# Revolutionary Cells:
# On the Role of Texts, Tweets, and Status Updates in Nonviolent Revolutions

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Paper presented at the conference on
"Internet, Voting and Democracy"
Laguna Beach, California

May 14-15 2011

## 1. Introduction

The question of the role played by new ICTs in the 2011 revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), particularly those of Tunisia and Egypt, triggered a heated debate among pundits and academic observers (Bennett-Jones 2011; Gladwell 2010; Gladwell and Shirky 2011; Tufekci 2011b). On the one side, myriad bloggers, tweeters, journalists and scholars declared these revolutions to be "2.0" in form, i.e. triggered by online activists and won thanks to the internet (Shirky 2011; Tufekci 2011a; 2011b). On the other side, critical voices surfaced, claiming that the internet was merely a tool amongst others used by opponents of dictatorial regimes, and hence less relevant than internet enthusiasts claim (Gladwell 2010). With this paper we aim at contributing to this debate by going beyond these simplistic contrasts. While it is naïve to contend that the internet and cell phone communications did not contribute to the positive outcome in Tunisia and Egypt, it would also be historically and theoretically uninformed to suggest that the absence of these technologies would have made the revolutions impossible.

In this paper we examine the relationship between ICTs and nonviolent revolutions. Defined as non-institutionalized mass movements that cause regime change through the deliberate and strategic opposition use of nonviolent methods of struggle, such as strikes, demonstrations, and boycotts, nonviolent revolutionaries have benefited greatly from the emergence of the internet and other advanced technologies that facilitate mass mobilization. But is their reason to believe that there is a causal link between new ICTs and revolutionary success? As we will see, old ICTs were used in past nonviolent revolutions as well, long before the ousters of Ben Ali and Mubarak. Through a comparison between the first nonviolent revolution, that

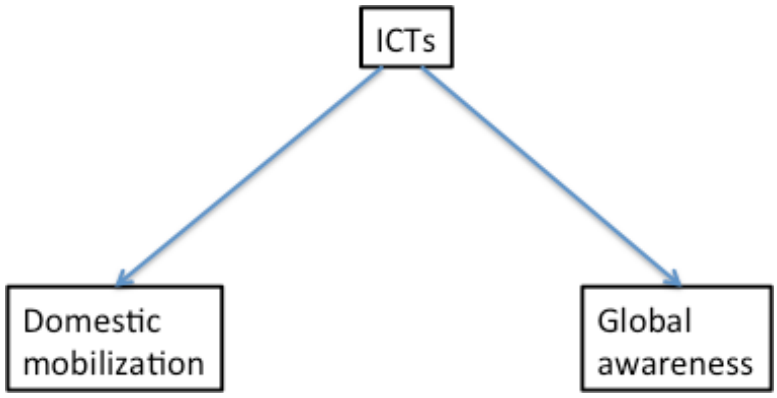
of Iran 1977-79, and the two most recent examples in Tunisia and Egypt, we will analyze the role played by new ICTs in nonviolent revolutions. We argue that although the use of new and old ICTs in nonviolent revolutions are very similar, modern, internet-based forms thereof have nevertheless altered the game in important ways.

It is puzzling that the traditional literature on revolutions quite entirely misses out on the central role played by information and communication *techniques*, not to say *technologies*. While much ink has been shed in attempts to analytically isolate the specific structural factors that cause revolutions (Foran 2005; Goldstone 1991; Goodwin 2001; Skocpol 1979, Soboul 1977, Tilly 1978), much less attention has been given to the role of the revolutionaries themselves (Selbin 1997; 2010). Even among those sociologists and political scientists who have focused on agency in revolutions, few contributions have been devoted to the role of information and communication technology in the process of regime change, nonviolent or otherwise. This is mainly due to two interrelated facts: first, the study of revolutions has as noted above tilted heavily towards structural analyses that leave little room for the role of the actual revolutionaries, and even less for their communication tactics. Second, and perhaps more important to the argument made here, nonviolent revolutions remain severely understudied. This matters, because the successful use of ICTs seems to be correlated with nonviolent revolutions in particular, not their violent counterparts. Hence a failure to recognize the nonviolent nature of the ICT revolutions would lead to a faulty understanding of the role of such technologies. With the revolutionary events in Tunisia and Egypt now firmly within the relevant universe of cases, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, for observers to ignore the role of information and communication in revolutionary processes.

While we may anticipate that events in the MENA region will increase scholarly interest in an understudied subject, nonviolent revolutions have nonetheless already received some attention from researchers (Garton Ash 2009; Nepstad forthcoming; Ritter 2008; 2010; Schock 2005; Sharp 2005). In this paper we particularly draw on Ritter's (2010) notion that the emergence and success of nonviolent revolutions depend on the internationalization of these struggles and the presence of an iron cage of liberalism (ICL) in the countries experiencing a "revolutionary situation" (Tilly 1978). The concept ICL is based on the insight that governments that have perished at the unarmed hands of nonviolent revolutionaries share one central commonality: they tend to be autocratic regimes closely allied with democratic states. These relationships, which develop over the span of decades, initially provide autocratic leaders with both international legitimacy and economic gains in the form of grants, loans, and trade. Eventually however, the relationship may eventually become a burden if domestic opposition groups can highlight the discrepancy between the regime's insincere commitment to the liberal democratic principles of the patron state and its actual performance in these areas. Historically, nonviolent protesters have often been successful in making this discrepancy manifest to the world and have thus managed to trap numerous dictators in ICLs. The reason for this is quite simple: nonviolent protest is in itself little more than the expression of some of the most fundamental human and civil rights – the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Any government officially committed to liberal values, regardless of the hypocrisy accompanying that commitment, will encounter great difficulties in its efforts to repress peaceful protesters and their messages. This is *especially* the case if the government in question is closely allied with one or more Western democracies that have their own liberal reputations to consider.

Despite the absolute nature of his assertion, Downing (1996) is largely correct when he states that "a movement that is not reported does not take place" (22). In terms of the dynamics of the ICL, it is not enough that a state represses nonviolent protesters – the world must also be aware the repression takes place. And this is where ICTs enter the story. Fundamentally, information and communication technologies are employed by nonviolent revolutionaries in two contexts: the domestic and the global. In the domestic arena, ICTs primarily serve the function of mobilization through information diffusion and protest coordination. ICTs facilitate mobilization on the ground by connecting like-minded citizens, offering non-official information to anybody interested in the events and inviting protesters to gather in public places, marches or other forms of political activism. Beyond the domestic arena, ICTs aid the movement's cause by increasing global awareness of the revolutionary situation. This dynamic is illustrated in *Figure 1*.

*Figure 1: The impact of ICTs in nonviolent revolutions*




We posit that these two major effects of ICTs are central features of all nonviolent revolutions. In the empirical section of this paper we therefore investigate to what extent both domestic mobilization and global awareness were facilitated by new ICTs specifically. The remainder of this paper proceeds through a comparison between the

world's first nonviolent revolution, namely the Iranian revolution of 1977-79 (Goodwin 2001), and the most recent ones in Tunisia and Egypt. We will show to what extent ICTs mattered in all three cases for domestic and global purposes in order to draw conclusions about the unique contributions of new ICTs. While the similarities between the cases exceed their differences, we show that digital media tied the domestic and the global arenas together in an unprecedented way. As this paper is rather theory-building than theory-testing in form, we will not develop proper hypotheses at this point. Rather, we depart from a hunch, i.e. that new ICTs have caused the domestic and the global arenas of nonviolent revolutions to become increasingly interwoven and at times even overlap one another.

## 3. From Iran to Egypt: ICTs in Nonviolent Revolutions

### 3.1 ICTs and the Nonviolent Iranian Revolution

The Iranian Revolution is often depicted of as one of the most violent examples of regime change in the second half of the 20th century (Arsenault 2011). But the chroniclers of the revolution overwhelmingly agree that the removal of Muhammad Reza Pahlavi – the shah of Iran – occurred without the reliance on opposition violence (Abrahamian 1982; Amjad 1989; Arjomand 1988; Bakhash 1990; Burns 1996; Cottam 1988; Daneshvar 1996; Dorman & Farhang 1987; Fischer 2003; Foran 1994; Green 1982; Hoveyda 1980; Keddie 1983; Kurzman 2004; Milani 1988; Parsa 1989; Parsons 1984; Shivers 1980; Sick 1985; Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi 1994; and Stempel 1981;) Instead, Iranian protesters employed nonviolent tactics, in particular massive demonstrations and debilitating strikes, to bring the government to its knees. In the end, an alarming rate of the shah's 400,000 soldiers began to desert

from the military not because they were engaged in gun battles with hostile freedom fighters, but because they day after day had to listen to their countrymen and women plead with them to join the people and stop killing their Muslim brothers (Amuzegar 1991; Arjomand 1988; Heikal 1982; Kurzman 2004). The role of communication technology in Iran's nonviolent revolution has rarely received the attention it deserves, but as one of its most prominent chroniclers has declared, "national integration and improved nationwide communications were the essential preconditions of the revolution of 1979" (Arjomand, 1988: 119)

One of the architects behind this nonviolent revolutionary strategy was, perhaps surprisingly to a Western audience, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the man who would take over after the shah and become Iran's first Supreme Leader. Khomeini realized early on that violent attacks on the state would serve little purpose. When eager Islamist guerrillas, who were engaged in a bloody and ultimately unsuccessful battle with the shah's military in the late 1960s and early 1970s, came to receive the Ayatollah's blessing for their struggle, Khomeini reprimanded the disappointed young men and informed them that "the regime would fall not when the masses took up arms but when the whole clerical stratum joined the opposition" (Abrahamian 1989:150). He recognized that the shah's government with its vast military and international support would have little trouble defeating an armed uprising (Bakhash 1990; Heikal 1982; Milani 1988).

***Old ICTs and Domestic Mobilization***

Khomeini knew what needed to be done, but how does one go about mobilizing millions of people in a largely rural developing country, in particular when one finds oneself in exile? Well, one uses the most advanced technologies available, in this case

cassette tapes and telephone landlines. The Ayatollah's sermons and messages, recorded in exile in Iraq and later France, were smuggled into Iran. Once in Iran, Khomeini's collaborators within the religious establishment made sure the tapes were copied and distributed widely. As one commentator explains,

> tapes of Khomeini's sermons and speeches passed through the mosque network from his residence in Iraq to Qom, Iran's most holy city and the Ayatollah's home until his exile. From there, they were taken to other cities, where enterprising and friendly bazaar merchants duplicated tapes and sold them to the faithful. Beginning in 1976 the mosque network eliminated the middleman and delivered the cassettes and pamphlets which spread revolutionary doctrine directly to the sympathetic mullahs. They in turn passed it to the people in the mosques. Much of this activity went unnoticed until it was fully organized in late 1977. Strangely, there were no successful attempts on the part of the government to interfere with this network on a sustained basis. In a few sporadic cases local distributors were arrested, but this would only enrage the faithful and increase sympathy for revolutionary efforts." (Stempel 1981:45)

While Khomeini's messages may in some ways have been more difficult to access than the tweets and Facebook updates of 2011, Iranians founds ways to spread the Ayatollah's message in creative ways by tapping into and altering existing cultural practices. For example, rather than treating their passengers to the latest developments in popular music,

> it was one symbol of the Islamic revolution in Iran that the only tapes played in long-distance trucks, in buses and taxis were the tapes of Ayatullah Khomeini. We can say that in one way the revolution was a revolution of which the technological symbol was the cassette tape. (Algar 1983:105)

Just like the cassette tape became the "technological symbol" of the 1977-79 revolution, it is worth noting that ninety years earlier, during the Tobacco Rebellion of 1891, the Iranian clergy had made good use of that era's revolutionizing communication technology – the telegraph. While that struggle was far from a

revolution, the clerics used technology at their disposal to mobilize the Iranian population against a proposed government concession that would give a British industrialist monopolistic rights to the entire Iranian tobacco industry (Keddie 2003:61-62).

The concrete effects of the opposition's tactic of distributing Khomeini's cassette tapes went beyond simply mobilizing the Iranian people. The cassette tapes also influenced the responses of the armed forces. Amuzegar (1991) has noted that

> encouraged by Khomeini, through widely distributed cassettes, not to shoot at their Moslem brothers and sisters and to overthrow the illegitimate monarchy, army conscripts and junior officers began to question the righteousness of the task. And military commanders began doubting the unquestioned loyalty of draftees and enlisted men. (286)

In order to fully explicate the extent of the role played by the "Khomeini tapes," Taheri (1985) has shown that Parviz Sabeti, the then-head of the "anti-subversion unit" of the SAVAK, Iran's secret police, believed that over 100,000 tapes were distributed in Iran during 1978. "That meant," Taheri suggests, "that millions of Iranians were able to hear Khomeini's uncompromising condemnation of the Shah directly and were encouraged by his total lack of regard for conventional rules of politesse when speaking of 'the hated Shah, the Jewish agent, the American snake whose head must be smashed with a stone"' (1985:213).

In an ironic twist in the fate of the man who famously referred to the United States as "the great Satan," Khomeini's enterprise benefitted tremendously from American Bell International's $10 billion project (paid for by the shah's government) to revamp Iran's telephone system in the mid-1970s (Stempel 1981:72). Taking full advantage of the improved telephone network, Khomeini's messages to the Iranian masses "would be recorded in Paris and read over the telephone to a number of

individuals in Tehran who would have tape recorders held against the telephone. They would then telephone other individuals in provincial cities who were waiting with their tape recorders, and in a brief time the message would be duplicated and circulated throughout the country" (Algar 1983:105).

In addition to being used in the distribution of Khomeini's revolutionary messages and sermons, revolutionaries also relied on the telephone system to coordinate their demonstrations in different cities (Stempel 1981). In other words, and in a manner not very different from how protest events were coordinated more than 30 years later in Tunisia and Egypt, organizers used the most advanced technological means at their disposal to increase the effects of their efforts. For the shah's security forces, coordinated demonstrations in different parts of the country naturally became a difficult expression of dissent to contain.

***Old ICTs and Global Awareness***

The improved telephone system also allowed Iranians to keep the world, and especially Iranian living abroad, abreast of what was happening at home. Once again we see how the telephone system filled the role played by online communication technology in 2011. As cell phone calls, Tweets and Facebook updates were used by Tunisians and Egyptians to inform the world of the progress of their revolutions, Iranians used their telephones in a similar manner. An indication of how accessible information about the revolution was to the rest of the world is represented by the virtual explosion of telephone calls between Iran and the U.S. in the years leading up to the shah's ouster. Zonis (1991), quoting James Bill, reports that while 53,597 calls were made from the United States to Iran in 1973, that number increased to 854,382 calls in 1977, an increase of over 1,600 percent. The 1973 figures equals almost 9,000

hours of conversation time, an already significant number. However, by 1977, that number was up to 134,000 hours. While many of these calls undoubtedly were made to the roughly 50,000 Americans living in Iran at the time, it still seems quite likely that Iranians exploited their improved access to telecommunications to inform friends and family abroad about the political situation at home (Stempel 1981).

A final use of communication technology in the Iranian Revolution is represented by the radio. Similarly to the use of the telephone system, the radio became a revolutionary tool as an inadvertent consequence of the shah's modernization scheme. Eager to rapidly develop his country to the level of the West, the shah welcomed new technology into Iran. While "in the sixties, a radio was a luxury few people could afford… In the seventies, the situation drastically changed. More than 65 percent of private households owned radios in 1976. In urban areas, the figure was more than 75 percent" (Milani 1988:121).

The revolutionaries made use of this development in several different ways. First, Khomeini benefitted from more or less unrestricted access to BBC radio journalists while in Parisian exile to communicate directly with the Iranian people, thus removing the need for cassette tapes (Foran 1993:381). Second, when the shah lifted some of the censorship restrictions on the media as a part of the liberalization measures he hoped would save his throne, the opposition pounced on the opportunity to keep each other up to date with developments in different part of the country. "This additional means of communication… generated a sense of solidarity among different groups of strikers" at the height of the revolution in the fall of 1978 (Parsa 1989:151). Knowledge that other strikers suffered the same difficulties contributed to the resilience of the strikers, thus allowing them to crucially put pressure on the regime and its finances.

As this section has shown, communication technology clearly contributed to the Iranian revolutionaries achieving their objectives. However, ICTs had a much greater impact on domestic mobilization than on the movement's efforts to raise global awareness. Old ICTs, such as cassette tapes and landlines, lack the immediate and wide-reaching capacities of the internet. Consequently, old ICTs were less effective in internationalizing the revolution. In order to reach the international community, Iranian movement leaders had to rely on the Western media. In fact, it was not until Khomeini moved to Paris that the European and American news outlets seriously began to cover the revolution. In addition, and as further evidence of the slower transmission of the revolution to the world, Khomeini had to send some of his collaborators to the United States on "speaking tours." These trips were intended to reassure Americans that the Islamic Revolution was peaceful and that "nothing would prevent the continuation of mutually satisfactory relations with the United States" (Sick 1985:112). While the revolution eventually succeeded, the shah held out for roughly a year and half. Meanwhile, Ben Ali lasted a little less than a month and Mubarak for a mere 17 days. It seems plausible that the delayed internationalization of the revolution, explained in part by the lack of direct and effective communication tools capable of reaching the West, may help explain its relatively long duration. As we will see next, ICTs contributed similarly to domestic mobilization in Tunisia and Egypt, but the presence of new ICTs drastically accelerated the internationalization of the two revolutions.

### *3.2* ICTs and the Revolutions of Tunisia and Egypt

Similarly to earlier nonviolent revolutions, events in Tunisia and Egypt were characterized by mass mobilization and the eventual internationalization of the movement. Commentators emphasizing the positive impact of increased internet

penetration in Egypt and Tunisia point to the fact that Facebook groups were instrumental in the early stages of the revolutions. These online communities allowed movement leaders to coordinate dates and meeting points for the initial protests, thus increasing the likelihood of large turnouts (Hauslohner 2011; Miladi 2011). In the later stages of the revolutions, new ICTs allowed the activists, unlike their Iranian counterparts, to immediately and vividly transmit their struggles directly to the world.

***New ICTs and Domestic Mobilization***

In both Tunisia and Egypt, ICTs played an important role in the very early stages of the revolutions. In response to the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi in the central town of Sidi Bouzid on December 17, Tunisian demonstrators took to the streets that same day (Rifai 2011). As the traditional Tunisian media was tightly controlled by the state, online activists took it upon themselves to disseminate news of these protests. Bouazizi's story was told on Facebook and other social networking sites, causing outraged Tunisians to participate in demonstrations in various parts of the country (Anderson 2011; Miladi 2011). In the early stages of the uprising, this form of citizen journalism set the revolution on a path of potential success. Although online activists continued to post directions for protesters to congregate at given locations at specific times throughout the month-long struggle, the revolution was decidedly decentralized (Beckett 2011). To imply that one cyber activist-leader, or a group thereof, was effectively pulling the strings of the revolution would therefore be to exaggerate the importance of online activism and organizing. Instead, once the initial protests had grabbed the hopes and imaginations of Tunisians, the street, not cyberspace, became the locus of organizing efforts. Bloggers continued to report on the progression of the protests and announced meeting points and times for planned

demonstrations, but mobilization in the latter part of the revolution would likely have occurred even without the participation of online activists.

Similarly, online activists played a central role in organizing the January 25 Police Day protests that kicked off the Egyptian Revolution. While this protests had been planned far in advance, it acquired new meaning in the aftermath of Ben Ali's ouster. One activist told us that although organizers hoped that the recent events in Tunisia would inspire people to join the demonstration, they simultaneously remained realistic. Calls for public expression of dissent had often been issued in the past, but typically with disappointing result (Personal interview). However, the January 25 demonstrations turned out to be an unprecedented success that set the Egyptian revolution on its path to victory.

In the days preceding what had been labeled by the organizers as "Day of Wrath" or "Revolution Day," 85,000 people had committed to participating in the protests via the Facebook page called "We are all Khaled Saeed" (Hauslohner 2011). The Facebook page, which had about 400,000 members, was the brainchild of Wael Ghonim, the Google executive who became one of the faces of the revolution after his arrest in the early days of the upheaval. The actual number of demonstrators participating in the protests ultimately turned out to be significantly less than the 85,000 "registered" attendants, but it seems plausible that the large "virtual turnout" may have contributed to a larger physical turnout than would have been the case had a more modest number of Egyptian Facebook users announced their participation. In this sense ICTs played an important role in triggering the revolution as it helped generate an initial protest large enough to provide the movement with the necessary momentum. Still, as the revolution played out its course, online activism again became less and less important in organizational terms. As in Tunisia, the revolution

took on a life of its own as new demonstrations were organized by the activists on the ground rather than those operating in the ether.

In terms of domestic participation, both Egypt and Tunisia display a similar dynamic in which the internet with its bloggers and Facebook users played an important catalyzing role. As the events progressed however, the streets replaced the web as the main source of organizational activity. With only 33 and 21 percent of the population having access to the internet in Tunisia and Egypt respectively (Kuebler 2011), we should perhaps not expect the web to be instrumental in maintaining large demonstrations once a critical mass of activists has taken to the streets. Rather than relying on a technology that ultimately only a relatively small portion of the movement base had access to, organizing future protest events became part of the demonstrations themselves. In the late stages of the Egyptian revolution the Tahrir Square protests were more or less continuous, making organizational activities superfluous. The inhabitants of Cairo could not escape being aware of the events that were taking place, and anybody itching to partake in the revolution knew where to go in order to be a part of the historic process unfolding before their eyes.

***New ICTs and Global Awareness***

Once the two revolutions had been set in motion with the help of ICTs, the technological tools at the disposal of the revolutionaries were used in a decidedly different manner. Rather than mobilizing their own citizens, online activists moved to inform the international community. Through blogs, Facebook updates, cell phone communication, and, most vividly, YouTube, activists targeted friends, family and colleagues abroad, as well as the international media. Crucially, cyber activist worked

to complement the traditional media outlets in the task of informing the world of conditions on the ground.

In Tunisia, where activists faced a more concerted government effort to censor their activities, online protesters collaborated with satellite TV channels. Al-Jazeera, which was a central player in both the Tunisian and Egyptian revolution and has done its best to encourage similar protest movements elsewhere in North Africa and the Middle East, was the most important partner of the Tunisian blogosphere. As Ben Ali's government aggressively sought to limit the public impact of its online opponents, mainly by blocking sites and stealing usernames and passwords, Al-Jazeera contributed to the opposition's efforts by reproducing tweets and status updates on their TV channels (Miladi 2011; Wagner 2011). While many of the messages were directed at Tunisians, a large portion also sought to spread information about domestic events to the international audience. As Faris Bouhafa, an ordinary Tunisian broadcasting his experiences on YouTube, put it, "I was definitely afraid at first but I wanted everything we were filming to reach the outside world. When you know nobody was going to come down here and nobody could reach us, thanks God we were able to reach them" (Al-Jazeera 2011). Crucially, the impact of these activities was to make it difficult for the world, and in particular those Western governments allied with Ben Ali, to turn a blind eye to the regime's repressive response against predominantly nonviolent protesters. For example, French popular outrage resulted in severe criticism of those French politicians who had been linked to the Ben Ali government, and even forced resignations. In the past these connections had raised little concern, but now, as a consequence of the well-reported ruthless repression of protesters, French partnership with the Tunisian government was considered highly inappropriate.

In Egypt, we again see a similar dynamic, but one in which ICTs played a less important role due to the fact that Al-Jazeera even more aggressively interjected itself into the struggle to evict Hosni Mubarak from power. Whereas the Qatari news giant relied on video and text provided by activists to relay the Tunisian revolution to the rest of the region and the world, its Egyptian coverage was composed of live reports and video provided by the organization's own journalists. Texts, tweets, and status updates continued to play a role in informing the world since Al-Jazeera's journalists and those of other news outlets could not cover every corner of the Egyptian uprising. But in relative terms new ICTs may have been less impactful in Egypt than they were in Tunisia. This is not due to the fact that the Egyptian government more aggressively pursued a policy of cyber repression, it did not, but rather to the fact that traditional ICTs were better prepared and perhaps more willing to report on events in Egypt. Rather uncharacteristically for a revolution, this one turned out to be televised.

The internationalization of the Egyptian revolution generated widespread solidarity mobilization throughout the world (The Electronic Intifada 2011). In the United States, late January demonstrations took place in New York City, Washingon, DC, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Tampa, Seattle, Ann Arbor, Atlanta, Columbus, Cincinnati, Dayton, Portland, Houston, Blacksburg, Norfolk, Madison, Detroit, Minneapolis, Jersey City, Queens-Astoria and Los Angeles (Giambusso 2011; NBC Washington 2011; Szaniszlo 2011; The Electronic Intifada 2011). Meanwhile, London, Dublin, and the Hague witnessed similar protests targeting the Egyptian embassies in those cities (Cocker 2011; The Electric Intifada 2011). In addition sympathetic demonstrations took place in Canada, Australia, Venezuela, and throughout the Middle East (The Electronic Intifada). Besides encouraging Egyptian demonstrators to continue their activities, these demonstrations increased the pressure

on the some governments, particularly the American one, to take a harder line in its communication with Mubarak. Thus the internationalization of the revolution helps explain Obama's transformation from cautiously supportive of his Egyptian ally to demanding of meaningful change and eventually a political transition (Ritter 2011).

Clearly, preventing protest domestically was one of the main reasons for the Egyptian regime to take the unprecedented action of disabling both the internet and mobile phone services at country level on January 26 (The Guardian, January 26). However, activists rapidly found myriad ways to circumvent the blackout. For instance, landlines were used to phone in tweet messages thanks to Google's makeshift alliance with Twitter's "Speak to Tweet" service. The government block lasted until February 2 when suddenly digital communication was restored. The regimes' inability to block information from spreading globally over the internet was later complemented by the regime's incapacity to prevent information from entering Egypt. On the day before Mubarak's departure, his new vice president, Omar Suleiman, compelled his compatriots via national television to stop watching foreign broadcasts: "Don't listen to satellite television stations who are trying to create unrest and division and to weaken Egypt and distort its image" (Suleiman on February 10 2011). As we will see in the final section of the paper, this mutual permeability between information leaving and entering a revolutionary context is one of the main effects, in our view, of new ICTs in nonviolent revolutions.

## 4. Conclusions: Pushing the Theory

In order to properly assess the role played by new ICTs in the nonviolent revolutions of Tunisia and Egypt it is important to distinguish between the impacts they had on

the *revolutionary process* as opposed to the *revolutionary outcome*. Our central conclusion is that while new ICTs have directly altered the nonviolent revolutionary process, they only have an indirect effect on the outcome thereof.

***New ICTs and the Revolutionary Process***

On the domestic side, new ICTs affected the revolution process in two different ways. First, they allowed for an impressive *multiplication and amplification of voices* that complicated regime efforts to control expressions of dissent. As the sheer number of voices to be silenced drastically increased, the muting capacities of the state were quickly overwhelmed, thus allowing the message of the revolution to be heard, and acted upon, by large numbers of potential protesters. Second, the *tempo of the revolution* was unarguably affected by new ICTs, as they allowed for instantaneous dispersion of news. Mass participation in news production thus facilitated mobilization and made repression more difficult to accomplish. The multiple channels of immediate communication available to the revolutionaries (mobile phones, Facebook, Twitter and the World Wide Web in general) made the revolutions' messages impossible to contain. In short, new ICTs contributed to the diffusion of information and subsequently to the rapid mobilization of new activists.

Internationally, the same technologies were used to spread the message of the revolution beyond the borders of the revolutionary contexts. New ICTs allowed for an unprecedented *immediate international diffusion* of news. If it was difficult in the past for any government to contain information about events within a polity, it has now become almost impossible. Any information can spread virally without a real possibility for it to be quarantined. What the 2011 MENA events show is that for information and communication, borders have largely become irrelevant. As a

consequence, widespread global awareness of the struggles was achieved much more rapidly in Tunisia and Egypt than it was in Iran, with new ICTs playing crucial roles. Whereas Iranian revolutionaries, both before and during the revolution, were forced to rely on external media outlets in the United States and Europe to convey their revolutionary narrative to sympathetic audiences, Tunisian and Egyptian revolutionaries accomplished the same objective more directly through the use of new ICTs. Citizen journalists broadcasted the revolution directly to the rest of the world through their mobile phones, without having to rely on intermediary media outlets, in an example of what Trechsel (2011), building on Manin (1997) refers to as "Paparazzi Democracy."

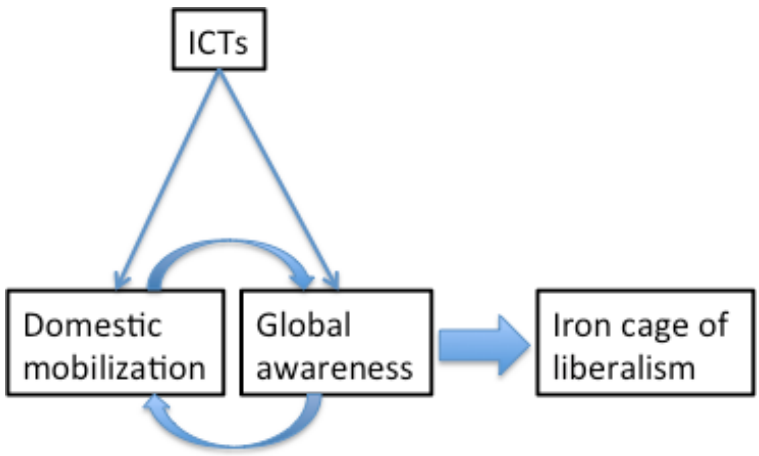
Due to the vast on- and offline coverage of the events in Tunis and Cairo, these domestic events quickly morphed into internationalized revolutions where the boundary between revolutionary and audience becomes increasingly blurred. Today, any internet-connected person is a potential revolutionary, regardless of their physical location. Whether you are located in Italy, the United States, or Egypt no longer makes a difference: by a click of the mouse anyone can become part of an initially domestic movement to the point where the domestic and international become indistinguishable. As a side effect of this, the language of revolution becomes English, the lingua franca of the internet. This fact is powerfully evidenced by the impressive presence of protest signs and banners in English in virtually all MENA countries now experiencing revolutionary activities.

But the crucial difference between new and old ICTs in the process of nonviolent revolution is not the independent impact new ICTs have on either the domestic or international sphere. Instead, what is "revolutionary" here is the capacity of new ICTs to tie the two together. The central contribution of new ICTs is therefore

their capacity to interweave the domestic and international into a feedback loop that can accelerate the revolution. Through the use of new ICTs the revolutionary efforts of both Tunisians and Egyptians were immediately and seamlessly relayed to the world. The world, in turn, responded as immediately and seamlessly and quickly became part of the revolution. This message of support and solidarity was in turn relayed back to the protesters in Tunis and, most spectacularly, Cairo's Tahrir Square. A *non-mediated, transnational loop of protest* was created, where domestic events became global news in a glimpse of a moment, and where regime-critical statements from the White House and capitals throughout the world were received by hundreds of thousands of protesters in the streets, thus causing a what Keck and Sikkink (1998) refer to as a "boomerang effect." In short, a domestic struggle had become and international affair.

*Figure 2* shows how we conceive of the impact of new ICTs on nonviolent revolutions. In more abstract terms, domestic mobilization and global awareness gradually converge, with one sphere strongly influencing the other. Campaigns to increase global awareness directly feeds into the domestic protest, which, in turn, increases the effects of international public opinion and pressures from foreign governments.

*Figure 2: The impact of ICTs 2.0 in nonviolent revolutions*



***New ICTs and Revolutionary Outcomes***

Can the dynamics identified in figure two also help explain revolutionary success? The answer is yes, but only indirectly and if we bring the iron cage of liberalism into the discussion. The processes we identified in the Iranian, Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions can be found in other contexts, too. For instance, let us briefly consider attempted nonviolent revolutions of Burma in 2007 ("The Saffron Revolution" or the "Movement of the Monks") and Iran in 2009 ("The Green Revolution"). Both are excellent examples of nonviolent revolutionary movements that failed despite activists' use of new ICTs. Burmese citizen journalists accepted tremendous risks in order to film the government's repression of monks and civilians. The tapes were then smuggled into neighboring Thailand where they were uploaded to YouTube. In Iran, activists used their cell phones to document government atrocities and to make live appearances on CNN and other international media outlets. In both countries, activists were mobilized and the world informed through the opposition's use of new ICTs. Yet, both Burma and Iran represent failed nonviolent revolutions, at least for the moment.

To make sense of Tunisian and Egyptian success in the face of Burmese and Iranian failure, we must go beyond the similarities (the use of new ICTs and the way they affect the interaction between global awareness and domestic mobilization) and look at the crucial structural difference between the cases. While we would suggest that new ICTs affected the *process* of all four revolutions more or less equally, we believe that the successful outcomes in Tunisia and Egypt can be explained by the presence of ICLs in Tunisia and Egypt and the lack thereof in Iran and Burma. As discussed in the introduction, ICLs only emerge in countries allied with the

"democratic" nations of the West. While Tunisia and Egypt fit that profile, Burma and Iran do not find themselves in equivalent international relationships. Consequently, the governments in the latter two countries brutally repressed the opposition and the revolutions were momentarily stalled. Does this mean that new ICTs have no impact on the outcome of nonviolent revolutions? Not at all, but their impact is indirect. In contexts where and an ICL is present, new ICTs can contribute tremendously to the exacerbation of the negative effects the ICL has on an autocratic regime. To conclude, new ICTs affect the *process* of nonviolent revolution, but their impact on the *outcome* is conditional on the ICL. In short, ICTs are important when they are employed under the broader context of a pre-existing ICL.

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