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- يطبق تقييم يونيو 2020 للمجلات على كل الأبحاث التي سنكشر فيها بدء من 1 يوليو 2020 و حتى صدور تقييم جديد في يونيو 2021
- المجلات التي لم تتقدم بطلب إعادة تقييم سيظل تقييم مارس ٢٠٢٠ مطبقا على كل الأبحاث التي سنكشر بها وذلك لحين صدور تقييم جديد في يونيو 2021
- يتم إعادة تقييم المجلات المحلية المصرية دورياً في شهر يونيو من كل عام ويكون التقييم الجديد سارياً للسنة التالية للنشر في هذه المجلات



● **Internet Use and Democratic Satisfaction  
in Egypt after Five Years of the 2011 Revolution**

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● **التعرض للإنترنت وعلاقته بمستويات الرضا عن الديمقراطية  
في مصر بعد مرور 5 سنوات من ثورة 2011**

● **أ.م.د. علاء الشامي**

أستاذ الإعلام المساعد بكلية البنات للآداب والعلوم والتربية بجامعة عين شمس

## Abstract

There is widespread evidence that digital media contributed greatly to the organization and transformation of sociopolitical dissatisfaction dominated Egypt's public sphere during the 2011 and 2013 revolts into productive collective action. Exploring the interplay between Internet consumption and democratic dissatisfaction in today's Egypt has received scant scholarly attention, however. Based on secondary data from a representative nation-wide survey, conducted in 2016, the current article reveals that the Internet is considered an influential factor constructing citizens' perceptions about the democratic supply and demand in Egypt. Findings show that while Internet consumption enhances levels of dissatisfaction with how democracy works in Egypt, it cultivates positive attitudes toward the principle of democracy and democratic regimes. Theoretically, these results are better understood employing two causal mechanisms: The Internet's mirror-holding and window-opening functions.

Keywords: democratic satisfaction, Egypt's politics, democratic supply and demand, Arab uprising, Egypt's transition, Internet and politics

### ملخص الدراسة

كان للاستخدام المتزايد لكل من الإنترنت ومواقع التواصل الاجتماعي دور بارز في تحويل حالة السخط السياسي والاجتماعي التي شهدتها مصر إبان أحداث الخامس والعشرين من يناير عام 2011 والثلاثين من يونيو عام 2013 إلى حراك سياسي جمعي أفضى لتغيير المشهد السياسي في مصر. ورغم اهتمام الباحثين المتنامي بدراسة ماهية وأبعاد التأثيرات السياسية للإنترنت وشبكات التواصل الاجتماعي خلال أحداث 2011 و 2013؛ إلا أن البحث في التأثيرات السياسية للإنترنت خلال الفترات التي أعقبت تلك الأحداث لم ينل بعد الاهتمام الكافي من قبل الباحثين. تأسيساً على ذلك، تحددت مشكلة الدراسة الراهنة في التعرف على ماهية العلاقة بين التعرض للإنترنت ومستويات الرضا عن الديمقراطية في مصر بعد مرور خمسة أعوام على ثورة يناير 2011. استندت الدراسة في إطارها النظري إلى مفهومين نظريين طورتهما الباحثة الأمريكية كيتي بيلارد Bailard Catie عام 2012، لشرح الآليات التي يجري بموجبها توظيف الإنترنت لإحداث التغيير السياسي: المفهوم الأول يتعلق بالإنترنت كمرآة عاكسة لتقييم الوضع الداخلي -The mirror holding function of the Internet، في حين يتعلق المفهوم الثاني بالإنترنت كنافذة مشرعة على الخارج -The window-opening function of the Internet. منهجياً، استندت الدراسة في اختبار فروضها البحثية إلى بيانات مسح ميداني، كان قد أجراه الباروميتر العربي على عينة عشوائية ممثلة، قوامها 1200 من المواطنين المصريين البالغين، عام 2016.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرضا الديمقراطي، السياسة في مصر، المطالب الديمقراطية، الربيع العربي، الفترة

الانتقالية في مصر، الإنترنت والسياسة



## Introduction

Before the Arab uprising of 2011, the North Africa and the Middle East was deemed the only major part in the world remained untouched by the “third wave” of democratization. In his seminal article entitled *Democracy’s Third Wave*, Samuel Huntington (1991) stated that “The wave of democratization that swept the world in the 1970s and 1980s could become a dominant feature of Middle Eastern and North African politics in the 1990s” (p. 32). Although Huntington’s prophecy delayed for almost two decades, the third wave of democratization has eventually arrived to the Arab world. In December 2010 and the first months of 2011, massive popular protests erupted across many Arab countries, including Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Iraq, Lebanon, Algeria, and Sudan. Within a couple of months after their occurrence, the sustained demonstrations helped topple long-standing regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. The spark of the Arab Spring reignited again in 2019, when another two long-serving regimes in Algeria and Sudan were ousted.

Needless to say, the political changes resulted due to these popular uprisings do not mean that countries of the Arab Spring have been democratized or even experienced a complete and successful transition. According to scholars of democratization and regime change, transitions from autocratic regimes are always prone to ebbs and flows, and in some cases to a probable reversion to authoritarianism (e.g., O’Donnell & Schmitter, 1968; Stepan & Linz, 2013). In addition, democratization is a long and multilayer process

and the waves associated with this process are evaluated in years not months as Howard and Hussain pointed out (2011, p. 47).

Broadly, two main points can be inferred after reviewing the literature on political transition in general and the potentialities of digital media in transitional settings in particular. First, political scientists have primarily been emphasizing the roles of the elite factions and/or the wider structure (e.g., sociopolitical, cultural, and economic contexts) while explaining the underlying causes instigating political changes (e.g., Bunce, 2000; Geddes, 1999). Relatedly, the impacts of the technological advancements, such as the Internet and social media platforms, have usually been understudied in this regard. The Arab Spring has, however, given rise to a host of scholarship attempting to reconsider the influences of digital media in political mobilization and organization (e.g., Beissinger, 2017; Evans, 2019; Ferdinand, 2000).

Second, political communication scholars, in turn, have emphasized the significant roles played by interactive media in instigating the popular demonstrations seen for instance during the Arab Spring, which eventually helped opening up and then breaking down several authoritative regimes in the Arab region (e.g., Eltantawy & Wiest 2011; Lotan et al., 2011; Ruijgrok, 2017). Motivated by the fundamental political changes brought about during the Arab uprising and the growing impacts of online media associated, some scholars (e.g., Hussain & Howard, 2012) marked what happened in the Arab uprising as a “fourth wave of democratization”.

Generally, whereas the contribution of digital media in opening up and toppling autocratic regimes has received much scholarly attention, little attention has been paid to investigate the democratic potentials of online media in transitioning societies towards democracy or otherwise (Doorenspleet, 2012). The current study attempts to fill this gap by investigating the democratizing impacts of the Internet after the Arab Spring. Specifically, it explores the connection between

general use of the Internet and levels of democratic dis/satisfaction in the countries experienced the Arab Spring after 5 years from its inception. The Egyptian case provides a unique atmosphere to investigate the main arguments under study. To elaborate, online media were utilized by millions of Egyptians to express and share increasing levels of political cynicism as seen during the 18th days of the 2011 revolution and during the Brotherhood's rule two years later. That is, digital media helped instigate and encourage certain types of political attitudes and behaviors among users in times of political upheavals (i.e., the Arab Spring). It is vital, however, to continue exploring the relationship between Internet use and democratic dis/satisfaction in the transitional settings following regimes' breakdown.

This study contributes to existing literature in different ways. To begin with, it expands our understanding of the impacts of the Internet not only in opening up and breaking down authoritarian regimes, but also in shaping and reshaping citizens' attitudes toward the quality of democracy as well as essential democratic values in transitioning times that followed. In addition, while much of the academic effort exploring the connection between Internet consumption and democratic dis/satisfaction has usually been conducted in established democracies (e.g., Min, 2010; Stoycheff & Nibset, 2014), little has been known about this interplay in relatively poorer democracies or transitioning societies.

Empirically, this article utilized data collected by the Arab Barometer from a representative sample of 1200 Egyptian citizens in 2016. The survey is deemed one of the fewest opinion polls conducted in Egypt after the June 30<sup>th</sup> massive uprisings onwards.

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

The advent of the Internet and social media has generated much scholarly effort investigating the capacities of digital media to encourage political mobilization and organization. The mechanisms

through which political actions are motivated in the first place have received little academic interest (Bailard, 2012a), however. In an attempt to better understand when and where the Internet can generate certain political actions among users, Bailard (2012a) contributed critically to existing literature on the political impacts of the Internet providing two main mechanisms: The mirror-holding and window-opening functions of the Internet. The following section is dedicated to thoroughly elaborate the two mechanisms.

### **Mirror-Holding Function of the Internet**

A growing body of research has emphasized the importance of critical citizens for a sustained and healthy democracy. As straightforwardly put forth by Nye (1999), “Critical citizens’ are good for democracy” (p.vi). In her turn, Norris (1999) defined critical citizens as those “who value democracy as an ideal yet who remain dissatisfied with the performance of their political system” (p. 269). Since the publication of the seminal book entitled *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance*, edited by Norris, the concept of critical citizens has received increasing scholarly attention (Doorenspleet, 2012, p. 282). Focusing on the positive consequences associated with the growth of critical citizens on democracy, particularly in democratic societies, Norris concluded in this invaluable volume that “these trends in public opinion can be expected to prove healthy if they fuel pressure for major institutional reforms designed to strengthen representative and direct democracy” (p. 270).

Previous research has shown that higher demands for democracy, which are mainly generated by the “dissatisfied democrats” (or the so-called “critical citizens”), is inevitable for a successful democratic consolidation to occur. For example, Bratton et al (2005) contended that “democracy can only be consolidated if ordinary people have an accurate vision of this form of governance clearly in mind (p. 336). Relatedly, consolidation is perceived in existing scholarship as a process that can only be achieved when

democracy is continuously supplied by the government on the one side and demanded by the citizens themselves on the other side (Bratton et al., p. 339; Rose et al., p. 147). Generally, dissatisfied citizens are hence “seem to be an asset rather than a burden on the functioning of democratic political systems” as Abdelzadeh and colleagues have pointed out (2015, p. 430).

Understandably, citizens need to be well informed first about politics in order to become critical. That is, exposing to diverse and profound political knowledge is a prerequisite condition for the formation process of critical citizens to happen. According to Groshek (2009), “an informed public is essential to the proper functioning of government” (p. 117). Other scholars identified informed citizens as a fundamental factor predicting political participation and organization (e.g., Cho & McLeod, 2007; Hsieh & Li, 2014). Thus, it is no exaggeration to say that democracy hinges on both an informed public and critical citizenship. These two factors help ordinary citizens to continuously evaluate the performance of their government on the one hand, and to measure how the democratic principles are applied in reality by government on the other hand.

From a media-related perspective, there is widespread evidence that digital media are playing crucial roles in shaping citizens’ evaluations of government’s execution of democracy and levels of democratic dis/satisfaction associated. Empirical instances supporting this argument have been generated from both democratic and non-democratic societies. To begin with, the “technologies of freedom,” as described by Howard (2011), have fundamentally influenced citizens’ attitudes toward democracy in non-democratic and transitioning regimes in the Arab and Muslim world (p.13). In addition, Nisbet et al (2012) examined the relations between Internet penetration and demands for democracy across 28 African and Asian countries. The authors demonstrated that Internet use enhanced citizens’ commitment and demands for democratic ideals among all

countries under study. Furthermore, analyzing macro-level panel data gathered from 152 countries from 1994 to 2003, Groshek (2009) concluded that digital media were an important democratizing agent either in the developing or developed countries investigated. The results showed that increased Internet diffusion was interrelated with higher levels of democratic growth across all the countries examined.

The connection between digital media use and the growth of democracy does not only apply at the country level as the previously elaborated studies have shown, but also at the individual level. For instance, the rise of the Internet helped create a newly emergent online community in China, referred to as “netizens” according to Lei (2011). These netizens, as the author elaborated, tended to be more politized and more critical of power holders and the authoritarian state compared to non- Internet users. In addition to their support of democratic values, the Chinese netizens were more likely to actively engage in political collective action compared to traditional media users and non-media users. The online active citizens have been recognized an important social force challenging the restricted political scene and media environment in China as the author concluded. Similarly, El-Shamy (2019) demonstrated that online media consumption was positively associated with growing democratic demands among Egyptian citizens in post-revolutionary Egypt.

The discussion on the interplay between Internet use and democratic dis/satisfaction has deeply been enriched by Bailard (2012b), who introduced the concept of mirror-holding as a primary mechanism driving the Internet’s potentialities in shaping citizens’ attitudes towards government’s performance (p. 4). By the Internet’s mirror-holding function, the author meant that “the Internet holds up a mirror for users to better discern and reflect on how their government is actually performing” (p. 333). In other words, the advent of the Internet has empowered average citizens with very large and diverse amount of information about the general performance of their

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governments, helping them arrive to more accurate judgements regarding the actual performance of governments, as Bailard furthered (p. 334).

In order to empirically investigate the Internet's mirror-holding theorization, Bailard (2012a) employed a multiple level and multiple method approach in examining the influences of Internet penetration on democratic satisfaction. At the country level, where 73 developed democracies and non-democratic countries were studied, the results showed that Internet penetration enhanced democratic satisfaction in established democracies whereas depressed it in non-democratic societies. As for the individual level, Internet users were able to evaluate how democracy is working in their own countries more accurately than non-users. According to the author, the results could be attributed to the quantity and diverse amount of information available online (i.e., a mirror-holding function of the Internet).

In another attempt, Bailard (2012b) conducted a field experiment during the 2010 Tanzanian presidential election examining the extent to which Internet use could shape citizens' perceptions of the fairness and transparency of the electoral procedures adopted by Tanzanian authorities. The results supported the mirror-holding assumption in that the Internet group were less likely to believe in the fairness and objectivity of the election and the recount than the control group. In other words, Internet consumption developed more negative evaluations of government's general performances among citizens.

Given the large and diverse political information that can be easily found through the Internet and social media outlets, the likelihood of a "bottom-up" democratization model has increased. Before the rise of digital media, significant political changes were traditionally associated with the elite factions, such as politicians, military personnel (e.g., Bounce, 2000; Geddes, 1999) and/or wider sociopolitical and cultural structures (e.g., Brownlee et al., 2015; Lipset, 1959). However, the Internet has empowered ordinary

individuals to communicate and organize more effectively and hence to advance certain political outcomes. Undoubtedly, the Arab uprising provides a clear instance proving this argument on the ground. During the Arab Spring, the online public sphere was extensively utilized in disseminating and sharing certain types of photos, information, political grievances, and sensitive documents. Eventually, this encouraged millions of apolitical citizens to occupy main squares in several Arab countries calling for democracy.

To understand the dramatic transformations online media have advanced concerning the formation of a “bottom-up” democratization model (i.e, political change from below), it is important to consider the underlying characteristics distinguishing new media from other traditional media platforms. Firstly, the rise of the Internet has yielded a newly emergent type of communication called “mass self-communication” as Castells (2015, p.6) described. According to the author, it is mass communication since the online content produced is disseminated from many to many, connecting so diverse audiences inside and outside borders of a given country. It is self-communication, Castells continued, since the processes of the production, selection, and interpretation of the digitized content are entirely controlled and shaped by the desires of the senders and receivers involving in the communication process (p.6). By time, online interactive communication has created an autonomous and enlarged online public sphere, undermining the abilities of authoritarian regimes in particular to control over local public opinion (Fung et al., 2013; Habermas, 2006).

Secondly, these new horizontal online networks are more accessible and decentralized when it comes to the flow of communication and information compared to one-to-many vertical media platforms (e.g., radio, television, and newspapers). This is attributed to the very nature of digital communication, as explained by Skoric and Park (2014), where participants enjoy greater levels of



control over the information and communication processes. Therefore, digital media have led to a major shift in citizens' access to information, triggering positive political outcomes especially in authoritarian rules as seen in the Arab Spring. Protests are considered one of these political outcomes, as Ruijgrok (2017) indicated. The author argued that greater access to the Internet facilitated protests in dictatorship regimes through the following four causal mechanisms: a) by decreasing the costs and risks of participation in anti-regimes activities; b) by developing negative attitudes toward government's poor performances, paving the ground for mobilization to occur; c) by providing complete information about the actual size of the protest and numbers of participants, undermining citizens' fears about engaging in protests; d) and by providing diverse information showing regime brutalities, making political organization and mobilization more likely (p. 501-503).

Thirdly, the Internet has been deemed a democratic value changer since it cultivates fundamental democratic values among citizens and hence "nurtures democratic citizenry that does not sit well with authoritarian politics" (Huhe et al., 2018). Relatedly, online media have been playing liberating roles in modern politics since they made political communication and organization easier, enabling ordinary citizens to challenge authoritarian regimes (e.g., Diamond, 2010; Kendzior, 2011; Miswardi, 2015). The above elaborated features distinguishing the Internet from other traditional forms of communication technologies have fundamentally changed the ways by which citizens can engage in politics, shaping the decision-making processes differently. Hence, "this is why governments are afraid of the Internet," as Castells (2015, p. 7) has straightforwardly indicated.

Given this theoretical background, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: Internet consumption increases levels of dissatisfaction with democracy among the participants

H2: Internet use increases levels of dissatisfaction with the general performance of the Egyptian government

### **Window-Opening Function of the Internet**

Providing citizens with mirrors through which they can evaluate the political and economic performances of their government more accurately is not the only mechanism driving the Internet's political influences. Bailard (2012a, 2012b) introduced another causal mechanism called the "window opening" function of the Internet. To elaborate, she argued that the Internet opens up several wide windows in front of citizens, by which they get well informed how democracy works in other nations, especially in established democracies (2012a, p. 191). Unlike traditional media, online media platforms cannot be entirely controlled by state's apparatuses or ruling elites. To elaborate more on this point, Bailard reported that "the decentralized nature of the Internet means that censorship of the Internet will be less tenable for governments than censorship of the traditional media" (2012a, p. 333). Therefore, managing what citizens can watch or learn about other political cultures has been undermined due to the rise of the Internet (Howard, 2010).

The Internet's window-opening function has certain political consequences. Specifically, exposing to a diverse array of information about how the democratic principles and values are transformed into reality, particularly in functioning democracies, develops critical citizens cable of evaluating the positioning of democracy in their countries more precisely (Bailard, 2012a, p. 200).

Therefore, Internet consumption became a crucial factor determining levels of democratic dis/satisfaction among citizens as existing literature has empirically showed. For instance, Bailard (2012b) explored the relation between Internet use and satisfaction with democracy in Bosnia, using a randomized field experiment in which the participants were divided into two groups: Internet group and control group. The author found that Internet users were more

likely to conform to global democratic values than non-Internet users. The findings also showed that the Internet group were more dissatisfied with the quality of democracy adopted in Bosnia than the control group, supporting the window-opining argument.

Additionally, Stoycheff and Nisbet (2014) examined the interplay between Internet use and perceived supply and demand for democracy utilizing data gathered from 34 developing countries. The results indicated that while Internet use was associated with perceived lesser supply of democracy, relying on television for information increased perceptions of greater democratic supply among participants. At the country level, Internet penetration nurtured positive attitudes toward democracy across the countries under study. Moreover, while discussing the main factors encouraging the Arab Spring protests, Howard and Hussain (2011) emphasized the roles played by digital media in keeping the windows opened widely to the world, where young political and tech-savvy activists could communicate with and learn from democracy activists abroad. Digital media, hence, served as a window-opining function which eventually helped advance significant political changes in the Arab world after decades of political stagnation, as the authors furthered.

In addition to the influences of the Internet's window-opining function on internal politics, the globalized nature of the Internet and social media has enlarged the public sphere in a given country beyond national borders. While explaining his theory on the power structure of the public sphere, Habermas (2006) distinguished four types of power: political power, social power, economic power, and media power (p. 418). As for media power, the author emphasized the significant roles played by the technology of mass communications, which boosted the power of media outlets in general and the Internet's political roles in authoritarian societies in particular. To elaborate this point, Habermas posited that "computer-mediated communication in the web can claim unequivocal *democratic* merits only for a special context: It can

undermine the censorship of authoritarian regimes that try to control and repress public opinion” (p. 423). Agreeing, Castells (2009) argued that the Internet has created what he called a “networked communication,” which helped transform the state-citizen power relations undermining the abilities of the state to depress local public opinion or online public sphere (p. 275). The “networked communication,” facilitated by digital media, follows a “logic of connective action,” which is different than the logic of traditional collective action as assumed by Bennet and Segerberg (2012). The authors elaborated the differences between both logics arguing that “connective action networks are typically far more individualized and technologically organized sets of processes” (p. 750). Thus, the mechanisms guiding the logic of connective action “result in action without the requirement of collective identity framing or the levels of organizational resources required to respond effectively to opportunities” as the authors advanced (p. 750).

These sorts of reasoning were proved right in the Arab uprisings, where young, active, and well-educated generations succeeded to gain international attention in support of their political cause through generating a supportive globalized public sphere. Thanks to the Internet’s window-opining function, which distinguishes digital media from traditional ones creating what Castells (2009) called “networked communication.” Also, the globalized nature of the Internet has transformed individual citizens, generating what Lynch (2011) considered “new kinds of citizens.” According to the author, digital communication has empowered ordinary individuals negotiating the legitimacy claimed by the Arab states.

It is important to note that the previously illustrated implications represent only one side of the argument addressing the Internet’s influences on politics; the pessimistic views advocating the digital media’s positive consequences on democracy and democratization processes. However, existing scholarship has drawn attention to some

other negative political consequences that can result from Internet consumption. Slacktivism, for instance, is one of these negative consequences. According to some critics, slacktivism refers to the mere engagement in a low-risk and low-cost online political activities (e.g., Cabrera, 2017; Dennis, 2019; Glenn, 2015; Lee & Hsieh, 2013; Leyva, 2017). Slacktivist online actions include, for example, “liking” certain Facebook pages, “retweeting” given posts on Tweeter, or signing an online petition and so forth. On the long term, slacktivism is deemed harmful for actual political activism since it “satisfies peoples’ motivations to take action but does not really have an effect,” as Lee and Hsieh (2013) stated.

Echo chambers is another example proving the unfavorable political implications associated with frequent online media use. Defined by Baumgaertner (2014), an echo chamber occurs in communication contexts “where peoples’ prior beliefs are ‘echoed back’ giving the impression that their beliefs are correct” (p. 2549). This phenomenon can easily be recognized in online chatrooms, discussions, and communications, which are running mostly among like-minded people. The rise of social media echo chambers can weaken democracy, since it enhances political polarization at the community level on the one hand, and decreases the likelihood of exposure to diverse political views on a given debated issue on the other hand (Baumgaertner, 2014; Justwan et al., 2018; Lynch 2015).

A third manifestation indicating the negative impacts of the internet, which has usually been overlooked by Internet optimists, is that the likelihood of surveillance, censorship, and propaganda practiced by governments has increased. To this end, several scholars have challenged the “liberating technology” argument, emphasizing the potentialities of the Internet as a “repressive technology” that can empower autocratic regimes rather than maintaining democracy and political activism (e.g., Greitens, 2013; Gunitsky, 2015; Kruse et al., 2017; Rod & Weidmann, 2015). In his

controversial book entitled *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, Morozov (2011), for instance, indicated how authoritarian regimes succeeded in turning the great potentials advanced by the Internet into their sides, maintaining their power and undermining democracy. While it is hard for government to practice a complete censorship over the Internet as the author admitted, he contended that the Internet “made propaganda more effective, as government messages can now be spread through undercover government-run blogs” (p. 82). Relatedly, “the proliferation of Web 2.0 services-and especially social networking-has turned “amateur” activists into easier target for surveillance,” as the writer furthered (p. 82). In terms of the critical political roles played by the Internet and online media in the Arab Spring, Morozov (2011) has admittedly stated that his book did not help a lot in explaining what happened in the Arab revolt (p. 897). Accordingly, he made it clear that the ultimate goal of the book was to emphasize the fact that “both journalists and academics spend too much time extolling the positive (i.e. democratization-enhancing) uses of social media and technology, leaving their more repressive uses almost invisible” (p. 897).

Guided by the window-opining theorization, the following assumptions were produced:

H3: Internet use cultivates positive attitudes toward democracy and democratic values

H3 a: Internet use cultivates positive attitudes toward the ideal of democracy

H3 b: Internet consumption enhances negative attitudes toward dictatorship regimes

H3 c: Internet use develops negative attitudes toward human rights violations committed by government

### **The influences of political dissatisfaction on democracy**

Addressing the influences of political dissatisfaction on democratic processes and developments has generated adversary theorizations and accordingly conflicting results. Some scholars argued that having positive attitudes and feelings toward government (i.e., political satisfaction) is inevitable for the development of democracy, and hence the rise of dissatisfaction with democracy is expected to danger democracy (e.g., Almond & Verba, 1963; Stoker, 2006). In their classical work entitled *The Civic Culture*, Almond and Verba (1963) demonstrated that “The state of feeling or political emotion in a country is perhaps the most important test of the legitimacy of its political system” (p. 62).

Other researchers emphasized the roles played by “critical citizens” in maintaining democracy through monitoring how democratic principles are practiced in reality by government (Klingemann, 1999; Norris, 1999a; Nye, 1999). Klingemann (1999), for example, enriched the debate on the underlying factors affecting the quality of democracy by introducing the concept of “dissatisfied democrats.” By dissatisfied democrats, the author referred to certain individuals who believe in democracy as a way of governance, yet they are highly concerned and critical about how democracy is applied by their political system (p. 32). The author moved on confirming that “dissatisfaction does not imply danger to the persistence or furtherance of democracy” (p. 32).

A third tradition, however, went beyond these sharp views, where political dissatisfaction has been seen as either a completely valuable asset or a completely real threat to democracy. Abdelzadeh et al (2015), argued that political reality is very complicated and cannot be fully explained unless the two approaches are utilized in a way that each one complements the other (p. 413). In terms of this debate, the following assumptions were developed:

H4: Dissatisfaction with democracy does not undermine offline or online political activism

- H4 a: Democratic dissatisfaction is not associated with political interest
- H4 b: Democratic dissatisfaction is not correlated with political informational use of the Internet
- H4 c: Democratic dissatisfaction is not correlated with online political expression
- H4 d: Democratic dissatisfaction is not correlated with voting turnout

## Methodology

### Data Source

In order to investigate the aforementioned hypotheses, the study relies on secondary data from a nationally representative survey conducted in Egypt by the Arab Barometer (AB), Wave 4<sup>1</sup>. The survey was fielded in April 2016, providing the chance to investigate the study's main argument: The interplay between Internet use and democratic dis/satisfaction in Egypt after 5 years of the 2011 revolution. The sample was diverse to include Egyptian citizens from different genders (50.6% men and 49.4% women), age groups ( $M=40$  year), marital status (77.5% married), levels of education (21.3% illiterate), work status (46.2% working), religions (95.5% Muslims, 4.5% Christians), and status of political party affiliation (only 0.8% affiliated with political parties). The survey contained a wide battery of question items touching upon several elements relevant to the main purpose of the current work. These items varied to include, for example, the following dimensions: Levels of satisfaction with how democracy works in Egypt, attitudes toward democracy as a way of governance, patterns of Internet and social media consumption, traditional media use, perceived evaluations of government's political and economic

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<sup>1</sup> To read and download the technical report, the original survey, and the SPSS sheet related to Egypt and the Egyptian sample, please visit the Arab Barometer website: <https://www.arabbarometer.org/survey-data/data-downloads/>



performance, political interest, voting behavior, political trust in government's institutions, in addition to a standard set of demographic question items.

## **Measurement**

### ***Independent Variable***

The main independent variable in this paper is Internet use, which was evaluated using the following question item: "On average, how often do you use the internet?" Responses given to answer this question ranged from: 1 (I am online almost all day), 2 (Daily), 3 (Several times a week), 4 (Once a week), 5 (Less than once a week), 6 (I do not use the Internet). To make sure, this measure was reversed for statistical considerations, with higher scores indicative of greater Internet use.

### ***Dependent Variables***

The current work explores the interconnection between Internet use and levels of dis/satisfaction with democracy and with government's performance in today's Egypt (i.e. during el-Sisi's presidency). In addition, it examines whether Internet consumption affects attitudes toward the ideal of democracy as a globally accepted principle or not. Moreover, it investigates the political consequences of democratic dis/satisfaction on one's online and offline political behavior. Given this broad conceptual framework, the dependent variables vary to include the following:

*Democratic dis/satisfaction:* This variable was evaluated employing the following question item: "In your opinion, to what extent is your country democratic?" A scale ranged from 0 (no democracy whatsoever) to 10 (democratic to the greatest extent possible) was provided in answering this question. To be sure, this variable was deemed an independent variable in some instances.

*Dis/satisfaction with government's general performance:* To measure this variable, participants were asked to evaluate the government's

general performance on a scale ranged from 0 (absolutely unsatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied).

*Levels of support the ideal of democracy:* To measure citizens' support the ideal of democracy, the following survey question was chosen: "Which of the three statements is closer to your own opinion: 1. Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government; 2. Under some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable; 3. For people like me, it does not matter what kind of government we have."

*Demands for a democratic system:* To measure this variable, a relevant question item was chosen asking respondents to what extent they agree or disagree to have "A political system governed by a strong authority which makes decisions without considering electoral results or the opinions of the opposition." Responses varied from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree).

*Attitudes toward human rights violations:* This factor was measured by a relevant phrase asking citizens: "To what degree would you agree that the violation of human rights committed by the government in your country is justifiable in the name of promoting security and stability? Responses varied from 1 (completely justified) to 4 (not justifiable at all).

*Political interest:* Political interest was evaluated using a 4-point phrase, asking respondents to what extent they are interested in politics, ranging from 1 (very interested) to 4 (not interested at all).

*Political informational use of the Internet:* Political informational use of the Internet was estimated using a single phrase asking participants whether or not they use the Internet to "Find out about political activities taking place in your country." A dichotomous scale of 1 (yes) and 2 (no) was utilized in answering this question.

*Expression of political opinions on the Internet:* To estimate citizens' willingness to express certain political views on the Internet, a single

phrase was utilized where participants were asked whether they employ the Internet to “Express opinion about political issues.” Responses were 1 (yes) and 2 (no).

*Voting behavior:* Voting turnout was measured by asking participants whether they voted in the last parliamentary elections of 2015 or not. A dichotomous scale consisting of 1 (yes) and 2 (no) was introduced to answer this question.

### **Covariates**

Guided by existing literature (e.g., Hsieh & Li, 2013; Strandberg, 2013; Zhang et al., 2010), certain variables including partisanship, gender, residence, and religion, were statistically controlled. This would help capture the connection between the independent and dependent variables under investigation more accurately.

## **Results**

Before examining the extent to which Internet use has shaped citizens’ satisfaction with democracy in Egypt nowadays, it is first important to explore patterns of Internet consumption and how it is employed for political causes by Egyptian citizens, and then provide a short descriptive analysis for the variables under study. To begin with, the findings in Table 1 illustrate that only a third of Egyptians (32.2%) expose (with varying degrees) to the Internet, whereas the rest of the population (67.8%) do not use it at all.

**Table 1:** Levels of Internet Use among Egyptian Citizens

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
I’m online almost all day	94	7.8
Daily	163	13.6
Several times a week	85	7.1
Once a week	20	1.7
Less than once a week	24	2
I do not use the Internet	814	67.8
Total	1200	100

As for the political use of the Internet, it can be argued that Internet users still employ it for political reasons in today's Egypt as they did during the 2011 and 2013 uprisings. As the results in Table 2 showed, 47% of the participants used the Internet for gathering information about the political activities taking place in the country. In addition, 26.4% of them utilized it in order to express opinions about the political issues discussed in Egypt. Given the socioeconomic transformation and associated hardships Egyptians have been undertaking since the 2011 and 2013 revolts onwards, patterns of the Internet's political use showed above seem revealing and understandable.

**Table 2:** Political Internet Use in Egypt (N= 386)

Use the Internet to find out about political activities	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	181	47
No	205	53
Use the Internet to express opinion about political issues	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	102	26.4
No	284	73.6

Moving to the variables under investigation, Table 3 introduces a general idea on levels of dis/satisfaction with democracy in Egypt and levels of dis/satisfaction with government's performance. In addition, it gives an overview to other variables relevant to the mirror-holding and window-opining functions of the Internet. To start with, Egyptians are not satisfied with either how democracy works in Egypt or with the general performance of their government after 5 years of the 2011 revolt. As showed in Table 3, the mean of democratic satisfaction ( $M= 4.7$ ) and satisfaction with government's general performance ( $M= 4.7$ ) are below the average.

**Table 3:** Descriptive Statistics of Variables under Study with Mean (*M*) and Standard Deviation (*SD*)

<b>Variables</b>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Levels of Internet use	1	6	4.8	1.84
Dis/satisfaction with democracy	0	10	4.7	2.55
Satisfaction with government's performance	0	10	4.7	2.59
Levels of political interest	1	4	3.0	0.95
Public demands for democratic political system	1	3	1.6	0.78

Despite the increasing levels of democratic dissatisfaction and dissatisfaction with the government's general performance, Egyptian citizens still interested in politics and political process ( $M=3$ ). Specifically, the findings indicated that 61% of the respondents expressed varying degrees of interest in politics compared to 39% who showed no interest in politics at all. In addition, the majority of Egyptians remained adherent to democracy as being the most appropriate way of governance. To elaborate, 58% of the participants stated that "Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government," whereas 23.3% said that "Under some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable." Only 18.7% showed no interest in the type of rule they have, stating that "For people like me, it does not matter what kind of government we have."

### **Internet Use and Dis/Satisfaction with Democracy**

A series of Partial Correlation tests were performed in order to examine the potentialities of Internet use in shaping levels of dis/satisfaction with democracy and with government's performance among Egyptian citizens. To begin with, the results demonstrated that Internet use was positively associated with increasing levels of

dissatisfaction with democracy [ $r(785) = 0.07, p = 0.03$ ], supporting H1. In other words, Internet users were more dissatisfied with democracy than non-Internet users. Relatedly, Internet use increased levels of dissatisfaction with government's general performance [ $r(863) = 0.13, p = 0.000$ ], agreeing with H2. Based on these results, the mirror-holding hypothesis is empirically accepted.

In accordance with the Internet's window-opening function, the results revealed that Internet users showed higher levels of support of democracy and democratic system than non-users. To elaborate, Internet use cultivated positive attitudes toward the ideal of democracy [ $r(832) = 0.06, p = 0.05$ ] as predicted in H3 a. In addition, Internet consumption enhanced negative attitudes toward authoritative regimes [ $r(958) = -0.113, p = 0.000$ ], as H3 b assumed. Moreover, frequent exposure to the Internet maintained negative attitudes toward any act of human rights violations committed by government [ $r(811) = -0.06, p = 0.07^2$ ], which supports H3 c.

### **The Consequences of Democratic Dissatisfaction on Political Behavior**

The results elaborated above call for an important question: What are the main consequences of these increasing democratic dissatisfaction, associated with frequent exposure to the Internet, on citizens' political activism and attitudes toward democratic values? The following section is devoted to answer this question. Generally, the findings indicated that democratic dissatisfaction did not undermine political activism either off or online. Specifically, the study found no significant correlations between levels of democratic dissatisfaction and political interest [ $r(1034) = -0.01, p = >0.05$ ] as predicted in H4 a. Additionally, the Independent Samples T-Test presented in Table 4 indicated that there no significant differences in the means of democratic dissatisfaction were found between who

<sup>2</sup> This hypothesis was accepted at a significant level of 0.07.

used the Internet to get informed about political issues and others who did not use it that way, which supports H4 b. Similarly, democratic dissatisfaction did not affect willingness to express personal political opinions on the online sphere [ $p = >0.05$ ], agreeing with H4 C.

**Table 4:** T-Test Showing Differences in levels of Political Activism between Groups

Informational use of the Internet	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>sig (2-tailed)</i>
Yes	181	4.2	-0.92	372	0.3
No	193	4.4			
Online political expression	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>sig (2-tailed)</i>
Yes	101	4.2	-0.59	372	0.5
No	273	4.4			
Voting turnout	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>sig (2-tailed)</i>
Yes	598	5.1	6.1	1063	0.000
No	467	4.2			

Contradicting with H4 d, the Independent Samples T-Test results showed in Table 4 reported that citizens who were not satisfied with how democracy works in Egypt ( $M=4.2$ )<sup>3</sup> tended to abstain from participating in the 2015 parliamentary elections compared to democratically satisfied citizens ( $M=5.1$ ) [ $P= 0.000$ ].

<sup>3</sup> The lower scores are indicative of greater democratic dissatisfaction.

## Discussion

The above findings show how exposure to the Internet has helped shape citizens' evaluations of the quality of democracy in Egypt after 5 years of the 2011 uprising. Collectively, the Internet seems an influential democratizing factor in constructing people's perceptions about the democratic supply and demand in Egypt. To begin with, the results indicated that individual Internet use developed high levels of dissatisfaction with how democracy works in Egypt on the one side, and enhanced negative attitudes about the government's general performance on the other side. These findings can be better understood in terms of the mirror-holding argument, where exposure to diverse media platforms generates more critical views about the system of governance and the quality of democracy in a given society. Similarly, exposing to conflicting personal attitudes questioning the effectiveness of governance on the online sphere enhances citizens' ability to reflect on the performance of their government more accurately.

In the Egyptian case, the findings revealed that the Internet provided individuals with a more objective "mirror" through which they were able to evaluate the quality of democracy and governance performed by incumbent government more precisely. In addition, Egyptians were more likely to trust the interactive and independent resources such as the Internet than state-owned media. More specifically, the findings revealed that only 31% of the participants stated that the press freedom in Egypt is completely guaranteed compared to 69% who reported that the press freedom in Egypt is partially (i.e., guaranteed to a medium or a limited extent) or not guaranteed at all. It is understandable, therefore, why 77.8% of the respondents stated that they did not follow political news through the daily newspapers, whereas 47% reported that they employed the Internet to find out about political activities taking place in the country. Primarily, holding such "mirror" helped cultivate what Elseewi labeled



the “mediated culture,” where ordinary Egyptians could develop certain robust “personal narratives” challenging the “official national narratives” (Elseewi, 2011). Eventually, this made Egyptian citizens more aware of the distance between the level of democracy they already have and the awaited-liberal democracy they had in mind during the 2011 uprising.

These findings are congruent with previous scholarship, which has found positive associations between Internet exposure and perceived lesser democratic supply. For instance, Stoycheff and Nibset (2014) analyzed data collected from 34 developing countries and concluded that exposure to new information and communication technologies enhanced perceptions of lesser democratic supply among citizens. This, in turn, facilitated democracy by cultivating greater democratic demands at the country level as the authors elaborated. In addition, Ceron and Memoli (2016) investigated data collected from 27 European countries and found that consuming news coming from social media platforms was positively correlated with increasing levels of democratic dissatisfaction. The authors attributed the findings to the pluralistic and diverse environment distinguishing interactive social media from other state-controlled mass media or electronic websites, which are often susceptible to regular editorial filtering.

The declining perceptions of democratic supply in Egypt, resulting due to the process of a mirror-holding function of the Internet, have increased the numbers of “dissatisfied democrats”- the phenomenon introduced by Klingemann (1999). Influenced by the infinite “windows” opened widely to the world, due to the Internet’s underlying features, Egypt’s “dissatisfied democrats” were more likely to support the principle of democracy while rejecting dictatorship regimes. Moreover, they strongly condemn any act of human rights violation performed by state’s apparatuses. Previous research has supported these findings, highlighting the political consequences of

digital connectivity with like-minded Internet users, either inside or outside country, on political change. Hussain and Howard (2012), for instance, examined the relationship between digital media use and the likelihood of democratization and regime change during the Arab Spring. The authors demonstrated that digital connectivity associated with Internet diffusion was a causal factor facilitating the formation of social movements and political activism, leading to what they considered a “fourth wave of democratization” in each one of the 22 Arab and Muslim countries investigated in their qualitative study.

Moreover, Bailard (2012a) concluded in her experimental study in Bosnia and Herzegovina that the Internet group were more likely to perceive efficient democratic governance in terms of the global democratic norms and rights applied in advanced democracies than non-Internet users. She attributed these results due to that exposure to the Internet provided citizens with “panoramic windows” updating them with how democracy works in other nations, and hence helping them evaluate the status of democracy in their own countries more accurately. Having such “panoramic windows” helped generate “new citizens” with horizons “extend beyond the nation-state” as Lynch (2011) put it (p.307). Explaining what happened in the Arab Spring, these “new citizens,” the author continued, “demonstrate great impatience with the traditional “red lines” of Arab politics” (p. 307).

Despite the deteriorating democratic supply perceived by Egyptian citizens, as elaborated above, Egypt’s “dissatisfied democrats” still believe in democracy as the best way of governance. Moreover, they are not willing to refrain from political participation or the political process. In detail, the results found no significant correlations between democratic dissatisfaction and the informational use of the Internet, political interest, or online political expression. Nonetheless, democratically dissatisfied citizens were less likely to take part in the parliamentary elections. Taken together, Egypt’s “dissatisfied democrats” can be deemed an added value rather than a

threat to the democratic process in transitional settings such as Egypt, agreeing with some scholars (e.g., Abdelzadeh et al., 2015); Klingemann, 1999; Norris, 1999a; Nye, 1997).

Some limitations to the current work should be noted before concluding. First, as with any secondary resource, the conceptualizations addressing the variables under study were constrained by the original questions included in the Arab Barometer survey (i.e, Wave 4). Therefore, future research is invited to explore the influences of Internet use on democratic dis/satisfaction in Egypt employing more specific question items designed primarily to address predetermined conceptualizations.

Second, the independent variable in the study was the general not the political use of the Internet, and this is due to that the original survey lacked such more specific question items exploring the political use of the Internet in particular. Thus, it would be more revealing for upcoming studies to examine the consequences of the Internet's political use on citizens' evaluation of how democracy works in Egypt.

Finally, given the rapid growth of social media use in Egypt over the last decade, future scholarship is invited to content analyze the actual political views and attitudes expressed and shared among social media users toward the quality of democracy they enjoy and the government's performance. Accordingly, this would broaden our knowledge on how online platforms are exploited for political ends in times of political transitions.

## **Conclusion**

In times of political transition, especially from long-standing dictatorships, democracy is desired by ordinary citizens. Nonetheless, it is not yet consolidated nor installed institutionally. During these critical sociopolitical changes, democratic dissatisfaction can undermine the future of democracy in transitioning communities. Controversially, the current work provided an empirical evidence that

democratic dissatisfaction has been an asset rather than a threat to the Egyptian political scene since 2011 onwards. Relatedly, the Internet has remained a potent democratizing factor in this regard, shaping and reshaping citizens' perceptions about the democratic supply and demand in today's Egypt. In elaboration, frequent exposure to the Internet cultivated negative attitudes toward the quality of democracy practiced by the incumbent government as well as toward its general performance. Furthermore, while Internet consumption generated positive attitudes toward the ideal of democracy, it enhanced negative attitudes toward dictatorships and toward any human rights violations committed by government.

Whereas previous scholarship has emphasized the potentialities of the Internet in generating certain political outcomes, the mechanisms driving these outcomes have not received much attention. Accordingly, two relevant casual mechanisms were utilized in this article for a better understanding of the relationships between Internet exposure and democratic dis/satisfaction in Egypt. The two mechanisms, introduced by Bailard (2012a, 2012b), are as follows: The mirror-holding and window-opining functions of the Internet.

As for the former, the findings showed that Internet users utilized the diverse and relatively unrestricted political information and views shared through online media to evaluate the quality of democracy and government's performance more accurately. Holing such "reflective mirrors," Internet users tended to be less satisfied with the quality of democracy as well as with the general performance of the Egyptian government than non-Internet users.

Concerning to the window-opining mechanism, the results indicated that online media use was positively correlated with increasing democratic demands. Moreover, Internet use motivated citizens to reject any form of dictatorships as well as any kind of human rights violations performed by state's apparatuses. To be sure, these widely opened windows generated growing democratic

aspirations among Egyptian citizens toward democracy and democratic values as practiced in consolidated democracies. These rising democratic aspirations, which have been prevailing Egypt's public sphere despite the passage of five years since the 2011 revolution, can be understood as ordinary Egyptian citizens, seemingly, still believe in their potentialities to change existing power relations whenever needed.

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