

In recent discussions of nonviolent social revolutions, an issue that has been discussed is whether social media (especially Twitter and Facebook) have helped launch and sustain the revolutions or not.

On the one hand, some argue that though social media is certainly used during social revolutions, it isn't their backbone. From this perspective, people are using Iran in its post-election turmoil as one example. News services all ran stories exclaiming Twitter's role in the protests, but in reality as time went on people started finding out that foreigners (to Iran) were the main people tweeting. Andrew Sullivan was labeled the godfather of these protests, and Nico Pitney was another person doing most of the blogging and tweeting (Morozov, 10). Neither of these men are Iranian; they were contributing updates not from Iran, but from the Iranian Internet (Morozov, 10). Those with this view on the issue will use examples like these to illustrate how social media is around as a part of revolutions, but isn't the authentic backbone of them. We live in a day and age where social media is everywhere all the time, but that doesn't mean it is crucially important in nonviolent social revolutions.

On the other hand, however, others argue that social media (especially Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube) has been the primary organizational backbone for recent nonviolent social revolutions. In just the past few months the Arab world has been shaken up with revolutions started using social media. When Tunisia's dictator Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali fled his country it was the first time in history that social media helped bring down a government (*Arab world shaken by power of Twitter and Facebook* by John Timpane). Not long afterwards protests to get Mubarak to step

down in Egypt got underway, these were organized on Facebook. Social media is the train running on the tracks of the internet that is allowing people to organize massive social revolution and ultimately get change in their nations. In the words of Geoff Livingston, one who holds similar views (but isn't a scholar or academic), "The best testimony about social media's role in these events has to be the efforts of the Tunisian and Egyptian governments to thwart or completely cut off the Internet". According to this view, one needs no more evidence of social media's core contributions than the fact that the national governments tried to cut off the internet entirely. In sum, then, the issue is whether social media helps organize social revolution or just helps to get the news across regarding social revolution, but not actually be an organizational tool for them.

My own view is that social media plays a definite organizational role in nonviolent social revolutions, especially in recent months. Tunisia, then Egypt, and now a plethora of other Arab countries are in the midst of nonviolent social revolutions organized largely through Twitter and Facebook. Though I concede that the young age of social media and anonymity involved in it may make it prone to failure in use as an organizational tool for social revolutions, I still maintain that it is these very traits of social media that make it more accessible to younger generations, and in doing so one of the best organizational tools for social revolution these days. For example, just take a look at the Arab world in the past few months that I've been discussing as my main examples here. Though some might object that much of the social media usage during social revolutions may not actually be from people "on the ground" in those nations I reply that even if that were the case

(which you can't be sure of without looking the poster up) those posters are still massive contributors to the outpouring of grassroots support for the revolutions in those nations. The issue is important because our world is becoming increasingly global with new technology (social media included) and at the same time revolutions are a major aspect of national change in recent months. The cross between these two, as this research topic would examine, should give us all some insights to how new technology is being utilized in some of the most important (and in some cases dire) change that non-democratic nations enter in to out of necessity.

Works Cited

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