

## Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the Social Media Moment

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### Introduction

In this paper, I reflect on the relationship between social media and the Arab uprisings of 2011, contrasting the Egyptian experience with that of Saudi Arabia.<sup>1</sup> My argument is conditioned by the fact that I observed the uprising in Egypt from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, a city in which, throughout the year of revolt that has gripped the Arab world, one could have heard a proverbial pin drop. It is conditioned as well by the fact that Egypt is the largest social media market in the Middle East, and Saudi Arabia the third largest. If social media was the determining element of the Arab uprisings, as the euphoria of the moment seemed to suggest, why were the outcomes in Saudi Arabia and Egypt so vastly different? In order to ascertain the influence of social media on the Arab uprisings of 2011, it would help first to identify and define the broader context in which social media is operating, namely, the new media context.

Over the past several decades, communication technologies like satellite television, cellular phones, and the Internet have dramatically influenced the way in which people absorb and produce information. This development has been examined by a number of scholars, who have focused their attention on the role new media plays in reshaping Middle Eastern societies.<sup>2</sup> In the view of these scholars, new media is more than anything else a driver of social change. The most common application of this view in the context of the 2011 Arab uprisings is that social media was the *sine qua non* of the revolutionary movements that toppled Middle Eastern autocrats in Tunisia and Egypt. Western cable news stations leapt quickly onto this narrative, while Al Jazeera played host to a rotating lineup of guest analysts who sang the praises of the youth of the “Facebook Revolution.”

The narrative of social media’s transformative properties is justifiable in some respects; in Egypt, anti-regime Facebook pages like “We are all Khaled Said” helped foster a solidarity of sentiment that had eluded previous generations of regime opponents, while permitting activists to evade

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<sup>1</sup> This paper derives from one presented at an April 2011 workshop on social media and revolution for the Liechtenstein Institute of Self-Determination at Princeton University. I’d like to thank Wolfgang Danspeckgruber and Jessica Sheehan for inviting me to participate, and my Saudi geek friends for sharing their insights and perspectives.

<sup>2</sup> Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson, *New Media in the Muslim World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Marwan Kraidy, *Reality Television and Arab Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public: Iraq, Al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

regime censorship and repression during the crucial early moments of the uprising. A familiar problem arises, however, when social media becomes an object of discussion set apart from the motive forces—personal and historical—that condition its use in a specific political context. This is the fallacy of technological determinism, which after the toppling of former presidents Hosni Mubarak and Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, helped foster a presumption that the proliferation of social media in a given Arab context would necessarily lead to democratic revolution and the overthrow of authoritarian regimes. As the bloody and complicated conflicts in Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, and Libya have demonstrated, underlying social and political dynamics continue to dictate political outcomes, with technology playing a more complex and less determinant role than is conventionally ascribed to it.<sup>3</sup> This observation suggests a second and no less significant way of understanding the role of the Internet and new media—as a mirror of underlying social dynamics, not transformative so much as reflective, and even reinforcing of pre-Internet values and hierarchies. My own research on Internet use in Saudi Arabia has identified the ways by which pre-Internet status hierarchies are often reinforced or adapted to the new media environments of Internet discussion forums.<sup>4</sup> The power of social media to amplify grassroots social and political conservatism must not be overlooked.

In any given society, the Internet and social media perform both of the above-described functions, propelling social change and reflecting social systems. Yet analytical clarity demands that an effort be made to differentiate between these two roles. A recent study by a team of digital media scholars at the University of Washington calls attention to the influence of social media in shaping debates and spreading democratic ideas during the revolutionary uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia.<sup>5</sup> The researchers find as well that “a spike in online revolutionary conversations often preceded major events on the ground.” They make this claim based on the fact that Twitter use by local actors in Tunisia and Egypt peaked in the days preceding the resignations of Ben Ali and Mubarak.<sup>6</sup> Although explicitly disavowing the idea that social media *caused* the Arab Spring, these scholars advance an argument that implicitly endorses this notion. For example, with respect to the period preceding the resignation of interim Tunisian prime minister, Mohamed Ghannouchi, the authors write: “The primary topic of political conversation in Tunisian blogs then became ‘revolution’ until a public rally of at least 100,000 people on February 27, after which Ghannouchi was forced to resign. In Tunisia, the blogosphere anticipated what happened on the ground by days. Demand online for liberty eventually

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<sup>3</sup> In Libya, for example, the most relevant technologies were those deployed by NATO forces to erode the Libyan regime’s military capacity.

<sup>4</sup> Nadav Samin, “Internet Bulletin Boards in Saudi Arabia: Analogues of Change and Resistance,” *Arabic and the Media*, ed. Reem Bassiouney (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Philip N. Howard et al., “Opening Closed Regimes: What Was the Role of Social Media during the Arab Spring?” *Project on Information Technology and Political Islam*, University of Washington, 2011 [http://dl.dropbox.com/u/12947477/publications/2011\\_Howard-Duffy-Freelon-Hussain-Mari-Mazaid\\_pITPI.pdf](http://dl.dropbox.com/u/12947477/publications/2011_Howard-Duffy-Freelon-Hussain-Mari-Mazaid_pITPI.pdf) (accessed March 1, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 17.

manifested itself in the streets.”<sup>7</sup> While emphasizing the importance of sequencing, the authors fail to establish an explicit and convincing chain of causality between the frequency of tweets and developments on the ground. Their data could just as easily be interpreted to mean that Twitter served as one of multiple outlets for the collective airing of grievances and broadcasting of the latest developments on the ground, alongside television, word of mouth, and other means. Whether the use of social media in these instances was reflecting or driving sentiments becomes of crucial import for understanding what precisely transpired.

Examining the contrasting outcomes in Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the period encompassing the Arab Spring revolts and their aftermath, I would like to argue that it is not the Internet and social media, but rather the underlying dynamics of a given society that determine where opposition movements will emerge and persist. Social media serves largely as an accelerant of processes already afoot. If that is the case, then why have we locked onto social media as the main story of the Arab uprisings? This is because of a third, complementary function of the Internet and social media—as a window, for Western academics, journalists, activists, and general consumers of news, into Middle Eastern societies.<sup>8</sup> Before the new media age, media penetration was a unidirectional phenomenon, flowing from Cold War-era propaganda and commercial centers into the radios and television sets of developing countries. Western attention to social media use by Egyptians and Saudis is thus an expression of the balancing of information flows. But what sort of view do we get through this window? In what language are the signals through this window appearing? Does the view through this window, from a vantage point in the West, truly reflect the balance of forces in a given society? Does it accurately reflect the extent of mobilization or discontent in a given society?

The question of language is important, because it determines in part which social media platforms Arabic speakers will use and when. Twitter, for example, until March 2012, did not have an Arabic language interface, and this fact seems to have inhibited the growth of its Arabic-speaking user base.<sup>9</sup> Facebook experienced a massive increase in Arabic-speaking users after introducing its Arabic interface in February 2009. While it is difficult to casually disaggregate Facebook’s overall growth from its growth in specific language zones, the fact that only a small percentage of Arabic speakers are comfortable using English on the Internet would suggest that language platforms matter. How many Egyptians would have heard of Khaled Said, the twenty-eight year old who was beaten to death for refusing to be searched by state security and emerged posthumously as the symbol of the anti-Mubarak movement, if Facebook did not have an Arabic

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>8</sup> For a reflection on this point, see Blake Hounshell, “The Revolution Will Be Tweeted,” *Foreign Policy*, 187 (Jul/Aug 2011): 20-21.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Saudi web entrepreneur, Riyadh, March 2011; for more on this point, and on the grassroots effort to create an Arabic language Twitter interface, see “Coming to the Web: Twitter in Arabic,” *The National*, January 21, 2012, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/coming-to-the-web-twitter-in-arabic> (accessed March 4, 2012).

language platform? The question of language is also important for us in the West, because it helps determine which individuals and social media platforms we follow. The most able of the social media personalities, the ones who tend to emerge in the West as iconic representatives of the revolutionary power of these new media, are progressive youth with good knowledge of English, activists such as Wael Ghonim and Gihan “Gigi” Ibrahim. While giving voice to the anti-regime sentiments shared by most Egyptians, these activists represent a narrow sliver of Egyptian society. Interpreting the actions and expressions of these courageous secular personalities as the embodiment of social media’s liberating potential, therefore, conceals as much as it reveals about both social media and Egyptian society.

Turning to Saudi Arabia, we see how an over-investment in social media’s progressive promise can grossly distort the collective sentiments of a society. A person following Western press coverage of Saudi Arabia and the major social media platforms in the kingdom in the lead-up to the proposed March 11, 2011 protests might have come away with the sense that major unrest was brewing. But had he or she visited older social media platforms, like the Internet discussion forums, particularly some of the prominent tribal forums (*al-muntadayat al-qabaliyya*), they would have observed widespread sympathy for the king and antipathy toward the would-be demonstrators. For every activist blogger who is imprisoned or harrassed in Saudi Arabia, there are ten tribal Internet discussion forum members announcing their fealty to the king and the Saudi monarchy.<sup>10</sup>

### **Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Social Media Revolution**

There is no doubt that progressive, networked elements of Egyptian society were at the fulcrum of the recent uprising, and that it would likely not have occurred when it did without their deft outmaneuvering of Egyptian authorities, in part via social media.<sup>11</sup> Subsequent developments in Egypt, however, demonstrate that a silent majority of residents of smaller cities and towns across the country is unwilling to follow the secularizing agenda of the young activists, and will adhere to a more conservative, populist, and old media course in its choice of leaders. The first hint that the Egyptian uprising would begin to deviate from the social media-driven narrative of revolution was the outcome of the March 2011 constitutional referendum. Egyptians went to the polls on March 19 to cast their votes in a referendum on constitutional reforms designed to limit the power of the executive and speed parliamentary elections. While the amendments were approved by three-fourths of voters, many urban voters rejected the electoral provisions for

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<sup>10</sup> If, as one avid Saudi Twitter user explained to me, a “silent Arab spring” had arrived in Saudi Arabia, then the absence of any hint of collective action against the regime (outside the Eastern Province) has been particularly notable.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Levinson and Margaret Coker, “The Secret Rally that Sparked an Uprising,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 11, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704132204576135882356532702.html> (accessed June 10, 2011).

giving an unfair advantage to established organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood, thus diminishing the prospects that a progressive, secular politics would take root. The early promise of a social media-driven, decentralized politics gave way quickly to an old-fashioned, get-out-the-vote activism, one for which the Muslim Brotherhood and its cadres of physically embedded activists was uniquely prepared. As Jon Alterman has written, “Social media are not evidently helpful in facilitating political bargaining in constitution-writing processes, and social media have only played a limited role in helping form new political parties. In both cases, old-fashioned political horse trading and solid field operations seem to be decisive.”<sup>12</sup> The overwhelming electoral success of conservative Islamist parties in the recent parliamentary elections confirmed what the referendum foreshadowed, that while social media served as a captivating window onto the ground floor of Egyptian revolutionary agitation, it proved flawed as a driver of particular political outcomes, the expectations of its promise unjustly burdened by an excess of progressive technorati affection.<sup>13</sup>

In his groundbreaking research on social media use among Egyptian digital activists, David Faris cautions scholars “to avoid the analytic dichotomy of asking whether technology did or did not cause the Egyptian revolution.”<sup>14</sup> While this is a useful reminder, there are other valid and relevant questions to ask about the role of technology in the revolution, including: which technologies were the *most* influential, the most accessible, and the most lasting in their impact? As scholars of Arab media such as Marc Lynch and Jon Alterman have argued, television proved a far more dependable ally for mass agitation, one capable of reaching audiences less engaged with the Internet and social media. Media use by rural Egyptians has received detailed ethnographic treatment in a recent study by Sahar Khamis.<sup>15</sup> Returning after an absence of ten years to examine changes in media consumption patterns by women in the Egyptian Delta village of Kafr Masoud, Khamis found that while the Internet is becoming increasingly influential, television still dominates media consumption in rural Egypt.

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<sup>12</sup> Jon Alterman, “The Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted,” *The Washington Quarterly* 34:4 (2011): 104.

<sup>13</sup> Observing discussions on Tunisian social media sites preceding the Tunisian revolution, the authors of “Opening Closed Regimes” remarked that “Islam, as a political theme, tracks on only a few blogs,” and that “conversations about liberty and freedom were more important than conversations about Islam.” This seems particularly useful evidence for the fact that bloggers and digital media activists are not the kingmakers in the new Arab politics, Islam having emerged as the dominant political theme in the early post-revolutionary political period. “Opening Closed Regimes,” 13.

<sup>14</sup> David Faris, “We Are All Revolutionaries Now: Social Media Networks and the Egyptian Revolution,” *Social Media Revolutions: All Hype or New Reality?* Liechtenstein Institute for Self-Determination, Princeton University, 2011: 14, [http://www.princeton.edu/lisd/publications/socialmedia\\_2011.pdf](http://www.princeton.edu/lisd/publications/socialmedia_2011.pdf) (accessed January 6, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Sahar Khamis, “New Media and Social Change in Rural Egypt,” *Arab Media & Society*, Issue 12, Winter 2010, [http://www.arabmediasociety.com/topics/index.php?t\\_article=310](http://www.arabmediasociety.com/topics/index.php?t_article=310) (accessed April 20, 2011).

Rather than social media, which undoubtedly helped propel “cascades” of demonstrators into the early protest ranks,<sup>16</sup> it seems that it was the satellite television station Al Jazeera that drew the majority of the Egyptian protesters into the streets. Al Jazeera, that old (state-run) media instrument in a new guise, was vitally important in mobilizing public opinion in Egypt.<sup>17</sup> As Alterman has noted, “through its words and images, al-Jazeera and many of the other stations sanctified and validated those protests as revolutionary when they were still in their early days.” While BBC and other stations drifted off periodically to report on their requisite marginalia, the Qatari station’s coverage of the demonstrations in Tahrir Square continued without interruption for weeks. Al Jazeera invited scores of opposition figures to speak live on the air, all day and all night. In the days before Mubarak’s resignation, protesters erected a huge screen to broadcast Al Jazeera live in Tahrir Square. On the night of Mubarak’s resignation, some celebrants in Tahrir Square raised a massive banner thanking two parties in particular for making the revolution possible—the Egyptian armed forces and Al Jazeera. To watch oneself making history, to be both object and subject in this process—this is one of the most fascinating aspects of the Egyptian uprising, and one that lay beyond the fragmentary scope of social media. And as Philip Seib has noted with respect to activist Wael Ghonim, the man behind the “We are all Khaled Said” campaign, his first appointment after being released from prison was with a popular private Egyptian satellite television program, where he sat for a lengthy interview.<sup>18</sup>

In the Saudi case, many of the ingredients for a social media-driven revolution were in place during the lead-up to the Arab Spring. A tech-savvy, increasingly Westernized mass of youth was acquiring consciousness in a country with limited opportunities for stimulating employment, and had begun to agitate in fits and starts for greater opportunity, more social mobility, and an end to mediocrity in the notoriously conservative kingdom. Yet outside of the Eastern Province, with its restive Shiite minority, no serious opposition movement has emerged to challenge the regime’s legitimacy. Inspired by events in Egypt and Tunisia in early 2011, Saudi intellectuals and prominent figures circulated a number of online petitions demanding political reform according to a fixed timetable. Signatories included prominent religious conservatives like Salman al-Awda and Youssef al-Ahmad, as well as a host of established liberal figures. One young activist set up a website for Saudis to lodge complaints against their government. It is telling that of the thousands of complaints posted on the site, practically none were directed toward the key institutions of regime control (e.g. Ministry of Interior, Saudi Arabian National Guard). The most substantial development in the kingdom during this period was an anonymous Facebook page calling for nationwide protests against the regime on March 11, 2011.

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<sup>16</sup> Faris, 14.

<sup>17</sup> Alterman, 110.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the influence of Arab satellite television on the Egyptian revolution, see Lawrence Pintak, “Breathing Room: Toward a New Arab Media,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, May/June 2011, <http://pintak.com/2011/10/11/breathing-room-toward-a-new-arab-media-columbia-journalism-review/> (accessed February 27, 2012).

March 11 was a strange day in Saudi Arabia. Police cars patrolled the streets constantly, and almost all shops were shuttered. Helicopters flew overhead in certain areas, and there was a palpable sense of unease. Yet no protests occurred, either in Riyadh or in Jeddah, the kingdom's two principal cities. That an anonymous Facebook call could trigger a nationwide security service mobilization demonstrates the enormous power of social media and the Internet. But the ghostly quality of Saudi streets on that day speaks to the superior power of the underlying dynamics in the kingdom. Saudi society was neither ready nor willing to demonstrate, a fact confirmed both in my observations of daily life and in the scores of interviews I conducted. Savvy adolescent consumers of technology seemed excitedly defiant about their disinterest in mass collective action against the regime. One young Internet entrepreneur described with pride the moment in March 2011 when he felt compelled to rebuke his father for the latter's reformist zeal, urging him to "stop talking about [constitutional monarchy] and focus on your work."<sup>19</sup> While this upending of traditional family dynamics may announce progress of some kind, it is clear that media savvy and digital activism in authoritarian Arab countries are not indivisible. Young Saudis, if not reflexively averse to the idea of protest, were for the most part turned off by the anonymity of the Facebook page and its unfocused message. It is worth pointing out, however, that the Egyptian Facebook campaign that helped topple the Mubarak regime was anonymous as well. The discrepancy between Saudi and Egyptian responses to anonymity may reflect the lack of a widespread network of activists coordinating their efforts throughout the Saudi kingdom. The Egyptian Facebook campaign was the culmination of a decade-long engagement with the tools of new media and nonviolent protestation on the part of a broad collective of Egyptian activists, both secular and Islamist. By contrast, Saudi Arabia's activist community had been sitting on the sidelines while the regime confronted al-Qaeda domestically, and was in no position to argue for regime destabilization while nominal oil prices were reaching historic highs and the national bounty was overflowing. Lastly, one cannot discount the fact that, on balance, Egypt is poor, while Saudi Arabia is rich, making most Saudi citizens less interested in forcing political change. The Wael Ghonims of Saudi Arabia are more inclined to see their desire for reform realized through entrepreneurship and market mechanisms than radical measures like regime overthrow.

Of course, the fact that Saudi Arabia is socially and politically conservative relative to other Arab countries does not immunize it from change, and does not exclude it from the dynamic influence of new media. Since March 2011, there have been several important developments in social media use that reveal both the limitations on political activism in Saudi Arabia and the prospects for change there. In May 2011, Saudi activist Manal al-Sharif posted a video of herself driving around the eastern city of Khobar,<sup>20</sup> and was promptly arrested by the Saudi police. Al-Sharif's move came in anticipation of a planned June 17<sup>th</sup> nationwide protest drive by Saudi

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<sup>19</sup> Author interview, Riyadh, April 2011.

<sup>20</sup> "Manal al-Sharif driving in Saudi Arabia," YouTube, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sowNSH\\_W2r0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sowNSH_W2r0) (accessed March 1, 2012).

women, who are unofficially banned from driving by the country's strict social codes. The call to protest crystallized on a Facebook page that attracted over 10,000 followers. Yet on the designated day of action, no more than several dozen women took to the road. While the collectively enforced restrictions on Saudi female freedoms make this case a problematic template for the dynamics of group behavior, the failure of online action to produce significant real world consequences here must be noted.

YouTube has also been the site of a budding guerilla filmmakers' movement in the kingdom. One prominent figure in this movement is Saudi director Badr al-Hamud, whose satire "Monopoly" calls attention to the housing shortage in the kingdom. This darkly comedic short film, which is interlaced with commentary by economists and other experts, concludes with the recommendation that the government institute a tax on undeveloped plots of land (*aradi bayda*), as a way of raising the cost of market manipulation for real estate monopolists.<sup>21</sup> In February 2012, after months of debate about the issue in the popular press, the executive advisory body known as the Consultative Council (*Majlis al-Shura*) recommended that the state implement a 15-20 percent tax on idle lands.<sup>22</sup> Whereas Badr al-Hamud's film obeyed the etiquette of Saudi reformist discourse, another production team of Saudi youth took a decidedly more confrontational tack. With their hand-held camera and provocative name ("We're Being Played"), video blogger Feras Buqnah and his colleagues produced a series of short films for YouTube, one of which cast harsh light on the conditions in Riyadh's impoverished neighborhoods.<sup>23</sup> In October 2011, the "We're Being Played" team was arrested by Saudi authorities, and released ten days later. Unlike Fouad al-Farhan, the Saudi blogger who was jailed for several months in 2007-08 but has continued to post provocative political content on his blog,<sup>24</sup> Feras Buqnah seems to have abandoned his taste for provocation, and, like so many other young Saudis, has embraced that intoxicating mix of moralizing and consumerism that characterizes the culture of the realm. Yet, Feras's films live on through the web, and will likely inspire another round of digital provocateurs in the near future.

Most substantially, in recent months, the Saudi Twittersphere has produced something approaching a full-blown royal scandal. An anonymous insider using the handle @mujtahidd has been airing information about alleged corrupt dealings by some of the royal family's most

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<sup>21</sup> "Monopoly short film," YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMvCURQEhpM> (accessed March 1, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> "Shura member to *Al-Iqtisadiyya*: we raised the recommendation to the King for a 15 percent tax on idle lands," *Al-Iqtisadiyya*, February 11, 2012, [http://www.aleqt.com/2012/02/11/article\\_625403.html](http://www.aleqt.com/2012/02/11/article_625403.html) (accessed March 2, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> "We're Being Played #4: Poverty" YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hztjXWFUgA4&context=C3bbee2cADOEgsToPDskIgfJCqTDK4A0Ob4pGuvdK> (accessed March 2, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> *Fouad al-Farhan: Unreformed Saudi Citizen*, <http://www.alfarhan.ws/> (accessed March 2, 2012).

prominent princes, especially the sons of King Fahd, Muhammad and Abd al-Aziz (“Azouzi”).<sup>25</sup> Though the possibility remains that @mujtahidd is a fictitious character whose attacks are calculated to damage particular members of the Saudi royal family for the benefit of others, his unfiltered commentary on top-ranking royals and their predilections (King Abdallah and his second-in-command Prince Nayef are not excluded) has set the Saudi Twittersphere ablaze.<sup>26</sup> By many measures, @mujtahidd’s whistleblowing constitutes an unprecedented turn in Saudi public life, one enabled by cheap and easy access to social media by millions of Saudi citizens.<sup>27</sup>

Taking the collective measure of these social media-driven episodes of Saudi activism, we see a society whose embrace of technology has without a doubt advanced the public debate over questions of justice and equality in the kingdom. Yet, with the possible exception of @mujtahidd’s flirtation with the third rail of Saudi politics, none of these campaigns have addressed fundamental questions of regime legitimacy, and none have inspired the kind of mass agitation seen in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain. Part of this has to do with the zealously preemptive style of regime repression. The Arab Spring came at an unfortunate time for a group of 17 Saudi political activists, who were detained in 2007 after convening a meeting on political reform in Jeddah. In November 2011, the 17 were sentenced to lengthy prison terms of up to 30 years each. While some observers were surprised by this decision, the severity of their punishment is less unexpected when considering the message it conveys to other would-be activists. Khaled al-Johani, the only Saudi to show up at the protest site on March 11, 2011, was arrested on that same day, and is now standing trial for subversion and defamation of the kingdom’s character.<sup>28</sup> Regime repression, however, is only one side of the story. The other point to consider is that Saudi Arabia has no experience with modern collective action of the sort that produced republican revolutions throughout the Arab and Islamic world in the several generations preceding the uprisings of 2011. This Saudi distaste for collective action has been distilled into a cynical joke: Saudis would of course have shown up at the protests, if only they could have protested from their cars, as they do not much like walking anywhere.

In conclusion, the use of the Internet and social media can help empower democratic movements in the Middle East to resist non-democratic regimes. But it will not produce the same outcome in every Middle Eastern country. The influence of social media should therefore be considered in terms of the underlying social and political dynamics of a given country, and not as an independent driver of change. The old is the new.

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<sup>25</sup> @mujtahidd on Twitter, <http://twitter.com/#!/mujtahidd> (accessed March 2, 2012). @mujtahidd has also set his sites on Tallal b. Abd al-Aziz and his influential son Walid b. Tallal.

<sup>26</sup> “Mujtahidd’s Tweets Scandalize Saudi Princes,” *Al-Akhbar*, February 18, 2012, <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/35427>. For English translation see: <http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/mujtahidd-tweeting-thorn-side-al-saud> (accessed March 2, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Author interview, Riyadh, January 2012.

<sup>28</sup> “Saudi ‘Day Of Rage’ Protester to go on Trial: Khaled al-Johani,” *Amnesty International*, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE23/004/2012/en/55fa644a-92ea-4f1d-9c6a-ea826083c13f/mde230042012en.html> (accessed March 2, 2012).

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