Chapter 5
The Effects of Cyberdemocracy on the Middle East: Egypt and Iran

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Abstract The effects of the internet have proved to be a major catalyst for democratic reform in the Middle East. These changes have been mainly attributed to social media networks and the free flow of information through the internet. The purpose of this analysis is to uncover the degree and impact these movements have played in the Middle East through cyberdemocracy. The Arab Spring has shown how cyberdemocracy in action can make a major impact in changing regimes. Egypt and Iran serve as the primary case studies to understand these changes while formulating our analytical view for the future of these states. The analysis aims to uncover the underlying realities of the dynamics of events and trends that led to this monumental change in the course of history for the region.

Keywords Arab spring • Green revolution • Cyberdemocracy • Democracy • Facebook • Twitter • LinkedIn • YouTube • Google • Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps • Blogosphere • Digital divide • Social media • Muslim brotherhood • Islamist

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5.1 Introduction

"If you want to liberate a society, just give them the Internet." Wael Ghonim, a Google executive turned online revolutionary made this statement as his conclusion on the effectiveness of the new dimension of cyberdemocracy in the Arab Spring. Cyberdemocracy engages citizens to take part in the democratic process through various outlets now readily available in the digital age. This dynamic process has never been more fascinating to see than through its revolutionary dimension in facilitating change in the developing world. This dimension of cyberdemocracy is believed to have toppled authoritarian regimes of states who are still struggling to find a resolution to the change it delivered as it continues to unfold. One region deeply impacted by the use of cyberdemocracy is the Middle East.

The Middle East, a region where change and reform was once seen as an impossibility, is today redefining itself as a place for new possibilities. On December 17, 2010 Tunisian vegetable vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, immolated himself publicly in desperation to voice his opposition to the mistreatment and harassment he faced by local officials in Tunisia. His self-immolation is credited as the catalyst for the Arab Spring. The term Arab Spring defines a period of widespread revolutionary demonstrations against several governments in the Arab world from late-2010 to 2011. The onset of this event inspired protests in Jordan, Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Bahrain, Morocco, and Syria. Protesters utilized the internet to voice their discontent and organize against their governments by taking to the streets. Although technology served as a key facilitator for coordinating massive protests in the region, it was not the sole reason for the Arab Spring. There were already several issues that enabled the Arab Spring to flourish. Whether it be socioeconomic disparities, lack of participation in government, or nepotism in the political and economic sphere, the deteriorated state of affairs in these countries left many with no choice but to call for change.

We must note, the Arab Spring was not an isolated incident in the region. Similar demonstrations took place before the Arab Spring in Iran following the disputed presidential election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009. Iranians protested in opposition to what was viewed as a highly contested election, where the reformist candidate, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, conceded the election to the incumbent Ahmadinejad. Like the Arab Spring, voters utilized the internet and social media to make their demands heard and to expose their discontent to the rest of the world. Unlike the Arab Spring, the "Green Revolution" was not successful. The impact of these events in Iran played an important role in providing a framework for the Arab Spring.

The Arab Spring showed the revolutionary dimension of cyberdemocracy by reinforcing the view that technology acts as a facilitator for change in society, but technology is not the defining factor for the change witnessed. It provided a means to an end by connecting an audience to a cause of fostering change. This chapter aims to uncover and understand the role cyberdemocracy played during the Arab Spring.

We aim to uncover the tools used during the Arab spring and identify the role these tools continue to play in the Middle East. We will also analyze the attempts these regimes made to curb the use of these tools to maintain power. Egypt and Iran will serve as a basis for comparison and contrast as case studies to understand the effects of these movements respectively. Finally, this chapter will develop conclusions on the outcomes of these events while processing the challenges facings these countries and the future role of cyberdemocracy.

5.2 The Tools of Cyberdemocracy in the Middle East

Several tools were identified as the key contributor to the success of the Arab Spring. Social media was one source of technology widely accredited as the most influential tool for bringing the masses together to call for change. Social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs were used constantly during this time. In order to understand this trend, we must uncover the demographics of these web users in the region, and relate this trend to the development of web usage in the Middle East.

5.2.1 Demographics and the Digital Divide

Internet usage in the Middle East has increased rapidly since the turn of the twenty-first century. Four years before the Arab Spring, Albrecht Hofheinz of the University of Oslo, wrote about developing trends emerging as a result of expanded internet usage in the region. Although he claimed the usage of the internet did not result in the overthrow of autocratic regimes in 2005, his research uncovered the tools that served as a foundation leading to the Arab Spring (Hofheinz 2007, p. 56). Hofheinz credits the launching of the widely viewed Arab media station *Al-Jazeera* in 1996 as the first symbolic step in spreading the "communications revolution" in the Middle East (Hofheinz 2011, p. 1418). Armando Salvatore, a sociologist at the Oriental Studies University in Naples (L'Orientale), sheds light on the importance of the launching of *Al-Jazeera*. He claims satellite TV enabled the public to access information not formulated under the guise of state-run media. Salvatore states that *Al-Jazeera*:

> [C]annot be overestimated: the new TV channel started to broadcast all the news which state-owned TV did not give and, most critically, to frame them via the public perception of the fading legitimacy of their governments. They did so also through such innovations like online polls and call-in programs where the audience could debate with the TV guests. Satellite TV impacted over time tremendously on the entire spectrum of old and new media, also affecting internet and the booming blogosphere from its beginning (Salvatore 2011, pp. 6–7).

The hope for change developed greatly as the internet penetrated the region in the late 1990s. Despite these hopes, it became clear a digital divide formed (Salvatore 2011, pp. 6–7). The digital divide refers to the unequal availability of technology. The divide consists of two dimensions: the access to technology and the quality of the access to technology (Allagui 2009). The digital divide in the Arab world is directly influenced by the lack of access to technology. Ilhem Allagui of the American University of Sharjah, attributes this lack of access to the restrictions governments place on the population as a result of fear that the internet could mobilize the public against them. Allagui notes governments are not entirely to blame for the lack of access to the internet. She discovered the people themselves also share the responsibility. Many in the Arab world lack the awareness or the education to access the internet. Finally, gender gaps have also played a major role in the digital divide due to cultural standards. At the onset, women in this area were not engaged—although this is changing dramatically—in the past, women feared voicing their opinions because of possible backlash (Allagui 2009).

The introduction of the internet quickly led to the digital divide we see presently, but we do see positive trends as penetration of internet usage in the region gradually increases. Prior to the Arab Spring, the most improved country in internet penetration was the United Arab Emirates (UAE) which saw an increase of internet penetration from 35.1 % in 2007 to 49.2 % in 2008 (Allagui 2009). In 2012 the UAE penetration rate was at 70.9 % or 5.8 million users, a dramatic increase since 2000 where there were 735,000 internet users. It is important to note, the UAE did not experience a toppling of the monarchy during the Arab Spring despite its large penetration rate. Bahrain on the other hand, shows the largest penetration rate in the region in 2012 at 77.0 %, yet it only totals for 1.1 % of internet users in the Middle East (Internet World Stats 2012). Bahrain did experience protests against its government during the Arab Spring given the lack of representation among the Shiite majority which is ruled by a Sunni monarch. Although Bahrain claims it has addressed the grievances of it citizens since the uprisings, it has not made significant changes, and continues to face criticism from international human rights organizations (Fahim 2012, New York Times).

In 2012, internet penetration in the Middle East surpassed the world average. According to Internet World Stats (2012), internet penetration globally was at 34.1 %. The Middle East saw a penetration rate of 40.2 % which encompasses 3.7 % of internet users in the world. Quantified data shows the world total at 2.4 billion and the Middle East at 90 million. Iran stood as the largest internet consumer accounting for over 46.7 % of users in the region. Although the penetration rate within the country was at 53.3 %, it scored lower than its Arab neighbors; however, we must recognize, Iran is the most populated country in the region and still contains market share in this area. Iran saw significant increases since the year 2000 where the number of users increased during this period from 250,000 to 42 million in 2012. In North Africa, Egypt and Tunisia also saw similar increases since the year 2000. In Tunisia, the penetration rate was 39.1 % totaling 4.1 million users in 2012. In 2000, there were 100,000 Tunisians on the internet. Egypt's penetration rate was comparable to Tunisia's. In 2012 the penetration rate was 35.6 % totaling 29.8 million whereas in

2000, the total number of users on the internet was 450,000 (Internet World Stats 2012). Internet penetration in the Middle East continues to surpass the rates of previous years showing the internet is still showing grow and new potential.

5.2.2 The Blogosphere

Influenced partly by the advent of satellite television, the Blogosphere emerged in the Middle East as the first milestone in developing the path for cyberdemocracy. Blogging in the Arab world first started in 2005 and was influenced by the rapid expansion of blogging in Iran. Egypt became the Arab leader in blogging. The first Egyptian bloggers began writing about several issues in society that spanned from abuses by state authorities to sexual harassment. These efforts did gain international attention and did see reaction from the state to enact legal action against violators, yet it was not monumental (Hofheinz 2011, p. 1419). Finding concrete data on the number of Egyptian bloggers is difficult to find, but it is clear the blogosphere in Egypt started with a handful of blogs and expanded exponentially. The average blogger in Egypt is considered educated, equally male or female, under the age of 30 and originates from the middle or upper class (Rifaat 2008, pp. 51–52). In addition, young supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood (the main Islamist opposition group in Egypt) also began utilizing blogging around this time. Their injection into the Egyptian blogosphere created a divide within the sphere between secular and Islamist bloggers (Salvatore 2011, p. 7). Hofheinz helps form a conclusion on the impact of the Egyptian blogosphere stating that blogging failed to topple the regime leading to crack downs and leaving the "fatigue [of] Egyptian Blogging" (Hofheinz 2011, p. 1419).

In Iran the blogosphere developed more vibrantly and took a stronger foothold as a model for the region. Iranian blogging first emerged through a young journalist named Hossein Derakhshan who began blogging in Toronto, Canada shortly after September 11, 2001. Derakhshan began voicing opposition to the Iranian regime by posting instructions on the Internet in Persian on how to create a blog. Derakhshan was named the "Father of Iranian Blogging." In 2006, Derakhshan successfully made Persian the tenth most used language on the internet (St-Louis 2010, p. 1). The Iranian blogosphere is diverse and is categorized into two segments: (1) blogs inside Iran and (2) blogs formed by the Iranian diaspora. Hervé St-Louis in his analysis *Iranian Political Unrest in Cyberspace* formulated a vision of what Iranian blogging "is" through the impressions of a Tehran based British journalist. Angus McDowall states that

> …while Iranian bloggers vividly portray a genuine part of Iranian society, they are a self-selecting sample that consist mostly of young, affluent, liberal-minded people who do not represent 'the real' Iran." He added, "What we rarely see in the English-language blogs are the views of a car-parts worker in the Khodro factory in Karaj, the unemployed young man who smokes heroin in a new, cheap housing estate on the edge of Semnan, or a housewife in Mashhad worrying whether her kids will get a place at the university. These people are as much 'the real Iran' as the bloggers, but their voices are less often heard (St-Louis 2010, p. 6).

The domestic base of Iranian bloggers do attempt to draw western attention to their content regarding the political situation in Iran. St-Louis cites research conducted by Harvard University's John Kelly and Bruce Etling who have mapped the domestic Iranian Blogosphere. They conclude it comprises of four subgroups. The first is the secular/reformist group which consists of journalist and dissidents who orient their content towards political affairs. The second is the conservative/religious group which splits into two subgroups. The first subgroup being aligned to the conservative Shi'a regime, attempts to promote the Shiite worldview and also criticizes the regime's leaders. The second subgroup attempts to build awareness of the Twelver branch of Shi'a Islam. They focus on preparing the world for the return of the Twelfth Imam, the al-Mahdi. The third group is the religious youth which is viewed as the "Persian poetry and literature subgroup because blogs in this category feature poetry and literature from Iran" (St-Louis 2010, p. 7). Kelly and Etling found that this group parallels the conservative/religious group suggesting this group is coordinated by the regime. The final group is the "mixed network" which is general in nature, covering personal topics and sports (St-Louis 2010, p. 7).

In 2010, there were over 700,000 bloggers in Iran. Like in Egypt, Iran was also exposed to the revolution of satellite TV. Although the state attempted to control the satellite TV, these efforts were later abandoned (Litvak 2011, p. 4). Iran was also the first nation to execute a blogger and establish the Cyber Army through the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) (Litvak 2011, p. 11). According to Australian journalist Antony Loewenstein, there are key differences between Egyptian and Iranian bloggers stating "[u]nlike the Egyptian bloggers who lost their fear of the regime, Iranian bloggers exercised self-censorship out of fear of the regime" (Litvak 2011, p. 11).

Although Hofheinz references the "fatigue of blogging" in Egypt. His research on Islamist groups working within the framework of the internet cannot be overlooked. Islamist groups have been using the internet to also proliferate their worldview. In 1993, several Islamist groups in America and Europe established widely read mailing lists to spread awareness of aggression on Muslim communities throughout the world; namely Palestine, Chechnya, Bosnia and Kashmir. As technology improved, they shifted to full websites and news aggregation. Extremists also utilized chatting venues most often through Yahoo! The outcome of the revolution in Egypt led to the empowerment of the Muslim Brotherhood, and his research offers insight showing the mobilization of online activists were not solely in the secular camp (Hofheinz 2007, p. 72).

In 2005, Islamists were keen on using technology to influence the outcomes of municipal elections in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Islamist groups were actively using the internet and SMS (Short Message System or Text Messaging) to promote clerics in Saudi Arabia. Hofheinz points out it was no surprise "Golden List" candidates (a directory of Islamic leaning candidates under the umbrella of the social trend, Islamic Awakening), won local elections despite being banned from running as a political party. Egyptian Parliamentary elections in 2005 saw similar efforts with the Muslim Brotherhood successfully mobilizing voters. The Muslim Brotherhood was effective in using email, websites, SMS, and a strategy of house

to house campaigning to bring out the vote. It left many commentators, including secular ones, to marvel at their success. Hofheinz shows that internet traffic on the Islamist web platform Ikhwan Online shadowed the traffic that was experienced on the secular Kefaya movement's website (Hofheinz 2007, p. 73). Although the fatigue of blogging may have settled in, it is clear the advent of the blogosphere set the stage for a new avenue of outreach and revolution embodied in social media.

5.2.3 The Dawn of Social Media

Social Media was the new evolution for cyberdemocracy in the Middle East. The evolution of social media in the context of the Middle East and more specifically during the Arab Spring has been debated by experts who monitor these trends in the region. Several questions develop when looking at this subject. How effective was social media in the Arab Spring? What did social media do that blogging could not? Was social media during the Arab Spring intended for domestic consumption or was it predominantly consumed by the outside world? In order to understand these trends with greater insight, we must identify the usage in the region and further understand its development in its modern context.

Several social media tools were utilized during the Arab Spring. Two social media sites that stand out above the rest where Facebook and Twitter. According to Facebook's website, the mission of the site is to "give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected" (Facebook.com). Facebook enables a site user to publish their entire life story through a form of a digital diary. It enables one user to connect to other users who they may have an affiliation with: a close friend, family member, acquaintance, or a random person. In addition to connecting members together in one place, it also gives users the ability to form groups surrounded by a common interest or cause. Twitter on the other hand, "is a real-time information network that connects you to the latest stories, ideas, opinions and news about what you find interesting" (Twitter.com). It enables its users to post short messages that contain 140 characters or less in the form of a tag line. In addition to raw text, a user can embed hyperlinks to websites, articles, pictures, and additional content found on the web. On one screen, a member can aggregate information quickly related to a wide array of content and more specifically current events.

Usage of both sites continue to grow at a fast rate. According to Internet World Stats (2013) the number of Facebook users in the Middle East as of December 31, 2012 totals at 23.8 million achieving a 10.6 % penetration rate among internet users in the region. Unfortunately, this data is not quantified for Iran and Syria. In the United Arab Emirates the number of Facebook users stands at 3.4 million with a penetration rate of 41.7 %, while in Saudi Arabia there are 5.8 million users with a penetration rate of 22.1 % (Internet World Stats 2012). In North Africa, particularly in Egypt, the number of Facebook users totals at 12.1 million achieving a 14.5 % penetration rate. In Tunisia the number is smaller at 3.3 million users, but penetrating at 31.0 % of internet users in that nation (Internet World Stats 2012).

Twitter continues to hit milestones as more users in the region are exposed to its reach. According to the Arab Media Report, the number of Twitter users globally as of February 2012 stands at 500 million users "tweeting" over two billion "tweets" a week. As of June 2012, the number of Twitter users in the Arab world numbered at two million averaging 5.75 million tweets per day. Although Turkey continues to be the leader in the Middle East, Egypt consists of the largest Twitter users in the Arab world with 129,711 users. The top five Arab countries using Twitter are Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Lebanon, and Qatar. In terms of penetration, we see a divergence in the number of users to penetration ratio. Even Turkey with its users approaching 600,000 straggles at 2.02 % behind countries like Kuwait (12.8 %) and Bahrain (5.33 %). Egypt's penetration rate was only at 0.35 % as of June 2012 (Mourtada and Salem 2012, pp. 15–16).

Despite the attention that Twitter drew on the Arab Spring, we find the microblogging site continuing to grow at a rapid pace, but not surpassing the rate of other social media networks. The Arab Media Report sheds light on this trend when compared to LinkedIn usage. LinkedIn is another social media tool similar to Facebook, but it is predominately used as a networking tool for business professionals to link together on the premise of a business nature. The number of LinkedIn users as of June 2012 was 4.2 million with an average penetration rate of 2 % across the Arab world showing the number of LinkedIn users double the number of Twitter users (Mourtada and Salem 2012, p. 19). According to the Arab Media Report, "Twitter penetration remains behind that of LinkedIn—except in Kuwait—indicating that job hunting and professional networking services through LinkedIn are more relevant in the region than the informational, social and political uses of social media that Twitter provides" (Mourtada and Salem 2012, p. 22).

YouTube was a major source of video content documenting the events during the Arab Spring and the Iranian Green Revolution. Although the majority of the content viewed during these periods were considered gruesome, they were also eye-opening and brought forth a front row seat to the situation not covered by conventional media. To cite the Arab Media Report, YouTube promoted citizen journalism and "is arguably the primary social networking platform that effectively established the strong convergence between traditional broadcast media and social media in the Arab region" (Mourtada and Salem 2012, p. 23). YouTube usage continues to grow at a fast rate. There are over 167 million video views on the site a day in the region only trailing behind the United States. In Egypt, uploads were up 150 % and views increased by 220 % from 2010 to 2011. Comparatively, Saudi Arabia's uploads were up 200 % and views increased 260 %. In Egypt over 41 % of YouTube users are women, the average age of all users are 35 with 67 % having university degrees. Findings showed 28 % of YouTube users access the internet through a smartphone while 19 % of these users access the YouTube site via a smartphone. Saudi Arabia on the other hand proved to show differences. Primarily in the area of gender comparison, 50 % of YouTube users in Saudi Arabia are women. The average age is lower at 33 years old. Finally, 36 % of Saudi users have university degrees and over 65 % of Saudi's access the internet via smartphone (Mourtada and Salem 2012, p. 23).

5.2.4 *Restrictions on Cyberdemocracy in the Region*

Many regimes in the Middle East faced a difficult choice in introducing the internet into their societies. On the one hand, they fully understood the importance of the internet, yet on the other, they were aware of its dangers. For most states in the region, the internet was both a blessing and curse. This feeling was best described in former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's words:

> The effects of the revolution in ICTs [information and communication technologies] should not be limited to achieving economic and developmental gains. They should be extended to strengthening political, social, and cultural links among nations to bring about world peace based on justice, equality, and…supporting national efforts toward more freedom, democracy, and respect of human rights" (Zarwan et al. 2005, p. 20).

The rise of the Internet Café has been a predominate point of access to connect to the internet in many of these countries. These cafés provide an affordable avenue for many in the region to access the web. They have also been targets of crackdowns and filtration in many respects due to their popularity. During the Mubarak era, "free" internet programs were started to encourage any Egyptian with a computer, modem, and a phone line to access the web. The programs enabled many Egyptians to connect to the internet for less than the price of a phone call. The outcome of this promotion led to detentions, more monitoring, and entrapment. Opposition group websites were blocked and their members arrested for posting their views online (Zarwan et al. 2005, pp. 3–4).

Egypt in many respects was viewed as a model for the developing world in expanding internet access. The government went as far as starting the "PC for Everyhome" initiative where Egyptian families could afford to purchase a computer through a credit system. The "IT Clubs" and "Smart Schools" initiatives provided rural areas and schools the ability to access the web where before it was not possible. Finally, Egypt even promoted "e-government," enabling Egyptians with the ability to streamline access to government records and information (Zarwan et al. 2005, pp. 19–21).

Despite these efforts, the Egyptian government moved to filter and monitor the internet. Egypt began policing the internet in September 2002 when the Interior Ministry launched the General Administration for Information and Documentation (GAID). The primary function of this group was to monitor the internet in real time to protect the integrity of morality in society and prevent cybercrime. In the early days of monitoring, online pornography was a major target for censorship. Restrictions were slowly lifted as complaints from competitor internet service providers (ISPs) who were losing business to ISPs who were not filtering pornographic material. It appeared the discussion of internet pornography evolved into a matter of personal responsibility and self-censorship, rather than public concern. The Egyptian government was concerned with the recruitment of militants willing to engage in violence under the influence of the internet. This fear was often the justification for human rights abuses against activists. Human Rights Watch cites several case studies of individuals who faced repression from the government due to online monitoring (Zarwan et al. 2005, pp. 25–28).

The Gulf States also use similar restrictions on the internet. Saudi Arabia allowed internet access in 1999, and later in 2001 launched its internet police, the Internet Services Unit (ISU). The ISU continues to block web access to websites and blogs, and is often boasting about its efforts in this area. In Bahrain, websites are required to register with the Ministry of Information where they have blocked several websites and have also arrested web moderates over content viewed as critical of the ruling family. The UAE through the sole ISP, Etisalat also blocks several websites that contain pornographic material, gambling, gay and lesbian content, and minority faith websites. Furthermore, ISPs are required by law to report user information to the Ministry of Post and Telegraph as is in Bahrain (Zarwan et al. 2005, pp. 4–5). In November of 2012, the UAE placed tougher restrictions on online dissents, making it a crime to mock its rulers or organize unauthorized demonstrations. Although the UAE did not experience mass demonstrations as seen during the Arab Spring, the passage of this legislation increases restrictions on free speech. Furthermore, several arrests were made and in certain cases deportation of dissidents was witnessed (BBC News 2012).

Iran in comparison to the Gulf States and Egypt falls in line with the general trend of the region's restrictions on the internet. Like Egypt, Iran also invested heavily in developing online access and growing internet users. Several key members of the government including Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, participate online by developing their own blogs, a common tool many Iranians use online. Iran is conscious of controlling the media by cracking down or closing print and television media all together (Zarwan et al. 2005, p. 20). Web media is a primary source for voicing opposition against the government today. The Iranian government has retaliated against journalists, bloggers, and technical staff through imprisonment and blocking their content online. Interestingly, the Iranian constitution states, "the investigation of individuals' beliefs is forbidden, and no one may be molested or taken to task simply for holding a certain belief" (Zarwan et al. 2005, p. 44). Other examples of prohibition of censorship in Iranian law are present and suggest censorship is not tolerated, yet violations of these statues continue.

To conclude on identifying the tools of cyberdemocracy in the Middle East, we are still on the horizon of a new frontier. Disseminating what is truly going on is a major focus. Since the inception of the worldwide web, the Middle East and more specifically the Arab world are growing with global trends. As the use of social media grows in the west, it is also true for the Middle East. The quantified data uncovered in this section shows there is more potential ahead. Penetration rates of online usage in a majority of these countries is still not at the levels sustaining the argument that the internet birthed the revolutions of the Arab Spring alone, yet we cannot underestimate its role nor its potential for the future. Social media is used most heavily by users in parts of the region where change did not take place. This was particularly seen where social media sites like Facebook and Twitter are more widely used in Gulf States like Saudi Arabia and the UAE. No toppling of those regimes materialized, but these states enacted tougher policies to curb online activism since the Arab Spring. Shifting to the traditional reasons for revolution, we aim to uncover the underlying issues in Egypt and Tunisia that further enhanced the need to call for change. It leads to this question, what was the tipping point? The next section will present an analysis of a case study for Egypt.

5.3 Egypt: Case Study for Cyberdemocracy and Underlying Realities of the Arab Spring

The revolution in Egypt showed that mobilization and mass protest encouraged change, yet we cannot underestimate the underlying realities encouraging activists to take to the streets and protest. The basis for these revolutions were based predominantly on the "politics of bread." Economic strife was the cornerstone of the will to protest. The general consensus is the Arab Spring began after the vegetable vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, immolated himself in Tunisia on December 17, 2010. Bouazizi's act sheds light on the underlying realities and frustrations shared by a majority of people in the region. In a desperate call for help, Bouazizi sparked a call for change. So who was Mohamed Bouazizi? Hernando de Soto of the Institute for Liberty and Democracy describes him in this light:

> As is so often the case with political martyrs, Bouazizi means strikingly different things to different people. To some he's a generic symbol of the resistance to injustice; to others an archetype of the fight against autocracy… It is hard to imagine that the real Mohamed Bouazizi would have recognized himself in any of these incarnations (De Soto 2011).

Bouazizi was a simple man trying to provide for a better life for his family. He was a struggling entrepreneur who at young age was responsible for sustaining his entire immediate and extended family. De Soto qualifies him as a repressed entrepreneur who faced "insurmountable obstacles" in his way. He regularly faced corrupt local officials who stole his products, arbitrarily fined his business, and sought bribes. His fate would change on the morning of December 17, 2010 when he was confronted by two inspectors for not paying a fine. His products were seized along with an electronic scale he used to conduct business. He was publicly embarrassed after being slapped by a female police officer, and after failing to appeal his case, he set himself on fire in front of the government building in his home town of Sidi Bouzid.

This story was far too familiar for many in the Middle East, many dealt with the same disenfranchisement. Bouazizi was "deprived of the only thing that stood between him and starvation—the loss of his place in the only economy available to poor Arabs" (De Soto 2011). There were an additional 35 acts of self-immolation in the Middle East and North Africa following this incident. The Bouazizi story and tragedy is a common one in the Middle East. A down-trotted entrepreneur set on making a better life for his family while facing repression by the state. As the story relates to the Arab Spring, understanding the how of this event, is equally as important as understanding the why of this event. Political and socioeconomic inequalities played a major role leading up to the Arab Spring. We shift from Tunisia to Egypt to identify a case study where these factors played a role.

5.3.1 Egypt Prior to the Revolution

The Egyptian economy was performing at peak levels prior to the revolution. Noha Bakr explains that GDP growth had increase to 7 % in 2007 and 2008 as opposed to being below 5 % levels in the mid-1990s. Foreign investment from 2004 to 2009

was at $46 billion, exports tripled, and foreign debt was shrinking (Bakr 2012, p. 58). In addition, major sectors of health, education, access to technology were improving. Unfortunately growth in Egypt was not seen in all areas of Egyptian society. Unemployment was at 9.7 % while heavily concentrated among young people with degrees (Bakr 2012, p. 64). The socioeconomic situation in Egypt also created motivations for change. The population grew rapidly from 57.8 million to 83.1 million from 1990 to 2009. Over 23.5 % of the population was between the ages of 15–29, characterizing Egypt as a young country (Bakr 2012, p. 59). The infant mortality rate increased along with decreased rates in malnutrition, and the average life expectancy rose from 64 years to 71. In addition, the extreme poverty rate was at 6.1 % in 2008 and 2009. The poverty rate has increased in the aftermath of the revolution, yet in 2008–2009 the poverty rate was 21.6 % and rose to 25.2 in 2010 and 2011 (World Bank 2013). Illiteracy rates dropped; however, the quality of education did not prepare young Egyptians to compete in the labor market. The ethnic and religious disparities also presented challenges. Egypt is divided predominantly into two religious groups: 90 % Sunni Muslims and 9 % Coptic Christians. Ethnic groups in the country consist of Nubians, Sinai Bedouins, and Bedouin tribes along the western border with Libya. Bakr notes religious, and ethnic lines, stating all segments had "grievances and refrain from sharing in the fruits of development" (Bakr 2012, p. 59).

Technological development was soaring, the IT revolution in Egypt granted more access to the public than ever before. The Egyptian government made heavy investments in improving technology and access to the internet. In June 2009 over 3,211 IT companies existed in the country. Expansion was dramatic, leading to the media sphere comprising of "21 daily newspapers and 523 other forms of publications, as well as 700 Arab speaking TV channels, the majority of which broadcast ferocious political talk shows" (Bakr 2012, p. 60). Like Noha Bakr, we ask the following question: if the economic and social situation in Egypt was improving, then why did the revolution happen?

The political landscape in Egypt did not compare to the economic improvement seen prior to the revolution. As Bakr puts it, Egyptians were becoming cynical and bitter with the political process and the 30 year reign of Hosni Mubarak. Moreover, Bakr notes the alienation among the youth as manifested on Facebook through slogans stating: "Egypt isn't my mother, Egypt is my step mother" (Bakr 2012, p. 61). Constitutional reforms in 2005 also contributed to further discontent with the Mubarak regime. Reforms were concentrated on evoking hereditary rule followed by fraud in parliamentary elections (Bakr 2012, p. 61). Mubarak attempted to transfer power to his son Gemal Mubarak (Steiman 2012, p. 5). People also viewed Egypt's regional and international policies as weak. In many dimensions, Egypt's hegemony on Arab culture diminished from prominence unlike the 1960s and 1970s (Bakr 2012, pp. 61–62). Human rights abuse cases were no longer going unnoticed by Egyptians. Intolerance of minorities, particularly in the case of Egyptian Copts, enabled outrage as the government did not react to protect these minorities (Bakr 2012, pp. 65–66).

5.3.2 The Revolution

Despite previous failures to mobilize protestors through social media, a young man's brutal death would spark enough outrage to influence the masses to take to the streets. Khaled Said on June 6, 2010 was heading toward an internet café and was intercepted by police officers who beat him brutally to death in broad day light (Trew 2013). Inspired by Said's tragedy and the quest to seek justice for his death, Wael Ghonim launched a Facebook page titled "We are all Khaled Said." Unaware of the impact his Facebook page would bring, he began to mobilize people online. Encouraged by the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia, Ghonim called for a revolution through his Facebook page on January 25, 2011. Protestors flooded into Tahrir Square crying for "bread, freedom and human dignity." Their demands were broadcasted around the world through television and the internet. Ghonim was arrested on January 27 and beaten and tortured for his role in collaborating protests, his emotional interview to the press further encouraged protestors to take part in the revolution (El-Arian 2013). During the revolution, over 34 million people participated on Facebook on 2,313 pages. Inside and outside of Egypt, over 93 million tweets referencing the revolution were tweeted on Twitter. The price for the revolution cost the lives of 846 Egyptians and left 6,467 wounded (Bakr 2012, p. 68).

The Mubarak regime held its position in the face of protest, but the tide changed and the regime fell short of managing the crisis to maintain control. The regime responded with more brutality against protestors through intimidation, and cutting access to the internet and communication. Mubarak offered halfhearted gestures of reform. He dissolved the parliament and agreed not to participate in presidential elections in September. His efforts fell on deaf ears. Protestors called for his resignation and would not accept any other action. Mubarak addressed the nation on February 10th and proclaimed he would delegate his authority, yet still remaining in power. As a result, the crowd was not pleased and continued to call for his resignation. On February 11th, the 30 year reign of Hosni Mubarak came to an end (Bakr 2012, p. 66).

5.3.3 The "Inaction" of the Military

The reaction from the military during the revolution was surprisingly neutral. The military faced a difficult choice as it related to their place in the revolution. On the one hand, they could have supported the Mubarak regime and maintained their power; yet on the other, if the revolution succeeded, they would face unprecedented dissatisfaction. The military was viewed as a professional, powerful, and highly respected institution by the Egyptian people. Prior to the revolution the military benefited greatly from the Mubarak regime. Their cooperation with the regime enabled the military establishment to enjoy lucrative business opportunities, yet

within the last 10 years, the military began to lose respect for Mubarak. The attempt to bolster his son as a successor to the presidency was not favorable among the military ranks. Furthermore, Mubarak's efforts to create a system of crony capitalism without the military was also looked down upon. Mubarak ignored the military's influence in the political realm when it came to appointees and policy (Steiman 2012, p. 5). The presidency in Egypt was always reserved for high ranking military commanders including Abdel Gamal Nasser, Anwar Sadat, and even Hosni Mubarak. Finally, the military had to protect its image in the eyes of the Egyptian people. They had succeeded in portraying this image until they took control through the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces in October 2011. The military later showed its might through various crackdowns, particularly against Copts in a bloody quelling of a protest—this lead to shock and anger. Daniel Steiman concludes the military's actions were guided by two motives: survival/maintaining power and material gain (Steiman 2012, p. 7). The military's efforts were very critical in determining the outcome of the revolution. If the military had interjected like their counterparts in Iran, Mubarak may have maintained power. Their decision to not intervene aided in making Mubarak and the Egyptian people understand the end was in sight. Mubarak alienated the military from taking advantage in the fruits of economic prosperity and political influence. In the end, the military made a tactile decision and survived.

5.3.4 Consequences of the Revolution

For Egypt, change yielded consequences. The economic and political situation in Egypt was greatly affected. On the political front, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) took power after Mubarak's resignation. SCAF was viewed as the defender of the revolution, but eventually began to lose credibility as it moved to remodel Egypt to mirror the constitutional system of Turkey. The military in Turkey maintained a strong role in politics and could interject in the political sphere if it felt the nation was straying from the original framework of the republic model founded by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. The Egyptian public did not view this as a favorable outcome for the new Egyptian state and began to disapprove of it (Bakr 2012, p. 73).

Several election cycles took place from November 2011 to January 2012. The Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party gained 46.3 % of the vote, but combined with the Salafist Nour party the Islamists camp accounted for 70 % of the seats in parliament. Liberal groups were hugely underrepresented as result of their lack of organization and internal rivalries. In June 2012, the Supreme Court dissolved the lower house of parliament a few days before the presidential run-off election. The Islamist succeeded in electing the Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi as president (Körner et al. 2013, pp. 2–3). The military attempted to maintain power after Morsi's election, yet Morsi responded by retiring top level military officials. Thereafter, a constitutional assembly was set in motion to create

Egypt's new constitution. In November 2012, a decree by Morsi exempted presidential decisions from judicial review and prevented the court from dissolving the body responsible for drafting a new constitution. Finally in December 2012, the drafting of the new constitution was completed and approved in a popular referendum. The constitution was met with criticism as the opposition voiced concerns for the legislation on the subject of the rights of women and minorities (Körner et al. 2013, p. 5).

The economic fallout of the Arab Spring in Egypt was equally concerning. Following the revolution, the real GDP decreased dramatically to −4.2 %. Investment dropped by 26 % and net exports decreased by 3.6 % since the third quarter of 2010 (Bakr 2012, p. 71). The production process was crippled by mass demonstrations and strikes. Tourism levels were at some of the lowest levels seen dropping by 40 %. Foreign direct investment in the region was impacted by the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt dropping by 46 %, the same levels as in 2004. In 2012 net exports significantly dropped by 5 % in Egypt and Tunisia. Foreign currency reserves also dropped as a result of the Arab Spring. Finally, the fiscal debt accounted for 11 % of the Egyptian GDP in Fiscal Year 2011/2012 (Körner et al. 2013, pp. 6–8).

The revolution had its heartaches. The political, economic, and social situation in the country further divulged into a state of affairs not envisioned by all groups who participated in overthrowing the Mubarak regime. As a direct consequence, the situation in Egypt is at an unclear roadblock. Although it is true, a government stands in place today, determining the longevity of this new government is still in question. It is of no surprise the Islamist camp claimed power. They were the most organized, and also utilized the same cyber tools employed by their secular counterparts. The fact remains, the Islamists were more united, better organized, and had more experience in Egyptian politics. They worked around the repression delivered by the Mubarak regime, the military, and the secular movement and still succeeded. However, the success of the Muslim Brotherhood was tested after the military staged a coup on July 3, 2013 after 1 year of Morsi's presidency. Morsi was placed under house arrest and was ousted from the presidency. The military designed a roadmap that attempted to steer the country in the direction the revolution had originally intended.

We shift now our discussion to Iran and analyze what went wrong in Iran as opposed to what went right in Egypt.

5.4 Failures in Iran

The Iranian presidential election of 2009 set the stage for the Arab Spring to flourish. Unlike its Arab neighbors, Iran did not see the ousting of its government. Named after the color of the opposition movement to the incumbent president, the "Green Revolution" or the "Green Movement" refers to the massive protests following the 2009 elections. In this section, we aim to understand why the Green Revolution did not succeed in overthrowing, or much less reforming the Islamic

Republic. Iran's history in the political context has endured several changes. The overlapping theme in Iran's political development is heavily influenced by the nation's effort to thwart foreign influence from its domestic affairs. Although having been subjugated to the will of foreign influence, Iran in the later part of twentieth century developed a system, where in its view, eliminated these influences and created a system that is uniquely its own. The state's view of itself is still at the center of debate among its domestic population and its diaspora aboard. A brief history of Iran's political development during the twentieth century will create a point of reference leading to the events surrounding the Green Revolution.

5.4.1 Iran: A Brief Political History of the Twentieth Century

Revolutionary trends are nothing new for Iran. The country endured several revolutions during the twentieth century. The Constitutional Revolution of 1906 established an elected parliament (the Majlis) and a constitution limiting the power of the Qajar monarchy. The revolution successfully established these changes as a result of different factions fighting to limit the power of a corrupt government. Later in 1925, the Pahlavi Dynasty was established through the efforts of a military coup removing the Qajar Dynasty under the direction of the Persian Cossack Brigade. The commander of the Cossack Brigade, Reza Pahlavi, succeeded the throne of the Qajars and established his dynasty as the new Shah of Iran. Reza Pahlavi was succeeded by his son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the last Shah of Iran. In 1953, a coup orchestrated by The United Kingdom and The United States overthrew Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq. Western powers were concerned Mosaddeq was sympathetic to communist influence. These fears were heighted by Mosaddeq nationalizing Iran's oil industry. The Shah briefly fled the country only to return after military forces quelled riots and restored the Shah's authority. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's reign in Iran ended with the "Islamic Revolution of 1979." The Shah's efforts to repress opposition through his secret police, the SAVAK, and his deteriorating image among Shi'as lead to great dissatisfaction in Iran. The revolution, headed by Ayatollah Khomeini, who through the use of audio cassettes, was able to spread his message of revolution to the people of Iran. Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran transformed from a monarchy to an Islamic Republic, and has remained an Islamic Republic since.

5.4.2 The 2009 Election and the Green Revolution

After presiding over his first term as the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was up for re-election in June 2009. With record breaking turnout, Iranians on June 12th went to the polls with the ambition of electing a new president of the Islamic Republic. After a very energetic election campaigned filled

with debate and vigor for the candidates, Iranians went to the polls. Shortly after the polls closed, the Interior Ministry determined incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was re-elected president by a 62 % majority. In the final days of the election campaign, rallies in support of the main opposition and reformist candidate, Mir Hossein Moussavi, showed fleeting support for Ahmadinejad. Although Ahmadinejad gained support in the rural segments of the country, unemployment and growing inflation were a leading factor in the reduction of Ahmadinejad's popularity. Ahmadinejad was essentially viewed as a populist candidate who helped increase benefits to the people. The growing support for Moussavi became alarming to the military establishment and lead the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to decree that any revolutionary activity in light of the election results would be dealt with harshly. As the ballots were being counted, the Iranian government reportedly shut down Internet sites and mobile telephones while deploying security forces and the youth volunteer corps Basij in the streets of Tehran. Once voting was concluded, both the Ahmadinejad and Moussavi campaigns declared victory. Allegations of voter fraud were announced and the government moved to investigate the matter, but required this be conducted through legal channels. After massive disappointment of the government validating the election in favor of Ahmadinejad, Iranians took to the streets in protest. Widespread protests throughout the country directed the government to send in the IRGC and Basij forces to quell the uprising with tear gas and weapons.

5.4.3 The Green Revolution in Contrast to the Arab Spring

The Green Revolution and the Arab Spring where different on a number of levels. Like its Arab neighbors, Iran is a young nation. Over 60 % of the population is under the age of 30, and reformist efforts have been actively utilized since the inception of blogging and social media. Unemployment among the youth is also a major issue. According to the CIA, both unemployment and inflation rates were both at 20 % while unemployment for the youth was estimated at 23 % (Litvak 2011, pp. 3–4). Protests against the outcome of the 2009 presidential election was primarily based on the disenfranchisement of the vote. Voters in Iran genuinely believed that their voice was going to be heard. The government turned its back on the very principles it claims to uphold. This yielded a loss of "faith in the system as a whole" (Litvak 2011, p. 8).

Like in Egypt, the economic system in Iran was equally filled with economic nepotism. The IRGC was a major benefactor of this arrangement claiming major stakes in the "oil [industry], construction, agriculture, mining, transportation, defense industry, and import/export" (Litvak 2011, p. 8). Loyalty to the regime was further enhanced on the economic front. Shortly after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the government linked the wellbeing of the people to the state through Bunyads, employing hundreds of thousands through this system of economic patronage (Litvak 2011, p. 8). As in Egypt, literacy rates in Iran increased significantly

since the Islamic Revolution. Iran's "thirst" for the written word reached new heights, and is still actively counteracted by the government (Litvak 2011, p. 3). Litvak describes Iran's internet usage in this way: "[I]t is safe to say that 32 years of Islamic rule have led to the erosion of Islamic ideology among segments of Iran's younger population. Culturally, Iranian youth are increasingly shunning traditional norms and constantly testing the country's restrictive laws" (Litvak 2011, p. 4).

Support for Moussavi and the Green Revolution eventually came undone. The Green Revolution was quelled by the security apparatus in Iran and as a result, the collateral damage of this event could not be over looked. Incorporating Meir Litvak's commentary on the aftermath of the revolution, he finds that there is still a case to be made for democratization in Iran, but he conveys the contrast to the Arab Spring. One of the many challenges facing Iranians living within the context of the Islamic Republic relates to the vision the Islamic Republic has of itself. As alluded to in the beginning of this section, the Iran-West dichotomy ("East–west" dichotomy) on reforming the regime is in constant contention with the liberal segment of society and the religious establishment. Litvak's interpretation on this matter is appropriate:

> Consequently, the debate has two contradictory characteristics: the first is the presentation of a sharp, almost essentialist, dichotomy between East and West in an effort to demonstrate the superiority of the Islamic concept over the Western ones, such as the universal declaration of human rights. The second is the effort to show similarity between various Shii concepts and the ideas of leading Western thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Emmanuel Kant, in order to demonstrate to Iranians that they need not look outside their country for inspiration. Consequently, all current Iranian leaders pay lip-service to the ideas of freedom in order to demonstrate that the Revolution and regime do not oppose it, but merely give it a different interpretation, which is highly superior to the Western view (Litvak 2011, p. 6).

This is the most difficult obstacle to overcome if we are to see real reform in Iran. Eliminating foreign influence from Iran's domestic affairs is a major theme that has shaped Iran's political development. Even if the reformists were to seize control of the regime, how could they make the case to reform the Islamic Republic into a western style democracy? The Islamic Republic of Iran is a uniquely Iranian concept. A conflict of ideology presents itself as an obstacle for reform, even with a young population in Iran, overcoming this issue has proved difficult.

Litvak presents three reasons for the Islamic Republic's longevity following the Green Revolution. One, Ahmadinejad's populist agenda enjoyed a considerable amount of support domestically. His efforts in campaigning and providing economic subsidies to the provinces was well received and gained loyalty from his followers. The second advantage focuses on linking international prestige with Iran's nuclear program. As noted by Litvak and Bakr, the Arab States lost their prestige on the international front. In the eyes of a majority of Egyptians, Mubarak was seen as a western puppet. Whereas in Iran, its national image and pride were enhanced by the state's resistance to the international community's pressure to increase transparency on its nuclear program. Finally, general disillusionment among the population leading to the sentiment of "escapism" enables the regime to encourage it as a means of detracting political dissent (Litvak 2011, pp. 12–13).

At the time of the Green Revolution, the Iranian regime was successful in making preparations to counter revolutionary trends by controlling communication and online activity. The military and security apparatus reacted immediately and brutally in preventing the protestors from taking over. In Egypt, the military remained neutral during the revolution. Only after Mubarak left the country did the military take action. Secondly, the leaders in the Green Revolution were not prepared or organized to take control of the protestors. The argument for revolution was not reinforced, their focus was "voter fraud," not overthrowing the regime. In addition, many of the leaders in the Green Revolution were either active members of the regime or were formerly regime officials (Litvak 2011, p. 11). Finally, foreign intervention in both the Arab Spring and the Green Revolution were also handled differently.

The international response to the Arab Spring and the Green Revolution played a major role in their outcomes. On the international level, the response was observed with caution. Neither the United States or Europe were willing to deal with the events unfolding in Iran head on. The reaction of the Obama administration may have been driven by its concern of portraying an image of interference with Iranian affairs as in the past, but this action of non-interference or expressing solidarity with the protestors did draw criticism from domestic and international audiences. At the onset of the Arab Spring however, the United States was far more vocal and willing to support the opposition in many Arab states. In Egypt, the Obama Administration applied pressure directly on Mubarak to concede power and make changes inside his country. In Libya, the Obama Administration created a coalition and provided direct military support to rebels against the Gadhafi regime. The contrast on the international level for both is starkly different. Had the West intervened during the Green Revolution, the outcome may have been different. Instead, the Islamic Republic overcame the Green Revolution and in June 2013 witnessed a transfer of power from Ahmadinejad to the new president, Hassan Rouhani, in accordance with the Iranian constitution.

The lessons learned in Iran had an impact on the Arab Spring. Iran's security apparatus was far more prepared to deal with an upheaval than in the Arab states. The Iranians had the experience in countering the threat from the Internet and were further mobilized to disorient the flow of information within the country. The leadership of the Green Revolution was not only disorganized, but it also lacked the proper message to drive people to overthrow the regime. On the economic front, at least from a statistical standpoint, the situation looked similar to its peers in the region, yet Iran's economic situation was not as bad as in the Arab states. The Arab protestor took an "all or nothing" approach to change the system. The leadership of the Green Revolution in Iran had no quarrel with the system itself, they were seeking a resolution to a disputed election rendering them uninterested in revolutionary change. Consequently, the Green Revolution worked inside the parameters of the Islamic Republic, they were not opposed to the system—they simply wanted to reform it. For the Arab states, the support for the Mubarak, Ben Ali, and Gadhafi regimes were completely diminished—there was no going back. In both cases the most organized elements won. In Egypt it was the Muslim Brotherhood and not the

Liberal factions that seized power. In Iran, the state was at maximum readiness to tackle the protestors head on. The military in Egypt remained neutral until Mubarak resigned. Internationally, foreign powers provided support to the opposition movements in the Arab states either through direct intervention or moral support. In Iran, the reaction was caution and nonintervention. For the Arab Spring, Iran served as a good example on how to use technology to its advantage. Whether through blogging or social media, technology proved to be an effective tool in calling for change.

5.5 Conclusion

"We're not like the American administration. We're not social media administration or government. We are the government that deals with reality" (Charlie Rose Interview with Bashar Al-Assad, September 10, 2013). Although Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad expressed his criticism of social media usage in American politics, his views tie into the greater impact social media had on the Arab Spring. Cyberdemocracy has played a significant role in the developments that have led to change in the Middle East, but this criticism sheds light on the value of understanding the situation on the ground. Mark Lynch, one of the founding fathers of blogging on the Middle East, expands on the negative effects of social media on the progression of the Arab Spring.

Before reviewing these "negative effects" in greater detail, we want to develop some (more general) ideas on cyberdemocracy and democratic development (see Sect. 5.5.1 below). These ideas we present as propositions for further discussion.

5.5.1 Some Principal Ideas on Cyberdemocracy, Islam and Democracy

We should expect that the further diffusion of knowledge (knowledge, research, education, and innovation) should have at least in principle the effect of supporting and further progressing processes of democratization. Knowledge society, knowledge economy and knowledge democracy interplay (Carayannis and Campbell 2012; Campbell and Carayannis 2013). Knowledge and good quality knowledge, available for and accessible to more people and larger segments of society, also via platforms or networks that are internet-based, advance reasoning capabilities of citizens, eventually pushing forward developments that encourage democracy and democratization. Authoritarian regimes, therefore, are confronted by the following dilemma: without more knowledge and innovation, it appears not possible to advance economic performance. One the other hand, when more knowledge is being introduced to society, then it cannot be prevented that knowledge will have spill-over effects in the sense of nurturing demands for more democracy. In the long run, it does not appear to be realistic, to advance economy without also advancing

democracy and democratization. However, in the short run, the relationship between knowledge and democracy can be complex, meaning that diffusion processes of internet-based knowledge are not necessarily and automatically linked to a fostering of processes of increased democratization.

What is the relationship between democracy and Islam in Muslim-majority countries and societies? This certainly represents a sensitive key question. Islam (in Muslim-majority countries) has an influence on society and democracy. However, we are convinced that it is absolutely misleading and in fact wrong, to assert that Islam per se is not compatible with democracy or necessarily at conflict with democracy (for a further reading, see Campbell et al. 2012). What appears to be more important is to acknowledge a need for sensitive learning processes in Muslim-majority countries, so that a prospective relationship between Islam and democracy can evolve, so that democracy there can progress to developing further to levels of a high-quality democracy. Democracy, as a concept and belief, is wider than a specific religious system (or a specific party-political approach). Within democracy, there must be sufficient space and tolerance, allowing for different religious beliefs (for example Islam, Christianity and Judaism), but also for secularism and an explicitly non-religious comprehension and construction of a vision of society. Pluralism and heterogeneity are essential for democracy and for driving quality of democracy. We should not forget that also Europe experienced complex processes of "separation of church and state" for several centuries, leading to the formation of modern democracy. Christian-Democratic parties in Europe represent an innovative example for a development of bringing Christianity into a good political balance with democracy. In the coming years we should be prepared to expect that also in the Muslim-majority countries a greater diversity in interpretations of Islam may evolve. The global spreading of knowledge (also via the internet) should impose some additional effects.

5.5.2 Negative Impacts of Cyberdemocracy Post-Arab Spring

Mark Lynch outlines several hazards social media created for the Arab Spring. The first hazard was the exaggeration of the situation on the ground. Lynch was in Egypt during the protests and notes that the "apocalyptic" image presented in social media was not accurate. He concludes that social media welcomes and enjoys a crisis. Secondly, he found social media was successful in mobilizing protests rather than organizing civil society or political parties. As a result, movements found on social media were not ready to take on the challenges of finding leaders, cohesive strategies, or even interest in the democratic process. Lynch predicted that Tahrir Square would continue to be the forum of outrage and protest in a post-Mubarak world. His astute analysis was proven right in the summer of 2013 when the military regained control of the government as a result of continued protests in Tahrir Square, offering the military their own justification to take control. Consequently, the internet is responsible for the "dangerous polarization" present in the Arab world. This forced

opposing groups to retreat to their respective positions and engage in a war of rhetoric rather than creating a forum for dialogue.

In light of the internet creating the unification of the Arab political narrative of popular revolt, Lynch finds that this effort has been reversed. This reversal forced the short-lived unified political narrative to retract and focus on domestic affairs rather than creating a regional concentration for widespread democratic reform. In addition to creating regional disunity, the negatives of "sectarianism, fear, and hatred spread as rapidly on social media as do more positive ideas" (Lynch 2013). Although victory was at hand in the eyes of many, the sad realities of bloodshed in Syria was in full display on social media, leaving a hurdle for popular mobilization. Lynch also points out that social media helped create active restrictions online by other countries. Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait all moved to counteract the effects of social media on their people. This left many to abandon hopes of utilizing online forums to express their discontent toward their regimes because of harassment and policing of these online venues.

Syria remains at the focal point of a potential pitfall for the Arab Spring. Lynch focuses on Syria as being an area where the online experience of the Arab Spring has changed. Syria's engagement on the social media scene was relatively conducted anonymously in contrast to Egypt. The Egyptian experience proved to encompass well known individuals or groups that were present on social media. Syria was conducted more secretively because of fear. As a result, Lynch concludes Syria's engagement in the social media sphere has proved divisive. Violent images of the slaughter skewed the perception of the events on the ground leaving traditional media outlets to rely on this presentation as fact. For Lynch, the credibility of the situation comes into question. To conclude on Lynch's analysis, overall he finds that the revolutions conducted through the internet offer a mixed set of successes and failures. Lynch does not credit social media and the internet as the sole reason for the creation of Arab Spring nor are they the sole reason for the ongoing struggles. On the one hand, the internet shattered the "monopoly" on the flow of information by regimes, yet there are still many negative consequences to choose from.

5.5.3 Geopolitical Realities Post-Arab Spring

Lynch's conclusions on the Arab Spring fit the analytical conclusion found through the course of this discussion. Claiming social media was responsible for launching the Arab Spring does not produce sufficient evidence to prove that it was the sole cause for the revolutions witnessed. They played an important role, but to declare it as the sole catalyst, undermines the underlying realities that motivated people to call for change. As identified, the economic situation (and political stagnation) in Egypt and Tunisia set the stage for the motivation to hit the streets. Given that social media brought attention to these issues on the world stage through televised media and projections of these images to a western audience, we must acknowledge that the tools of cyberdemocracy took several years to develop a significant impact.

Foreign involvement in these revolutions further propelled the effective change that toppled regimes. This comparison was most apparent in the contrasting results of the Egyptian Revolution and the failed attempt of the Green Revolution in Iran. In Egypt, the United States exerted its power to change the course of the Egypt's fate. Egypt's dependence on American aid determined a need to stabilize the situation on the ground in order to maintain confidence for future relations. Iran on the other hand, had no strategic interest in cooperating with American foreign policy interests. In addition, the leaders of the Green Revolution were not attempting to overthrow the theocratic regime, they were already part of the status quo attempting to overturn the results of a presidential election.

Syria further embodies where foreign intervention in these revolutions has proven that without international pressure, materializing change is difficult. As Syria continues its civil war, the West complying with Russia's proposal to facilitate the transfer of Syria's chemical weapons to international oversight, prolongs the longevity of the Assad regime. Although social media has called for change and action to be taken against the Syrian regime for using chemical weapons against its own people, it fell short of empowering western powers to bring the Assad regime to relinquish power. As a result, the west will have to continue on focusing on online sources and media to drive its policy on how to deal with the Syrian civil war.

Egypt continues to be at the forefront of a new chapter in the evolution of its revolution. After the military coup (in 2013), restrictions on freedoms have been established to maintain control and security on the ground. The Muslim Brotherhood suffered a major blow in light of the coup and is on the offensive to regain control. The Egyptian court moved to ban all activities of the Muslim Brother in September 2013 (RT News 2013). As result of the military takeover, opposition by the Brotherhood to the military drew significant backlash and violence. What lies in question for Egypt is how the democratic process will develop under the guidance of the military. With the onset of the Muslim Brotherhood ban, a significant part of Egypt's political landscape cannot participate in the political process. This does present a unique opportunity for the more liberal elements of the landscape to become organized and yield a fair result in Egyptian politics.

Events in Turkey have shown interesting developments. Opposition to a construction project in Taksim Square and Gezi Park sparked widespread protest in the country. The debate over the project uncovered the population's dissatisfaction with its current government lead by Islamist Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Turkey's political system is heralded as the only thriving Muslim democracy in the Middle East founded by the reformist principles of the republic's founding father Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. The debate over the ruling party's reforms was projected to the forefront of these protests. The argument transformed from the construction project to a referendum on Erdogan's attempt to return Turkey to its traditional roots. The issue was resolved through dialogue and resorted to cancelling the project. Social media in this case yielded mobilizing protestors to produce a successful outcome for change, and further put the ruling party on notice for possible future dissatisfaction from the general populace. Attempts of Turkey, trying to join the European Union in the future, also have ramifications for political processes in Turkey's democracy.

Developments in the Tunisian political system have also brought positive changes as a result of the Arab Spring. In September 2013 the ruling Islamist Ennahda party decided to resign from power due to failures to improve the economy. Unlike Egypt, Tunisia's political development after the Arab Spring has been relatively peaceful despite two key assasinations of prominent opposition politicians. The Ennahda concluded that there needed to be more participation of opposition groups in government in order to create fair representation and cooperation. Outrage from the population over the Ennahda's link to Al-Qaeda also diminished its legitimacy (Gall 2013). The Islamists' new position was a significant change proving their program lacked clear understanding of how to run a country. Islamists throughout the Middle East ran on the "Islam is the answer" platform, yet they still must develop or show a coherent plan on how to solve the problems of the state. Many have argued that if an Islamist party were to take control, their ineffectiveness in running the state would prove to diminish their power and would foster better competition among other parties. Eventually the Islamists' political capital could diminish on this basis.

5.5.4 Cyberdemocracy Post-Arab Spring

To conclude on the cyberdemocracy in the Middle East, there are still many obstacles ahead. We realize that the advent of internet was not the sole reason for the evolution of the Arab Spring. The development of cyberdemocracy in the Middle East has been on a steady path towards expansion since the turn of the twenty-first century and continues to offer new possibilities. To rule out the impact of the internet and social media as a facilitator of change in region is also incorrect. In addition, traditional forms of media also played a key role. Televised reporting through outlets like Aljazeera was in fact the first milestone in presenting the issues through the lens of non-governmental bias, although the portrayal of the issues is still not free of its own bias. The internet and social media brought the Arab Spring to the forefront by connecting the story on the ground to an audience. As the audience became intrigued and gained a need for self-expression, the revolutions grew in reaction to the preexisting grievances and frustrations that had been brewing for some time.

As for the future of cyberdemocracy in the Middle East, the possibilities are continuing to redefine themselves, and at this point, the key players who can develop change will rely on this avenue to attempt to draw attention to their viewpoints and programs. The tools of cyberdemocracy can also influence foreign audiences to rally support to pressure their governments to take action against authoritarian states in the region. Authoritarian states will attempt to counteract these tools by placing restrictions or taking harsher actions in order to limit the potential impact witnessed by their neighboring predecessors. This will be, and has been, the case in the Gulf States and Iran. Foreign intervention whether peaceful or forceful, must be observed with caution as such internal conflicts can engulf a foreign power mutually.

The Arab Spring is still in its infancy, the countries who saw direct change in their governments will be vigilant in ensuring that their initial intensions for freedom and representative government are preserved. Changing the destiny of a country has never been easy. Revolutions, civil wars, outside forces attempting to capitalize on internal divisions have all been aids in detracting states from achieving success. America's first President, George Washington eloquently stated: "Against the insidious wiles of foreign influence (I conjure you to believe me, fellow-citizens) the jealousy of a free people ought to be constantly awake." Indeed the people of these countries will have to remain awake to such influences whether foreign or domestic. What can be said is that Cyberdemocracy has opened a new avenue for demonstration and uniting a voice of protest. Fortunately, the door cannot be closed at this point, despite opposition. Cyberdemocracy has provided for this opportunity and as it continues to expand in places like the Middle East, its impact can no longer be overlooked.

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