting that these abilities to work around constraints become mobilized during moments of political crisis."<sup>255</sup>

### **The Opposition Mobilizes**

In 2008, Mohammad Sadeghi a 27 year-old "German-Iranian student" created a "Facebook support group" for the Mousavi campaign.<sup>256</sup> Emulating the deft use "of social networking by the Obama campaign," Mohammad ran the page as "a support group and news stream," in hope that it would help condense Mousavi's "online presence" through a central channel.<sup>257</sup> In an interview conducted by the US Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), Sadeghi said "I liked Mir Hossein Mousavi from the start, he was an Islamic Republic statesman with a good track record. I also believed he represented the best chance for reform, as a middle-path figure who would attract conservative and moderate voters alike."<sup>258</sup> According to the PBS article,

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<sup>254</sup> James Jay Carafano, "All a Twitter: How Social Networking Shaped Iran's Election Protests."

<sup>255</sup> In Henry Jenkins, "Twitter Revolutions?"

<sup>256</sup> Tara Mahtafar, "The Face behind Mousavi's Facebook," *PBS Frontline Dispatches*, November 18, 2009. <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/11/the-face-behind-mousavis-facebook.html>.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

Mohammad visited Iran in March, just when Mousavi formally announced his candidacy. He attended the presidential contender's first speech session in Tehran's working-class district of Nazi Abad, where he first heard the rallying motto 'Every Iranian is a Campaign Manager.' 'It was evident from the outset that public broadcasting would be at the service of Ahmadinejad,' he recalls. 'I knew we would have to use non-conventional methods to compete.'<sup>259</sup>

Mohammad subsequently uploaded "promotional material" and videos onto the Facebook page "for supporters to share and distribute, and also announced dates for provincial rallies, televised debates, and grassroots events."<sup>260</sup> Mousavi's Facebook page soon reached "upwards of 50,000 members,"<sup>261</sup> making Mousavi the first candidate in Iran's electoral history to create a Facebook account and a digital platform where his supporters could befriend him, spread news on meetings and rallies, and contribute to the conversation about political agendas on his Facebook wall.

## **5.2) THE 2009 ELECTION**

In the days preceding the Iranian presidential elections of June 2009, "a group of employees from Iran's Interior Ministry issued an open letter revealing that they had been authorized to change votes."<sup>262</sup> Authorities were "unable to release the leaked document," and the letter rapidly spread through email and was "hosted on websites both inside and outside the country"<sup>263</sup> Iranian author Setareh Sabety reports "for a nation that has never really experienced free elections, the allegations of rigging came as no surprise. Yet no one expected that the government would conduct itself so blatantly, so

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Howard, *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, 5.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

audaciously. This conduct is why so many were offended, hurt, and angry.”<sup>264</sup> Following the release of “election results in favour of the incumbent candidate, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad” on June 12<sup>th</sup>, “a huge number of unsatisfied Iranians took to the streets of Tehran and other major cities en masse, proclaiming ‘Where is my vote.’”<sup>265</sup> The publicizing of the fraud allegation elicited a strong emotional response in Mousavi’s supporters, and thousands immediately took to the streets, with many “onlookers” stating “that they had not seen such disturbances since Iran’s student-led uprisings in 1999.”<sup>266</sup> According to Carafano, “the Iranian government moved quickly to control the flow of public information,” including “blocking or interfering with access to mobile networks, the Internet, and satellite television, as well as restricting access to foreign and domestic members of the media.”<sup>267</sup> Reporter Nahid Siamdoust writes “the entire mobile network was cut off from about late afternoon until midnight (...) Later, Internet connections were reduced to snail speed, and satellite television was almost entirely jammed. It was becoming impossible to report on events. The only “news” left unblocked was that propagated by state television.”<sup>268</sup> Iranian dissidents were nonetheless able to bypass the censors and get their message out thanks in large part to years of preparation and experience in working around the system. Trita Parsi, who is current president of the

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<sup>264</sup> Setareh Sabety, “Graphic Content: The Semiotics of a Youtube Uprising,” in *Media, Power, and Politics in the Digital Age: The 2009 Presidential Uprising in Iran*, Ed. Yahya R. Kamalipour (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Little Field Publishers, 2010), 119.

<sup>265</sup> Yahya R. Kamalipour, *Media, Power, and Politics in the Digital Age: The 2009 Presidential Uprising in Iran*, Ed. Yahya R. Kamalipour (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Little Field Publishers, 2010), xvii.

<sup>266</sup> Colin Freeman, “Iran elections: revolt as crowds protest at Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s ‘rigged’ victory,” *The Telegraph*, June 13, 2009. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/5526721/Iran-elections-revolt-as-crowds-protest-at-Mahmoud-Ahmadinejads-rigged-victory.html>.

<sup>267</sup> James Jay Carafano, “All a Twitter: How Social Networking Shaped Iran’s Election Protests.”

<sup>268</sup> Nahid Siamdoust “Forbidden Iran: How to Report When You’re Banned,” *Time*, June 22, 2009. <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1906069,00.html>.

National Iranian American Council, reported “early images of large crowds of protesters sent out over Twitter emboldened others to join in.”<sup>269</sup> She further goes on to write,

Facebook messages circulated widely detailing how protesters could protect themselves when security forces arrived at the scene with batons and tear gas. And powerful Youtube videos of “Allahu Akbar” chants ringing out through the night illustrated the spirit and passion of the opposition’s movement defiance. All of these were important for sustaining the opposition during the first chaotic days and weeks, putting the lie to government propaganda efforts that portrayed protesters as elite youth from Northern Tehran only. With images and video circulating in real time showing the opposition spread throughout the country and across all segments of society, millions of ordinary Iranians had proof that they were not alone in their discontent; for the first time in the Islamic Republic, real substantive criticism of the entire ruling system was being aired out in the open.<sup>270</sup>

In his research on events during the post-election upheaval, Howard writes, “despite government interference with digital services, SMS, Twitter, and other social media were used to coordinate massive turnout at protests across the country for Monday, June 15.”<sup>271</sup> On June 15<sup>th</sup>, *The Guardian* reported “more than 100,000 Iranians were protesting against the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad,” in Tehran alone.<sup>272</sup> The Iranian soon deployed a sophisticated censorship strategy, which included “coordinating cyber attacks on opposition websites, and limiting the country’s bandwidth to prevent users from uploading large files like photos and videos.”<sup>273</sup> Despite the regime’s intervention, “Twitter survived,” allowing those few Iranians with access to the site to

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<sup>269</sup> Trita Parsi, David Elliott, and Patrick Disney, “Silencing Iran’s Twitterati,” in *Media, Power, and Politics in the Digital Age: The 2009 Presidential Uprising in Iran*, Ed. Yahya R. Kamalipour (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Little Field Publishers, 2010), 163.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Philip Howard, *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, 6.

<sup>272</sup> Ian Black, Vikram Dodd, and Matthew Weaver, “Shots fired as more than 100,000 Iranians defy march ban,” *The Guardian*, June 15, 2009. Accessed online: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jun/15/iran-opposition-rally-banned-mousavi>.

<sup>273</sup> Trita Parsi, David Elliott, and Patrick Disney, “Silencing Iran’s Twitterati,” 167.

spread dissent and protest tactics.<sup>274</sup> According to a New York times article dated June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2009,

Twitter users are posting messages, known as tweets, with the term #IranElection, which allows users to search for all tweets on the subject. On Monday evening, Twitter was registering about 30 new posts a minute with that tag. One read, “We have no national press coverage in Iran, everyone should help spread Moussavi’s message. One Person = One Broadcaster. #IranElection.” The Twitter feed StopAhmadi calls itself the “Dedicated Twitter account for Moussavi supporters” and has more than 6,000 followers. It links to a page on the photo-hosting site Flickr that includes dozens of pictures from the rally on Monday in Tehran. The feed Persiankiwi, which has more than 15,000 followers, sends users to a page in Persian that is hosted by Google and, in its only English text, says, “Due to widespread filters in Iran, please view this site to receive the latest news, letters and communications from Mir Hussein Moussavi.”<sup>275</sup>

According to Carafano, “numerous other Web sites were set up as an information clearinghouse, including funneling details about the location of future protests, posting warnings on government crackdowns, and sharing updates of individuals injured, killed, arrested, or missing.”<sup>276</sup> Philip Howard reports, “one week after the protest marches had begun, Google fast-tracked the development of a Farsi-language translator, and Facebook rushed out a beta translation of its content into Farsi.”<sup>277</sup> In a move that is uniquely revealing of Twitter’s impact on the revolt, on June 16 the “U.S. State Department asked Twitter to delay a network upgrade that would have shut down service for a brief period during daylight hours in Tehran.”<sup>278</sup> In their article about the role of new information technology during the Iranian crisis, Mahboub Hashem and Abeer Najjar write “while it is hard to visualize what exactly happened in the streets of Tehran during those days of the Iran election crisis, social media were there and opened a nonstop line of available

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<sup>274</sup> The Revolution Will Be Twittered, <http://www.theatlantic.com/daily-dish/archive/2009/06/the-revolution-will-be-twittered/200478/>.

<sup>275</sup> Brad Stone and Noam Cohen, “Social Networks Spread Defiance Online,” *The New York Times*, June 15, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/16/world/middleeast/16media.html>.

<sup>276</sup> James Jay Carafano, “All a Twitter: How Social Networking Shaped Iran’s Election Protests.”

<sup>277</sup> Philip Howard, *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, 7.

<sup>278</sup> Philip Howard, *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, 7.

information to the public at a time when Iranian authority was trying to ban all individuals who did not please that authority.”<sup>279</sup> According to reporters Brad Stone and Noam Cohen, “reports and links to photos” from the marches in Tehran became “the most popular topic on the service worldwide” with “Twitter feeds” acting as “virtual media offices for the supporters of the leading opposition candidate, Mir Hussein Mousavi.”<sup>280</sup> The feed Mousavi1388 had over “7,000 followers” and was “filled with news of protests and exhortations to keep up the fight, in Persian and in English.”<sup>281</sup> Regarding the events in Iran, Howard concludes that digital technologies enabled “unprecedented activation of weak social ties,” which “brought the concerns of disaffected youth, cheated voters, and beaten protesters to the attention of the mullahs.”<sup>282</sup>

### **The Death of Neda Agha Soltan**

On June 20, Neda Agha Soltan, a 26-year-old Iranian student, was shot by paramilitaries during a street demonstration.<sup>283</sup> “Her death was caught on several mobile phone cameras,”<sup>284</sup> and was immediately uploaded to YouTube. Distributed through a myriad of tweets, Facebook messages, and Youtube videos, “that sole incident was a galvanizing moment in Iran’s troubled election and ensuing uprising, and it shook the entire world and showed how powerful social media can be in such circumstances.”<sup>285</sup> According to a

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<sup>279</sup> Mahboud Hashem and Abeer Najjar, “The Role and Impact of New Information Technology Applications,” in *Media, Power, and Politics in the Digital Age: The 2009 Presidential Uprising in Iran*, Ed. Yahya R. Kamalipour (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Little Field Publishers, 2010), 129.

<sup>280</sup> Brad Stone and Noam Cohen, “Social Networks Spread Defiance Online.”

<sup>281</sup> Ibid.

<sup>282</sup> Howard, *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, 8.

<sup>283</sup> Howard, *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, 7.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid.

<sup>285</sup> Mahboud Hashem and Abeer Najjar, “The Role and Impact of New Information Technology Applications,” 130.

Guardian article, “Agha-Soltan was quickly lionised by an engaged online community inside and outside Iran.”<sup>286</sup> In the days that followed, “Agha-Soltan's name became a battle cry for Iranian protesters, her face a symbol for the thousands of people who suffered under the government's heavy-handed crackdown.”<sup>287</sup> Thanks to social media Agha-Soltan’s death became the centerpiece of renewed efforts by the dissidents and their supporters who rallied around her image to spark new protests and international condemnation. According to a *Time* magazine article, Agha-Soltan's last moments became “probably the most widely witnessed death in human history.”<sup>288</sup> Fearing that the opposition would turn Neda into a martyr, on June 25<sup>th</sup> 2009, the high-ranking cleric Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami “urged for Iran’s protest leaders to be punished ‘without mercy’ and said some should face execution.”<sup>289</sup> In the following days, protests grew gradually smaller, and protesters settled on quiet public gatherings to mourn those killed during the upheaval. On June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2009, Iran’s Guardian Council chose not to consider the complaints and protests, and validated the results of the 10th presidential election.<sup>290</sup> While sporadic protests did carry on, the flurry of activity that had marked the weeks following the election died out. According to a New York Times article, “Iran’s Islamic government gradually stamped out the 2009 protests through the shooting of

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<sup>286</sup> Robert Tait and Mathew Weaver, “How Neda Agha-Soltan Became the Face of Iran's Struggle,” *The Guardian*, June 22, 2009. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jun/22/neda-soltani-death-iran>.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Krista Mahr, “Neda Agha-Soltan,” *Time*, December 8, 2009. [http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1945379\\_1944701\\_1944705,00.html](http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1945379_1944701_1944705,00.html).

<sup>289</sup> “Call to Execute Iran Protest Chiefs,” *The Guardian*, June 26, 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/feedarticle/8579273>.

<sup>290</sup> Michael Slackman, “Iran Council Certifies Ahmadinejad Victory,” *New York Times*, June 30, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/30/world/middleeast/30iran.html>.

demonstrators, mass trials, torture, lengthy jail sentences and even executions of those taking part.”<sup>291</sup>

### **5.3) IRAN CASE THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

#### **The Social Media effect**

Twitter’s impact on the size and duration of the protest movement that followed the 2009 presidential election is still unclear. Research suggests there were “only 19,000 registered Twitter users in Iran” in June 2009, “while estimates for the number of protestors range from a few hundred thousand to three million.”<sup>292</sup> While it is clear that the majority of Iranians who took to the streets to protest the election were not using Twitter, the majority of them were responding to an information cascade initiated by an opposition that had made unprecedented use of social media during the campaign. As Philip Howard notes “it does not matter that the number of bloggers, twitterers, or internet users may seem small, because in a networked social moment only a few ‘brokers’ need to be using these tools to keep everyone up to date”<sup>293</sup> The Moussavi campaign, which had limited access to state-run television and newspapers, turned to the internet and social media to spread its message, and became the initial ‘broker’ of the Iranian revolt. The team running Mousavi’s Facebook campaign effectively helped create a community of supporters, and activated a network of weak ties that transformed into a mass protest movement once the election results had been announced. Due to the government

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<sup>291</sup> Neil Macfarquhar and Alan Cowell, “Iran Uses Force Against Protests as Region Erupts,” *New York Times*, February 14, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/15/world/middleeast/15iran.html>.

<sup>292</sup> Joshua Roberts, “Why Twitter? Why Twitter could subvert government censorship in Iran when other Web 2.0 services could not,” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*. <http://csis.org/blog/why-twitter-why-twitter-could-subvert-government-censorship-iran-when-other-web-20-services-cou>.

<sup>293</sup> Howard, *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, 11.

censorship and the clandestine nature of social media use within Iran, it is hard to measure the precise impact of these services on the protest movement, however many observers believe that the movement is comparable in scope and scale to the 1979 revolution, which had ousted then's leadership in favor of Ayatollah Khomeini.<sup>294</sup> In his most recent work on digital media in the Arab spring, Howard finds that the 2009 Iranian social movement lasted longer than expected under such a repressive regime, "drew in thousands more participants, and produced more witnesses to the brutal regime crackdown."<sup>295</sup> Howard attributes part of the credit to social media for "extending the life of civil disobedience."<sup>296</sup> The longevity of the protest is not only attributable to the dissemination and organization taking place on Facebook and Twitter, but also for letting people outside the country follow events. Social media helped broadcast the grievances of pro-reform Iranians to the world, sparking international indignation, encouragement and outrage. The fact that "Twitter enabled individual citizens to keep up-to-the-minute information flowing out from Iran's borders,"<sup>297</sup> fueled the protesters' fervor as they began to realize that expatriate communities all around the world were expressing solidarity and support. This "unprecedented activation of weak social ties" therefore had an impact not only within Iran, but also on an international scale.<sup>298</sup> According to Philip Howard, "between June 7 and 26, an estimated 480,000 Twitter users exchanged over 2 million tweets, with Twitter streams peaking on election day at over 200,000 per

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<sup>294</sup> Con Coughlin, "Iran analysis: protest draws comparisons with 1979 revolution," *The Telegraph*, June 15, 2009. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/5543261/Iran-analysis-protest-draws-comparisons-with-1979-revolution.html>.

<sup>295</sup> Philip Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain, *Democracy's Fourth Wave ?* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2013), 69.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Joshua Roberts, "Why Twitter?"

<sup>298</sup> Howard, *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, 8.

hour.”<sup>299</sup> While the majority of this traffic came from the US and Europe, the fact that Iranians within Iran understood that the world was watching led to an increase in their social media outputs. According to Henry Jenkins “the protesters appealed directly to the desire among a large group of Twitter users to know what was happening and that group’s fantasy of exerting a greater influence over world events.”<sup>300</sup> Another striking development was the shaming of CNN, which was perceived to have failed in its responsibility to cover the Iranian election protests. The twitter hashtag #CNNfail was established to lash out at CNN for not reporting on the hundreds of thousands of protesters who had taken to the streets on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009, resulting in CNN “significantly” increasing “its coverage of the events in Iran.”<sup>301</sup> Despite the many perceived successes of the Iranian protest movement in 2009, Iranians were met with brutality and repression, and ultimately failed in bringing about any measurable change within Iran. The Iranian protest movement nonetheless stands out as a case study on how social media can affect a closed society in need of means to express dissent in defiance of an authoritarian regime willing to execute its own people to survive. Twitter emerged as the most important platform (above Facebook, Youtube and other social networks), because it allowed technologically savvy protesters, “particularly those affiliated with universities in Tehran, to organize and to follow updates by Mir Hossein Mousavi; by spreading the word about the location of government crackdowns and the threat of machine-gun-wielding.”<sup>302</sup> Referring back to Eva Bellin’s thesis regarding the robustness of authoritarianism in the Middle East, it can be said that those machine-gun-wielding

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Henry Jenkins, “Twitter Revolutions?”

<sup>301</sup> Henry Jenkins, “Twitter Revolutions?”

<sup>302</sup> Marc Ambinderjun, “The Revolution Will Be Twittered,” *The Atlantic*, June 15 2009.  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2009/06/the-revolution-will-be-twittered/19376/>.

soldiers, and the police forces dedicated to the regime, are the main reason why the current regime in Tehran is still standing. The events in Iran confirm Bellin's hypothesis that many autocracies live on through "the presence of an exceptionally muscular coercive apparatus endowed with both the capacity and will to repress democratic initiatives originating from society."<sup>303</sup> As the enforcer of the Iran's Islamic revolution, the coercive apparatus had the last word due in large part to the fact that it was willing to shoot, kill, imprison and torture protesters. This may be due to the fact that Iran's Revolutionary Guard derives its *raison d'être* from its role as protector of the previous revolution, which toppled the American-backed Shah in 1979. Despite the fact that social media was used to facilitate mobilization, participation and information gathering, the Iranian ultimately uprising failed to even bring about its most modest goal - a vote recount - because the regime in Tehran kept control of a coercive apparatus faithfully committed to its goals. Whereas in Egypt Khalid Sa'id's death had created an unprecedented opportunity for hundreds of thousands of activists and protesters to mobilize in reaction to police predation, in Iran it appears that Neda Agha Soltan's death served both to galvanize the public but also to remind it that military snipers would spare no one. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, social media penetration in 2009 Iran was not up to the level of Egypt in 2011. The fact that unfettered access was reserved to those few technologically-savvy users who mastered the 'proxy' mechanism, means that the vast majority of the population was still reliant on cell phones and television for their information, both of which were intermittently shutdown by the regime during the election crisis.

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<sup>303</sup> Eva Bellin, "Reconsidering the Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East," 128.

## 6) NEW PROTEST MOVEMENTS

### 6.1) A Worldwide Phenomenon

The year 2013 saw the emergence of massive protest movements in India, Turkey, Brazil, Ukraine and Thailand. These movements appear to confirm an upsurge in mass protest movements in recent years, not only in the sheer number of protests but also in size and duration of the protests. A recent analysis of 843 protests in 87 countries between 2006 and 2013 finds a “steady increase in the overall number of protests every year,” from 59 protests in 2006 to 112 protests by mid-2013.<sup>304</sup> The study also finds that “crowd estimates suggest that 37 events had one million or more protesters; some of those may well be the largest protests in history (eg. 100 million in India in 2013, 17 million in Egypt in 2013).”<sup>305</sup> Since the publication of this research in September 2013, new movements have emerged in Thailand and Ukraine. For the purpose of my research, I will provide an overview of the movements that emerged in Ukraine and Turkey, tracing the processes of initial mass mobilization in each case. While Turkey and Ukraine cannot be labeled as authoritarian, they share qualities of authoritarianism, such as “displaying an increasingly tone-deaf, majoritarian-authoritarian tendency,” as exemplified by leaderships that “are plowing through with divisive projects,” despite clear public opposition.<sup>306</sup> At the time of their respective protests, both Turkey and Ukraine had leaders widely seen to be unresponsive to the demands of huge swathes of the population, leading large segments of these populations to react with swift and protracted defiance. In

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<sup>304</sup> Isabel Ortiz, Sara Burke, Mohamed Berrada and Hernán Cortés, “World Protests 2006-2013,” *Initiative for Policy Dialogue*, (Columbia University and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung: New York, 2013): 14.

<sup>305</sup> Isabel Ortiz et al. “World Protests 2006-2013,” 6.

<sup>306</sup> Zeynep Tufekci, “Is there a Social-Media Fueled Protest Style? An Analysis From #jan25 to #geziparki,” *Technosociology Blog*, <http://technosociology.org/?p=1255>.

both cases the movements quickly developed into the largest protests these countries had witnessed in decades. These movements are relevant to my research because they display many attributes of social media inspired protests, such as “non-activist participation,” the “breaking of pluralistic ignorance,” and narratives structured on social media, which may help further reveal how social media may spark mass protests movements.<sup>307</sup> Moreover, Turkey and Ukraine have broad social media penetration, with 35% of Turks reporting that they use social networking sites according to a 2012 Pew Research Center study, and a 34% internet penetration rate in Ukraine.<sup>308</sup> For the purposes of my research, I will focus principally on the initial eruption of the protest movements, and the events that immediately preceded their occurrence. This will allow me to concentrate solely on the particular use of social media made in each case, and how it may have contributed to initiating mass movements.

## **6.2) TURKEY**

In 2013, Turkey entered its 10th year under the leadership of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Mr. Erdogan had successfully put together an “urban working-class, agrarian and neo-Islamist voter coalition in three consecutive election victories,” and led Turkey through a protracted period of economic growth, “job creation and infrastructure strengthening.”<sup>309</sup> After his re-election on 2011, a shift was perceived in Mr. Erdogan’s style of governance, with many observers decrying his authoritarian ambitions and an

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<sup>307</sup> Zeynep Tufekci, “Is there a Social-Media Fueled Protest Style? An Analysis From #Jan25 to #GeziParki,” *Technosociology Blog*, <http://technosociology.org/?p=1255>.

<sup>308</sup> “Social Networking Popular Across Globe,” *Pew Research: Global Attitudes Project*, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/12/12/social-networking-popular-across-globe/>.

<sup>309</sup> Simon Tisdall, “Turkey protests expose anxiety over Erdogan's growing autocratic ambitions,” *The Guardian*, June 3, 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/03/turkey-protests-erdogan-autocratic-ambitions>.

“assault on the secular republic” that developed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>310</sup> Many Turks believe that a “culture war” has emerged “against the country’s secular classes,” exemplified by a proposed legislation to ban “serving alcohol in public places,” and “legislation to curb the availability of abortion through Turkey’s national health insurance system.”<sup>311</sup> As evidence of corruption and graft in the awarding of lucrative construction contracts emerged in 2012, many journalists lost their jobs, and the media companies who diffused such information were threatened with “huge tax bills on the order of the billions of dollars.”<sup>312</sup> According to *Reuters*, “pro-government newspapers like Sabah, Star and Yeni Safak have largely portrayed the corruption investigations as a plot against Erdogan,” while the “senior editor at one of Turkey’s largest dailies” became “the subject of a hate campaign on the Internet and in pro-government newspapers” after publishing incriminating evidence.<sup>313</sup> Though echoes of corruption circulated, very little of it was ultimately covered in mainstream media, mainly because “large conglomerates” with ties to Prime Minister Erdogan “have purchased television channels and newspapers, which they use to run sycophantic coverage of the government.”<sup>314</sup> Moreover, in 2013, for the “second consecutive year, jailed more journalists than any other country,” which is considered “the hallmark of an intolerant, repressive society,” according to Joel Simon, Executive Director of the Committee to Protect Journalists.<sup>315</sup> It was in this climate of

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<sup>310</sup> Seyla Benhabib, “Turkey’s Authoritarian Turn,” *The New York Times*, June 3, 2013.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/04/opinion/turkeys-authoritarian-turn.html>.

<sup>311</sup> Seyla Benhabib, “Turkey’s Authoritarian Turn.”

<sup>312</sup> Zeynep Tufekci, “Is the Internet Good or Bad? Yes,” *Matter*, <https://medium.com/matter/76d9913c6011>

<sup>313</sup> Dasha Afanasieva, “Corruption scandal tests Turkey’s cowed media,” *Reuters*, February 3, 2014. [www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/03/us-turkey-corruption-media-idUSBREA1201220140203](http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/03/us-turkey-corruption-media-idUSBREA1201220140203).

<sup>314</sup> Zeynep Tufekci, “Is the Internet Good or Bad? Yes.”

<sup>315</sup> In “Turkey again jails most journalists, annual index finds,” *AlJazeera America*. December 18, 2013. <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/12/18/turkey-jails-mostjournalistsfor2ndyear.html>.

mistrust between elements of Turkey's secular civil society and the prime minister, that the Turkish protests were sparked in May 2013.

### 6.2.1) The Gezi Park Movement

In April 2013, a small gathering was planned in reaction to an announcement that Gezi Park, a green area in central Istanbul, would be replaced by an urban redevelopment project including the construction of a mosque and shopping mall. A “small group of activists”<sup>316</sup> dedicated to conserving the park occupied the area “to protect trees that were to be cut down for the government's project.”<sup>317</sup> Launched as a hashtag on the Turkish twittersphere on April 10, 2013, #ayagakalk (“stand up”) became the initial rallying call for small protest in Gezi park.<sup>318</sup> On May 27, Taksim Solidarity - the first group to mobilize in defense of the park – assembled in Gezi to confront the tractors sent to uproot the trees.<sup>319</sup> Initially uneventful, the small protest carried on into a second day, as approximately “50 people set up a camp among the trees.”<sup>320</sup> In the early hours of the next morning, riot police took over the park, “using teargas and high-pressure water hoses (...) to disperse” the assembled protesters.<sup>321</sup> The hashtag #OccupyGezi was instantly created on Twitter, creating a focal point for the delivery dozens of images of

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<sup>316</sup> Baran Mavzer, “A Social Media Chronology of Occupy Gezi”, *Azadolu Blog: Turkish news, translations, and context*. <http://azadolu.com/2013/06/02/a-social-media-cronology-of-occupy-gezi/>.

<sup>317</sup> Ece Temelkuran, “People have killed their fear of authority - and the protests are growing,” *New Statesman*, June 3, 2013. <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2013/06/people-have-killed-their-fear-authority-and-protests-are-growing>.

<sup>318</sup> Baran Mavzer, “A Social Media Chronology of Occupy Gezi.”

<sup>319</sup> “Timeline of the Gezi Park Protests,” *Hurriyet Daily News*. [www.hurriyetdailynews.com/timeline-of-gezi-park-protests-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=48321&NewsCatID=341](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/timeline-of-gezi-park-protests-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=48321&NewsCatID=341).

<sup>320</sup> Luke Harding, “Turkey protesta: Q&A,” *The Guardian*, June 7, 2013.

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/07/turkey-protests-istanbul-recep-tayyip-erdogan>

<sup>321</sup> Hunter Stuart, “#OccupyGezi Protests: Police Attack Peaceful Protesters In Istanbul,” *The Huffington Post*, May 31, 2013. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/31/occupygezi-protests-istanbul-taksim\\_n\\_3366583.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=world](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/05/31/occupygezi-protests-istanbul-taksim_n_3366583.html?utm_hp_ref=world).

protesters being attacked by police.<sup>322</sup> The following images exemplifies the combination of photographs and tweets that helped generate popular anger and spur people to action:



<sup>322</sup> Hunter Stuart, “#OccupyGezi Protests: Police Attack Peaceful Protesters In Istanbul.”

<sup>323</sup> In Hunter Stuart, “#OccupyGezi Protests: Police Attack Peaceful Protesters In Istanbul.”

Among the flurry of photographs and tweets sent out that day, one stands out from the others in its shock value, and provides a crucial insight into understanding how mass movements are created in the age of social media. Ceyda Sungur, an instructor from Istanbul's Technical University urban planning department, had walked in to Gezi park to join the people assembled there.<sup>324</sup> Dressed in “a red cotton dress,” and carrying nothing more than a “white shoulder bag,” she ended up face-to-face with a line of riot police, when “one of them crouched down and fired pepper spray directly into her face.”<sup>325</sup> Standing right beside her in that instant was “*Reuters* photographer, Osman Orsal,” who “captured the moment, creating an image which in the ensuing days went viral – shared via Facebook, Twitter and other social media.”<sup>326</sup> The image of Sungur, now named the “lady in the red dress,” became an instant icon throughout Turkey, and was even “transformed into a giant billboard” in the coastal city of Izmir.<sup>327</sup> The image is stark due to the photographer's proximity to Sungur, who appears to weather the act of violence with abandon, simply standing her ground and allowing the police man to go on spraying her. The image was so revealing of the authorities' disdain for the protesters in Gezi Park that it helped spur tens of thousands more people to action. Below is the photograph that became the dominant image of the unrest in Turkey:

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<sup>324</sup> Luke Harding, “Turkey's resistance image forged as pepper spray burns woman in red dress,” *The Guardian*, June 5, 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/05/turkey-lady-red-dress-ceyda-sungur>.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.



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On that same day, Twitter became “flooded with images of violence, including one of a protester on his or her knees using a sign that read ‘CHEMICAL TAYYIP’ as a shield against a police hose.”<sup>329</sup> And on the following day, “activists made a call through social media for a major gathering in Gezi park”<sup>330</sup> under the new hashtag “#direngeziparki (resist Gezi Park).”<sup>331</sup> One example of how Tweets may attract protesters came from a popular Turkish actor who was present in Gezi Park on May 30. Memet Ali Alabora was with the assembled protesters, when he tweeted (translated from Turkish) “This is not only about Gezi Park, my friends, don’t you get it yet? Come on, come here.”<sup>332</sup> A snapshot of the actor’s Twitter account taken at 2:45PM on May 30, shows that the Tweet had been retweeted (meaning that it was forwarded or resent by followers) 22,969 times.

<sup>328</sup> Osman Orsal, “The Lady in the Red Dress,” *Reuters*. May 30, 2013.

<sup>329</sup> Elif Batuman, “Occupy Gezi: Police Against Protesters In Istanbul,” *The New Yorker*, June 1, 2013. <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2013/06/occupy-taksim-police-against-protesters-in-istanbul.html>.

<sup>330</sup> “Timeline of the Gezi Park Protests,” *Hurriyet Daily News*.

<sup>331</sup> Baran Mavzer, “A Social Media Chronology of Occupy Gezi.”

<sup>332</sup> Baran Mavzer, “A Social Media Chronology of Occupy Gezi.”



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In the absence of televised news surrounding the event, it seems highly likely that social media played a crucial role in urging large numbers of people to join the budding movement in Gezi Park. According to Turkey's *Hurriyet Daily News*, on the "evening" of May 30, "more than 10,000 people were at Gezi Park."<sup>334</sup> In the ensuing crackdown, at least a dozen protesters "were hospitalized with head traumas and respiratory injuries" linked to police brutality and tear gas.<sup>335</sup> Following another early morning police raid against the protesters on May 31<sup>st</sup>, and with Twitter ablaze with images of violence and calls for a "major gathering in the city center in the evening ... By 8PM an estimated 100,000 people were in the Beyoğlu district" of downtown Istanbul, with many marching "across the Bosphorus Bridge" on the Asian side of the city to defy riot police in Taksim Square.<sup>336</sup> On May 31<sup>st</sup>, students from New York University's Social Media and Political Participation (SMaPP) laboratory began gathering and analyzing the social media response to the protests in Gezi Park. Staring at 4pm local time in Turkey, on Friday May 31<sup>st</sup> 2013, the researchers found that

<sup>333</sup> Memet Ali Alabora, "Mesele sadece Gezi Parkı değil arkadaş, sen hâlâ anlamadın mı? Hadi gel. #direngeziparki," May 30, 2013. Tweet. <https://twitter.com/memetalalabora/status/340177091599400960>

<sup>334</sup> "Timeline of the Gezi Park Protests," *Hurriyet Daily News*.

<sup>335</sup> Elif Batuman, "Occupy Gezi: Police Against Protesters In Istanbul."

<sup>336</sup> "Timeline of the Gezi Park Protests," *Hurriyet Daily News*.

at least 2 million tweets mentioning hashtags related to the protest, such as #direngeziparkı (950,000 tweets), #occupygezi (170,000 tweets) or #geziparkı (50,000 tweets) have been sent (...) Even after midnight local time last night more than 3,000 tweets about the protest were published every minute. What is unique about this particular case is how Twitter is being used to spread information about the demonstrations from the ground. Unlike some other recent uprisings, around 90% of all geolocated tweets are coming from within Turkey, and 50% from within Istanbul.<sup>337</sup>

The high volume of tweets sent out at the height of the protests can be attributed to the muted response in Turkish media, especially in terms of television coverage, which is considered to have been virtually “non-existent” during the first days of the movement.<sup>338</sup>

“Turkish mainstream TV stations, including MNSBC-affiliated NTV and CNN Turk, failed to cover the protests,” with the most notable failure coming from CNN Turk, who infamously “chose to air a documentary about penguins” while the protests were raging in Gezi Park.<sup>339</sup> A *New Yorker* article describing the events on the ground in Istanbul on May 31<sup>st</sup> noted “the whole country seemed to be experiencing a cognitive disconnect, with Twitter saying one thing, the government saying another, and the television off on another planet. Twitter was the one everyone believed—even the people who were actually on the street.”<sup>340</sup> Despite the absence of media coverage, hundreds of thousands of protesters took to Istanbul’s streets on May 31<sup>st</sup>, fearlessly confronting riot police, with tens of thousands marching across “the Bosphorus Bridge (...) to lend support in

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<sup>337</sup> Joshua Tucker, “A Breakout Role for Twitter? Extensive Use of Social Media in the Absence of Traditional Media by Turks in Taksim Square Protests.” *The Monkey Cage Blog* <http://themonkeycage.org/2013/06/01/a-breakout-role-for-twitter-extensive-use-of-social-media-in-the-absence-of-traditional-media-by-turks-in-taksim-square-protests/>.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid.

<sup>339</sup> Kerem Oktem, “Why Turkey’s mainstream media chose to show penguins rather than protests,” *The Guardian*, June 9, 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/09/turkey-mainstream-media-penguins-protests>.

<sup>340</sup> Elif Batuman, “Occupy Gezi: Police Against Protesters In Istanbul.”

Taksim.”<sup>341</sup> Social movement scholar Zeynep Tufekci was in Istanbul throughout the course of events. On her blog *Technosociology*, she wrote,

Unsurprisingly, social media, especially Twitter and Facebook have emerged as key protest and information conduits (...) Most protesters I talked with said that this just wouldn't be possible without especially Twitter and Facebook. Most people heard of what was going on in the park during the initial police attack (when the protest was small, the police moved in, burned the tents and started cutting down the trees) via Twitter and Facebook and showed up to try to protect the park. They couldn't have heard it on mass media because it was broadcasting anything but the news.<sup>342</sup>

Selen Cimin, “a lawyer (...) present at the Gezi-Taksim protests since the beginning” similarly reports that social media was crucial to the uprising, stating “we use social media because it is the only thing we can use to show people what is really happening,” and “social media helped us to learn what was happening around [us], because we couldn't follow [on] TV or anywhere.”<sup>343</sup> As Zeynep Tufekci concludes, “Twitter had become the capillary structure of a movement without visible leaders, without institutional structure.”<sup>344</sup> Although Erdogan had initially told reporters “even if hell breaks loose, those trees will be uprooted,”<sup>345</sup> following the confrontations with protesters on May 31<sup>st</sup>, “an Istanbul court (...) ruled in favor of a petition by a local advocacy group and halted the project until parties submitted their legal arguments to court.”<sup>346</sup> Moreover, Turkish business magnates “announced that they would not participate if a mall were built in Taksim amid growing unrest.”<sup>347</sup> Erdogan conceded that

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<sup>341</sup> Ibid.

<sup>342</sup> Zeynep Tufekci, *Technosociology Blog*, June 21, 2013, <http://technosociology.org/?p=1349>.

<sup>343</sup> Kate Knibbs, “Arrested for Tweeting in Turkey: The Social Media Machine of #Occupy Gezi Movement,” *Digital Trends*, June 8 2013. <http://www.digitaltrends.com/social-media/the-invaluable-role-of-social-media-in-occupygezi-and-protest-culture/#!BTje9>.

<sup>344</sup> Zeynep Tufekci, “Is the Internet good or bad? Yes” <https://medium.com/matter/76d9913c6011>

<sup>345</sup> Elif Batuman, “Occupy Gezi: Police Against Protesters In Istanbul.”

<sup>346</sup> Tim Arango and Ceylan Yeginsu, “Peaceful Protest Over Istanbul Park Turns Violent as Police Crack Down,” *The New York Times*, May 31, 2013. [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/01/world/europe/police-attack-protesters-in-istanbuls-taksim-square.html?pagewanted=1&\\_r=1&hp](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/01/world/europe/police-attack-protesters-in-istanbuls-taksim-square.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1&hp).

<sup>347</sup> “Timeline of Gezi Park Protests,” *Hürriyet Daily News*.

the shopping mall development was uncertain, but “remained defiant on the government efforts” to rebuild Ottoman-style “Artillery Barracks in the area.”<sup>348</sup> Undeterred by these concessions or by the police barricades set up around Gezi Park, “hundreds of thousands of people ... continued to protest” in Istanbul and in “more than 40 Turkish cities” on the night of June 1<sup>st</sup> 2013.<sup>349</sup> Over the course of June 2013, “people from all walks of life” joined the street protests in cities across Turkey, prompting Turkish journalist Ayşe Çavdar to argue that the movement had “fundamentally changed the understanding of participatory democracy in Turkey.”<sup>350</sup> She is quoted in a *Guardian* article dated June 5, 2013, “in my opinion we owe Tayyip Erdoğan a debt of gratitude. He brought us all together, he turned every inch of the pavement, every tree, and every flower into a political arena. We are very happy about what is happening in Turkey.”<sup>351</sup> While the protesters ultimately retreated, the Gezi Park movement succeeded in shifting Erdoğan’s image as an “unbeatable” politician, and “in December 2013, a corruption scandal” came to light with “most of the news related to the scandal, once again, primarily circulated on social media as the government attempted to quash the investigation.”<sup>352</sup> As of March 28 2014, the Turkish government has “blocked access” to both Twitter and Youtube throughout the country “amid national security concerns.”<sup>353</sup>

### 6.3) TURKEY CASE THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

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<sup>348</sup> “Timeline of Gezi Park Protests,” *Hürriyet Daily News*.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Ian Traynor and Constanze Letsch, “Turkey divided more than ever by Erdoğan's Gezi Park crackdown,” *The Guardian*, June 20, 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/20/turkey-divided-erdogan-protests-crackdown>.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Zeynep Tufekci, “Is the Internet good or bad? Yes” <https://medium.com/matter/76d9913c6011>

<sup>353</sup> Constance Letsch and Dominic Rushe, “Turkey blocks YouTube amid 'national security' concerns,” *The Guardian*, March 28, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/27/google-youtube-ban-turkey-erdogan>.

The Turkish protest movement is different from others here explored because it occurred in a context where Prime Minister Erdogan enjoyed mass popular support (exemplified by his three electoral victories), and therefore begs the question of why the protests occurred at that particular moment in his rule. While causal inferences are difficult to draw in the Turkish case, understanding what motivated hundreds of thousands of protesters to coalesce around the Gezi Park movement is crucial to revealing the dynamics of protest movements in digitally networked societies. What is clear from the protest tactics used in Istanbul is that social media “broke media censorship, created an original narrative, and allowed coordination,”<sup>354</sup> especially in the early stages of protest action. Perhaps the most surprising, and telling feature of the protest movement in Turkey was the spontaneous nature of the protests, and the expression of solidarity among varied sectors of society, such as “university students (...) football fan club and radical hard left groupings.”<sup>355</sup> The fact that these segments of society are more likely than others to have experienced police brutality or summary arrest, may help explain why they were galvanized by images of police brutality on social media at the start of the protests. Evidence of police brutality occurring in a familiar space in downtown Istanbul, against protesters who were initially peaceful appears to have worked as a “flashpoint,” turning simmering grievance into mass riots.<sup>356</sup> In an article for the *Center for Research and Policy on Turkey*, Kıvanç Atak, a PhD. candidate at the European University Institute

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<sup>354</sup> Ethan Zuckerman, “Zeynep Tufekci on Protest Movements and Capacity Problems,” *My Heart’s in Accra Blog*, October 17, 2013. <http://www.ethanzuckerman.com/blog/2013/10/17/zeynep-tufekci-on-protest-movements-and-capacity-problems/>.

<sup>355</sup> Didem Collinsworth and Hugh Pope, “Turkey’s Protests: The Politics of an Unexpected Movement,” *International Crisis Group Blog*, June 4, 2013. [www.crisisgroupblogs.org/eu-turkey-cyprus/2013/06/04/turkeys-protests-the-politics-of-an-unexpected-movement/](http://www.crisisgroupblogs.org/eu-turkey-cyprus/2013/06/04/turkeys-protests-the-politics-of-an-unexpected-movement/).

<sup>356</sup> Kıvanç Atak, “Uprisings in Turkey: Preliminary Thoughts and Questions from Social Movement Theories”, *Centre for Policy and Research on Turkey* Vol. II, Issue 4, (London: Research Turkey, June, 2013) : 49-54. <http://researchturkey.org/?p=3515>.

writes, “bearing in mind the rich history of policing of demonstrations in Turkey, it is still curious why, in this case, police repression sparked off further mobilization on a large scale.”<sup>357</sup> Mr. Atak suggests that the disproportionate “use of force by the police indisputably escalated public resentment and created a backlash in the form of sustained action.”<sup>358</sup> However the question remains as to why this had not happened before. One of the explanations that emerges from Mr. Atak’s reflection is that “one needs to take into account individual and collective experiences with the police violence, as well as emotional determination to further protest as by-products of these experiences.”<sup>359</sup> Analysis of events in Istanbul suggests that initial episodes of police brutality had the effect of motivating protest participation, inspiring people from across the political spectrum to act together and simultaneously. The images flowing out of Gezi Park on social media during the first days of protest essentially acted as an emotional trigger for those seeking to express frustration with the regime. The fact that hundreds of thousands of protesters gathered in the immediate aftermath of the first night of violence in Gezi park indicates that a large subclass of Turks were ready and willing to engage in protest given the right trigger. In the case of the Gezi park police crackdown, graphic photographs and videos of rampant police abuse, combined with emotional calls to action, served as enough of a rallying call. Zeynep Tufekci joined the movement in Istanbul during the first week of protests and questioned a number of protesters about what had brought them out to Gezi Park. She writes “many told me that the reality gap between television and Twitter had brought them to Gezi. ‘I knew there was censorship on TV,’ one told me. ‘But it wasn’t until Twitter came along I realized how bad it was.

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<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

<sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid.

It's one thing to be insulted discreetly, and another to be insulted so brazenly. I had to come here.”<sup>360</sup> While it is impossible to judge whether social media alone gave each individual protester the sufficient feeling of anger and indignation needed to join the protest, analysis suggest that social media was crucial in providing information about the protest, and in creating a new “tactical repertoire,” which protest participants then employed to produce “disseminate, and contest the language and narratives used to describe a movement.”<sup>361</sup> Hence social media allowed a small group of individuals which Sidney Tarrow calls “early risers” to create and communicate their own representation of reality, exposing an opportunity for protest where none had previously existed. Mr. Erdogan's overwhelming popularity, combined with the lack of coverage of his excesses on state television may have dissuaded many Turks from previously expressing grievances or frustrations at the regime's arrogance. In this sense, police brutality against seemingly benign protesters trying to protect one of Istanbul's last green areas sparked the ire of tens of thousands of individuals and helped them summon the courage to take to the streets. Follow-up episodes of police brutality over the coming days, combined to Mr. Erdogan's insults and disdain towards the protesters, served to galvanize the masses across the country, igniting Turkey's major urban centers for the entire month of June 2013.

#### **6.4) UKRAINE**

In the aftermath of Ukraine's “Orange Revolution” of 2004, the country took steps towards “greater media freedom” through regulation that promised citizens “access to

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<sup>360</sup> Zeynep Tufekci, “Is the Internet Good or Bad? Yes.”

<sup>361</sup> Garrett, “Protest in an Information Society,” 4.

information” and “protect[ed] the professional activities of journalists.”<sup>362</sup> However with the election of Victor Yanukovych in 2010, press freedom had gradually weakened as the President “and his ruling ‘Party of Regions’ cracked down on the country’s opposition, consolidated their influence over the national broadcast media, and approved restrictive laws in the parliament that led to greater media self-censorship.”<sup>363</sup> Moreover, a “highly politicized judicial system ensured that Yanukovych’s main political rival, former prime minister Yuliya Tymoshenko, remained in prison under a seven-year sentence that was imposed in 2011 for her alleged mishandling of natural gas negotiations with Russia in 2009.”<sup>364</sup> It was in this stifling political climate that on November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013, Ukraine declared “that it had suspended its plans to sign far-reaching political and trade agreements with the European Union and said it would instead pursue new partnerships with a competing trade bloc of former Soviet states.”<sup>365</sup> The sudden decision was unsettling because the agreement had come as a “result of years of negotiations” and “represented a confirmation, especially for Ukraine’s educated youth, that theirs was a normal country—part of Europe, not some ‘Little Russia’ appendage of the hegemon to the north.”<sup>366</sup> Hundreds of people instantly took to the streets of Kiev, defying “a court ban on protests,” to occupy Independence Square, the site of the 2004 Orange

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<sup>362</sup> “Ukraine: Freedom of the Press 2006,” *FreedomHouse.org*, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2006/ukraine>.

<sup>363</sup> “Ukraine: Freedom of the Press 2012,” *FreedomHouse.org*, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2012/ukraine>.

<sup>364</sup> “Ukraine: Freedom of the Press 2013,” *FreedomHouse.org*, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2013/ukraine>.

<sup>365</sup> David M. Herszenhorn, “Facing Russian Threat, Ukraine Halts Plans for Deals with E.U.,” *The New York Times*, November 21, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/22/world/europe/ukraine-refuses-to-free-ex-leader-raising-concerns-over-eu-talks.html>.

<sup>366</sup> Andrey Slivka, “Rage In Kiev,” *The New Yorker*. December 11, 2013. <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2013/12/rage-in-kiev.html>.

Revolution.<sup>367</sup> “Participants in the spontaneous protest gave it a name and a twitter hashtag: EuroMaidan,” a term combining the words ‘Europe’ and ‘Maidan’ (Ukrainian for ‘square’).<sup>368</sup> The growth of the movement is attributed to the creation of this Twitter hashtag, which was “used more than 21,000 times by Friday” November 22<sup>nd</sup>, as “overnight opposition demonstrations were held” in cities across Ukraine.<sup>369</sup> One example is the tweet sent out on November 21<sup>st</sup> by a well-known investigative journalist named Mustafa Nayyem, “who first called on citizens via Twitter to mobilize at Independence Square,” with the tweet “Meet at 22:30 under the monument of Independence. Dress warmly; take umbrellas, tea, coffee, and friends.”<sup>370</sup> As a small group occupied the square, social media were “buzzing with rallying calls for a major protest on Sunday,” November 24<sup>th</sup>.<sup>371</sup> In a BBC article published on November 22, Olexiy Solohubenko, an executive editor at BBC Global News and “former head of the BBC’s Ukrainian service,” is quoted expressing doubt that the call to mass protest would be heard, saying “many people tell you of their protest fatigue, and many believe that not just the numbers but the spirit of the Orange Revolution will hardly be repeated - whatever the tools.”<sup>372</sup> Unexpectedly, the rally in Kiev on November 24 drew in an estimated “100,000 to 250,000 people,”<sup>373</sup> making it the largest public gathering since

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<sup>367</sup> Oksana Grytensko and Shaun Walker, “Ukrainians call for Yanukovych to in protests sparked by EU u-turn,” *The Guardian*, December 1, 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/dec/01/ukraine-largest-street-protests-orange-revolution>.

<sup>368</sup> Christopher Miller, “From the Icy Streets of Kiev, Ukraine Spring Goes Global.”

<sup>369</sup> Michael Hirst, “European Square: Hashtag of Ukraine protest,” *BBC News*. November 22, 2013. <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-25050141>.

<sup>370</sup> Christopher Miller, “From the Icy Streets of Kiev, Ukraine Spring Goes Global,” *Mashable.com*, December 11, 2013. <http://mashable.com/2013/12/11/kyiv-protests-ukrainian-spring/>

<sup>371</sup> Michael Hirst, “European Square: Hashtag of Ukraine protest.”

<sup>372</sup> Michael Hirst, “European Square: Hashtag of Ukraine protest.”

<sup>373</sup> Olga Onuch and Gwendolyn Sasse, “What does Ukraine’s #Euromaidan teach us about protest?” *The Washington Post: The Monkey Cage Blog*, February 2, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/02/27/what-does-ukraines-euromaidan-teach-us-about-protest/>.

Ukraine's Orange Revolution of 2004. Following the success of the march, a group of dedicated "peaceful" activists stayed on in Independence square, organizing concerts and rallies.<sup>374</sup> In an unprecedented turn of events, the morning of November 30<sup>th</sup> saw riot police invade Independence square, "swinging truncheons and spraying bursts of tear gas to forcibly break up a crowd."<sup>375</sup> The unrestrained show of force was captured on pictures and video and instantly made available online, leading the EuroMaidan Facebook page to become the "fastest-growing page in the Ukrainian segment of the social network," garnering "over 102,000 subscribers".<sup>376</sup> On Twitter, two EuroMaidan pages garnered "tens of thousands of followers, who use the hashtag #Euromaidan and Ukrainian and Russian equivalents #Євромайдан #Евромайдан to filter news about the demonstrations."<sup>377</sup> According to the *Kyiv Post*, Ukraine's English-language newspaper,

Twitter, which until now has been underutilized in Ukraine, finally became a main and important source of information, simultaneously with Facebook. On Nov. 26 every one or two seconds a message with the hashtag #euromaidan was posted (...) On Nov. 21-28, the average number of Twitter posts that mentioned the hashtag reached 1,500-3000 per hour.<sup>378</sup>

On December 1, 2013, "after a coordinated effort by opposition parties" and civil society, "500,000 to 800,000 people joined the protests in Kiev."<sup>379</sup> Starting on November 27, interviewers for a "British Academy funded survey," began gathering data and "conducting surveys at Kiev protest sites for two to three hours each day," using "a strict

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> David M. Herszenhorn, "Ukrainians Back in the Street to Support EU Accord," *The New York Times*, November 30, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/01/world/europe/ukraine-protests.html>.

<sup>376</sup> Katerina Kaplyuk, "Role of social media in EuroMaidan movement essential," *The Kyiv Post*, December 1, 2013. <http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/role-of-social-media-in-euromaidan-movement-essential-332749.html>.

<sup>377</sup> Christopher Miller, "From the Icy Streets of Kiev, Ukraine Spring Goes Global."

<sup>378</sup> Katerina Kaplyuk, "Role of social media in EuroMaidan movement essential."

<sup>379</sup> Olga Onuch and Gwendolyn Sasse, "What does Ukraine's #Euromaidan teach us about protest?"

random sampling strategy” whereby “only every sixth protester was approached.”<sup>380</sup> 1,203 protesters took part in the surveys, complimented with “daily documentation of protest slogans and signage (digital video and photography), as well as rapid interviews with a smaller sample of protesters (n= 200).”<sup>381</sup> Data from the Ukrainian Protest Project show that the movement was composed of a “cross-cleavage coalition” of citizens representing “three age groups (under 30, 30 to 55, and 55-plus), at least two religious cleavages (Catholic and Orthodox), and they included large numbers of Russophones (30 percent) and participants who had previously voted for Yanukovich (19 percent) and the Party of Regions (15 to 19 percent).”<sup>382</sup> Researchers also asked protesters how they received information about the protests, and found that “large numbers of protesters indicated that they had learned about the protests from internet sites like Facebook (49 percent), and VKontakte (a Facebook-like social media site that is popular among Russian speakers, 35 percent).”<sup>383</sup> The findings are summarized in the graph below:

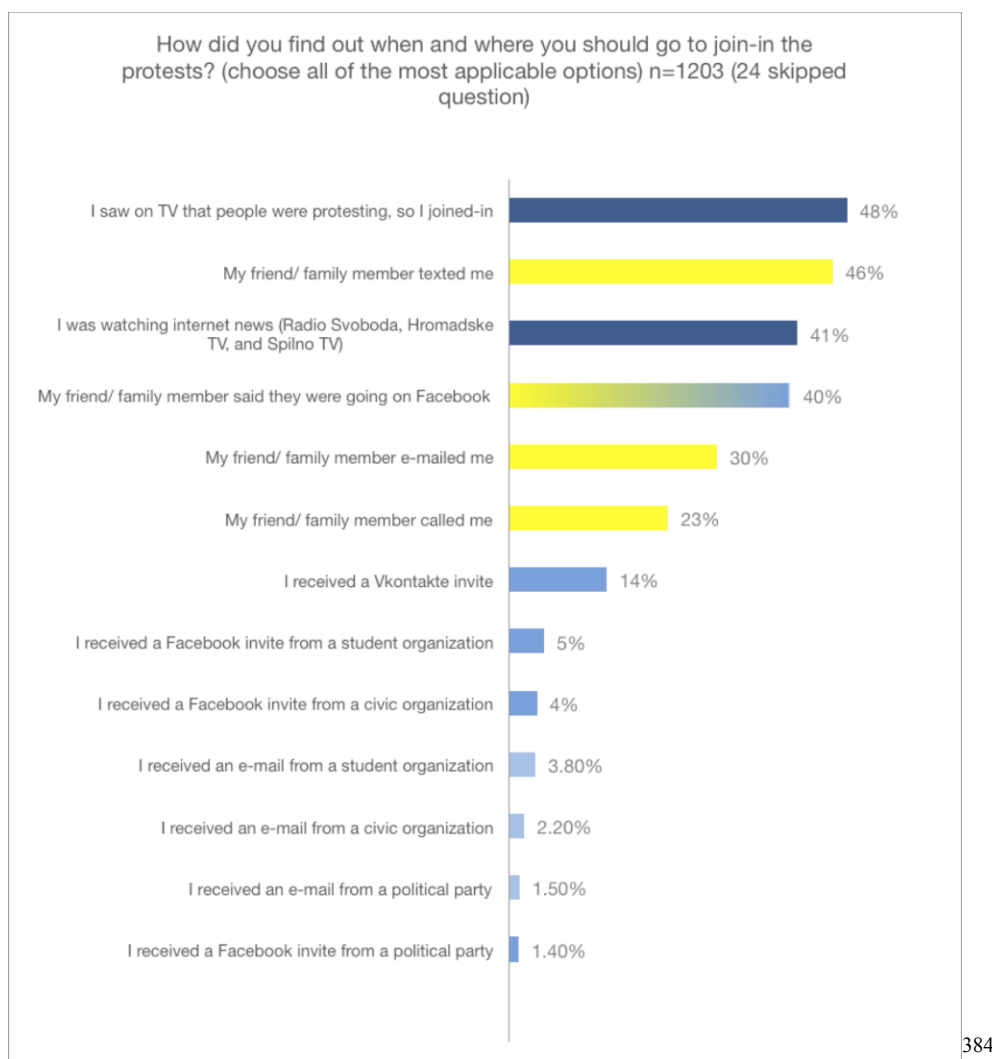
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<sup>380</sup> Olga Onuch, “Social networks and social media in Ukrainian “Euromaidan” protests” *The Washington Post*, January 2, 2013. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/01/02/social-networks-and-social-media-in-ukrainian-euromaidan-protests-2/>.

<sup>381</sup> Christopher Miller, “From the Icy Streets of Kiev, Ukraine Spring Goes Global.”

<sup>382</sup> Olga Onuch and Gwendolyn Sasse, “What does Ukraine’s #Euromaidan teach us about protest?”

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.



While the graph clearly shows that television and networks of strong ties were the leading contributor to protesters' choice of when and where to join the movement, Facebook and Internet news follow close behind. This may be indicative of the broad cross-section of the population present at the EuroMaidan protests, with older protesters more likely to follow events on television and younger protesters on Internet and social media. Another questionnaire sought to understand the specifics of how, when and where protesters chose to join the protest. In her discussion of the findings, lead researcher Olga Onuch writes

<sup>384</sup> Olga Onuch, "Social networks and social media in Ukrainian "Euromaidan" protests."

“when we interviewed protesters, they explained that they found Facebook and Internet news sites more reliable sources of information than television because they gave a ‘general idea of the mood and what was going-on.’”<sup>385</sup> This reveals that many protesters found internet and social media sources to be more trustworthy, and to be more accurately reflective of events of the grounds. Another preliminary finding of the Ukraine Protest Project is a “pattern whereby a sign or slogan first goes viral on Facebook, and then seems to show up more often in protester signs.”<sup>386</sup> This reinforces the notion that social media is influential in defining the demands of protesters, and in creating a language of contention for protesters to articulate their grievances, as exemplified by the “UKRAINEUKRAINE” poster displayed throughout the first weeks of protest.<sup>387</sup> This also suggests an “Internet-to-the-streets directionality of claims and framing of demands,”<sup>388</sup> punctuated by self-reinforcing cycles of protesters joining the movements and posting similar personalized messages to their Facebook and Twitter pages for their digital networks to see. With mottos such as “a European future for Ukraine,” and “Ukraine is Europe,” a new language of contention was created and disseminated almost instantly throughout Ukraine, with the term EuroMaidan gaining broad diffusion both locally and across international media outlets.<sup>389</sup> While the initial impetus for protest was a rapprochement to the EU, the movements was soon co-opted by extremist right-wing parties who capitalized on the budding chaos to expound their own demands. According to researchers Olga Onuch and Gwendolyn Sasse “these groups began coordinating teams of 100 to 200 armed individuals who walked around the city center wearing hard hats,

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<sup>385</sup> Olga Onuch, “Social networks and social media in Ukrainian “Euromaidan” protests.”

<sup>386</sup> Ibid.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

holding bats, chanting nationalist slogans” and engaging riot police in violent confrontations, causing protests to “shrink in size” following “each violent encounter.”<sup>390</sup> As protest tactics grew to include “extreme violent repertoires, such as Molotov cocktails and the increasing use of nationalist symbols,” Kiev soon became a battleground for a deeper cultural conflict within the country.<sup>391</sup> In the first weeks of February 2014, Kiev descended into urban warfare as protesters took control of the city center, leading president Yanukovich to flee the country on February 22, 2014.

## **7) CASE DISCUSSION AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.1) SOCIAL MEDIA AND MASS UPRISINGS**

Social media did not cause the uprisings in Egypt, Iran, Turkey and Ukraine.

Longstanding grievances regarding corrupt, oppressive or paternalistic governments sowed the seeds of protest. Added to these were an array of concerns - different in each case - regarding growing inequalities, the rising cost of living, fraudulent elections, police brutality, and tone-deaf leaderships displaying utter disregard for the grievances of significant segments of their populations. However these concerns alone cannot explain the sudden flurry of mass protests after years, often decades, of relative quiescence.

Research has shown that social and economic grievances cannot create social movements on their own, and the literature on unexpected revolutions clearly demonstrates that preference falsification is the norm under authoritarian regimes, where the fear of reprisal delays the onset of mass mobilization. Analyses of the cases of Egypt, Iran, Turkey and Ukraine yields new insights about the impact of the viral communication that preceded

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<sup>390</sup> Olga Onuch and Gwendolyn Sasse, “What does Ukraine’s #Euromaidan teach us about protest?”

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

recent episodes of mass protest. The cases suggest that social media allowed for the speedy creation of mass movements by helping persuade indignant citizens to occupy public spaces in defiance of repressive regimes. In each case the delivery of personalized political messages and shocking images to diverse audiences via social media was followed – often within hours – by activists occupying public places in protest of government action. In each case, the early risers succeeded in employing social media to produce massive swells of additional protesters bent on joining the initial movement. Such mobilization grew out of the communication between individuals employing technologies that “enables the personal framing of communication in ways that do not entail shifts in categorical thinking,” yet allows them to “join with others as connectivity is established, filtered, and coordinated in networks organized by both human and technological agents.”<sup>392</sup>

### **Technologically Mediated Personal Connectivity**

The mechanism that enables digitally mediated connectivity to occur appears to be firmly rooted in the nature of the political communication propagated via social media. Facebook, Twitter and other social media allow individuals to air their grievances and broadcast their calls-to-action through short personalized messages and directives, accompanied by visual evidence of perceived injustices. The instant sharing of this content through digital networks appears to strip away conventional barriers to political action, and occasionally succeeds in convincing citizens under authoritarian regimes to overcome their fear or reluctance to protest. One of the most telling aspects of the technologically mediated connectivity which led to the mass protests in my case studies

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<sup>392</sup> W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, *The Logic of Connective Action*, 29.

is that the majority of protesters initially rallied around movements largely devoid of traditional ideological slogans, and succeeded in assembling protesters across class lines. While Ukraine's movement was eventually co-opted by far-right ideologues, this only occurred once the initial mass movement was entrenched and occupying central Kiev. Moreover, the move was largely tolerated by an opposition who saw the emergence of violent repertoires of contention as a solution to the 3-month stalemate between the protesters and President Yanukovich. The spark for mass protest action in the cases Ukraine and Turkey were images of police brutality against small gatherings in public squares, diffused via social media to broad networks of technologically connected individuals. In both cases, quasi-authoritarian leaders wishing to quell the initial uprising were faced within days with massive uprisings, forcing them to back down or negotiate with the activists.

## **7.2) CASE BY CASE DISCUSSION**

Turkey stands out from the other cases because the country had experienced consistent economic growth and stability over the previous decade, and because most protesters were not demanding the outright ouster of the prime minister. Instead, they were reacting to a Prime Minister who had "eroded checks and balances by placing supporters in all branches of government," and often awarded lucrative construction contracts "to those who curried favor with the government."<sup>393</sup> Adding to their anger was the growth of militarized police forces known for their excessive responses to small-scale protests, and a mainstream media system largely owned by companies favorable to the government. Following the publicizing of the brutal crackdown on Gezi Park protesters, the thrice

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<sup>393</sup> Zeynep Tufekci, "Is the Internet Good or Bad? Yes."

reelected president was faced with a sudden onrush of hundreds of thousands of protesters in Istanbul and other major cities, generating protest frames through Twitter and Facebook, galvanizing masses, and directing the locations of protest activity throughout the country. Turkey's Gezi Park movement also succeeded in bypassing and shaming CNN Turk who had completely failed to report on the events, and as of April 2014 activists still use social media to reveal details of an ongoing corruption inquiry targeting Prime Minister Erdogan.<sup>394</sup> In Ukraine, events took a similar turn when overzealous riot police attacked peaceful protesters in Kiev's Independence Square, sending out a flurry of activity on social networks, leading hundreds of thousands of angry protesters to Independence Square to demand greater democracy and transparency.

In Egypt, years of isolated, tentative protests by labor unions, youth movements and fringe political parties were crystallized into a uniform movement on January 25<sup>th</sup> 2011, when hundreds of thousands came out to protest against Hosni Mubarak's authoritarian rule following the overthrow of Tunisia's president. The initial protest experiments led by the Kefaya movement, followed by the growth of Facebook and social media penetration throughout the country suggests that the revolution was initially sparked through a crucial evolution in activist tactics and repertoires of contention. The research I have reviewed shows that Khalid Sa'id's murder, and the Facebook page created posthumously in his name, which displayed photographs of his face disfigured by a brutal beating at the hands of corrupt police officers, became a rallying point against rampant abuse under Mubarak's regime. The opportunities for digital activism that arose online following the death of Khalid Sa'id opened the possibility for other dissidents to

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<sup>394</sup> Sebnem Arsu, "Turkey's Leaders Spar Over Plan to Muzzle Social Media," *The New York Times*, March 7, 2014, [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/08/world/europe/turkey-president-social-media.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/08/world/europe/turkey-president-social-media.html?_r=0).

join the movement, and led to an outpour of emotion and solidarity between disparate segments of the Egyptian public. Zeynep Tufekci's subsequent research has shown that those who reported using blogs, Facebook and Twitter for obtaining information and communicating about the protests were more likely to join the protests on the first day. One example of the type of messaging that galvanized protest action is the stark premonition about the fate of Mubarak, expressed by a Facebook user named Mohamed Issa who wrote the following message of the Facebook wall of the the Kalid Sa'id page: "January 25th is the beginning, the days that follow will force the tyrant to leave."<sup>395</sup>

In Iran, the creation of a Facebook page in support of opposition leader Hossein Mousavi, combined with the diffusion of protest tactics on this same page and via Twitter feeds following the publicizing of skewed election results, engendered the greatest protest movements since the Islamic revolution on 1979. Youtube videos of defiant Tehran residents taking to the streets and chanting on their rooftops, and Twitter feeds coordinating protest action presented the regime with its greatest challenge since student protests in 1999. When the regime shut down the communication infrastructure, Iranians experienced in circumventing official censorship set-up proxy connections in order to maintain their access to internet and social media, thereby prolonging their ability to coordinate and disseminate their movement. Iran also marks the first case in which social media was used to force the hand of a major international network such as CNN, who was shamed into covering the Iranian protest movement after failing to do so for the first 3 days of activity. Of the four cases studied in this paper, the Iranian movement was the least successful in achieving its aims, but the most successful in breaking through heavy

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<sup>395</sup> Tim Eaton, "Internet activism and the Egyptian Uprisings: Transforming Online Dissent into the Offline World," *Westminster Papers* (April 2013): 17.

censorship structures and exposing its grievances to the international community. In the absence of accurate television media coverage within Iran, social media filled the gap by providing outlets for disseminating images of violence in Tehran's streets throughout June 2009. However Iran stands in stark difference to the other cases in that the police and military forces were fully dedicated to preserving a regime which they were created to protect, engaging in the indiscriminate killing of protesters during the violent crackdown of June 20, 2009. While social did help create, coordinate, and disseminate a movement, it was powerless in the face of a coercive apparatus willing to kill protesters en masse - other than in exposing the brutality to the international community. Moreover, Iran is the earliest case study analyzed in this paper, and therefore had the lowest social media penetration rate here represented. The combination of low penetration and heavy censorship of other outlets such as newspapers and television may explain why the movement was successfully quashed by the regime. Nonetheless, all the cases stand out as examples of digitally enhanced mass movements whereby the grievances of various sub-groups and social classes were transformed into targeted action against central leaderships, materializing in episodes of coordinated mass contention whereby hundreds of thousands of people defied established authorities by fusing their individual grievances into unified movements aimed at reforming or replacing their national leaderships.

### **7.3) THE TELEVISION VARIABLE**

The Gezi Park protest in Istanbul is a useful case study for controlling for television's role, because major networks within Turkey completely failed to cover the budding protests or even report on events happening in downtown Istanbul. After the violent police crackdown on the peaceful Gezi Park protest on the morning of Friday May 31<sup>st</sup>, at least 2 million tweets regarding the event were sent out between 4pm and midnight on Friday alone, with over 90% of tweets originating from within Turkey.<sup>396</sup> In the absence of local television coverage, social media allowed users to generate their own coverage, "live-tweeting the protests as well as using smart-phones to live stream video of the protests."<sup>397</sup> These social media feeds also became the main funnel for channeling information to Western news media. A similar situation occurred in Iran on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009 when the regime shut down the entire communication infrastructure as a massive movement erupted in the wake of fraudulent election results. Iranian activists trained in circumventing the regime's censorship structures delivered a stream of messages, pictures and video's from Iran's streets via Twitter. The failure of international media outlets to pick up on events in Tehran led to Twitter-hosted "outbursts of fury against CNN and other news organizations", forcing the networks to increase their coverage of the crisis in Iran.<sup>398</sup> Moreover, the speed and coordination with which modern protest movements are developing is casting doubt on traditional media's ability to accurately report on events, leading many activists to turn to social media for diffusion on tactics and messages. Moreover television networks are increasingly taking their cues from

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<sup>396</sup> Joshua Tucker, "A Breakout Role for Twitter? Extensive Use of Social Media in the Absence of Traditional Media by Turks in Turkish in Taksim Square Protests," *The Monkey Cage Blog*, June 1<sup>st</sup> 2013. <http://themonkeycage.org/2013/06/01/a-breakout-role-for-twitter-extensive-use-of-social-media-in-the-absence-of-traditional-media-by-turks-in-turkish-in-taksim-square-protests/>.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.

<sup>398</sup> "Twitter 1, CNN 0," *The Economist*, June 18, 2009. <http://www.economist.com/node/13856224>.

social media in that citizen journalists are often the first to upload images of protest activity, leading networks to follow the trail of activism on social media for the latest up-to-the-minute information. While satellite television broadcasts undoubtedly played a role in informing certain publics about events Egypt and Ukraine, it was the combination of satellite news with social media messaging and live-streaming which is likely to have generated and sustained the initial push for mass mobilization.

#### **7.4) CROSS CASE ANALYSIS AND THEORY INFERENCE**

The four cases analyzed in this paper reveal that an evolution is occurring in the tactics available for generating contentious political action and politicizing large segments of populations under authoritarian and quasi-authoritarian regimes. Egypt, Iran, Turkey and Ukraine stand as case studies where people responded immediately and emotionally to perceived injustices being carried out with impunity right before their eyes. These injustices sparked movements that led to the downfall Mubarak in Egypt, and Yanukovych in Ukraine, the rescinding of the Gezi Park ruling in Turkey and Iran's largest social movement since its 1979 revolution, combined with worldwide attention and condemnation of rampant electoral fraud in the Islamic Republic. These reactions speak to the benefits of spreading messages via these services. Speed, diffusion, and coordination were greatly enhanced thanks to the ability to deliver stark images and poignant messages, accompanied by visual depictions of events on the ground, faster than and more accurately than any other medium. My analysis suggests that social media's main contribution to protest movements is the ability to galvanize activists and previously un-politicized citizens through personalized messages, accompanied by photographic or video evidence of an injustice being committed in a familiar and accessible public space.

These messages seems to elicit strong emotional responses in would-be protesters as they offend their sense of justice while providing an immediate opportunity to react, hand in hand with thousands of others. The personalization of contentious political action may thus be allowing a wide variety of “individuals and groups to contribute to contentious conversations by virtue of their access to a smartphone, a computer, or a server,” and to participate to protest action in immediate response to injustices which their consciences consider too heavy to bear.<sup>399</sup> This may explain why representation of police brutality played an important role in galvanizing protesters in all cases, motivating hundreds of thousands to act out after seeing streams of images and messages on Facebook and Twitter.

#### **7.4.1) The Personalization of the message**

In a recent study on voting behavior in the United States, published in the international science journal *Nature*, “a randomized controlled trial of political mobilization messages delivered to 61 million Facebook users,”<sup>400</sup> found conclusive evidence that “a message designed to encourage people to vote so that it came with affirmation from a person’s social network, rather than being impersonal ... could persuade more people to participate in an election.”<sup>401</sup> The results show that Facebook messages directly influenced “political self-expression, information seeking and real-world voting behaviour of millions of people.”<sup>402</sup> Furthermore, the messages extended their reach and

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<sup>399</sup> Tarrow, *The Language of Contention*, 208.

<sup>400</sup> Robert M. Bond et al. “A 61-Million-Person Experiment in Social Influence and Political Mobilization,” *Nature* 489 (13 September 2012): 295.

<sup>401</sup> Zeynep Tufekci, “Is the Internet Good or Bad? Yes,” *Matter*, <https://medium.com/matter/76d9913c6011>.

<sup>402</sup> Robert M. Bond et al. “A 61-Million-Person Experiment in Social Influence and Political Mobilization,” 295.

influence to the recipients' extended networks, suggesting that personalized online messages might influence political mobilization across a broad spectrum of ties.<sup>403</sup> My analysis of 4 case studies with instances of mass mobilization following politically contentious social media use by activists indicates that social media may play a similar role for protest participation as it does for voter turnout. Participation to and interaction with politically contentious social media condenses individual grievances regarding the various abuses of an authoritarian regime into inclusive and emotional rallying calls against the regime as a whole. My research shows that the publicizing of a recent injustice via social media, combined with the creation of personalized and emotionally salient content may spark inclusive mass protest movements among citizens with grievances, especially if the regime reacts with further abuse such as police brutality against peaceful protesters. Through my process-tracing analysis of the case studies, I have indentified certain causal mechanisms that appear to lead to mass protest under authoritarian regimes, such as the immediate publicizing of an egregious injustice on social media, combined with personalized calls-to-action and visual evidence of initial protest activity. These processes seem to increase the likelihood that small protests will scale-up to mass movements as more aggrieved individuals gain awareness of the budding movement. Hence, the hypothesis I infer from the case studies, and which I recommend for future testing in similar cases is: the use of social media for the production of personalized emotionally salient political content denouncing abuses under authoritarian regimes will allow activists to politicize large segments of the population and alter the cost-benefit analysis of protest action by exposing immediate opportunities for protest, thereby increasing the variable incidence of mass protest action.

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<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

## 7.5) WEAKNESS

The retroactive analysis of protest phenomena does not necessarily explain the complex reasoning behind the timing and location of their emergence. Many cases with similar political and social conditions will be observed with no apparent sign of mass mobilization. For this reason, I chose to contextualize and process-trace four cases of mass mobilization, in hope of observing the organizational and individual benefits of politically contentious social media use in each case. However this analysis does not necessarily indicate that future episodes will follow similar patterns. One of the main impediments to the emergence of future digitally media political contention will be the lessons learned by authoritarian regimes between 2009 and 2013. The upheaval observed round the world during those years has prompted those regimes to monitor, control and censor access to social media. In 2013, Prime Minister Erdogan passed an “Internet censorship and surveillance law that makes it easier for his government to shut down websites without judicial oversight.”<sup>404</sup> In a testament to social media’s power, Mr. Erdogan is currently engaged in efforts to ban Facebook and Youtube, arguing that opponents use it to attack him through ongoing allegations of corruption.<sup>405</sup> In Syria, regime opponents operate under the “widespread belief that government hackers are browsing the Internet to search for dissidents and tracking them down via social media websites.”<sup>406</sup> This follows allegations by “U.S. State officials that Iran [has] started providing the Syrian government with sophisticated surveillance equipment to assist in

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<sup>404</sup> Tufekci, “Is the Internet Good or Bad? Yes.”

<sup>405</sup> “Turkey PM Erdogan Threatens to Ban Facebook and YouTube,” *BBC News*, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26480982>.

<sup>406</sup> “Social Media: A Double Edge Sword in Syria,” *Reuters*, July 13, 2011. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/07/13/us-syria-social-media-idUSTRE76C3DB20110713>.

tracking down opponents via the Internet.”<sup>407</sup> These same officials claim that “the techniques were used in Iran to crush a pro-democracy ‘Green Movement’ in 2009.”<sup>408</sup> The expanding ubiquity of internet penetration and social media access will therefore not necessarily translate to increased mass movements, especially if activists fear that they can be watched and singled out by the regime. Zeynep Tufekci captures the essence of this contradiction when she writes “Internet technology lets us peel away layers of divisions and distractions and interact with one another, human to human. At the same time, the powerful are looking at those very interactions, and using them to figure out how to make us more compliant.”<sup>409</sup> Another crucial concern is whether the heightened scrutiny of authoritarian regimes “will translate into heightened accountability and actual improvements in governance and democracy.”<sup>410</sup> Recent events in Ukraine and Egypt suggest that while social media may be a powerful tool for organizing and fomenting dissent, their horizontal structure is less useful for articulating coherent policies and translating democratic change into lasting laws and regulation.

## 8) CONCLUSION

The idea that social media may serve to encourage people to rise up against authoritarian rulers is reminiscent of an argument advanced by American philosopher John Dewey. Dewey believed that dictatorships endure not just through force and intimidation, but also

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid.

<sup>409</sup> Tufekci, “Is the Internet Good or Bad? Yes.”

<sup>410</sup> Faris and Etling, “Madison and the Smart Mob: The Promise and Limitations of the Internet for Democracy,” 69.

by controlling public opinion and ideas through propaganda. Dewey argues that totalitarian states survive by controlling public's consciousness through cinema, newspapers, television networks, and sporting events. "A totalitarian state" wrote Dewey, "is committed to the control of the whole life of all its subjects by its hold over feelings, desires, emotions, as well as opinions."<sup>411</sup> However this control will begin to unravel if citizens "gain the potential to expose government abuses of power," and may eventually lead the public to overturn the government "if is cast as illegitimate, violent, dishonest, or untrustworthy."<sup>412</sup> As people increasingly gain the capacity to obtain and circulate information on social media, this information may shape public opinion and lead to an increase in mass mobilization against oppressors. This paper has shown that certain prerequisites must occur for these phenomena to take place, including the personalization of political messages and the immediate diffusion of emotionally salient images able to convince individuals that the regime has committed acts that are too heavy to bear with quiescence. Under those circumstances, individuals may find that social media reveals opportunities they had not yet perceived, such as the safety of numbers, and the potential to finally confront a regime long held to be unshakeable. In this regard, I have developed a theory worth testing, and hope that future scholarship will see the benefits in so doing.

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<sup>411</sup> John Dewey, "The Problem of Freedom," In *Freedom and Culture* (Prometheus Books, 1989), 16.

<sup>412</sup> Michael. L Best and Keegan W. Wade. "The Internet and Democracy: Global Catalyst or Democratic Dud?" *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 29, no.4 (2009): 256.

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