



The Progression of Social Movements under Authoritarian Regimes: A Case Study of Egypt and Syria

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Abstract

This paper examines the transformative role of social media in the mobilization and progression of social movements under authoritarian regimes, focusing specifically on the Arab Spring protests in Egypt and Syria. Sparked by the success of Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution, mass protests swept across the Middle East and North Africa in 2011, with activists leveraging platforms like Facebook and Twitter to organize demonstrations, spread uncensored information, and attract global attention. By comparing Egypt and Syria—two countries with divergent protest outcomes—the study highlights how former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's decision to step down contrasts sharply with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's refusal, which ultimately led Syria into civil war. Drawing on theories from Sidney Tarrow's *Power in Movement*, the paper analyzes how social media facilitated rapid mobilization, sustained protest momentum, and circumvented state censorship. The findings underscore social media's enduring significance as a catalyst for political change, not only in the Arab Spring but also in later global movements such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that social media has become an indispensable tool in shaping modern social movements, challenging authoritarian controls, and redefining collective action in the 21st century.

Keywords: *Social Movements; Authoritarian Regimes; Egypt and Syria*

Introduction

In 2011, the Middle East and North African regions were met with a wave of protests against old authoritarian regimes. The first wave of protests began when a Tunisian street vendor by the name of Mohamed Bouazizi lit himself on fire in response to his experience with police brutality and the harsh economic conditions within Tunisia. This incident ignited protests throughout Tunisia, later known as the "Jasmine Revolution." These protests within Tunisia focused on reforming a corrupt government and a broken economic system.

Many activists used social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to spread information on protests. In turn, this helped spread awareness of issues and political information, which mobilized protests throughout the country. The magnitude of these protests forced former President Ben Ali to step down. Through watching the former Tunisian president flee the country after 23 years of authoritarian rule, the Jasmine Revolution was seen as a success story to countries in the Middle East and North African region. Starting a wave of protests, all with the same goal of pushing democratically elected governments and more stable economic reforms.

The success of the Tunisian protests inspired many anti-regime demonstrations in Arab and North African countries, such as Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Oman, Libya, and Morocco. These protests focused on reforming authoritarian regimes and other governmental reforms, such as the economy and having free and fair democratic elections. Similarly, as in Tunisia, social media played a prevalent role in spreading information on protests within each country and sharing information both within and outside each country. The outcome of each country's protests varies due to internal and external factors such as the type of authoritarian leader, the country's third-party international actors, and censorship within the media.

Social media has played a significant role in the development of protests under authoritarian regimes. Many of the protests throughout the Arab Spring were able to mobilize and attract massive amounts of attention through the role that social media plays in its quick capability to mobilize people throughout a country. Due to the internet's vastness and capability of reaching a wide range of people in seconds, social media became a useful tool in protest mobilization, such as allowing for protest information to be spread quickly without the threat of being targeted and persecuted as an activist by the regime.

The paper plans to answer the question, "How did the rise of social media influence the mobilization and impact of the Arab Spring protests in Syria and Egypt?" When looking at the complexities of the Arab Spring protests, this paper will focus specifically on social media's role in how online activism shapes social movements, as well as continues to spread them to gain international attention. When deciding the countries that the paper will examine, it will focus on Syria and Egypt because both countries have had significantly different societal outcomes and impacts after the Arab Spring protests. When examining Syria and Egypt's differences, it is apparent that former Syrian President Bashar Al Assad's refusal to step down from power during the protests, leading his country into civil war, versus Hosni Mubarak's stepping down after the protests, is the clear distinction between both countries' prosperity after the protest cycle.

The research question will be answered by examining the effectiveness of social media in the Arab Spring in protest mobilization, gaining international attention, and the spread of uncensored political information despite the regime type. It is apparent that the rise of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter significantly influenced the Arab Spring protests in Syria and Egypt by enabling protest mobilization, increasing momentum through international attention, and making possible the continuous spread of information despite authoritarian censorship within regimes. The paper will examine theories from Sidney Tarrow's book *Power in Movement*. This further contextualizes the Arab Spring's use of social media in further developing their protest movements.

This paper will examine the full impact of social media on the Arab Spring. Through looking at the correlation of social media and protest turnout, the effectiveness of social media websites, and examining how social media continues to fuel protest momentum through increased communication and gaining international attention. This paper will start by examining the role of authoritarian leaders within both Egypt and Syria while comparing Hosni Mubarak and Bashar al-Assad's methods of repression to highlight the political system between Egypt and Syria that set up the foundation for the protests. Then, the paper will examine the relationship of the media within both countries and how social media

revolutionized the media. Finally, the paper will focus on the fallout of the protests and the international actors that played a role in both countries' outcomes post-Arab Spring Protests in Egypt and Syria.

Through looking at the use of social media in the Arab Spring protests, it is evident that social media played an integral role in mobilizing protest movements. The method in which social media was used in the Arab Spring is evident in its use of mobilization and the political attention of social movements behind the #METOO, the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the January 6th movement. Through analyzing social media's impact on social movements, it is clear that social media can be used as an effective and influential tool in popularizing social movements that could not be achieved through traditional forms of media such as print or word of mouth. This paper proves social media is a tool that should not be ignored when discussing political movements in the 21st century.

Literature Review

Mobilization and Protest Involvement

In this global day and age, social media can be seen as a useful tool to help connect and foster communication with people all across the world. When examining the use of social media in protest movements, it is evident that social media is used as a tool to foster protest mobilization and communication, which is seen as unfamiliar in other social movements in the past. When examining modern social movements, the first social movement to push the capabilities of social media to mobilize a protest movement was the Arab Spring of 2011. It is evident that during the Arab Spring, social media was used as a tool to incentivize and spread information throughout authoritarian regimes. Prevalent examples of this include Syria, Egypt, and Libya. This paper aims to answer the question of how the rise of social media influences mobilization and the impact of Arab Spring protests in Syria and Egypt. This literature review aims to argue that the rise of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter significantly influenced the Arab Spring protests in Syria and Egypt by enabling protest mobilization, increasing momentum through international attention, and making possible the continuous spread of information despite authoritarian censorship within regimes.

When examining how social media impacted the Arab Spring protest, it is clear that social media was used as a tool to mobilize citizens who had little access to traditional media (Reith, 2019). This allows for protests and demonstrations to be organized discreetly away from the strict censorship laws in traditional media, such as in the authoritarian regimes of Egypt and Syria. When examining social media usage in Egypt during the 2011 protests, it can be seen that blogging allowed bloggers and journalists to go into "highly sensitive topics that traditional media does not cover (Abdulla, 2023), such as police brutality and sexual harassment. These were prevalent topics during the Egyptian Arab Spring, which was instrumental in the longevity of the protests. This shows how social media provided an outlet to spread news throughout the country without fear of persecution. When going further into this topic, it can be seen that protest turnout is correlated to social media usage (Boulianne, 2020). It is also evident that social media played a continuous role in "facilitating collective action amidst ongoing grievances within regimes (Al-Qteishat, 2024). This shows that the use of social media has helped Arab Spring protests foster momentum and perpetuate online grievances.

Social media has also played a role in connecting and organizing communities. In the literature reviewed, it can be suggested that "social media provides a voice to the people with government-controlled legacy media" (Simidi & Shahin). It should also be noted that much of the research shows that social media helps people connect, mobilize, and broadcast protests to a wider international audience (Simidi & Shahin). This is evident in the widespread news coverage of protest movements as well as the use of personal blogging sites like YouTube and Facebook that allowed those affected by brutal repression tactics to show directly what was happening without a form of censorship. Through research, it

can be concluded that social media also played a role in connecting not only the Western world to the protest but also connecting the Arab and North African regions. Through examining social media site usage during that time, it can be seen that as of 2010, social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter had as many as "200 million to 667 million users of the social media website (Toumani, 2016).

When looking at the specific impact of social media websites, it is evident that Twitter and Facebook carried the most impact. Along with YouTube, it is clear that these websites provided activists and users with the most success when looking. The social media sites that are Facebook and Twitter are due to the social media websites' ability for a person to document events in first person. The social media sites Facebook and Twitter became organizational hubs for many activists and protestors. Through examining the literature, it is clear that many activists were able to organize and discuss politics and protest movements (Al Sayyad & Guvenc, 2013). For example, with the rise of Twitter, many activists were able to "broadcast messages describing the number of protesters in the square, the nature of their clashes with security forces, and their routes of movement (Al Sayyad & Guvenc, 2013), which in the end helped sustain the uprising. Social media also provides a powerful, speedy, and reliable way to distribute images (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013b). This helps validate the repression that those communities are experiencing, as well as being able to provide "proof" that these issues are happening and not being fabricated.

Examining the correlation between actual protest turnout and social media usage, social media has a direct impact on voter turnout despite censorship under the regime (Howard). This is evident when examining the protest turnout in Tahrir Square, where many protesters came despite the lack of access to social media (Howard). It should also be noted that many of these social movements are dependent on failing government systems, which help frame the protests. Social media is simply a tool of mass mobilization. This is evident in its effectiveness in protest mobilization. The success of mobilization in online spaces can be transferred into physical spaces despite censorship in social media through the use of leaflets and word of mouth (Solomon & Steele, 2016).

In contrast to examining how social media can help political movements, social media plays a significant role in the framing and perception of social movements in both an international and domestic context. For example, when examining social media's effectiveness in the Syrian Revolution, it is clear that "social media helped shift the perception of the conflict" (Lynch et al., 2014). In turn, the framing of Syria's protests after the Arab Spring helped frame the conflict as a broader international conflict, which brought more attention to the protest cycle. Which also prolongs the conflict. Due to the international coverage of the protests, more people were able to connect with the protests and continue to protest internationally. Social media can increase communication with international members who support the cause and continue the stream of protests, which helps tremendously push forward the message of the protests. One example of this is during the Arab Spring, while there were protests throughout America, Europe, and Asia.

Through research, social media also carries a significant role in addressing and maintaining protest momentum within the Middle East during the 2011 protests. Social media played a role in spreading information to the West as well as unifying the Arab world. As well as continuing the momentum of the protests through gaining international attention. These factors have been important in deciding the elements to focus on in this paper. This paper will expand on the longevity of protest movements under authoritarian regimes and how social media can further the attention of a protest. However, few studies have been conducted to examine how long social movements and different regimes deal with online activism. This research intends to build on the knowledge of understanding what makes social movements prevalent in society while examining their longevity and how they impact their success.

Political Landscape in Egypt and Syria Before Uprisings

Hosni Mubarak first rose to power in an uncontested election after the assassination of the previous Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in October 1981 (View of a Revolutionist Analysis of the Thirty-Year Authoritarian Rule of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, n.d.). Once Mubarak became president of Egypt, it was noted that he used many different strategies to keep his power in check. For example, once in power, Mubarak held elections, but the elections were unconstitutional because the people of Egypt were not allowed to vote for any political candidates, thus ensuring his power (View of a Revolutionist Analysis of the Thirty-Year Authoritarian Rule of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, n.d.). It is also noted that Mubarak relied heavily on the power of the police to maintain order within the country due to the growing unrest of unfair elections, a poor economy, and numerous human rights abuses. This process continued up to 2010, where it can be seen that the "state heavily manipulated the 2010 parliamentary elections to favor Mubarak's party of the NDP (National Democratic Party), with the party winning 97% of the seats in the Egyptian Parliament" (Shehata, 2011). It can be noted that this process was done to ensure a smooth transition of power to Mubarak's son for the presidential election in 2011 (Shehata, 2011). This political corruption is instrumental in starting the Arab Spring protests in Egypt. It should be noted that the corruption and exclusion of other political parties, such as the Kefaya, the National Association for Change, the Democratic Front Party, and the Tomorrow Party, were in favor of joining the first set of protests on January 25th, as well as the Muslim Brotherhood joining later (Shehata, 2011). Through other political parties joining the protests it is evident that political corruption was a massive issue in Egypt. It can also be seen that protest on this massive scale were evident

Before Egypt's Arab Spring protests, media censorship was and is still heavily censored and controlled by the government. In response to any forms of criticism that came against the Mubarak regime, activists were repeatedly met with various forms of police torture and police brutality (Badr, 2019). The use of police brutality by the Mubarak presidency was one of the many ways that the regime would maintain power; the killing and torture of activists and anyone who publicly opposed the regime during this period were common before the Arab Spring protests. In 2007, the torture of minibus driver Emad El Kabir was leaked on the blog Misr Digital, which pushed Egyptian authorities to put the police officers on trial (Badr, 2019). This outcome was uncommon at this time but later set the stage for how social media would be used in Egypt during the protests. When examining censorship in traditional media, it is evident that Egypt had a semi-liberalized commercialization of print media (Badr, 2019). Through examining the media in Egypt, it is evident that it is split into two systems: private and public media sectors, with the obvious private sector journalism practices allowing for a wider reach around Egypt. However, it still fails to reach a wider audience as well as report accurately on political issues within the country.

When examining the political regime in Syria, it is evident that it has many similarities with the Mubarak regime of Egypt. Similar to the Mubarak regime, the Assad regime can be characterized by fifty years of brutal authoritarian rule. Starting when the father of deposed leader Bashar al-Assad, former military leader Hafez al-Assad, rose to power on November 13, 1970, as a member of the Ba'th party after a bloody coup that led to his success in the 1971 election, stepping into the role of prime minister and gaining 99.2% of the people's vote (Ma'oz, 2021). The Assad dynasty that ruled Syria from 1970 to 2025 is members of an Alawite minority who have imposed strict autocratic rule over the majority of the Sunni-Muslim population that resides in Syria. Hafez al-Assad can be characterized as an authoritarian dictator who kept his power due to his firmness, flexibility, (Ma'oz, 2021). It is evident, like the Mubarak regime of Egypt, that "when encountering public opposition by conservative and radical Sunnis, the Assads have used brutal measures against innocent civilians, such as violent massacres using the military and police brutality as well as burning (2021). The use of police and military violence against civilians is a common thread that links the two authoritarian regimes. Before Syria's Arab Spring protests, it can be

seen that under Bashar al-Assad's rule, the country faced high levels of economic and political instability. Any opposition was equally met with the same extreme brutality as shown by his father, Hafez.

When examining the relationship between the Assad regime and traditional media before the Arab Spring protests, it is evident that, much like in Egypt, the Assad regime had a monopoly over most media outlets within the country. Before the Arab Spring, it was evident that all forms of Syrian media were controlled by the state (Wessels, 2017). Access to social media sites such as YouTube was prohibited, and audiovisual media in Syria was aimed at constructing "fictitious propagandistic narratives about the realities in Syria (Wessels, 2017). Syria's state news and media channels were forced to keep up the facade of the successes of the Assad regime, fueling the propaganda machine.

Emergence of Social Media: Pre-Arab Spring Protests

Social media sites such as Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook have risen in use and popularity around the world since many of the websites' creations started in 2009. Looking at the most prevalent social media sites used within the Middle East, it is apparent that Twitter and Facebook were the most used when a survey conducted around 2012 throughout the MENA region noted, "67.3% claimed to get their news from Facebook, and 70% of users who took the survey claimed to get their news (Abdulla, 2023). The blog post format of both Facebook and Twitter has allowed for many activists to become citizen journalists and have a hand in writing their narrative when writing about the political issues within Egypt and Syria. The easy communication of both of these social media apps has allowed activists the capability of fast and reliable communication due to the large number of the MENA population that has access to these social media websites. It is also important to note that social media has become used heavily to conduct political conversations within the "young, urban, relatively well-educated individuals, many of whom were women. Both before and during the revolutions, these individuals used Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to put pressure on their governments". (Howard et al., n.d.). Social media is gaining popularity with the younger demographic, providing the youth a wider and easier platform to engage with political activism from the comfort of their own home. When examining the specific amount of reach before the Arab Spring protests, it should be noted that social media site membership hit its peak in 2010 with "667 million Arabic users in April and 200 million users in the Arabic world at the end of March (Toumani, 2016). These statistics show that before the high levels of social media usage before the Arab Spring protests in Syria and Egypt, social media already had a tangible impact and influence on the region, laying the groundwork for how it should be used as a tool for protest mobilization during the Arab Spring.

Role of Social Media in the Organization and Mobilization of Protests

Collective identity theory can be explained by the definition that "people will participate in mass protests if they see others doing so (Yilmaz et al., 2024b). Collective identity theory is present throughout many social movements, often demonstrating the strength of the adage "There is power in numbers." When examining the preference falsification theory, it is clear that social media can amplify the political feelings of others that can encourage a community to protest. When examining Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube use in both the Syrian and Egyptian protests of the Arab Spring, it is evident that social media "helped significant numbers of otherwise isolated activists find and coordinate their actions in real-time (Clarke & Kocak, 2018). This is evident in the organization of protests at Tahrir Square on January 25, 2025. It can be seen that social media provided an outlet for bloggers and activists to congregate and work together to organize protests and share and spread information away from the censorship of traditional media due to social media's vast capability to reach a significant number of people without delay. The use of social media to mobilize protests can be analyzed through resource mobilization theory, which states that "social movements succeed by emphasizing the importance of acquiring and mobilizing resources (Tarrow, 1998). This theory is demonstrated in the creation of the Facebook page "We are All Khaled Said," which attracted massive amounts of attention that saw the creation of over 30,000 Facebook

accounts. It should be noted that this Facebook account became instrumental in posting protest information in Egypt (AlSayyad & Guvenc, 2013). Through the influx of Facebook accounts that were created, it is evident that for many activists, Facebook became the prevalent form of communication between activists. As well as Facebook provides a vast platform that can reach a wide variety of people throughout Egypt. This is done through the popularity of the app as well as the fact that it is convenient due to its convenience.

Similar use of social media before and during the protests is also demonstrated in Syria. Due to the censorship and anti-regime government crackdowns, social media for a time was used to facilitate and inform people on protests and forms of dissent that were going on around the region. Due to traditional media being banned or censored during the time of the Arab Spring uprisings, using traditional methods of interviewing became impossible to mobilize a protest. It should also be noted that during Syria's Arab Spring protests, bloggers and activists were detained and tortured for their coverage of the protests and forms of repression that were used by the Assad regime (Toumani, 2016). Through documenting the persecution that activists faced during the protests with international news agencies such as the BBC or American news media sites like CNN, the stories of activists were able to generate more attention on the humanitarian situation of Syria as well as put pressure on the Assad regime by foreign leaders (Hamid, 2011). One social media site that was significant in the region during this time was the video streaming platform of YouTube. YouTube was instrumental in documenting the numerous human rights abuses; many activists took to sending media to foreign counterparts to publish "video diaries" of daily life in Syria post-Arab Spring protests (Wessels, 2017). Through the use of these first-hand accounts, social media provided a way for activists to connect and communicate independently with sources outside Syria, which became important in framing the conflict post-protest cycle as a humanitarian issue.

Social Media's Connection to Older Methods of Protest Mobilization

The Middle East has an extensive history of media censorship. Looking at the characteristics of authoritarian regimes, it is evident that these regimes thrive off limiting their citizens' civil liberties, which can potentially undermine their rule or turn them against the regime (Ma'oz, 2021). This is evident in the state-controlled forms of media, such as print and television which are heavily controlled by these authoritarian regimes. The comparison between social media and traditional media, when looking at its effectiveness in protest mobilization, is crucial for understanding the significant role that social media plays in the Arab Spring. The concept of social media provided an outlet for activists to come together in a non-physical space to talk about their protests and ideas away from the prying eyes of the government. It is clear that social media "can provide information and images that motivate people, they allow groups to organize and mobilize much more efficiently than in the past, and they allow protesters to convey messages to the outside world." (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). Social media allows for activists to bypass forms of persecution and targeting by the government through being able to maintain a level of anonymity online, which also helps the continuation of political movements. In comparison to traditional forms of protest mobilization, such as spreading information through word of mouth as well as enabling personal networks, social media was able to reach a wider audience quickly than any previous form of protest mobilization. Social media can also facilitate and help improve older methods of protest mobilization, such as creating an emphasis on the physical space of where a protest is held, even if the internet connection is disabled within the country. These circumstances are evident in the case of Egypt's Arab Spring protests, where "physical space was visible in leaflets circulating in Cairo that showed approach routes, crowd formations, and tactics to be used in public demonstrations." As one observer remarked, "You can switch off the Internet but not the streets." (Solomon & Steele, 2016).

Syria's relationship with social media during the Arab Spring protests is similar to Egypt's. This is due to the authoritarian nature of both regimes, as well as the intense state-censored media. It is evident that during the Arab Spring protests in Syria, social media was used as a way to "share information and frame it within a particular narrative context through self-selected networks; they can be used to condemn

or praise, to express solidarity, and to argue and disrupt ongoing conversations"(Lynch et al., 2014). Throughout the Arab Spring protests in Syria, the Syrian people relied heavily on "social media content, especially after many media offices, such as Al Jazeera and BBC, were shut down in Syria and their journalists were threatened"(Toumani, 2016). The use of social media to contact foreign media companies was instrumental in gaining international attention and fighting against Assad's propaganda machine. Without the use of social media, it would have been impossible for activists to spread information and inform the international media. In contrast to traditional forms of media, social media in Syria was used similarly to in Egypt, which allowed for communities to share and spread information on protest movements and regime changes.

The Arab Spring and Maintaining International Attention

The Arab Spring protests elicited an international reaction. Arguably, the biggest outcome of social media use during the Arab Spring protests is the outpouring of international support. The use of social media was able to grab the attention of the international community and provided the international community with a way to directly connect to those affected. When examining the data of tweets and social media interaction during Egypt's wave of Arab Spring protests, it can be seen that "13,754,988" tweets show what was being said, how it was being said, and the outpouring of connections each author had (Paul, 2017). This number demonstrates how much of a wide net of influence and awareness the protests gained internationally. It should also be noted that many world leaders, such as Barack Obama and many Western presidents, urged Mubarak to step down and transition power. Also, withdrawing Western support and aid from Egypt put more pressure on Mubarak due to the failing economy. By examining the effects of Western political influence on Mubarak, it is evident that the information provided on the methods of repression and protest movement of Egyptians during the Arab Spring by social media allowed Western leaders to effectively make foreign policy choices that directly impacted the political state of Egypt. Social media's vast influence and reach can inform politicians in ways that would not be possible without the internet's wide reach to other people, as well as the social media apps that allow for this kind of content to be posted.

The international attention received from these protests on social media is instrumental in affecting how Egypt and the Syrian regimes responded to the protests, as well as the chain reaction to the events in the country after the protests. In the early days of the Arab Spring protests, many Western countries supported a MENA country's attempt at democratization. For political reasons, it should be noted that countries like Russia opposed Western influence and therefore were against the protests (Laub, 2013). This further complicated any relief efforts or foreign policy goals that other Western countries could achieve without the fear of getting involved in a more complex foreign conflict. Looking at the collective response from Westerns, it varies. For example, once the Syrian Civil War broke out in retaliation to the protests, US and UN government officials condemned the armed crackdown and torture of civilians (Laub, 2013). This was able to be achieved through the work of spreading information to international media outlets through social media. This allowed for international news sources to publish information that would continue to gain attention with a wider group of audiences. It should be noted that once the Syrian civil war broke out, the United States ordered economic sanctions on Syria to stop the brutal government crackdowns. The effects of the economic sanctions deeply affected the citizens of Syria, but not the leaders, as the cycle of oppression and persecution of activists continued.

Government Response and Countermeasures after the Protest

When comparing and contrasting Bashar al-Assad's and Hosni Mubarak's roles in stepping down from power, it is evident that both leaders had different approaches to the protest responses. Examining Mubarak's response to Egypt's Arab Spring protests, it can be seen that after eighteen days of protest, once the military decided not to use force and brutality against protestors, Mubarak left office. Under the condition that power would be transitioned over to Vice President Omar Suleiman and the military

(Hajjar, 2023). It should be noted that once Mubarak lost US and military support, he decided to step down to try and save Egypt from a civil war (Cole, 2013). Effectively knowing that staying in power would be a lost cause. The result of Mubarak leaving office was that Egypt fell under a repressive military dictatorship, which was much more oppressive than under Mubarak (Josua & Edel, 2021). It should be noted that most regimes that experienced Arab Spring protests, except Tunisia, display a "higher rate of repression than they did in 2010" (Josua & Edel, 2021).

When examining Syria's response to the Arab Spring protests, it can be seen that Bashar al-Assad had a stronger resistance to leaving the presidency, using armed resistance and military force against its citizens (Laub, 2013). Despite calls to step down from the international community due to the intense brutality and the violent methods of repression that the Assad regime used, the Assad regime received support from Western "enemies" such as Russia and Iran to continue to repress its citizens. The immense and violent methods of state repression against the Syrian people can be seen as the catalyst that ignited the Syrian civil war and led to the flourishing of Islamic extremists around the region in the years of Arab Spring protests (Josua & Edel, 2021).

The response of the military is a key factor in maintaining the security of the region. When examining Egypt's military response to step down and not engage in violence with citizens compared to Syria's military response, it is evident that a more violent response to protest movements created a shift within the Syrian nation. The Assad regime's use of violence demonstrates the power and fear that authoritarian regimes use to stay in power. By examining the political foundation for the Arab Spring protests, it can be seen that there is a prominent correlation between how citizens protest and the relationship between leaders (Tarrow, 1998).

Outcomes of Protests and the Effect of Social Media

When examining the overall outcome of the protests and looking at whether the regions were impacted in any meaningful way, it can be seen that not much was changed politically, like authoritarian regimes shifting to democracies. When examining if social media had any long-term effects in enacting change, it is evident that social media had a great effect in mobilizing protests, gaining international attention, and continuing the spread of information despite censorship laws. However, there is a correlation between social media and protest activity, and it is evident that social media is impactful, and its effects can fail to create lasting change due to the authoritarian system of institutions of the Egyptian and Syrian regimes. Studies show that social media's impact varies across Arab countries (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). It can be concluded that there is very little correlation between high social media use and low protest levels (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). Instead, it is shown that political environments shape protection more than social media (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013). This explains the political and economic grievances that many felt in Syrian and Egyptian society that led to the protests. Under repressive regimes, it is also evident that mobilization becomes inherently harder due to an increase in censorship and fear of persecution. However, mobilization could not be done without social media through its vastness and ability to connect people through MENA countries.

When examining the impact of specific social media sites, it is evident that social media websites such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter carried significant weight in the mobilization of the protests; social media websites were not the only tool to mobilize protests. From looking at the data, it can be inferred that Facebook registration increased significantly after the protests began (Wolfsfeld et al. 128, 2013). Through examining this data, it can be inferred that many felt that the attention the protests were receiving influenced many people to join social media sites, which further increased the sharing of information and protests.

When examining the situation in Syria and Egypt post-Arab Spring protests, it is evident that the country is in far worse shape than it was pre-2011 protests. Syria is currently recovering from a civil war

that was ignited by the protests. When examining the initial start of the protests, it can be seen that Syrian people took the same approach to protesting as countries like Egypt and Tunisia, focusing on slogans and violent tactics (Lynch et al., 2014). Social media helped bring international as well as domestic attention to the situation inside Syria, creating a shared sense of solidarity, which helped further the movement. Many outside Syria expected the Assad regime to topple like Mubarak or the Gaddafi regime in Libya, but the situation changed drastically around 2012. This is due to Assad mobilizing the Syrian army to fight against the protestors. It is evident that once Syria shifted from peaceful protests to armed rebellion, it can be seen that the message was separate from the initial Arab Springs (Lynch et al., 2014). Social media's reaction to the armed conflict shifted less from the mobilization of protests and carried more of a focus on international actors that escalated the situation, such as Saudi Arabia, Russia, and Iran. It can be seen that the online discourse, when examining the situation in Syria, became more about the rise of Islamic extremist groups such as ISIS, which equally flooded the media. When examining how social media explicitly played a role in the protest movement, it showed that social media emphasizes a shared identity that helps connect wider protest movements.

When looking at Egypt's outcome in the Arab Spring, there is not much difference in the outcome compared to Syria. Once Mubarak fell, Egypt had its first democratic election with the election of presidential candidate Mohamed Morsi in 2012. However, Morsi's rule did not last long, soon overthrown by military leader General Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi in July 2013 (Saidin & Storm, 2024). This puts an end to Egypt's once-fair democratic election. It is generally understood among scholars that the Arab Spring protests failed in Egypt as well as Syria. This is due to the clash of ideologies between Islamists and secularists within the government, the role of the military in power, and the intense repression of activists. When examining Egypt's relation to the Muslim Brotherhood as well as other Islamist parties within the Egyptian government, it is evident that Mubarak was able to diminish their power within parliament. However, when Morsi gained power in 2012, as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, he clashed with the secularist and Westernized views of the parliament, causing rifts within the government. Under Sisi, Egypt became more authoritarian. This is seen in an increase in censorship, mass arrests, and trials of activists as well (Hosni Mubarak's Dramatic Rise and Fall From Power, 2001). The role of the military within the Egyptian government also plays a role in the stability of the country. Under Sisi, the Egyptian Army has grown into contracting with private firms as well as creating a monopoly within the economy on various businesses such as solar panels and weapons (Hagar Ali). Egypt has also made very little progress in strengthening the economy or fixing unemployment.

Conclusion

The Arab Spring protests in Egypt and Syria highlight the magnitude of social media in social movements. When used properly, social media can be integral in mobilizing protests and grabbing international attention that can create real change. The effects of social media in the Arab Spring protest were integral in breaking through censorship, maintaining international attention, and spreading awareness in ways that would be impossible with traditional media. The use of social media throughout the Arab Spring protests proved to be an integral part of protest mobilization as well as fighting censorship laws under authoritarian regimes. The usage of social media during the Arab Spring protests in Egypt and Syria laid the foundation for how social movements mobilize in the 21st century. Many social movements were able to gain traction from the general population's use of social media, such as the #METOO movement and the Black Lives Matter movement. As well as the political insurrection of January 6th. Examining the impact social media can have on social movements provides a framework for how social movements can be mobilized in the future.

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