

ICT and the Democratization Process in North Africa: Tool of Freedom or Instrument of Oppression?

A case study of Tunisia during the Arab Spring and onwards



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Abstract

The events of the Arab Spring sent a wave of revolutions, followed by the start of an early democratization process, through many countries of the Middle East and North Africa. What stood out was the extensive use of ICT, which played a crucial role during the uprisings. Tunisia, the place where it all began, is no exception to this as ICT played a key role during the uprisings of the “jasmine revolution”, whose outcome has led to the early and fragile stages of a democratization process. This thesis investigates the impact the use of ICT has had on the democratization process in Tunisia during the Arab Spring and onwards. It uses Larry Diamond’s book “Developing Democracy: Towards Consolidation” (1999) and what he outlines as the ten components of a liberal democracy as the main theoretical framework that guides the analysis. The empirical material will be analyzed within a case study design. This thesis concludes that ICT has had both positive and negative impacts on Tunisia’s democratization process. However, the positive impacts seem to largely outweigh the negative ones thus far and it could be speculated that ICT will continue being a tool that is mostly conducive towards democracy.

Key words: ICT, Democratization, Revolution, Tunisia, Arab Spring

Words: 9602

List of abbreviations

ATI: Tunisian Internet Agency

CPI: Corruption Perception Index

ICT: Information Communication Technology

MENA: Middle East and North Africa

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

A democracy refers to a system of government and decision-making in which all members of society have the right to participate, vote and enjoy equal rights (Oxford English Dictionary). Nowadays, many countries are considered democracies and most parts of the world have been through a democratization process at some point in their history. Samuel Huntington (1991) identified the existence of several waves of democracy in his work. The first wave of democracy took place in the beginning of the 19th century and the second wave transpired after the end of the Second World War. The third wave started in the 1970's and the world witnessed Latin America, Asia, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union taking steps towards democratization (Diamond 1999:2).

However, the Middle East and North Africa region seemed to have been left largely untouched by any of these waves, as no form of a democratization process had been detected in any of the countries. In their annual report, Freedom House classified 78% of all countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) as "not free", 17% as "partly free" and only 6% as "free" in 2010. According to Freedom House's ranking system, a country classified as "not free" is characterized by the absence of basic political rights and the absence of basic civil liberties. In 2009-2010, the MENA region had the worst freedom ratings worldwide (Freedom House 2010:11).

This finally changed when a wave of revolutionary protests and demonstrations started sweeping through the countries of among others Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Jordan and Algeria in December 2010. It all started with the self-immolation of fruit vendor Mohamed Bouazizi in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid. His actions, driven by chronic unemployment and the repeated abuse he suffered from the police sparked a national outrage (Freedom House). This marked the start of a much talked about democratization process in North Africa and the Middle East, commonly referred to as the "Arab Spring". The goal of

these protests was to overthrow the authoritarian government in order to eventually achieve democracy, fight the long-standing political corruption and draw some attention to the shady political, social and economic situation of the countries (Howard et al. 2011:2).

The events that occurred during the Arab Spring garnered a lot of attention for many different reasons. The fact that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) was extensively used as a part of the revolutionary protests became a much talked about aspect of the revolution. The Internet in general and especially social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and Daily motion ended up playing a central role in the uprisings (Howard et al. 2011:2). ICT, which includes all forms of information and communication technology such as the Internet, social media, cellphones, computers, television and wireless networks, have since started being hailed as the new “power tools” of contemporary cyber activism (Lynch 2011:306). It has opened new doors for the citizens, given them the opportunity to freely express themselves and gave them a platform to speak up and make a change collectively. This has turned into a global phenomenon that has now been observed in many different countries. It has also sparked a global debate about the relationship between democracy and ICT. Has ICT helped trigger democratization processes? Does ICT enhance and is conducive to democracy? Now that the novelty of the revolution is fading away it leaves space for a more critical examination of the situation.

Tunisia has long been considered to be among the more “progressive” and promising countries in North Africa. However, before the events of the Arab Spring, it was consistently classified as “not free” by Freedom House. On a scale of 0 to 7 (0 being the best and 7 being the worst), Tunisia’s overall grade was 6; it received 5 for civil liberties and 7 for political rights (Freedom House). Before being ousted in 2010, president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali had been ruling the country since 1987. For decades, he won the tightly controlled “elections” with usually about 90% of the votes. He was notorious for regularly imprisoning journalists, bloggers, human rights activists and political opponents. Tunisia was also well known for having a very strictly controlled media environment characterized by heavy censoring, state run media and overall very little freedom of speech, freedom of the media and freedom of the net (Freedom House). Ben Ali’s authoritarian rule led to rampant corruption. In 2009, Transparency International gave Tunisia a score of 4.2 in their annual corruption perceptions index (CPI), where 0 is the worst and 10 the best possible score (Transparency International). Since the events of the Arab Spring, a rather impressive improvement has been observed. Tunisia is currently ranked as “partly free”, with an overall grade of 3 as well as 3 for civil liberties and 3 for political rights, which seems to indicate the start of some positive changes (Freedom House).

1.2 Aims and Significance

The main aim of my research is to analyze the impact the use of ICT has had on the democratization process in Tunisia. The purpose is to determine what role it played during and after the events of the Arab Spring, whether and how it has supported Tunisia's steps towards democracy and assess if it has mostly been used as a tool of freedom or an instrument of oppression during the Arab Spring and onwards.

The media has covered the events of the Arab Spring and the democratization process that followed in the MENA region extensively over the past few years. Seeing the revolutions unfold the one after the other in a region that was previously so closed off and watching the countries take their first steps towards eventually becoming a democracy was fascinating. The motivation to undertake this research comes thus from a strong interest in the subject. The purpose of this research is however to examine a different angle of this subject than what has often been read in mainstream media and carry out a deeper research. Overall, I hope to contribute to the debate about the crucial role that ICT plays in revolutions, mass mobilizations, democratization processes and modern society in general.

1.3 Research Questions

The main, over-arching research question for my thesis is: "What has been the impact of the use of ICT on the process of democratization in Tunisia during the Arab Spring and onwards?"

The "sub-research questions" are as follows: "What role did ICT play during and after the Arab Spring in Tunisia?", "How does ICT help convey democracy in Tunisia?" and "In what ways can ICT be considered a tool of freedom or an instrument of oppression in Tunisia?" These sub-research questions will not be answered directly and individually; their aim is to guide the research and provide support in order to answer the main research question.

1.4 Delimitations

This is a broad subject and some decisions have been made considering the boundaries and limitations in order to be able to narrow it down and carry out a more focused research. ICT is a broad term that includes all forms of information and communication technology including the Internet, social media, telecommunication, wireless networks and television. I don't necessarily exclude any form of ICT in my research but will however mainly be focusing on the use of Internet and social media since they are the most relevant when studying the Arab Spring. As previously mentioned, this has turned into a global phenomenon but the focus lies solely on Tunisia and the events that occurred during the Arab Spring and onwards, since this area has been at the center of the debate and an excellent example of the role of ICT during a revolution and during a democratization process. The "time frame" is thus from the start of the Arab Spring (2010) up until today.

1.5 Disposition

The thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter consists of the introduction, which includes the background, aims and significance, research questions, delimitations and the disposition of the thesis. The second chapter is about the methods, which incorporates the research design, case study, data collection and data analysis as well as the strengths and limitations. The third chapter is the literature review, which is divided into two parts: "proponents-tool of freedom" and "opponents-tool of oppression". The first part is categorized into three separate sub-parts: platform for political discussion, creation of international political debate and diffusion of democratic ideas. The second part is categorized in two sub-parts: heavy censorship and detention of cyber activists. This will be followed by my fourth chapter, which consists of a presentation and a motivation of my theoretical framework. The fifth chapter consists of my analysis, which is divided into four parts. The first part is called "freedom of expression and channels of representation", the second part "access to independent media and information sources", the third part "protection of citizens from torture and detention" and the fourth part "free and fair elections". The sixth and last chapter sums up my conclusions, which incorporates a summary of my findings and a discussion as well as suggestions for further research.

2 Methods

2.1 Research Design

The research will be carried out in a qualitative way, since the aim is to focus on understanding the context, people, interaction and behavior in order to understand, explain and thus be able to interpret (Bryman 2012:379). The point of a qualitative study is to observe holistically and comprehensively and understand a phenomenon in its context, which feels appropriate for this research (Bryman 2012:186). A deductive approach will also be adopted, since theory will be guiding the research in a “top down” approach; from general to specific. The case study design, which is composed of a single case study of Tunisia during the Arab Spring and onwards, gives the opportunity to carry out an intensive analysis of a single case (Bryman 2012:66).

2.2 Case Study

The choice of doing a single case study of Tunisia during the Arab Spring and onwards will enable an in depth analysis of the impact that ICT has had on the democratization process, and lead to a thorough overview of the situation in the country (Bryman 2012:66). It is an intrinsic case study since “the researcher wants a better understanding of this particular case” (Punch 2005:144). Tunisia and the context of the Arab Spring were chosen because of the fact that it is a prime example of a country where ICT has played a crucial role during the revolution as well as afterwards during the early stages of the democratization process, and where the impacts have both been negative and positive. Tunisia was also the first country where revolutions took place and has also been

regarded as one of the more progressive and promising countries in the MENA region, adding to its interest.

2.3 Data collection and data analysis

The research is based on various types of data: books, academic articles and reports from various institutions, which constitutes the empirical foundation of the research. A secondary analysis of the data collected by these other researchers and institutions will be carried out. This will enable the generation of new interpretations, which in turn allows for a more in-depth analysis (Bryman 2012:311). The theoretical framework will also play a pivotal role in the interpretation of the data.

2.4 Strengths and limitations

A limitation that comes with choosing to do qualitative research is the fact that it can be too subjective and too generalizing (Bryman 2012:405). This applies especially to case studies since the findings usually cannot be generalized or applied to many different cases. Quantitative research tends to be very transparent, which is an advantage qualitative research does not have (Bryman 2012:195). A part of this research is also based on data coming from the Internet and social media platforms, which could compromise the credibility and authenticity of the material. Adopting a critical attitude towards the nature of the sources used is thus crucial. The use of secondary data, instead of primary data, allows for new interpretations but might also lack the insider's understanding that is provided when using primary data (Bryman 2012:587). However, a qualitative approach with a single intrinsic case study seems to be the most fitting method to carry out this research and answer the research question.

3 Literature review

The purpose of the literature review is to summarize and give an overview of the current literature on ICT, the Arab Spring and Tunisia. Identifying trends and gaps as well as classifying, categorizing and comparing the literature has led to gaining a deeper and more balanced knowledge on the subject that has helped to develop the research questions.

The trends in the literature tend to divide themselves in two categories: “proponents” of the use of ICT and “opponents” of the use of ICT. Proponents argue that ICT played a crucial role during the uprisings of the Arab Spring and was mainly used as a “tool of freedom”. It was used as a platform of communication and organization, helped raise awareness about the political situation in the MENA region, helped spread democratic ideas across borders and thus encouraged and supported the revolutions and the democratization process. Opponents argue that the role of ICT should not be idealized since it can also be used in favor of authoritarian regimes as a way of strengthening existing power relations and counter acting democracy movements.

3.1 Proponents - tool of freedom

3.1.1 Platform for political discussion

ICT, especially social media, played an instrumental role in the support and the success of the revolutionary protests in Tunisia. Bertot, Jaeger&Grimes (2010) argue that social media has four major strengths: collaboration, participation, empowerment and time (Bertot, Jaeger&Grimes 2010: 266). Also referred to as “cyber activism”, it allowed the mobilization of collective action by creating an online community, which turned out to be a crucial part of the revolution (Eltantawy&Wiest 2011:1207). Activists, usually young tech-savvy users, used social media and other platforms of online communication as a way of creating an online community where supporters and followers could interact with each other (Eltantawy&Wiest 2011:1213). It allowed users to discuss the political situation, talk about corruption, democracy and revolution and otherwise connect and share ideas (Eltantawy&Wiest 2011:1207). Like-minded people were able to find each other and bond over their shared ideas (Lynch 2011:304). This had

never really been possible before because of the heavy censorship exercised by the state and the very little freedom of expression this had led to. Most people were afraid to express themselves and share their political opinions. ICT gave them the chance to voice their opinions with a certain degree of anonymity and safety. This created a big community that supported and encouraged each other in their fight against the authoritarian state.

It was also used as a way of organizing mass protests, as it was used to spread information about the time and place in order to gather as many people as possible. Many took to Facebook to create and organize events and use the different platforms to invite people and spread the word. Protestors could communicate in ways the state could not control (Howard&Hussain 2011:32).

3.1.2 Creation of international political debate

The state run media in Tunisia has always been notoriously strict about what was being reported and shared with the rest of the country and the rest of the world. Many citizens were angry about the censorship and felt that the political corruption, the violence and the state's abuse were never acknowledged since international media was not able to report on it. This changed with the increased use of ICT since the state was no longer able to control what was being shared on social media and other Internet based platforms. It enabled every citizen to report, publish and broadcast information, which led to a democratization of the media (Bertot, Jaeger&Grimes 2010:266). This created the notion of "citizen journalism", where citizens were able to report when the traditional state-run media failed (Bertot, Jaeger&Grimes 2010:269).

A video and pictures of Mohammed Bouazizi setting himself on fire in protest against Tunisia's corruption and economic situation was shared on YouTube. Pictures of the protests and police violence went viral. Hashtags such as #tunisia, #jan14, #sidibouazid or #revolution were massively used on Twitter (Lotan et al. 2011:1375). In these examples social media and the Internet in general were used to draw attention on what was going on and generate international attention.

Most of these stories were picked up by international media outlets such as Al-Jazeera, CNN or BBC, which finally shed some light on the true situation of the country and allowed for the news to spread all around the world (Howard&Hussain 2011:35). Documenting and sharing all these atrocities and critical information about the government increased the international attention and having it picked up by big Western news sites helped raise awareness (Howard et al. 2011:2). The regime was exposed and it created an international outrage beyond the state's control (Lynch 2011:305).

3.1.3 Diffusion of democratic ideas

Howard et al. (2011) argue that social media played a key role in spreading democratic ideas across international borders. A “domino” effect has been observed concerning how the events seemed to spread from country to country. The Arab Spring spread like a wave across Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, Algeria and Jordan, among others. Howard&Hussain (2011) call this phenomenon a “cascade” that went from Tunis to Cairo, Sana’a, Amman and Manama and inspired people in Casablanca, Damascus, Tripoli and many other cities (Howard&Hussain 2011:35). The authors argue that Twitter is one of the reasons why the protests spread from city to city and from country to country. Many people Tunisia were very active on Twitter during the revolutions, sharing what was happening, exchanging information and connecting with people outside of their country. The events and protests in Tunisia inspired the largest protests Cairo had seen in thirty years (Howard et al. 2011: 9). This installed the idea of the possibility of a successful revolution in neighboring countries, which could partially explain the amount of revolutions that followed in other MENA countries (Howard et al. 2011:3). These information cascades also helped break the “wall of fear” that kept certain citizen silent because they were worried about failure and state repression, and it helped it turn into a broader movement (Lynch 2011:305).

All in all, it is rather clear that ICT in itself has not created the desire for political change and has not created these revolutions. But it is a powerful tool that democracy advocates and activists have managed to use to their advantage during the uprisings (Howard et al. 2011:5).

3.2 Opponents - tool of oppression

Contrary to popular beliefs, ICT is not only something authoritarian governments fear or feel threatened by; it can also be a tool that creates new opportunities for corrupt behavior. Many “skeptics” argue that ICT does not necessarily support democracy movements and has a way of both empowering and disempowering (Aouragh&Alexander 2011:1353). I can actually be used as a powerful instrument of oppression, a way to strengthen existing power relations and allow for further manipulation. This part gathers and analyzes literature that argues that in many cases, ICT “enhances the power of the rulers over the ruled” (Bertot, Jaeger&Grimes 2010:267).

3.2.1 Heavy censorship

Arab regimes are famous for having developed various techniques in order to maintain their power and their control. This includes among others surveillance, torture, abuse, censorship and large military apparatus (Lynch 2011:305). The events of the Arab Spring were in many ways the start of a pathway towards democracy, and the role ICT played was crucial. But it can also be argued that it has had ambiguous effects on specific mechanisms of authoritarian state power and that those same tools that played such a big part in the revolutions can easily be used against citizens to strengthen surveillance, censorship and repression capabilities.

Heavy Internet censoring is something authoritarian Arab states are very familiar with. Since the birth of the Internet these states have been using many different techniques to censor and control what the population would have access to. Anything deemed “politically incorrect”, “damaging” or that could encourage public activism or inspire ideas of a more democratic society would immediately be blocked. The different techniques include technical blocking, filtering, takedowns, monitoring, induced self-censorship and search result removal (Subramanian 2012:16). Tunisia has for years had their well-known “ATI” (Tunisian Internet Agency), which regulates the country’s Internet access and takes care of all the censorship (Breuer&Groshek 2014:31). It was used to intercept and check the content of emails, blocking foreign media, the regular blocking of social media and all video sharing platforms, the takedown of blogs that had too many visitors and resulted in many websites coming up with a fake “404 file not found” sign (Breuer&Groshek 2014:31). This created a barrier of fear for many years and kept a tight grip on what was accessible online.

One of the most obvious “repression mechanisms” the states have used as a response to the revolutions was a sharp increase in censorship, with some impressive “Internet black outs”, as a way of reminding the citizens who is in power. After the first protests went down in Tunisia, Cairo responded in January 2011 with a “globally unprecedented” countrywide, near- complete shutdown of the Internet and mobile phone network (Lynch 2011:305). 93% of the Egyptian population was completely disconnected from the Internet (Subramanian 2012:16). The move was so bold and something that had never been seen before and was referred to as an “Internet kill switch” since the government seemed to have the ability to switch off a country’s entire Internet with one simple move (Subramanian 2012:17).

As news of the Arab Spring spread around the world, this pattern of repression started showing up in other countries as well. Chinese authorities responded to the events of the Arab Spring with massive amounts of censorship, arrests and an increased control over the Internet. Russia’s state controlled media

emphasized the amount of chaos the Arab Spring had created, the clear underlying message being that similar demands for political reform in Russia would not be met with positive results. Even several countries in Africa went to great lengths to ensure that any movements for democratization would be suppressed. (Puddington 2012:1)

3.2.2 Detention of cyber activists

The government in Tunisia and other Arab countries is notorious for having arrested many bloggers, activists and journalists following the revolutions. Often, they were tracked down via their online presence and faced physical abuse, violence and long sentences in prison (Howard et al. 2011:7). Strings of arrests were made in 2011 as a response to the protests and specifically targeted the groups deemed the most threatening towards the state. This was a deliberate attempt of the government to gain control over the protests and install fear in order to counter act the start of the democratization process (Wagner 2011:1296).

After seeing how powerful of a tool ICT had been during the revolutions, security services started using Twitter and Facebook themselves in order to create fake profiles, monitor online activity, track down prominent activists, identify regime opponents and anticipate the next movements or revolutions that activists were planning (Howard&Hussain 2011:32). Border police also regularly demanded to see people's private Facebook pages in order to reveal possible political activity (Lynch 2011:306). The Internet was now being used as a tool to identify and punish activists (Lynch 2011:305). According to Reporters Without Borders, Tunisia and most Arab countries remain an unsafe place for journalists as they are often still persecuted (Reporters Without Borders).

To conclude, the literature helped establish the fact that ICT played a major role during the events that went down during the Arab Spring. It is a powerful tool that can be used to communicate, share, connect and organize. It has played a significant role in mobilizing large amounts of people, alerting foreign media of the events happening in the country as well as spreading democratic ideas and ideas of revolution across borders to countries all over the MENA region that were inspired and encouraged by what their neighbors had achieved. ICT was not the reason in itself that triggered these revolutions but it is an important "tool of freedom" that can be used in favor of the protesters and that supports today's cyber activism. On the other hand, ICT can also easily be transformed into an instrument of oppression by authoritarian governments. As a way of protecting themselves and fending off the threat of a possible democratization process, states have used ICT as a way of creating even greater censorship and complete Internet black outs in order to stop the movements. ICT was also used as a way

to punish activists by tracking them down and sentencing them to jail time. ICT is used as a part of a power game where authoritarian governments demonstrated how much power they still had despite all the revolutions. The previous literature on the subject did however leave me wondering how ICT had impacted the actual democratization process in Tunisia.

4 Theoretical framework

4.1 Presentation theoretical framework

4.1.1 Definitions

The theoretical framework for my thesis is mainly based on the book “Developing Democracy: Towards Consolidation” by Larry Diamond (1999). The book is an evaluation of the state of democracy at the end of the 20th century. Redefining the term “democracy” in order to evaluate the progression is central, as well as questions surrounding the “third wave of democracy” and the possibility of a fourth wave of democracy.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a democracy is a “ government by the people” in which all citizens are involved in the decision-making process by having the right to vote. It also entails ”the principle of fair and equal treatment of everyone in a state, institution, organization”, where ”all citizens have equal rights, ignoring hereditary distinctions of class or rank, and the views of all are tolerated and respected” (Oxford English Dictionary).

According to Diamond, democracy is the best form of government since it has shown to be optimal concerning the protection of human rights, the protection of the environment, inciting economic growth and declining the amount of violent conflicts, among others (Diamond 1999:2). The author also describes democracy as being instrumental for freedom in three different ways. Firstly, holding free and fair elections requires the existence of a certain amount of political rights of expression, organization and opposition. Secondly, it enhances the opportunity for people to choose the laws under which they live. Lastly, it is conducive to citizens being self-governing by facilitating moral autonomy. All in all, democracy promotes human development by providing the opportunity for citizens to protect and advance their shared interests (Diamond 1999:3).

The author introduces the terms “electoral democracy” and “liberal democracy”. A country qualifies as an electoral democracy when regular, competitive, multi party elections with universal suffrage are held, as well as minimum levels of freedom (of speech, the press etc...) are being met. Electoral democracies are a rather basic form of democracy that is relatively easily achieved since elections are more or less the only criteria and the required levels of freedom are rather minimal (Diamond 1999:10).

The concept of liberal democracy is central in Diamond’s work. A liberal democracy has the elements previously presented of an electoral democracy. Additionally, a liberal democracy requires the absence of a reserved sphere of power for the military or other actors not accountable to the electorate. Vertical accountability of the rulers to the ruled as well as horizontal accountability of officeholders to one another is necessary in order to constrain executive power and protect constitutionalism, legality and the deliberative process. Political and civic diversity as well as individual and group freedoms must be supported in order to allow opposing interests and values to be expressed and represented consistently. Another important part of a liberal democracy is the rule of law. Legal rules are to be applied fairly, irrespectively of class, status or power; all citizens have political and legal equality. (Diamond 1999:11)

Diamond also identifies another form of democracy, which he refers to as a “pseudo-democracy” or “non-democracy”. These types of regimes are democratic in a minimal way but not purely authoritarian either. They present certain characteristic of a democracy such as the organization of elections and the existence of several different political parties but lack aspects of freedom and fairness in those elections. They tolerate other parties, which differentiates them from authoritarian parties, but the ruling party usually cannot be taken away from the power and might make use of media control or other forms of corrupt behavior to deny opposing parties a fair chance in the elections. These pseudo-democracies usually mask authoritarian domination. (Diamond 1999:15)

Diamond also describes democracy as a “developmental phenomenon”. Whether a democracy is long standing or recently established, it can always be improved and become even fairer, more open, more efficient and thus more democratic. The fate of democracy is thus open ended since it can evolve and move in a different direction at any time. But a democracy can become more liberal, inclusive or participatory just as much as a democracy can become more abusive, corrupt or exclusive. Especially if left un-stimulated, a democracy can decay and eventually disappear (Diamond 1999:18).

4.1.2 Conditions for liberal democracy

Diamond outlines ten central components that he believes are to be achieved by a country in order to be defined as a liberal democracy. They are as follows:

- Elected officials control the state and its key decisions
- Executive power is constrained
- Electoral outcomes are uncertain since a significant opposition exists and everyone has the right to form a party and participate in elections if they fulfill the necessary criteria
- Cultural, ethnic, religious and minority groups are allowed to express their interests in the political process and also have the right to practice their culture and speak their language
- Citizens have the choice between multiple channels for expression and representation that are not only political parties but also diverse and independent associations that they have the freedom to join or form
- Citizens have unrestricted access to their alternative sources of information, including independent media that is not run by the state
- Individuals have a significant amount of freedom of belief, opinion, discussion, speech, publication, assembly, demonstration and petition
- All citizens are politically equal under the law
- Individual and group liberties are effectively protected by an independent, nondiscriminatory judiciary, whose decisions are enforced and respected by other centers of power
- The rule of law protects citizens from unjustified detention, exile, terror, torture and undue interference in their personal lives not only by the state but also by organized non-state and anti-state forces.

4.2 Motivation theories

I have chosen to focus on the ten conditions for liberal democracy that Diamond outlines since it provides me with a clear guideline for my analysis. Out of the ten conditions I have chosen to narrow it down to the five of them that felt the most relevant for the case of Tunisia. I have thus chosen to focus solely on the following conditions for my analysis: citizens have the choice between multiple channels for expression and representation that are not only political parties but also diverse and independent associations that they have the freedom to join or form; citizens have unrestricted access to their alternative sources of information, including independent media that is not run by the state; individuals

have a significant amount of freedom of belief, opinion, discussion, speech, publication, assembly, demonstration and petition; the rule of law protects citizens from unjustified detention, exile, terror, torture and undue interference in their personal lives not only by the state but also by organized non-state and anti-state forces; electoral outcomes are uncertain since a significant opposition exists and everyone has the right to form a party and participate in elections if they fulfill the necessary criteria. Using these five conditions and linking them to the case of Tunisia will help me examine and analyze the impact ICT has had on the democratization process during the Arab Spring and onwards, since it can be argued Tunisia's ultimate goal in the future would be to become a liberal democracy. ICT was a crucial part of the revolution, but how has it impacted Tunisia's chances of becoming a liberal democracy?

The decision to use Larry Diamond's work as the main part of the theoretical framework comes from the fact that he is a leading scholar in the field of democracy studies. His book "Developing Democracy: Towards Consolidation" is a well-known book in the field as well as one of his most famous pieces of work. What initially led to Diamond's work is the fact that I was looking to integrate liberal democracy in my theoretical framework. Liberal democracy is the most complete, balanced form of democracy that is often viewed as being the ultimate form of democracy to achieve that many countries strive for, which felt compatible with the direction of this research.

5 Analysis

The goal of the Arab Spring's revolutions was to overthrow the corrupt government of Tunisia in order to be able to eventually achieve a democracy. According to Diamond, in order to be a proper liberal democracy; which is arguably the most desired form of democracy, a country has to fulfill certain components. In this research, it will be narrowed down to the five components that seemed the most relevant for the case of Tunisia and the theoretical framework will be linked to the empirical material in order to carry out an analysis and determine the impact of ICT on the democratization process in Tunisia.

5.1 Freedom of expression and channels of representation

According to Diamond (1999), in a liberal democracy all individuals should have a significant amount of freedom of belief, opinion, discussion, speech, publication, assembly, demonstration and petition. Additionally, citizens should have the choice between multiple channels for expression and representation that are not only political parties but also diverse and independent associations that they have the freedom to join or form.

Up until the uprising of the Arab Spring, Tunisia had notoriously been very strict on the amount of freedom its citizens were allowed concerning speech, discussion, opinion and all other types of freedom previously mentioned. Tunisia was rated by Freedom House as "not free" for many years in a row and received the alarming grade of 6 regarding their overall freedom (Freedom House). The government had many different strategies to make sure their citizens would not be able to have the freedom to express themselves, online or otherwise, in order to keep Ben Ali's rule intact. Their multilayered Internet censorship apparatus was one of the world's most repressive. All of Tunisia's Internet traffic was controlled by the ATI, which used software to block URL's and entire domains. Internet Service Providers were instructed to block undesirable content such as

expressions of political opposition to the government or discussions of human rights. Heavy filtering techniques were used to mainly target websites such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. Keyword filtering was also used frequently to censor content. Blog entries would be taken down after being published and search engines filtered the ones that did not align with the Tunisian government. The only way for Tunisians to access censored websites was to use proxies and anonymizers. However, the government often blacklisted proxies as well as tools or technology that enabled users to avoid the government's controls and users risked some heavy repercussions if they were caught using them. In 2011, Freedom House rated the freedom on the net in Tunisia as 81 on a scale of 0 to 100, 100 being the worst. Freedom House's "Freedom of the Net" report of 2013 outlines the ten most commonly used types of Internet control which includes blocking and filtering, cyber attacks against regime critics, physical attacks, surveillance, new laws on online speech, forced deletion of content, blocking social media and other platforms as well as shutting down the internet and mobile services, all of which Tunisia had made use of (Kelly et al. 2013).

This came to a change during the events of the Arab Spring. The use of ICT created new opportunities and opened new doors for Tunisians to express themselves, which played an instrumental role during and after the revolution and thoroughly changed Tunisian society. ICT generated the opportunity to create a platform for political discussion. An online community was built where subjects related to politics, democracy, human rights and the revolution could finally be discussed freely on forums, blogs and social media platforms. People could interact with each other, share their ideas and support each other. Women were also able to participate in the discussion, which empowered and included a part of the population that had often been over-looked (Howard&Hussein 2011:42). This aspect of ICT led to the increase of freedom of speech, opinion, discussion and belief.

ICT also allowed for the mobilization of collective action since people were able to find others that shared similar ideas and join forces (Eltantawy&Wiest 2011:1207). This created a big community that supported and encouraged each other in their fight against the authoritarian state. It was used as a medium to organize mass protests, as it was used to spread information about the time and place in order to mobilize as many people as possible. Data has proved that a spike in conversations about topics such as "democracy" or "revolution" was recorded on social media platforms such as Twitter before a mass protest took place (Howard et al, 2011:3). Many people also took to Facebook to create and organize events and use the different platform to invite people and spread the word. Protestors could communicate in ways the state could not control and it also assisted in discussing and developing strategies to overthrow the president (Howard&Hussain 2011:32). ICT changed the tactics of democratization movements and helped support the creation of a movement that helped put an

end to the old regime's habits. This aspect of ICT increased the freedom of demonstration, petition and assembly.

All in all, it can be argued that the use of ICT during the Arab Spring had a positive impact on increasing the amount of freedom of belief, opinion, discussion, speech, publication, assembly, demonstration and petition as well as the choice between multiple channels for expression and representation for Tunisian citizens. This in turn had a positive impact on the democratization process since it has brought Tunisia a step closer to fulfilling the required conditions.

5.2 Access to independent media and information sources

Another characteristic of a liberal democracy is that citizens have unrestricted access to alternative sources of information, including independent media that is not run by the state.

“We could finally say all we wanted, we could interview any political figure we wanted, we could even slam any of them. We were free.” Those were the words of a reporter after the fall of Ben Ali (el-Issawi 2012:1). Since the 2011 uprisings, the Tunisian media has undergone a drastic change. Prior to the revolution, the media landscape in Tunisia was under an extremely tight control. The content was state run and extremely restricted, Tunisian media was even amongst the most heavily censored in the Arab world (el-Issawi 2012:3). The print media was divided in three groups: the ones owned by the state, the ones owned by the ruling party and those that were “privately owned” but had close ties to the president and the regime (el-Issawi 2012:4). Broadcast media consisted of two channels dedicated to reporting on the president and his family's activities (el-Issawi 2012:4). The Agency for External Communication, a part of the ministry, had the task of promoting the image of the regime in international media as well as conducting pro-regime propaganda abroad (el-Issawi 2012:4). The Tunisian Internet Agency (ATI) was responsible for censoring and monitoring the activity, especially that of political nature, on the Internet (el-Issawi 2012:5).

The use of ICT during the Arab Spring enabled the development of what is referred to as “citizen journalism” (Bertot, Jaeger&Grimes 2010:269). Citizens were able to report on events happening in the country via social media and other Internet based platforms without the usual censorship that came with the traditional state-run media. ICT gave citizens a new opportunity to decide for themselves what was being reported instead of leaving it up to the mainstream media that would most likely manipulate the coverage and ignore the burning issues. ICT enabled for everything to be recorded and reported instantly. Pictures, posts and tweets were immediately shared on social media and spread like wildfire. Hash tags, geo locations and keywords were used on Twitter. Pictures were shared on Facebook and videos were uploaded to YouTube. Blog posts were written and shared on all different platforms (Eltantawy&Wiest2011:1215). This citizen journalism attracted a lot of attraction worldwide, and many international media outlets picked up on the stories and published them, finally shedding some light on what was really happening in the country (Howard&Hussain 2011:35). This sparked an international outrage that the state could not control and generated a lot of support towards the Tunisian population (Lynch 2011:305).

It has since transitioned from being a “closely controlled tool of the regime” to more closely resembling the “free voice of a democratic society” (el-Issawi 2012:3). Nowadays, the media enjoys a greater level of freedom. The ATI has rebranded itself in an agency focused on promoting the openness of the Internet, legal reforms concerning the media were introduced and journalists are under less pressure and can express themselves and report with more freedom (el-Issawi 2012:7). All in all, the freedom of expression within Tunisian media has improved since the revolution. Reporters without Borders, in their annual Press Freedom Index, rated Tunisia as 133 on 180 countries in 2014. That is an impressive improvement compared to the rating given in 2010: 164 out of 180 countries (Reporters without Borders 2014). The use of ICT during the revolution is partly to thank for these changes.

It should be noted that despite the major progress that has been achieved, it is a complex transition and even though a free and unbiased media landscape is in the works, it is a battle that has not been won yet. Bias, manipulation, intimidation and restrictions are still present but it is a far cry from the strict control that was previously applied (el-Issawi 2012:1). The use of ICT was a big support in enabling and supporting this change and impacted the first step towards a free media landscape in a positive way.

5.3 Protection of citizens from torture and detention

Furthermore, Diamond argues that the rule of law in a liberal democracy should protect citizens from unjustified detention, exile, terror, torture and undue interference in their personal lives not only by the state but also by organized non-state and anti-state forces.

Tunisia, as many other Arab countries, is well known for persecuting its citizens for various reasons. Journalists, bloggers and political activists are usually the main target, as they were deemed “dangerous” for the state. In their annual report of 2011, Amnesty International described the situation in 2011 as “those who openly criticized the government or exposed its human rights violations continued to be harassed, placed under intensive surveillance, unjustly prosecuted, and physically assaulted” (Amnesty International 2011). For example, in 2012 Jabeur Mejri was arrested and sentenced to seven and a half years in prison for posting cartoons of Prophet Muhammed on Facebook. He spent two years in prison for publishing content “liable to cause harm to public order and morality”, “insulting others through public communication networks” and “assaulting public morals” and was only recently released (Global Voices). Another example is that of Zouhair Yahyaoui, the first Tunisian cyber activist that openly criticized Ben Ali’s corrupt regime on his website. The authorities tracked him down and sentenced him to prison where he was tortured and eventually passed away from his injuries (Global Voices). The corruption of the police was wide spread and the amount of arrests or torture performed on citizens has been hard to keep track of. Although there do not seem to be any clear numbers available, in Freedom House’s “Freedom on the Net” report of 2011, 2012 and 2013 it states “bloggers/ICT users arrested: yes”, indicating this has been happening regularly over the years (Freedom House).

During the revolution, the police noticed what a crucial role ICT was playing and how the citizens were using it in their favor, so they in turn decided to use it against them (Howard et al 2011:7). Security services started using Twitter and Facebook themselves in order to create fake profiles, monitor online activity, track down prominent activists, identify regime opponents and anticipate the next movements or revolutions that activists were planning (Howard&Hussain 2011:32). Special units were established to monitor online activity and authoritarian states cooperated closely with each other in order to establish

strategies and exchange information (Lynch 2011:305). Border police also regularly demanded to see people's private Facebook pages in order to reveal possible political activity (Lynch 2011:306). Countries and governments also started collaborating with each other and exchanging strategies. ICT was now being used as a tool to identify, track down and punish activists by analyzing their online activity and target the ones deemed the most "threatening" towards the state (Lynch 2011:305).

In an attempt to gain control over the protests, a string of arrests were also made, consisting mostly of protesters, cyber activists and journalists (Wagner 2011:1296). One of the more prominent arrests was the one of Tunisian rapper El Général, who was arrested because of his controversial political rap songs that were considered "the anthem" of the Jasmine Revolution and made him an obvious enemy of the state (Reporters Without Borders). In 2012, ten policemen savagely beat Lina Ben Mhenni, an activist and blogger and confiscated her camera while she was attending a pacifist sit-in protest (Global Voices). Azyz Amami, a famous blogger and human rights activist considered by many to be a symbol of the revolution, was arrested and beaten by the police in 2014. He worked together with some of Tunisia's most influential cyber-activists in order to speak up about state abuse and censorship and has been at the forefront of the social justice movement in Tunisia for many years. He was arrested for "possession of marijuana", which can entail up to five years in prison. However, arrests for drug possession are a standard practice used by Tunisian authorities to disguise and cover up politically motivated arrests (Global Voices Advocacy). Events like these have been occurring on a regular basis in Tunisia, and the events of the revolution do not seem to have put a significant stop to it yet.

However, an online platform to monitor abuse from the police was launched in 2012 (Global Voices). "Yezzi" ("enough" in Tunisian) was launched by the Tunisian Association of Digital Liberties to "help build a more democratic, free and open society in Tunisia" (Global Voices). Testimonies of bribes, physical abuse, sexual abuse, racism or death threats by the police can be sent in via mobile, web, email or text message and will be posted on the website (Yezzi). The objective of the website is to stop police abuse and corruption to go unnoticed and unpunished and is a prime example of how citizen action and ICT can be used to impact this issue in a positive way.

All in all, the fact that arrests, torture and persecution towards Tunisian citizens is still rather common is a substantial obstacle towards eventually achieving a stable democracy. It could be argued that ICT mostly impacted this in a negative way since created a new tool to track down, arrest, imprison and abuse activists and other people considered as a threat. Tunisia is unfortunately not yet on its way to fulfill this component of a liberal democracy.

5.4 Free and fair elections

Finally, according to Diamond, in a liberal democracy electoral outcomes should be uncertain since a significant opposition exists and everyone has the right to form a party and participate in elections if they fulfill the necessary criteria.

Ben Ali became president on November 7th 1987 after a bloodless coup d'état that ousted former president Habib Bourguiba (Alexander 1997:34). Ben Ali and his family ruled for twenty-three years until he was evicted on the 14th of January 2011 (Cavatorta&Haugbølle 2012:179). At first, he made some bold promises of democracy and drastic changes concerning human rights. However, things quickly moved in the opposite direction and Tunisia was soon led by an authoritarian regime (Alexander 1997:34). Corruption was rampant, press manipulation common and the opposition heavily repressed. Ben Ali repeatedly won the elections with about 90% of the votes (Cavatorta&Haugbølle 2012:179).

When the revolution came, his regime toppled. The first free and fair elections were held in October of 2011, which meant there was a possibility for the first time since Tunisia's independence from France in 1956 that there would be a regime that was not authoritarian (Cavatorta&Haugbølle 2012:179). Ennahda, a center right and moderately Islamist party won the elections with about 40% of the votes and Hamadi Jebali became Prime Minister. Many different parties were represented during the elections and there was a significant opposition made up of left leaning parties, religious parties and even communist parties. However, after two assassinations of political figures from the opposition that were blamed on the Ennahda party, revolutions erupted again and the Prime Minister resigned. Ali Laarayedh became Prime Minister instead but resigned in January 2014. New elections are currently scheduled for the end of 2014. Tunisia is now an electoral democracy, which is a far cry from the tightly controlled elections of the Ben Ali regime but it remains fragile. (Freedom House)

It could be argued that ICT impacted this in a positive way, not only because of the fact that it played a big role during the revolutions in general and could thus partially be held accountable for the fact that elections are even being held in the first place. But also due to the fact that ICT can now be used to promote voting amongst citizens and raise awareness about the importance of being politically

active. ICT can be used to share information from the government and engage with its citizens, which in turn leads to more transparency and more confidence in the government (Bertot, Jaeger&Grimes 2010:267). It could thus become a tool to support the development of an electoral democracy, and hopefully a liberal democracy in the future.

However, there is still a significant danger for Tunisia to become what Diamond refers to as a “pseudo-democracy” (Diamond 1999:15). This entails that authoritarian rule is strengthened through democracy promotion and elections are used as a way of hiding authoritarianism. Since Tunisia’s electoral democracy is still so fragile, falling into previous harmful habits could happen rather easily, which would be a major setback. It has previously been observed that Arab authoritarian rulers have introduced liberal reforms, thus creating the illusion of moving towards a democracy, while still maintaining a tight grip on their power (Haugbølleand&Cavatorta 2012:98). The adoption of liberal reforms such as the introduction of elections, multiple political parties and an increased freedom of the press are sometimes with the sole purpose of strengthening authoritarianism power (Haugbølleand&Cavatorta 2012:99). It gives the impression that a genuine change is under way while it is actually just a “facade reform” (Haugbølleand&Cavatorta 2012:98).

6 Conclusions

6.1 Summary of the findings

The events of the Arab Spring triggered a wave of revolutions that touched the majority of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa. A notoriously authoritarian region that had never been touched by any forms of democratization before finally took its first steps towards distancing itself from its corrupt and authoritarian governments. The extensive use of ICT made these revolutions stand apart from previous ones; ICT was the new “power tool” that generated new opportunities and provided unprecedented options that gave the revolutions of the Arab Spring a whole new dimension. In Tunisia, the place where it all started, it is undeniable that ICT played a crucial role in the uprisings. It was used as a tool to create a platform for political discussion, supported the creation of an international debate about Tunisia’s situation and assisted in the diffusion of democratic ideas across borders. It earned the label of “tool of freedom” since it positively assisted the Tunisian population in their quest to overthrow the corrupt government. However, it was also used as an instrument of oppression that the government used in their favor to perpetuate corrupt behavior and create a substantial backlash as a response to the uprisings; earning it the label of “instrument of oppression”. During the revolution, ICT was turned into something both empowering and disempowering for the Tunisian population.

6.2 Answer to the research question

Concerning the answer to the research question: what has been the impact of the use of ICT on the process of democratization in Tunisia during the Arab Spring and onwards? It can be argued that the use of ICT has had both positive and

negative impacts on Tunisia's democratization process. Among the positive impacts is the fact that ICT helped to considerably raise the amount of freedom of expression, speech, opinion, discussion, belief, demonstration, publication, assembly and petition. It also supported the development of alternative sources of information and an independent non state-run media. Furthermore, ICT helped in promoting the elections and raising voter awareness; which opened up a new political dialogue between the government and the citizens. Among the negative impacts is the fact that ICT has failed in providing support towards protecting citizens from unjustified detention, torture and terror from the state. ICT has instead created a new opportunity for citizen to be persecuted, which is a major setback that holds back Tunisia's progress. However, the positive impacts of ICT on the democratization process in Tunisia seem to clearly outweigh the negative ones and it could be speculated that it will continue being a tool that is mostly conducive towards democracy and that it will mainly support Tunisia's road towards becoming a liberal democracy and not undermine it.

6.3 Discussion and further research

It should however be noted that even though ICT played a prominent role during the revolution and that a lot was achieved through it, this is only the beginning of what is surely going to be a long process before Tunisia will gain some political stability. Being in a democratic transition is an extremely fragile process and what happened during the Arab Spring will not necessarily lead to the creation of new stable political parties or a sustainable democratic movement. Many countries in the Middle East and North Africa are currently in the early stages of a long-term transformation and it will take several generations before sustainable change will be witnessed. The future of most of the countries is currently very uncertain as they are at a crossroads, Tunisia included. Many fear that the old regime will make a comeback since the democratic transition is still so extremely fragile. ICT may have played a big role during the revolutions but it is uncertain whether it can nowadays serve a similar purpose to help build a sustainable democracy and help the country gain political stability or not. The power of ICT has been demonstrated by the activists but also by the government, and can clearly be used both ways.

Concerning further research, the debate whether ICT supports the democratization process in a post-revolution context is a complex one. The events of the Arab Spring are still very recent and most countries are still in the middle of unstable political situation, revolutions and major changes. No country

in the MENA region that was a part of the Arab Spring has transitioned to a full democracy or has a stable political situation yet, which is why it is challenging to make any certain conclusions within this debate. Further research would be needed by continuing to observe the country's political situation, seeing whether they continue on the path towards becoming a democracy or whether pre-revolution tendencies of authoritarian control will make a comeback. The role of ICT will not be the same as it was during the revolution but it would be interesting to see what role it could play during post-revolution times and whether and how it could provide support in the building of a democracy.

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