

# Tunisia's Media Spring?: New Research Project

 [blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2011/12/12/tunisia-media-spring-new-research-project/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2011/12/12/tunisia-media-spring-new-research-project/)

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*Polis Visiting Research Fellow Fatima el Issawi is just back from her first field investigation in Tunisia, trying to understand how Arab media is coping with the transitional political phase and how Arab journalists are redefining their identity and role. Not only is there a new political environment, but social media is also transforming journalism and political communications. This Polis research project is partly funded by the Open Society Foundation.\* Read her [Tunisia research report here](#). Here are her first thoughts.*



Tunisian journalists cover the new parliament

One of the journalists I met in Tunisia said it is the ‘Media Spring’ in Tunisia. But this young secular journalist was very suspicious of the arrival of moderate Islamists to power in the country, so he thought it might also be the autumn of national politics.

This ‘Media Spring’ means a tricky reconstruction process in which journalists have to rediscover their identity and learn how to practice real journalism, something they feel very excited about.

Another journalist told me: “During the revolution, people used to attack us in the streets while we were covering their demonstrations accusing us of being the agent of the regime. There is a gradual reconciliation going on now between us and our audience, they are finally accepting us and appreciating the efforts we are making to represent their voice, although very late”.

The process of reforming the media sector in Tunisia, especially the former state media, is long and complex: reforming the legislation; tackling the infamous working conditions of poorly-paid journalists; changing the press release culture of newsrooms; learning how to report from the field; how to represent diverse voices and opinions;

and perhaps most of all, learning what it means to be objective and professional when you are used to serving the regime agenda for years.

A journalist who worked since her first years in journalism in the state TV told me with emotion how she reported for the first time from a hostile field, a violent demonstration in which journalists, activists and demonstrators were treated brutally by the security:

“I found myself suddenly in a battlefield, for the first time in my life, I heard gun fire just near me and felt a strange smell, that of a tear gas bomb. I panicked. I was about to lose consciousness when I saw the word “police” just opposite to me. For years it had been the symbol of security for me so instinctively, I found myself hiding behind the policeman near me. Of course, he was the one I should have been fearing as it was the police that were attacking us”.

For this journalist and others I met, it is another job, but it is also another country.

Using case studies and qualitative interviews, our research project, which is in its first phases, aims to provide empirical data which will shed light on “media revolutions” encouraged by the unprecedented political change in the

Arab world. This project will investigate how traditional media are coping with the unfolding crisis and how and if this crisis is changing media practices and values.

Lots of work is required to understand what is going on in the Arab media scene and how it is evolving with the transitional political phase. Such an exciting time, such an exciting research.

\*We welcome any thoughts, suggestions or comments you might have regarding this project. Email us at [polis@lse.ac.uk](mailto:polis@lse.ac.uk) for more information.

You can see some background to the research [in this blog by Polis Director Charlie Beckett](#) from early 2011 when the uprisings began.

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