

# Social media aided but didn't cause Arab Spring, study finds

January 14 2013

---



Egyptian protests in Tahir Square. Credit: Dan H Creative Commons: BY NC

Social psychological research led by Murdoch University has concluded that social media accelerated but did not cause the Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt.

Undertaken with the University of Bath and Monash University, the study involving Professor Craig McGarty, Dr Emma Thomas and Girish Lala from Murdoch University found technologies such as [YouTube](#) helped mobilise mass support in weeks, which in similar cases, such as South Africa, took decades.

Professor McGarty said social media could be viewed as a platform for change.

"The first video of protest in [Tunisia](#) showed three minutes of people sitting down in a square, whistling and chanting. On some levels, this seems unremarkable, but mass public dissent was virtually unknown on the streets of Tunisian towns," Professor McGarty said.

"Rebroadcast of this event through social media and satellite TV bypassed government controls and enabled viewers to see the level of support for the cause."

Professor McGarty said this enabled new opinion-based groups to form, which increasingly contested ownership of national identity.

"Opposition movements can appear illegitimate when they attack a government who – wrapped in national symbols and in control of national institutions – can represent opponents as being disloyal to the country," he said.

"The fact that the emerging opposition fought the government for ownership of national symbols gradually allowed citizens to perceive their governments as outgroups with whom they could no longer identify."

Professor McGarty said national flags proliferated in shared videos as protest movements grew.

These include a video by [Freedom4Tunisia \(2011\)](#) with 487,000 views featuring an audio track over the Tunisian flag and one of Tahrir Square in [Egypt](#) which became the most popular video in the country.

"By adopting these symbols, the new political opinion-based groups came to stand for the nation. The result was the mass protest action that was the cause of regime change," Professor McGarty said.

"Had opposition remained in the domain of [social media](#), the regimes would still be in place."

'New technologies, new identities, and the growth of mass opposition in the 'Arab Spring' will be published in *Political Psychology*.

**More information:** [au.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTit.../productCd-POPS.html](http://au.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTit.../productCd-POPS.html)

Provided by Murdoch University

Citation: Social media aided but didn't cause Arab Spring, study finds (2013, January 14)  
retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2013-01-social-media-aided-didnt-arab.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--