

Dossier: Social Movements, Digital Transformations and Changes in the Mediterranean Region

# Social Transformation in a Digital Age: Youth Social Movements in the MENA Region

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Resistance movements in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have assumed a unique social, political, and cultural character due in large part to the authoritarian and repressive contexts of many regimes and societies in the region. The recent growth and emergence of social movements in the MENA region points to the inconsistent effectiveness of such movements, at best. In Iran, examples of such movements can be traced back to two key developments: (1) the “One Million Signatures Campaign” of 2006 and (2) the Green Movement of 2009. In June 2006, when security forces violently disrupted a peaceful women’s rights demonstration, a small group of Iranian feminists in Tehran embarked on the formation of a grassroots movement known as the “One Million Signatures Campaign.”<sup>1</sup> Launched on 27 August 2006, by Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani and Parvin Ardalan, this campaign aimed to establish equal rights for women and upend discriminatory laws, including, but not limited to those relating to, citizenship, divorce, defining the age of criminal responsibility, blood money (*díyeh*), inheritance and witness rights. The campaigners’ goal was to collect one million signatures for a petition that requested the abolition of several laws that discriminated against women. The completed petition was submitted to the Iranian government with the aim of persuading it to take necessary legal actions against these laws, while also raising public awareness, pro-

moting equality between men and women, as well as documenting lived and painful experiences that Iranian women have long endured.

This campaign demonstrated the vibrancy of Iran’s feminist movement, despite the State’s repressive measures to contain it. The judiciary sentenced both Ahmadi Khorasani and Ardalan to three years in prison, and many other campaigners were prosecuted, jailed, and banned from travelling inside and outside the country.<sup>2</sup> While the campaign as a social movement received scant attention in the Western media, many of its supporters sought yet another opportunity to express their demands. The 2009 Green Movement afforded them that opportunity.

## Iran’s Green Movement

The 2009 Iranian presidential elections resulted in a second term for President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and led to a series of public protests against alleged election fraud that came to be known as the Green Movement. Promoted by digital interactions via instant messaging and postings on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, the protests posed a serious challenge to the existing political order in Iran. The protesters were predominantly young but also included members of Iran’s reformist segments who have long sought broader democratic rights. The conservative ruling elements within Iran struggled to contain the emerging political narratives and shape public perceptions of these events.

Although the regime’s repressive apparatus ultimately suppressed the Green Movement, it undeniably felt

<sup>1</sup> RAFIZADEH, Majid. “The Unrecognized Social Movements: ‘The One Million Signature Campaign’ and the Islamic State of Iran,” *The Ahfad Journal*, Vol. 31: 53-66, Issue 2, December 2014.

<sup>2</sup> EBADI, Shirin. *Until We Are Free: My Fight for Human Rights in Iran*, New York: Random House, 2016.

threatened –if not shaken– by the efficiency and organizational skills that allowed opposition groups to inspire popular protests on a scale unprecedented since Iran’s 1979 revolution. During this brief period of protest in 2009, the movement galvanized a broad spectrum of Iran’s population, but most importantly among the country’s younger generation. The protesters demanded basic freedoms and rights, while using broadly based human rights rhetoric to stake their claims. The regime countered by invoking Iran’s security, sovereignty, and cultural uniqueness.<sup>3</sup>

### The Arab Spring Uprisings

Shortly thereafter, the momentous events of 2011 gave rise to the so-called Arab awakening, a term that identified the uprising’s regional interconnectedness and its broader peaceful slogan: “The people want the fall of the regime.”<sup>4</sup> Publicly known as the Arab Spring uprisings, this broad unrest was largely spearheaded by youth social movements in Tunisia when a street vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire in response to the confiscation of his wares by local police officers. Bouazizi’s self-immolation struck a chord among Tunisians, and protests swiftly spread across the country, bringing a number of issues to the fore, most notably unemployment, food insecurity, corruption, debilitating living conditions, lack of freedoms, and lack of government accountability.<sup>5</sup> The ensuing protests sparked considerable interest in social movements and tactics for mobilizing and developing grassroots action throughout the MENA region. More specifically, social media gained massive traction as a vehicle for dissent during these waves of popular unrest. Increasingly, young people converted their dismay and rage into an enormous outpouring of social and political activism by becoming agents of change both in symbolic and substantive ways. While modern technologies are functionally neutral—that is, they can either sustain the status quo

or alter the rules of the game –they have given the youth movement an unprecedented momentum to enter into the political arena, seek new economic opportunities, and redefine new terms of accountability.<sup>6</sup>

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The frequent and energetic use of social media by the people in the MENA region demonstrates the new platform for the voiceless and the underprivileged that the Internet offers. The emancipatory potential of the digital age and related communication and information accessibility has made the struggles of ordinary people to remake their worlds feasible, while also debunking the widely held belief about the Arab people’s presumed resignation to their autocratic regimes.<sup>7</sup> But at the same time, that potential has been regularly manipulated – or even, more accurately, exploited – by authoritarian regimes bent on manipulating social and political events. The effectiveness of social media in transforming these societies has been largely limited in repressive contexts characterized by longstanding and enduring institutions, rigid political structures, a persistent fear of economic uncertainties, and a culture of tolerating authoritarianism in the face of political instability and a climate of fear and threat.

The sites of social and political mobilization and contentious actions – bolstered by both agency and strategic choices – have increasingly encountered structural barriers. The growth of social movements, social media, and political activism has coincided with the increase in more repressive mechanisms of control

<sup>3</sup> MONSHIPOURI, Mahmood. “The Green Movement and the Iranian People’s Struggle for Human Rights,” in VOLK, Lucia, (ed.), *The Middle East in the World: An Introductory Guide*. New York: Routledge, 2015, p. 195-208.

<sup>4</sup> CLEVELAND, William L. and BUNTON, Martin. *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Sixth Edition, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2016, p. 538-539.

<sup>5</sup> GELVIN, James L. *The New Middle East: What Everyone Needs to Know*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> Several arguments of this essay have been taken from my work elsewhere, *Democratic Uprisings in the New Middle East: Youth, Technology, Human Rights, and US Foreign Policy*, Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> ANDERSON, Charles W. “Youth, ‘The Arab Spring,’ and Social Movements,” *Review of the Middle East Studies*, Vol. 74, No. 2, Winter 2013, p. 150-156; see especially p. 152.

exercised by governments. It is not easy to strike a proper balance between these conflicting trajectories. The practical and policy implications of balancing these movements vs. government pushbacks remain open to debate.

### The Gezi Park Protests

On 28 May 2013, the Gezi Park Protests in Turkey brought hundreds of thousands of people from across the country to the streets of Istanbul to protest against the increasingly authoritarian style of Erdogan's government and his ruling party (the Justice and Development Party – also known as the AKP). This event, also known as “the Turkish Spring,” propelled several opposition groups, including left-leaning liberals, nationalists, women, and the Kurds, to come out and protest against the government. The protests were triggered by government building plans, including a shopping mall, in Gezi Park, a small green area on the edge of Taksim Square. The government suppression of this spontaneous movement prevented further protests, as the protesters kept a low profile and their resistance eventually faded away.

### Cyber-activism and Its Implications

In an interconnected world, with new modes of communications available, ideas transcend borders and are carried over the airwaves or through the universe of the virtual world, where many minds come together and interact. The development of new digital technologies, especially online social networking, has increased the level of youth participation in cyberspace in myriad ways, including access to information and participation in informal and formal groups. The new information and communication technologies (ICTs) have enhanced young people's capacity to effectively engage and participate in mobilizing civic movements as well as to advocate for social change and

reform. For the region's many young people, especially females, ICTs and social networking technology are enabling tools.

By prompting interactivity and participation, where one becomes not only consumer but also creator of online content, and where sharing ideas and exchanging feedback becomes the norm, these new digital technologies enable often disconnected youth to reconfigure patterns of participation, civil involvement, and self-expression.<sup>8</sup> Access to new media has transformed communications throughout the MENA region and, together with the emergence of multiple new satellite television channels (e.g., al-Jazeera and al-Arabiyya), is likely to allow its citizens to further engage in public discourse around notions of human rights, social justice and transparency.<sup>9</sup> This increased access and participation has led to the emergence of a new political culture informed by modern ideas, ideals, and values, often known as “technological citizenship.” This form of citizenship emphasizes inclusive rights of an individual as a “citizen” of social justice and pursuit of modern global norms, as opposed to those of traditional parochial ones such as those rooted in sectarian and ethnic identities.

The year 2011 began with the social media-driven uprisings and protests in the MENA region, toppling the regimes of Tunisia's Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and Egypt's Hosni Mubarak. The triggering event for the 2011 uprisings in Egypt happened some 1,300 miles away in Tunisia, when Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in protest on 17 December 2010. He died three weeks later and shortly thereafter, on 14 January 2011, Tunisian President Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia under pressure from his people.<sup>10</sup> What happened in Tunisia encouraged and enabled Egyptians to follow suit. Wael Ghonim challenged the Egyptians to similarly mobilize by posting on the *Kullena Khaled Said* Facebook page on 14 January 2011, to come to Tahrir Square on 25 January, 2011, to demonstrate against the Mubarak regime.<sup>11</sup>

In Egypt, members of both the April 6 Youth Movement and Kefaya were behind the creation of a popu-

<sup>8</sup> COUNCIL OF EUROPE, “Training Course: New Media in Youth Work,” European Youth Centre, Strasbourg, Budapest, 5 July 2011, DJS/TC Media (2011)1.

<sup>9</sup> SMITH, Pamela Ann and FEUILHERADE, Peter. “Now, the Media Revolution,” *The Middle East*, Issue 427, 21 November 2011, p. 35-38; see p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> SHEHATA, Dina. “The Fall of the Pharaoh: How Hosni Mubarak's Reign Came to an End,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 3, May/June 2011, p. 26-32; see p. 29.

<sup>11</sup> GHONIM, Wael. *Revolution 2.0: The Power of People Is Greater than the People in Power: A Memoir*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012, p. 134.

lar Facebook group supporting Mohamed ElBaradei, the former head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, who returned to Egypt in 2010. The roots of such social media-driven uprisings can be traced back to the Kefaya Movement, which gave its support to textile workers who were planning a strike on 6 April 2008. Hence the origin of the name: “April 6 Youth Movement,” which referred to a loose coalition of many groups of activists, opposition parties, lawyers, professors and student protesters.

On 6 April 2008, workers at Al-Mahalla Textiles in the Egyptian city of Mahalla called a strike. Although no major protests ensued, two activist workers were killed, and the city became, however briefly, a site of violent confrontation between workers and security forces.<sup>12</sup>

Organized mostly online, especially on Facebook, the April 6 Youth Movement was a decentralized network of activists who used the tools of social media to broadcast economic and political grievances against the Mubarak regime, mobilize support, evade the government’s ubiquitous security forces, and, later, help bring down the Mubarak regime. It was Ahmed Maher and Ahmed Salah,<sup>13</sup> young members of the Kefaya opposition group, who helped launch a Facebook group to promote the protest planned for 6 April 2008.<sup>14</sup> The movement attracted 70,000 members on Facebook, making it the largest youth movement in Egypt at the time.<sup>15</sup>

In June 2010, activists, led by Wael Ghonim, a Google executive, created a Facebook page called “*Kullena Khaled Said*” (“We are all Khaled Said”) in memory of a young man whose cell phone contained images of political brutality and drug use and who was beaten to death on 6 June 2010, by two secret police officers in Alexandria. This page attracted more than one million supporters and became the focal point for a number of large protests against state abuses in the summer of 2010. Ghonim, Abdel

Rahman Mansour, and many of their colleagues brought the Khaled Said case into the public consciousness by organizing several “Silent Stands” on 18 and 25 June and 9 July 2010, mainly organized at the corniche in Cairo and Alexandria by online activists, while also posting on the *Kullena Khaled Said* Facebook page.

These online activists, including many bloggers, brought out more than 8,000 people on 25 June 2010. It was evident that the fear barrier had been broken and virtual and cyberactivism had been transferred into real-world action.<sup>16</sup> The interaction of organized groups, networks, and social media took shape in non-violent anti-Mubarak protests that led to the removal of the long-reigning autocrat from power on 11 February 2011. These protests, some experts contend, showed that Egyptian society, much like Western societies, has transformed away from traditional organizations and media – such as TV, radio, and newspapers – and toward more loosely structured “networked societies,” where there is less group control and more individual autonomy.<sup>17</sup>

### Limits to Social Media’s Effectiveness

There is no denying that social media provides affordable access to social movements by reducing the costs of mobilization and organization, while expediting the dissemination of information. Young men and women in Egypt were able to use social networks, the Internet, and mobile phones “to access large and diversified networks, reach beyond physical and social boundaries, and exploit more resources to potentially bring about social change.”<sup>18</sup> Yet it is important to guard against the euphoria over social networking. The fact remains that Twitter alone is unlikely to generate successful uprisings. While new media tools have a catalytic role, as some observers

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> Ahmed Maher was arrested by the el-Sisi regime on several occasions and on 4 January 2017, was freed after completing his three-year jail term. Ahmed Salah left Egypt in 2016 and now lives in exile in San Francisco.

<sup>14</sup> WOLMAN, David. “All Posts Tagged Ahmed Maher: Did Egypt Detain a Top Facebook Activist?” *Wired*, 2 February, 2011, available at [www.wired.com/dangerroom/tag/ahmed-maher/](http://www.wired.com/dangerroom/tag/ahmed-maher/). Last accessed on 21 June, 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Shehata, Dina. “The Fall of... *op. cit.*, see especially p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> GHONIM, Wael. *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>17</sup> ZHUO, Xiaolin; WELLMAN, Barry and YU, Justine. “Egypt: The First Internet Revolt?” available at <http://peacemagazine.org/archive/v27n3p06.htm>. Last accessed on 6 February, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

have noted, it is the interdependency between off-line activity on the ground and online activism that is critical to how protests achieve their goals.<sup>19</sup>

In the cases of Iran and Egypt, the governments resorted to internet crackdowns, shutting down internet and cell phone communications, before starting a violent crackdown against protesters. A US company—Boeing-owned Narus of Sunnyvale, California—had sold Egypt [Telecom Egypt, the state-run Internet service provider] Deep Packet Inspection (DPI) equipment that could have been used to help Mubarak's regime track, target and crush political dissent over the Internet and mobile phones. The same company has sold this spying technology to other regimes with poor human rights records.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the French government has authorized French companies to sell Egyptian authorities different surveillance systems for intercepting communications and restraining social movements. Many human rights NGOs have raised concerns about the increasing number of government critics, most notably bloggers and activists, in Egyptian jails.<sup>21</sup>

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New forms of internet-based activism proved to be a central factor contributing to the ousting of President Morsi. Tamarod – or the “rebellion” movement – used tools of grassroots mobilization, including

the Internet, formal media, and street protests, to collect signatures demanding Morsi's resignation. Created by the members of Kefaya, nearly 22 million signatures were collected in a matter of weeks. This widespread campaign became a catalyst for the 2013 demonstrations that culminated in Morsi's ousting by a military coup.<sup>22</sup>

More and more young people in the MENA region have come to express their opposition to the repressive regimes under which they have lived through the larger strategies of non-violence, non-cooperation and civil disobedience. Contrary to the widely held view that Arab youth are often raised in a cultural context of religious radicalism and anti-Americanism and that these values have therefore “become the formative elements of a new and dispossessed generation,” in reality, these protests have illustrated that young people “were a big part of the silent, moderate majority.”<sup>23</sup> In the case of the occupied territories of Palestine, social media trends have come to inform and fuel the Palestinian resistance. But the question remains: at what costs?

## A Digital Resistance

Ironically, social media has simultaneously unified and fractured the Palestinian people. It has facilitated international condemnation of Israeli occupation but has also fuelled violence and sectarian conflict. Pro-Palestinian activists continue to pursue boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) efforts and work with ICT professionals to further develop an internet-based presence and distribute information using social media and new platforms. If, however, the Palestinian resistance movement is to succeed, it should come to terms with the contradictory effects of social media.<sup>24</sup> The persistence of Palestinian resistance is deeply rooted within the State of Israel's structural and insti-

<sup>19</sup> MORRE, Jina. “The Revolution Will be Blogged,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, 4 July 2011, pp. 26-31; see especially p. 28.

<sup>20</sup> MONSHIPOURI, Mahmood. *Democratic Uprisings in the New Middle East: Youth, Technology, Human Rights, and US Foreign Policy*, New York: Routledge, 2014, p. 92.

<sup>21</sup> HOURY, Nadim and JEANNEROD, Bénédicte. “How French Weapons Enable Egypt's Abuses,” *Human Rights Watch*, 28 January 2019. Available at [www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/28/how-french-weapons-enable-egypts-abuses?fbclid=IwAR1XvTxqd-L8uQo-Vz0hB\\_rQBR1YLohTCQfFAnmVOQqiBrbkWZNzomfz5dMw](http://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/28/how-french-weapons-enable-egypts-abuses?fbclid=IwAR1XvTxqd-L8uQo-Vz0hB_rQBR1YLohTCQfFAnmVOQqiBrbkWZNzomfz5dMw). Accessed on 8 February, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> CAMMETT, Melani; DIWAN, Ishac; RICHARDS, Alan and WATERBURY, John. *A Political Economy of the Middle East*, Fourth Edition, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2015, p. 428.

<sup>23</sup> GHOSH, Bobby. “Rage, Rap, and Revolution,” *Time*, 28 February 2011, p. 32-37; see especially p. 34.

<sup>24</sup> This section is based on MONSHIPOURI, Mahmood and PROMPICHAI, Theodore. “Digital Activism in Perspective: Palestinian Resistance via Social Media,” *International Studies Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 4, Spring 2018, p. 37-57.

tutional oppression of its neighbour. Passivity on behalf of the Palestinian people could no longer be the norm. It was shortly after the second Intifada that there was a worldwide explosion of social media usage, facilitated by advances in information communication technology. Social media platforms were adopted and effectively utilized by the Palestinian resistance movement, while simultaneously used by the Israeli government to counter the new, digital dimension of activism. Social media provided the Palestinians a valuable tool to effectively organize and disseminate ideas, though several questions remain: To what effect? What role has it played for the Palestinians? What effect has the Arab Spring uprisings, within the context of social media, had on the Palestinian resistance movement? And perhaps most importantly, does it serve to enhance or constrain the movement?

The collapse and failure of the Oslo Accords prompted Palestinian civil society groups to consider a fundamental change to their resistance strategy by taking ownership of their destiny and not simply relying on outside actors, stakeholders, and interest groups. This shift led to a variety of new grassroots initiatives aimed at drastically changing the locus of control for Palestinians, away from externally driven forces to an internally driven engagement with their future.<sup>25</sup> One such movement that has taken on great significance in recent years has been the BDS, which is an international campaign – and/or better yet initiative – for establishing justice and peace in Palestine by mobilizing international efforts to break the siege of Gaza, terminate Israeli occupation and expanded settlement construction, promote equality and equity for the Palestinian people, and acknowledge the right of return and recognition of the several million Palestinian refugees worldwide.<sup>26</sup>

Increasingly, social media has also facilitated a rise in youth activism within jihadi groups, whose activities and documentation have presented the heavy-handed tactics of Israeli Defense Force soldiers and systemic oppression in the Palestinian territories. Their cyber ac-

tivities have galvanized the Palestinians and built solidarity from a grassroots level, facilitated by platforms like Facebook and YouTube.<sup>27</sup> Social media has also attracted artists and activists to voice their concerns over political oppression. Activist, musician and rapper Mohammad Assaf created a music video uploaded to YouTube entitled *Dami Falasteeni*, translated as “My Blood is Palestinian,” which had been viewed over four million times at the height of the 2015 Arab-Israeli violence.<sup>28</sup> It is also worth noting that several radical factions, such as the *Quds News Network* and *Shebab News Agency*, within the movement have used these platforms to push their own political agenda.<sup>29</sup> The internet-based activities of such extremist movements are likely to dissuade negotiations and diplomacy while prompting more aggressive Israeli security measures. To make matters worse, the genesis of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and their use of a YouTube video entitled “Slaughter the Jews” has been strongly correlated with an increase in violence against Jewish people. This type of media, spread widely among the Palestinian populace thanks to the ready access to user-generated media content, both promoted violence and acted as an instructional video on how to most efficiently kill those of Jewish heritage or ancestry. This threat has adversely affected the security of Palestinians in the occupied territories, while serving as a cover by the Israeli authorities to systemically abuse their rights. The weaponization of social media as such has certainly added new dimensions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, complicating the Palestinian resistance movement and undermining the international condemnation of occupation and settlements.

### Looking Ahead

Our discussions in this essay have shown that technology has in fact enabled disenfranchised groups to find a voice. While the MENA region has changed, in some cases for better and in others for worse, it is not

<sup>25</sup> WESBROCK, Shane; MONSHIPOURI, Mahmood and GHANNAM, Jess. “Grassroots Sanctions: A New Tool for Domestic and International Resistance for Palestine,” in MONSHIPOURI, Mahmood (ed.) *Information Politics, Protests, and Human Rights in the Digital Age*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 101-126.

<sup>26</sup> GHANNAM, Jess. “Health and Human Rights in Palestine: The Siege and Invasion of Gaza and the Role of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement,” in MONSHIPOURI, Mahmood (ed.) *Human Rights in the Middle East: Frameworks, Goals, and Strategies*, New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2011, p. 245-261.

<sup>27</sup> MONSHIPOURI, Mahmood and PROMPICHAI, Theodore. “Digital activism...”, *op. cit.*, p. 50

<sup>28</sup> NEXELSEVEN. “My Blood is Palestinian (Dami Falasteeni) Translation.” *YouTube*. YouTube, 14 October 2015. Web. 27 June 2017.

<sup>29</sup> MONSHIPOURI, Mahmood and PROMPICHAI, Theodore. “Digital activism...”, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

clear in which direction the broader trajectory of social transformation is moving. The political context within which social movements must operate in the MENA region looks dangerously unstable and yet the stakes for the dynamics of sustained participation in contentious and collective action have never been higher.

The initial euphoria of the Arab Spring uprisings has given way to disillusionment at the diminishing civil and political rights and deteriorating economic conditions for the vast majority of people. The restrictions on political freedoms – and the resultant dire human rights situation in the region – have been justified mostly under the guise of combating terrorism.<sup>30</sup> The outlook for youth in the MENA region is not entirely bleak, however, as new ruling elites in the post-uprising era have come to recognize their ability and potential to mobilize broader sections of the population against them. Many in the region still remain hopeful that a younger generation of activists can generate the much-needed energy and creativity to effect change and reform in the long term.

### While the MENA region has changed, in some cases for better and in others for worse, it is not clear in which direction the broader trajectory of social transformation is moving

The region as a whole, as one expert argues, measures poorly against the rest of the world when it comes to accountability, democratic values, the rule of law, and concern for human rights. From Iran's "Green Revolution" (2009) to the Arab Spring uprisings (2011), to the Gezi Park protests (2013), populations, especially the youth, took their frustrations and dismay to the streets. Some such protests succeeded and some failed. On balance, the outcome at the regional level has been political instability, civil wars, a decrease in human security, and an increase in human poverty.<sup>31</sup> Yet, young men and women, who led massive peaceful demonstrations in 2011, are still

longing for new politics. With the exception of Tunisia, a reversion to the authoritarian tactics of the past and heavy-handed policies enacted by the military-led Egyptian government, coupled with the continuing political tensions in Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, and Syria, have all cast their dark shadows over the optimistic view that only recently engulfed the region. For their parts, the Palestinian resistance movements have increasingly realized that the way in which social media has been utilized by some radical groups could entail potentially harmful consequences for their cause.

On balance, unless the Arab world's leaders implement good governance directed toward addressing the economic ills of their countries, their archaic and authoritarian politics are likely to lead to more instability over the longer term. While newer technological tools have potentially made social transformation more possible throughout the MENA region, positive change is unlikely to occur in the face of stagnant political structures and the absence of new power-sharing processes and mechanisms.

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<sup>30</sup> AZZAM, Fateh. "Reflections on Three Decades of Human Rights Work in the Arab Region," in TIRADO CHASE, Anthony (ed.), *Routledge Handbook on Human Rights and the Middle East and North Africa*, New York: Routledge, 2017, p. 463-473; see especially p. 465-466.

<sup>31</sup> GELVIN, James L. *op. cit.*, p. 162-163.