

# Twitter plays smaller role in political discourse among Iranian citizenry, study finds

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A survey of 2,800 Iranian youths regarding their consumption of media and social media indicates that the Internet and state-run television are their primary source for news and information, followed by traditional media and personal connections. Twitter, long thought to be the catalyst of the post-election discontent in 2009, did not show up on the radar of news and information sources.

The survey was conducted in 2011 by the Annenberg School for Communication's Center for Global [Communication Studies](#) (CGCS) and is reported in the journal *New Media & Society*. The article "Will politics be tweeted? New media use by Iranian youth in 2011" by Magdalena Wojcieszak, Ph.D. (Gr '09), IE University in Spain; and Briar Smith, associate director of CGCS, reported on efforts to determine what sources younger Iranians use for information, the extent to which they rely on new media (such as social media) for political exchanges, their experiences with online censorship, and political efficacy as related to new media. The uprisings in Iran following the 2009 contested elections and debate over new media's potential to affect dissent was, in part, a backdrop to the research. The survey was conducted at a time when the "Arab Spring" was taking place, raising the question of whether new media can empower popular protests.

"The country is currently gearing up for the presidential election in June 2013, which will be a heady period ripe with significance and intense

political debate," the authors write. "In this context, the Iranian government is on what can be described as permanent high alert against challenges to its authority."

The online survey found that the top sources of news are the Internet (89%), [television](#) (70%), friends and family (49%), print media (42%), and work and school (33%). Since the survey was done online (respondents found the survey via a banner on the website 4shared) it was not surprising that the Internet finished so high.

"Despite the central role that Twitter was said to play in the uprisings in Iran, it was the least prevalent new media platform used by our sample," the authors note. "Only 17% reported using Twitter to share or follow tweets." Interestingly, the authors note, the survey showed that [social media](#) is used far more for personal rather than political discussions.

The finding about television is eye-opening, considering that television is mostly state run in Iran. "This finding is surprising because the surveyed youth map well on to the collective profile of reformist activists who would distrust the government and its sources, suggesting perhaps that this young population is not uniformly politicized, mistrustful, or primed for protest," they wrote.

Additionally, the authors point out that the [survey](#) respondents were "young and technologically savvy." Over 80% were under the age of 30, and 78% had some kind of university degree (20% had graduate degrees).

"[O]ur findings could align with those voices that cast doubts on the extent to which new media swept in the wave of discontent that followed the 2009 presidential election, and the extent to which they have the ability to fuel activist protest and sustain revolution."

The authors note that "using the Internet is a political act in and of itself." While Iranians are not necessarily tweeting about women's rights in Iran, they do visit filtered websites, and use online circumvention tools to overcome online censorship.

Provided by University of Pennsylvania

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