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Expat-ing Democracy

Dissidents, Technology, and Democratic Discourse in the Middle East

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EDITION

Introduction: Expat-ing or Exporting Democracy

This book is the culmination of more than a decade of work and engagement with activists seeking to bring democratic discourse and democratic change to the Middle East. That work began on September 11, 2001 in Washington DC where, as a young researcher, I encountered voices of Middle East expatriate who argued about the feasibility of democratic change in their native countries, a process that appeared only too appealing in the months and years that followed. Soon after, under the leadership of President George W. Bush, the US began to pursue a more assertive democracy promotion agenda, providing additional platforms and resources for those who argued that such a change could realistically be achieved.

Technology became a clear factor in these events in light of its rapid dissemination in the region and at large. Egypt had a million cell phones in 2000, 60 million a decade later and more cell phones than people in 2015. The ASDA'A Burston-Marsteller 2015 Arab Youth Survey showed a generation of connected people, 82% of whom use the Internet daily and 77% who use a smart mobile phone. Clearly, people are communicating and somebody is listening – but to what?

As a son of the region, an Israeli who thus far has had limited opportunities for constructive engagement with my own neighbors, I have become fascinated and intrigued by these voices of change. It was not difficult to enlist in a journey aimed at creating a freer, safer and more peaceful region. However, as a student of the region, I have also developed a strong sense of skepticism while beginning to inquire more about the role and reach of these foreign democracy activists. Working in a think-tank that began to examine questions about the future of the region, I was able to engage further and begin my own personal work that included various writings as well as developing a discourse on the feasibility of political change in the region. I have had the pleasure of working with a large number of groups and individuals from the Middle East on different initiatives to promote that dialogue for change. This has been a fascinating journey filled with rare encounters as well as many surprising moments of hope that took place in unexpected

places like a Syrian Refugee camp or at the grave of President Anwar Sadat of Egypt. I have since traveled throughout the region and beyond to meet the individuals who dedicate their lives to the cause of freedom and peace in the Middle East, a cause that I endorse. However, I could also not escape from asking the obvious questions: How feasible are these visions? How wide is the reach of these voices? And what is the role that expatriate play in promoting a discourse on democracy and political change in the Middle East itself?

I decided to spend more time on these questions with a focus on the latter, which ended up becoming the subject of my PhD work "Technology and Democracy in the Middle East," published in 2013, a time when the "Arab Spring" inspired at least some democratic hope. The Arab uprising that began to shake the region at the end of 2010 provided a rare case study as well as a unique opportunity to further examine these assumptions and ideas. My work and research as well as the topic of this book were born out of the need to further evaluate the role of expat groups and the significance of technology in the quest for democracy in the Middle East.

While there are a number of recent works that deal with assessing the "Arab Spring" as well as the respected role of technology in forming and influencing these revolutions, this book's intended contribution lies within a unique component, the work of expat groups toward influencing the "democracy discourse" in the region. It seeks to analyze the influence of information and communication technologies (hereafter ICT) on democratization and democracy discourse in the Middle East with a focus on the work of expatriate groups who utilize ICT to advance political reforms and democratization. I am aware, as I write these lines, that the discourse on "Democratization" and "Spring" may not appear obvious at a time where radical forces like the Islamic State (ISIS) appears to have filled some of the vacuum left by the old political guard. Nervelessness, these developments - as significant as they are -do not contradict the main thesis of this work that should be seen not as an attempt to analyze the contemporary dynamics but rather as a pointer to deeper currents that will likely be indicative of events to come. Syria and Iran are used as the two central case studies that will be introduced in more detail, although the book also includes rather detailed analyses of related events in Egypt and Tunisia. The book focuses more specifically on what is sometimes dubbed "new media," which consists mainly of satellite, Internet and cellular communications, and on its

relationship to the political dynamics of the Middle East. Above all, this book addresses five major questions:

1. What is the role of ICT in relation to the discourse of political reform and democratization in the Middle East?
2. How do democratic expatriate groups utilize ICT in order to deliver and convey political messages?
3. How are these messages perceived, and what is their degree of penetration in the Middle East, specifically in Syria and Iran?
4. Can expatriate opposition efforts and the use of ICT be placed within the framework of Civil Society theory?
5. What is the overall influence and potential of democratic expatriate groups for democratization in the Middle East?

Structure and Methodology

The book is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 deals with the role of media as well as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the quest for democracy in the Middle East. The chapter looks into the idea of "communicating democracy" and surveys several recent historical events for which media played a role in the pursuit of democracy. The chapter also focuses on the two main countries covered in the book, Syria and Iran, and discusses the relevant technology and communication platforms that existed in them before the eruption of protests in Iran in 2009 and protests followed by a civil war in Syria in 2011.

Chapter 2 deals with the challenge of democratization in the Middle East. Naturally, democracy is a loaded word and one that is much debated. Addressing the question of "democratization" and focusing on efforts to promote democracy in the Middle East implies that democracy *should* be promoted and that it *can* be promoted using a variety of policy, advocacy, educational, and technological tools. Both assumptions about the feasibility of democratization and about the benefit or even the right to pursue a democratization agenda are not taken for granted. The chapter spends some time examining the foundations of the "democratization" agenda, including its merits and limitations.

Chapter 3 deals with diasporas, political diasporas and political change. The phenomena of political diasporas has not received significant attention

in the literature, although there are ample instances in which diasporas and political expat groups have been able to change societal and political dynamics in their host countries. This phenomenon has been witnessed in Czechoslovakia, Venezuela, Poland, El-Salvador, Spain, Argentina, South Africa, the Philippines, Turkey, Iran and Iraq to name just a few. Communication has long served opposition groups who began their political campaigns by advocating for competing ideas and political platforms. In this regard, it is important to stress that ICT is not expected to create dissent or lead the opposition effort. Rather, ICT is expected to serve the opposition and empower its ability to communicate messages, particularly to communicate with those in the opposition who are based outside of their native lands. The degree of that empowerment and service will be further examined in this chapter.

Chapter 4 offers a synopsis of the main questions that this book seeks to explore. The analysis featured in the book was built during fieldwork and was further developed as events continued to unfold in the region. This chapter also incorporates the insights gained from extensive field interviews conducted in the period preceding the upheavals in the Middle East.

Chapter 5 serves as a synopsis of this work. It delves into the present day and to the Arab uprisings that served as the ongoing case study for this work. The chapter deals with two additional case studies, Egypt and Tunisia, which enabled me to glean additional insights into the relationship between virtual differences and actual change.

Due to the contemporary character of this work, and the fact that some of the necessary data could not easily be found in a university library, it became apparent that a more comprehensive field survey would be needed in order to collect the needed data and gain access to additional resources and content that otherwise may not have been available. The Delphi Survey method was selected as a feasible solution since it was geared toward "expert-based" data collection that enables the collection of specific data, as well as gaining a broader perspective on issues relevant to the research. My personal contacts with the interviewees often resulted in access to new resources and individuals whom I found invaluable to the research process. A modified Delphi technique was selected for this study, based on a Delphi model of Linstone and Murray (1975). According to the methodology used

for a general Delphi study, a pilot (or pre-Delphi[1]) process was initiated, followed by one main round of Delphi questionnaires given to a group of established experts in seven categories:

1. Scholars who were working on Iran, with a focus on Iranian media and the work of the Iranian opposition
2. Scholars who were working on Syria, with a focus on the Syrian media and the work of the Syrian opposition
3. Scholars and policy experts who were working on issues of democratization and media in the Middle East
4. Journalists and writers who were writing from and/or about the region
5. Journalists and professionals who were working or had worked in state-funded agencies (i.e. VOA, BBC Arabic/Farsi, Kol Israel).
6. Activists in the expat pro-democracy camp in Iran
7. Activists in the expat pro-democracy camp in Syria

Over 60 in-depth interviews were conducted during the Delphi and pre-Delphi process, the results of which informed my research and the writing of this book. Additional interviews were conducted following the completion of the study and during the writing phase. Appendix I provides details on the list of interviews conducted and the affiliations of the individuals involved. The interview data is detailed in Chapter 4 as well as incorporated into the text of work.

While converting the text of the dissertation into this book, with an eye to making it more accessible to a general audience, I chose to limit the amount of references in the body of the text and I converted most of them to footnotes. Those interested in the original source material should refer to the bibliography section.

A large number of people have accompanied me in the past decade as I traveled the region, collected materials and began my academic pursuits. At first these were dissidents and activists who provided energy and

1 For the purpose of this work and in light of the complexity of the questions at hand, I decided to utilize a "pre-Delphi" pilot process which was focused on constructing the Delphi process itself: (a) defining the research process, (b) identifying key questions, (c) identifying criteria for the selection of interviewees, and (d) identifying an initial list of potential interviewees.

inspiration and who escorted me on journeys of a lifetime. I thank the inspiration and direction given by Professor Gabriel ("Gabi") Ben-Dor who provided ongoing guidance and helped me work through complicated methodological problems. I would also like to thank Adam Briscoe, the bright and young scholar who assisted me with good advice and excellent editing insights while compiling this work and to Dr. Chelsi Muller for her valuable reviews and insights.

Nir Boms
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Chapter 1: Media & Technology's Function in the Quest for Democracy

1.1 Communicating Democracy in the Middle East

The concept of democracy promotion or "democratization" has troubled researchers since the dawn of political science research and has been a subject of much debate since 1830, a time when even Great Britain—in some ways the most democratic European nation of that era—allowed barely 2% of its population to vote for one of its Houses of Parliament. As will be further discussed, "democrats" – or those who believe that liberal values and basic human freedoms should serve as a basis for political governance – hold that the values of democracy should be promoted, and that an effort should be made to influence political systems to move in this direction or at least to become more protective of human rights and individual freedoms. The founders of democracy envisioned it as a just and universal system that offers inalienable rights to all. They also saw it as a paradigm of governance that challenges the traditional authoritarian system and hence one that should be promoted.

Promoting the "democratic paradigm," as will be further discussed in Chapter 2, was historically an intellectual pursuit, a task for local democracy forces. Following WWII, this began to change and democracy promotion gradually expanded to other domains. The Cold War, solidifying a bi-polar international system, served as a convenient platform to translate the "democracy promotion" agenda to action. Democracy promotion was no longer an abstract idea but rather a "soft power" tool and a means to "influence foreign governments, foreign publics, and world public opinion through the non-forcible projection of culture, ideology and political value systems."[1]

Values and culture are instilled in a community or society when there is a steady promulgation of ideas. One of the first concrete actions following WWII was the creation of Radio Free Europe in 1949 under the motto "Free

1 See Robert Pee (2014), "The Cold War and the Origins of US Democracy Promotion," USSO, May, 2014.

Media in Unfree Societies." The radio, which gradually grew in its coverage, was aimed at offering an alternative media environment while challenging Soviet propaganda. Radio Liberty followed suit, airing in the Soviet Union. Language coverage grew and gradually expanded beyond Europe and the Iron Curtain, reaching Asia and the Middle East. The communist side reciprocated with similar steps as well.[2] Both the Western Allied governments and the Soviet Union could never have produced or maintained sufficient public support and jingoism for the long conflict without the media's contribution to the emerging "war of ideas." Following the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War, the topic of "democratization" received additional attention in light of new data which demonstrated links between democracy, economic prosperity, international stability, and peace as well as a positive, contemporaneous relationship between media liberalization and democratization.[3]

Following the events of Sept. 11, 2001 and the launch of the "war on terror," more attention was shifted to the Middle East, a region which still suffers from a significant "democracy deficit." In this respect, the process of democratization in the Middle East was also framed as a potential long-term policy answer to the problems of fanaticism and terrorism, two traits appearing to have prevalence in the region. Naturally, these issues came to a head again in 2010 as the region claimed its own "Arab Spring" with attempts to trigger democratically oriented revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Syria and the Gulf. These attempts that seemed to be spontaneous, young, and heavily broadcast proved to be a hopeful sign of the young "Facebook generation" that became mature enough to lead a change. However, the failure of most of these attempts, the introduction of the expression "Islamic Winter" in place of "Arab Spring," and overall turmoil brought some of the basic questions back to the table: Can democracy be established and can it flourish in the Middle East? Can the moderate camps assume positions of leadership? What was the meaning of these "Facebook revolutions?" And can technology play a constructive role in helping moderate camps alter the balance of political power?

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2 See T. Doherty (2003).

3 See Kant, 1981; Buchanan, 1984; Inglehart, 1997, 2003; Rummel, 1997, Moore, 2003 and Pasek, 2006.

The Middle East is still characterized as a region that is reluctant to welcome cultural, societal, or political changes. The Middle East has not been heavily influenced by the waves of democratization that have doubled the number of democracies in the world during the last two decades, and quadrupled them since the end of the Second World War. Alongside this process, the past two decades have witnessed the emergence of a shift in the balance of power since the end of the Cold War and the establishment of the US as the global hegemon, the one remaining superpower in the world. The end of the Cold War and the beginning of the unipolar era was not free from clashes, which were often triggered by new nationalist sentiments and/or religious awakenings. Some of these newer conflicts, such as those in former Chechnya, Yugoslavia, Sudan, and later in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq aligned their key players according to old and familiar lines of ethnic, national or religious divisions. These developments also resulted in the creation of 35 new countries in the world since 1990, many of them affiliated with ethnic or religious groups that sought further independence such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Croatia, Macedonia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Serbia, Slovakia and recently, South Sudan. The Middle East saw the emergence of three de-facto (although not yet recognized by the UN) states, Palestine, Kurdistan and the Islamic State. This discourse, which was further, delineated by Samuel Huntington's seminal work *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, triggered additional research in an attempt to evaluate the possible reasons for the lack of change in the political environment of the Middle East.

The literature, which will be further reviewed in this work, has long focused on the potential contribution of media and new media to democracy and civil society. Much of the literature has described the media as a fourth branch of government[4], or a watchdog, which safeguards the democratic process. The relationship between media and social change has been framed by classic works such as *Four Theories of the Press,* which explains existing relationships specifically between media and government.[5] The four models of these relationships, Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility Theory and Totalitarian, shed light on the different ways in which media

4 See Coronel, 2008, p. 2; Emery, 1971; Lichtenberg, 1990, p. 2.
5 Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm, 1956.

works vis-à-vis government and society. These models are differentiated according to parameters which include the purpose of a given media structure, its ownership, the control of media and the limitations placed upon it (that is, what cannot be published). Although this taxonomy was later criticized as simplistic and insufficient,[6] or as failing to pass the test of modern times[7], scholars continued to follow the lead of Siebert, Peterson and Schramm by developing more acute models in order to explain the relationship between the media, society and politics.

Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) developed the important concept of opinion leaders and formulated the two-step flow of communication theory, which frames the relationship between media and public opinion. Their study shows that opinion leaders – also called "primary group" leaders – serve as intermediaries between messages and public opinion. Leaders of the primary groups are also the main players in the media environment, and their opinions will therefore be evaluated initially on their primary group credentials and later on the merits of their message. In other words, since opinions and value systems are formed in primary groups, their leaders (or gatekeepers) serve as the best agents for changing those opinions, irrespective of any others, which may circulate in the media or elsewhere. Other studies have further established this point. In a study by Kalichman and Hunter (1992), data was gathered in Chicago before and after the November 7, 1991 televised press conference by popular basketball player Earvin "Magic" Johnson, in which he announced his retirement from professional basketball after being diagnosed as HIV positive. The researchers found a marked change in perceptions of AIDS, with an increased concern over the disease and greater interest in AIDS-related information. They also found that all the men interviewed in the study had heard or read about Magic Johnson's HIV infection; the majority (86%) had engaged in frequent discussions about AIDS with their friends during the three days following his news conference and most reported that their interpersonal interactions with peers had reinforced their concerns about HIV and AIDS. Juxtaposed with new media technology, these ideas have since developed to show how a relatively small group of activists and citizen journalists can help form

6 See Altschull, 1994.
7 See McLeod and Blumler, 1989.

an alternative information environment, which challenges the narrative presented by state-sanctioned media.

Before Lazarfeld, Charles Mills (1951) had already warned against the manipulative functions of the media, which are likely to strengthen the power of the dominant elite that has greater access to them. For Mills, mass media can influence the creation of a "mass society," characterized by the "transformation of public into mass." The impact of the mass media is crucial in this "great transformation," because it shifts "the ratio of givers of opinion to the receivers" in favor of small groups of elites who control or have access to it.[8] Moreover, mass media outlets engage in one-way communication not allowing feedback, thus obliterating another feature of a democratic public sphere.[9] Jürgen Habermas (1989) echoed Mills's warning but offered a remedy by arguing that critical media can actually revitalize the public sphere and that it contributes to the process of democratization. He sought to do this by "setting in motion a critical process of public communication through the very organizations that *mediatize* it."[10]

The emergence of new media appears to have strengthened these convictions. Kellner (2000) argues that the rise of the Internet helps this revitalization by expanding the realm for democratic participation and debate, through the creation of new public spaces for political intervention. He also argues that the state-controlled public broadcasting system "collapsed in the era of globalization where commercially-based cable television has marginalized public broadcasting" and that the new media outlets "have multiplied information and discussion, of an admittedly varied sort, and thus provide potential for a more informed citizenry and more extensive democratic participation."[11]

Likewise, Benkler (2006) contends that Internet technologies are transforming key social infrastructures, including those supporting the "public sphere" which he defines as "a particular set of social practices that members of a society use to communicate about matters they understand to be of public concern and that potentially require collective action or

8 Mills, 1951, p. 298.
9 Ibid.
10 See Habermas, 1989, p. 232.
11 See Kellner (2000), p. 280 and quote from page 278.

recognition."[12] For Benkler, the new model of media created by information and communication technology (ICT) is inherently more democratic, inclusive, and interactive when compared to older methods of mass-media production and control. He proposes that Internet technologies—even under conditions of censorship—can undermine the control of oppressive regimes, so that it can function as a catalyst for democracy. This work will attempt to put some of his assertions to the test.

The Arrival of Technology to the Middle East

Information and communication technology (ICT) is a relatively new medium that has only recently become available to groups in the Middle East. In the last two decades, its rate of penetration has accelerated significantly, particularly in the areas of Internet and satellite communication. Pan-Arabic television networks like Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya have changed the map of Arabic broadcasting and challenged the previously existing monopoly on communications held by most governments in the region. The Internet, which finally made its way to the Middle East, has created another powerful source of free information and a series of new challenges to governments, which quickly sought to limit its influence.

According to the InternetWorldStats/ Nielsen ratings, Between 2001 and 2011 the increase in Internet usage throughout the Middle East grew by 1,987%.[13] In real numbers, the number of Internet users in the region grew from 3,284,000 in the year 2000 to 90,000,000 in 2012. In 2009, – at the eve of the "Arab Spring" the number of Internet users in the Middle East reached 45 million, nearly matching the average world penetration of 24.7% and at the end of 2013 it reached 103 million, or 45% penetration.[14]

Cell phone penetration demonstrated a similar growth. According to the World Bank statistics, the MENA region has grown 40-fold, since the year 2,000 where 16.5 million users were listed. InternetWorldStats notes

12 See Benkler, 2006, p. 177; p. 212–13.

13 See Shannak, Rifat O (2011), "Using Web Analytics to Measure the Effectiveness of Online Advertising Media: A Proposed Experiment" in European Journal of Economics, Finance and Administrative Sciences Vol 42, P. 91. (Accessed on January 5th, 2015).

14 See InternetWorldStat.

a 60- fold growth in cell phone usage in Egypt between 2000 and 2010, from one to 60 million users. Official 2011 numbers from Egypt's Ministry of Communications and Information Technology report a 30.05% Internet penetration rate, and a cell phone penetration rate of 91.32%.[15]

The Pew Research Center surveys on mobile technology released in February of 2014 reported that 95% of Jordanians, 88% of Egyptians and Tunisians, and 86% of Lebanese nationals claim they own a mobile phone. These numbers were overall higher than those in the US where only 90% of American adults reported owning a cell phone.

Furthermore, the market research group, eMarketer, estimates that in 2014, more than nine in 10 web users go online via mobile phones and that 94.0% of Internet users in the Middle East and Africa go online via mobile phones at least once per month[16].

In a region where approximately 60% of the population is under the age of 24, the younger generation has been galvanized by these changes and was quick to adopt them. On the other hand, the traditional players, namely governments and the Islamist establishment, have also engaged the Internet by developing their own means of messaging along with a sophisticated system of governmental censorship and control.

15 Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Arab Republic of Egypt,"ICT Indicators in Brief: February 2011," <http://www.slideshare.net/ArabCrunch/egypt-ict-sector-in-brief-feb-2011>

16 Emarketer, "In Middle East and Africa, Nearly All Web Users Are Mobile," January 6th, 2014.

Table 1.1: Middle East Internet Users, Population and Facebook Statistics

MIDDLE EAST	Population (2014 Est.)	Users, in Dec-00	Internet Usage 31-Dec-13	% Population (Penetration)	Internet % users	Facebook 31-Dec-12	User Growth (2000–2007)	User Growth (2000–2010)
Bahrain	1,314,089	40,000	1,182,680	90.00%	1.10%	413,200	293.30%	1523.30%
Iran	80,840,713	250,000	45,000,000	55.70%	43.30%	n/a	7100.00%	13180%
Iraq	32,585,692	12,500	2,997,884	9.20%	2.90%	2,555,140	188.00%	2500.00%
Israel	7,821,850	1,270,000	5,537,870	70.80%	5.30%	3,792,820	191.30%	314.40%
Jordan	6,528,061	127,300	2,885,403	44.20%	2.80%	2,558,140	526.00%	1268.30%
Kuwait	2,742,711	150,000	2,069,650	75.50%	2.00%	890,780	444.50%	633.30%
Lebanon	4,136,895	300,000	2,916,511	70.50%	2.80%	1,587,060	216.70%	233.30%
Oman	3,219,775	90,000	2,139,540	66.40%	2.10%	584,900	254.70%	1274.10%
Palestine (West Bk.)	2,731,052	35,000	1,512,273	55.40%	1.50%	966,960	660.00%	917.10%
Qatar	2,123,160	30,000	1,811,055	85.30%	1.70%	671,720	866.30%	1353.3%
Saudi Arabia	27,345,986	200,000	16,544,322	60.50%	15.90%	5,852,520	2250.00%	4800.%
Syria	22,597,531	30,000	5,920,553	26.20%	5.70%	n/a	4900.00%	13016.7%
United Arab Emirates	9,206,000	735,000	8,101,280	88.00%	7.80%	3,442,940	132.40%	414.%
Yemen	26,052,966	15,000	5,210,593	20.00%	5.00%	495,440	920.20%	1360 %
Gaza Strip	1,816,379	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
TOTAL Middle East	**231,062,860**	**3,284,800**	**103,829,614**	**44.90%**	**100%**	**23,811,620**	**920.20%**	**1360.20%**

Source: Nielsen//NetRatings, InternetWorld Stats, September, 2007–September 2014, <http://www.Internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm>

Technology and Political Camps in the Middle East

As a means of distinction throughout this book, it is important to note the significant political camps that are operating throughout the Middle East. Traditionally, the region was comprised of two main camps: one affiliated with the governmental elite and the other with Islamist groups. I will also refer to a third camp, the liberal and often secular, "pro-democracy" opposition that consists of a variety of intellectuals, small organizations, political forums and activists (both country-based and expatriate).[17] It should be noted that these are broad generalizations since significant variation exists within the ranks of each camp and, particularly following recent events where we have witnessed significant changes in the structure of both Governments and their contenders in the region. The Islamist opposition – mainly the Muslim Brotherhood, and later more radical groups such as al-Qaida, Jabhat al-Nusra, and ISIS were able to gain political influence mainly in Tunisia and Egypt (for a brief period in 2013) as well as Syria and Iraq. With the addition of Gaza and Turkey, two additional places in which Islamist parties lead governments, we should conclude that Islamist parties can no longer be dubbed as simply "opposition" or contenders. On the other hand, the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Saudi Arabia were outlawed and defined as a terrorist group in 2014 brings us back to a more traditional Middle Eastern outlook.

The "government camp" has seen its share of turmoil with overthrows of heads-of-state in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Yemen and different degrees of reforms and co-optation of opposition groups in Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf. Throughout the region we are now beginning to see new types of political orders while other countries such as Libya, Iraq and Syria continue to bleed without any political order in sight. The liberal camp, the camp that triggered the "Arab Spring," achieved the least amount of success as it has failed to solidify (and organize) itself to a degree sufficient enough to acquire political power. Exceptions to this case being Northern Iraq (the Kurdish area) that can be considered more aligned with

17 I use the term "pro-democracy opposition" to describe a mixture of groups who oppose the government on the one hand but who also share similar agendas regarding the issues of democratization and political reforms in the region.

the liberal/secular camp and the new coalition government in Tunisia, the liberal camp as a whole was unable to gain political victories at the end of 2014. However, as I intend to argue, a number of variables may contribute to a process of solidification and political maturity of the liberal camp. These include the liberal discourse that has been amplified and continues to challenge the emerging new political structures, the push back against the Islamist movements and the fear by countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia of radical influences (which has led their ban the Muslim Brotherhood), and the fact that the region has not yet filled its political vacuum. These factors may help the liberal camp to solidify power and become a future political contender. As will be discussed in the following chapters, as the "Arab Spring" progressed, liberals made some attempts to acquire political power in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria and Iraq.

The region's governments, which seek to secure political continuity, usually revert to the objective of merely maintaining the status quo. They have been successful at doing so by asserting control over the means of communication. Understanding that technology would become a major player in social mobilization, they tried to limit its influence by asserting control over its usage and distribution. Most governments in the Middle East are still the official Internet providers, which enables them to maintain control over content and communication and to censor web sites run by their opposition or otherwise sensitive web sites.[18] In a similar fashion, some governments have attempted to limit the use of satellite technology by blocking and scrambling satellite and radio signals.[19] In order to further engage with the war of ideas, Middle Eastern governments have established their own satellite networks along with an Internet infrastructure.

The Islamist groups, which usually form the largest opposition camps, have also quickly realized the potential of ICT. They were quick to establish sophisticated Internet and satellite platforms such as Hizbullah's *Al Manar* television station, Hamas's *At Fatat* web site for youth, and the Muslim Brotherhood's *Ikwan*. They have also developed sophisticated Internet platforms in order to strengthen and enhance their organizational abilities. In his detailed work on the subject, Gabriel Weiman (2004) elaborates on

18 See Mendels, 1996; The ONI, 2005; Zarwan, 2005.
19 See AFP, August 14th, 2006.

eight different ways in which contemporary extremist, Islamist or terrorist groups have used the Internet, ranging from psychological warfare and propaganda to such practical functions as fundraising, recruitment, data mining and coordination of actions. By 1998, around half of the thirty organizations designated as "Foreign Terrorist Organizations" (hereafter FTO's) under the US Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 maintained a web site; and by the year 2000, virtually all groups listed as FTO's had established their presence on the Internet. A scan of Internet use in 2003–2004 revealed hundreds of web sites serving terrorist groups and their supporter.[20] Veerasamy and Grobler summarize the main reasons for terrorists and radical groups using the Internet, they contend that it is inexpensive and available worldwide, it offers little or no regulation along with an anonymous multimedia environment, it has the ability to shape coverage in the traditional mass media, and it is able to serve as a global fundraising mechanism.[21]

Likewise, moderates and pro-democracy opposition groups were quick to utilize ICT to create their own satellite, radio and Internet platforms. Considering the Internet's availability, sophistication, low cost, and the possibility of creating a virtual world independent of physical distance, it was no surprise that expatriate groups would also make it their medium of choice. Unlike governments on the one hand and the Islamist establishment on the other, the scattered and far less-organized pro-democracy camp had little or no means of communication through which it could advance its ideas. Facing a harsh societal and cultural climate that would not allow overt political activity, the pro-democracy opposition was severely crippled in its ability to organize internally, mobilize and disseminate its ideas. For decades, governments and Islamist groups maintained a variety of media outlets including newspapers and television and radio programs, which were tightly controlled and pursued an agenda that left little room for the dissenting ideas of the opposition. While ICT was merely an additional communication vehicle on top of pre-existing communication platforms for governments and Islamists, ICT quickly became one of the only available means for the dissemination of ideas among pro-democracy opposition

20 See Weiman, 2004, p. 6.
21 See Veerasamy and Grobler, 2011 p. 2.

groups (which lacked the same media access). It also served as a powerful tool for communication and coordination between political activists within the region as well as expatriate political communities around the world.

A few preliminary words about diaspora and expat groups should be mentioned here. As Chapter 3 argues, the phenomena of political diasporas is far from new and history provides many cases where diasporas and political expat groups were able to change political environments in their host countries. Such cases occurred in Czechoslovakia, Venezuela, Poland, El-Salvador, Spain, Argentina, South Africa, and the Philippines, Iran and Iraq, to name just a few. Communication has long served opposition groups who began their political campaigns by advocating for competing ideas and political platforms in their host countries. In this regard, I contend that ICT is not expected to create dissent or lead the opposition; rather, ICT is expected to serve the opposition and empower its ability to communicate its message, particularly for those in the opposition who are based outside of their native lands. The degree of that empowerment and effectiveness will be further examined in the pages ahead.

The role of ICT as a catalyst for the dissemination of ideas and as a means of coordination within the pro-democracy camp is a recent phenomenon in the Middle Eastern context. The influence of ICT and its use by the opposition has not yet been adequately researched. This study will attempt to assess that influence on the process of democratization in the Middle East and on the democracy discourse in Syria and Iran. The book will further attempt to analyze the scope and scale of the discourse by assessing the influence of ICT on the activities and accomplishments, as well as the solidification of the pro-democracy camp inside and outside the Middle East.

1.2 Media, New Media and Democracy

> *"There are only two forces that can carry light to all the corners of the globe… the sun in the heavens and the Associated Press down here."*
>
> Mark Twain

"Knowledge is power" wrote Francis Bacon in 1597. Malcolm X later added "The media is the most powerful entity on earth." As carriers of "knowledge" the media is a significant player in the political arena, a fact that helps explain historical and contemporary attempts by governments

and policy players to gain control over them. Print media (such as books and newspapers) was pivotal to the emergence of the nation-state as the principle modern unit of collective action.[22] During the American Revolution printed pamphlets with essays like Thomas Paine's "Common Sense" played a key role in establishing the independence movement.[23] During the French Revolution, print was used to pass short notes that were used for the same purpose. More than 40,000 such notes were used by all political camps.[24] In Europe, the telegraph and train were used during the revolutions of 1848, a period which has been called the "Spring of Nations," as means of communication between the different rebel groups. These revolutions were not isolated phenomena. In his book, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution, 1760–1800*, historian R.R. Palmer notes that democratic revolutionaries in Europe and the US were in contact with each other, learned from each other's experiences, and even planned their strategies and tactics in accordance with one another.[25]

Media has played an important role in contemporary revolutions as well. The *Bager Revolucija* (Bulldozer Revolution) is the name given to the wave of protests that occurred in October 2000 and which led to the fall of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milošević. The name of this revolution is derived from the actions of one Ljubisav Đokić who drove his heavy equipment vehicle into the headquarters of the Serbian state television station, the most visible symbol of the old Yugoslav system. Three years later, Rustavi-2, an independent, Western-funded television station, led the efforts to oppose Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze, accused of attempting to "steal" the Georgian elections of 2003. In spite of various government attempts to

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22 Anderson, B. (1983)" *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*." London and Tambini and Damian (2000) "The civic networking movement: the internet as a new democratic public sphere?" In: Crouch, Colin and Tambini, Damian and Eder, Klaus, (eds.) Citizenship, markets and the state. Oxford University Press, New York, US.

23 See Walker, 2000 pp. 521–2.

24 Chapter 2: Reichardt, Rolf (2012), " The French Revolution as a European Media Event," in *European History Online (EGO),* published by the Leibniz Institute of European History (IEG), Mainz 2012-08-27.

25 Robert, R. Palmer (1959), The Age of the Democratic Revolution. A Political History of Europe and America, 1760–1800, Princeton University Press.

sabotage the station and intimidate its employees, Rustavi-2 became one of the chief mobilizers of the crowd. Journalists such as Giorgi Sanaya, a popular anchorman for Rustavi-2 known for his investigations that exposed political corruption, led early the campaign against Shevardnadze. In 2001, Sanaya produced a documentary that exposed official corruption during the country's transition to privatized electricity. Sadly, he was murdered in July of 2001 and his murder was widely viewed as politically motivated. Nevertheless, his journalistic reports helped galvanized mass protests against Shevardnadze and led to the fateful events of 22 November 2003 when his opponents physically prevented him from opening the new session of parliament in what came to be known as the Rose Revolution.[26]

In Ukraine in 2004, some 500,000 people marched in protest against election fraud, corruption, and repression. This sparked the Orange Revolution, now regarded as one of the earliest revolutions in which the Internet and cellular phones played a significant role. Joshua Goldstein of Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet and Society authored a study that delineated the way in which a relatively small group of activists and citizen journalists helped create a distinct information environment that challenged the narrative presented by state-sanctioned media.[27] Moldova's 2009 revolution has already been coined the "Twitter Revolution[28]" due to the role played by the social networking and microblogging service "Twitter" in coordinating the protests in the Piața Marii [Maria Square] in Chişinău, Moldova's capital.[29]

The degree of freedom of the press, or freedom of the media, in a given society can also serve as a measure of the strength of its democratic system. Nevertheless, the relationship between media, society and democracy is

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26 Idsvoog Karl, "Journalism Rises And Stumbles In The Republic of Georgia" in *eJournal US,* 16 April 2008, (http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/publication/2008/05/20080518193617wrybakcuh0.8979303.html#axzz2dDDEDhUP accessed August 28th, 2013).

27 Goldstein, Joshua. "The Role of Digital Networked Technologies in the Ukrainian Orange Revolution," *Berkman Center Research Publication* No. 2007–14 (2007).

28 See 5 Allagui, Ilhem. "Multiple Mirrors of the Arab Digital Gap." In *Global Media Journal*, No. 14 (2009).

29 For more on this issue see Morozov, 2009, and the role that the hashtag "#pman" played in driving people to the protest. An earlier example is Greece in 2008.