Digital Affordances, Authoritarian Governments: Applying the Leveraged Affordances
Model to High Risk Contention

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Abstract of Thesis

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Previous studies of the "leveraged affordances" approach to collective action have only
studied the communicative costs of collective action. This thesis takes the next step by
applying affordances literature to high-risk contention. By utilizing illustrative case
studies, the thesis analyzes the leveraged affordances approach within the context of the
Arab Spring. This thesis holds that there are three general ways in which states may
increase the cost of collective action, whether or not activists take advantage of lowered
communication costs: concessions, exacerbating ethnic and religious tensions, and
violence.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

<u>Section I: Introduction</u>

In late 2010 and early 2011, a number of social movements spread across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Although mobilizations in Tunisia and Egypt pushed long-standing dictators out of power, the outcomes of mobilizations in other countries were not so clear cut. In Bahrain, a series of protests which seemed to have the potential to overthrow the monarchy were brutally crushed. In Libya and Syria, mobilizations quickly escalated into civil wars. In countries such as Morocco, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, mobilizations quickly fizzled before reaching similar intensity seen elsewhere.

Protest spread through the MENA region at a rapid pace. Though social media played a major part in the spread of the Arab Spring, the role of social media has often been exaggerated. Tunisia and Egypt have often been called "Facebook" revolutions, just as the failed Green Movement in Iran has been mistakenly called a "Twitter" revolution (Aday et al., 2010). As Morozov (2011a, 2011b) has discussed at length, there is a tendency to overstate the ability of digital media to create change. It has been well established that digital media use lowers communication costs (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2005; Bimber, 2003; Garrett, 2006; Garrett et al., 2012; Lupia & Sin, 2003). However, scholars have yet to take the next step of examining the place of digital media in the larger context of high-risk contentious politics. Affordances literature has discussed the ways in which digital media may be used to lower communication costs, but there has yet to be much theoretical discussion of the ways in which the benefits of these reduced costs may be curtailed.

Put simply, affordances describe the relationship between a person and their tools. Hutchby (2001) characterizes affordances as "functional and relational aspects which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object" (444). Although Rappert (2003) disagrees with Hutchby's approach, he nicely summarizes Hutchby's definition of affordances as "perceived properties of an object that *suggest*[1] (but do not determine) how it might be used" (566). Take for example, a mobile phone. A mobile phone enables a person to make a phone call; send an SMS; deposit and withdraw money; donate to a cause; form flash mobs (Rheingold, 2003); play games; and (depending on the phone) surf the internet or access social media tools.

It is up to the user to decide how best to use them. This is known as the leveraged affordances approach (Earl & Kimport, 2011). The leveraged affordances approach focuses on how people use technology without regard to how it came to be or its intended purpose. According to Earl and Kimport (2011), "We want to understand how people use technology as it exists at a particular time and why that might matter" (37). However, the vast majority of affordances studies have been conducted in situations where the people using digital media face few risks.

Likewise, much of the scholarship on the Arab Spring focuses on regime changes throughout the region. This is not without good reason; these studies provide insight into the effects of digital media on collective action. However, by ignoring failures to replicate the movements in Tunisia and Egypt, we only receive a partial picture of the Arab Spring. There is a gap in the understanding of variation in the opportunities and costs presented to activists in these countries.

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[1] Italics in original

I lay a framework for a discussion of digital affordances in high risk contentious politics. Digital affordances lower communication costs, allowing activists to create opportunities for contention. Governments, in turn, attempt to raise the costs of collective action. During the Arab Spring, there was an attempt to establish new repertoires of contention by integrating the use of digital media tools into past practices. Some states were able to respond adroitly enough to head off these innovations, while others were not.

States may introduce ways of making protest difficult for activists. Tilly refers to any action by "another group which raises the cost of collective action" as repression (1978, p. 100). This group may be a state, private, or hybrid actor. Its methods may be coercive, or its methods may subtly influence a desired behavior (Earl, 2003). According to Tarrow, (2011), "repression can either depress collective action or raise the costs of organizing and mobilizing opinion" (83). Mobilization and revolution are not new, but the means of going about them are constantly changing. As time goes on, states, citizens, and corporations build a repertoire of contention (Tilly, 1978), keeping old practices and developing new ones. Each time a new mode of dissent arises, a new "toolkit" for contention is formed.

Accordingly, I enter conversation with both political opportunities and affordances literature by analyzing the ways in which states may make it more difficult to reap the benefits of lowered communication costs. Specifically, I focus on the three major ways in which states may constrain contentious action: violent repression, providing concessions to ameliorate domestic grievances, and exacerbating ethnic and religious tension. I then examine the ability of states to utilize these methods of

repression, as well activists' ability to innovate in response, through illustrative case studies. I hypothesize that states which adequately utilize these methods of repression are able to disincentivize collective action.

Section II: Literature Review

Affordances and Collective Action

Traditional collective action theory assumes that communication costs are high and fixed. Mancur Olson (1971) asserted that rational, self-interested individuals would not contribute their time, effort, or money to a large group. Olson presents a basic cost/benefit scenario: the likelihood that someone will become a participant in collective action is ultimately a function of organizational efficiency and the extent to which members benefit. Small groups reduce organizational costs by cutting down on the amount of cumulative costs required to keep participants involved. These costs entail communicating with members, bargaining amongst factions within the organization, and providing incentives to participate. Members of small organizations, according to Olson, are able to benefit from having input on an organization's activities, the fact that it is easier and cheaper to communicate amongst a smaller group of people, and the existence of opportunities for personal recognition for participation.

While Olson saw collective action as a matter of size, McCarthy and Zald (1973, 1977) theorized that barriers to collective action may be overcome by providing the proper incentives for participants. The role of social movement organizations, with the assumption that communication costs are high, is to obtain resources, mobilize supporters, convince the public, and innovate new tactics (McCarthy & Zald, 1977, pp. 1216–1217). Groups which are able to deploy those resources are able to overcome collaboration costs. Moreover, grievances are immaterial if the incentives to participate are not in place. Repressed communities often lack the resources to make collective

action worthwhile and have a feeling of powerlessness about their situation (Gaventa, 1982).

With the introduction of digital media, communication costs are dramatically lowered (Bimber et al., 2005). Organizational costs such as locating members are decreased by affordances like email lists; coordination costs which restrict bargaining between members are all but eliminated (Lupia & Sin, 2003, pp. 320–321). With these lowered communication costs, the barriers for entry into collective action are lowered as well. Nowhere near as many resources are necessary to participate in collective action when that collective action is completely online or via mobile telephony. As opposed to traditional modes of organization such as protesting or boycotting, it is much easier to "like" a post on Facebook, to post a video on Youtube, to send out a mass text, or to sign an online petition. These are what Earl and Kimport (2011) call "theory 2.0" tactics. People who want to join a cause have no need to join a formal organization, nor do they ever need to actually meet in person. Activists may show their discontent without ever leaving their living room. Though social movement organizations are not made obsolete by such changes, the nature and methods of participation have certainly changed the structure of organization (Bimber et al., 2005; Bimber, Stohl, & Flanagin, 2008).

The ability to organize without physically gathering allows people to easily scale activism and reduces the costs of participation (Earl & Kimport, 2011). However, there are still occasions which call for offline participation. Gladwell (2010) and Morozov (2011), building off of work by Douglas McAdam (1986; 1982), claim that strong ties are the most important characteristic in determining the success of a social movement. Theory 2.0 movements are, by their nature, made up of weak ties. Indeed, eliminating

the need for direct contact between individuals deemphasizes the social aspects of a movement in favor of scaling. As Earl and Kimport put it, "lone wolves" now have a method of engaging in collective action. According to Karpf (2012), such activism is relatively fruitless. "The average e-petition is indeed of minimal value, viewed in isolation. But so is the average written petition. Digital activism is not a replacement for the Freedom Riders of the 1960's; it is a replacement for the 'armchair activism' that arose from the 1970's interest group explosion" (Karpf, 2012, p. 8).

Although theory 2.0 tactics are designed to maximally leverage online affordances, it is unlikely that users will be able to overthrow a government or convince stakeholders to change policies by shucking copresence and protest. Greater effort needs to be put forward in order to achieve more substantial goals. Supersizing is the term Earl and Kimport apply to the actions which do not take full advantage of digital affordances. In their view, weak leveraging of digital media "augments – or supersizes – the processes of activism we already understand"(Earl & Kimport, 2011, pp. 24–25).

Supersizing involves, for the most part, scale-related changes. The actions which are taking with this increased scale often resemble traditional social movement repertoires. People take to the streets, or social movement organizations contact a members' list through email. Whereas theory 2.0 strategies involve minimal effort, supersized movements require participants to utilize more analog strategies. Participants might march through the streets of a capital, boycott a retailer, or participate in activities organized by social movement organizations both online and off. Because supersized activities take more effort on the part of participants, Earl and Kimport (2011) outline a

hierarchy wherein theory 2.0 strategies are considered more adroit uses of the internet and supersizing is considered a lesser form of digital engagement.

Such a hierarchy goes against their central claim that affordances are variable. According to Joyce (2011), Earl and Kimport "miss one reason why someone might choose not to maximally leverage digital affordances: they have noticed the affordance and understand it, but skillfully realize that a digital tactic will not be effective in their particular context. That is, they make a *skillful* **decision** *not* **to maximally leverage digital affordances**."[2] Depending on the circumstances and the audience, entrepreneurs may decide to leverage certain affordances and not others. For this reason, digital affordances must be studied within the context of activists' goals and the constraints external to the tactics which they use. When the stakes are high, it takes more risk and higher costs for a social movement to achieve any desired political goals.

Thus far, the vast majority of affordances studies have been conducted in contexts where few to no costs are incurred on activists. Contributions by a number of scholars have established that digital communication costs have transformed from fixed and high to variable (Bimber, 2003; Bimber et al., 2012; Earl & Kimport, 2011; Flanagin et al., 2006). Though permissive communication environments reveal much about the ways in which information costs may be lowered by digital technologies, studies of non-permissive environments may be more revealing of how users may leverage those technologies to lower extremely high information costs (Meier, 2011).

Non-permissive communication environments may also reveal costs external to digital media use. Because studies of high risk affordances are just now reaching prominence, there has been a rather straightforward equation applied to the intersection

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[2] Bold and italics in original

between digital media and information costs: as access to digital media is increased, the cost of communication goes down, and the likelihood of collective action is increased. In non-permissive communication environments, the calculation of opportunities and constraints is not so simple. This is due to two exogenous factors: the stakes of contentious action, and the type of repression that participants face. Affordances are not opportunities in and of themselves, but tools which can be used to create opportunities. A constraint on an affordance may cause a forward-thinking activist entrepreneur to change strategy.

Political Opportunities and Constraints

Contentious politics are, at their core, a matter of opportunities and constraints. "By political opportunities, I mean consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national – dimensions of the political struggle that encourages people to engage in contentious politics. By political constraints, I mean factors – like repression, but also like authorities' capacity to present a solid front to insurgents – that discourage repression" (Tarrow, 2011, pp. 19–20). Until the failed movement to oust Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009, most digital affordances literature was concerned solely with the opportunities which digital media provide. This was due to two factors: a belief in the late '90's and early 2000's that the internet provides a universally safe space for activism (Deibert, Palfrey, Rohozinski, & Zittrain, 2011), and an overemphasis on Twitter's role in Iran's 2009 social movement (Aday et al., 2010). In reality, significantly more constraints were applied to digital activism than many scholars had anticipated. In sum, though digital media use reduces the cost of collective action, states may raise the costs of collective action through repression.

Repression may either be overt or covert. Overt repression is the willingness to use force, violence, or other means to prevent actors from doing something (Earl, 2003). This form of repression is the most dangerous, in that it provides real world punishments for engaging in controversial activity. Overt repression is meant to deter collective action (Feierabend & Feierabend, 1966), but excessive violence may occasionally draw more people to the streets. The risks of doing nothing are sometimes greater than the risks of collective action. Ondetti (2006), for example, found that Brazilian farmers increased their protest activity after a number of their peers were massacred. Covert repression, such as surveillance or regulation which targets a group or individual, carries both social control and the threat of overt repression. These two forms of repression provide a significant hurdle to activists in non-permissive states if utilized skillfully.

Theory 2.0 activism makes it less likely that activists will face overt repression, but even that is not a certainty. Activists and journalists who are willing to report on that activism are often subject to arrest and torture for dissent (Howard, 2010). The risk of arrest for online activity is still less than the risk incurred by mobilizing. Though the vast majority of people in the region access the internet through their mobile phones, internet access is still rare. The prevalence of mobile telephony provides a different set of affordances unique to the region. Mobile telephony helps keep activists informed, allows them to upload original content, and allow them to reach out to the international community. This activity may be supplemented with internet use, but the majority of participants do not have direct access to online affordances.

It is easy for autocrats to simply ignore pleas for reform when they are made online. Someone with a dissenting opinion might not have been involved in organizing

protests, nor may they have followed the planning process through social media, but there is a strong possibility that this person found out about actions through neighbors or through satellite television coverage. Shirky (2011) argues that knowledge spread by digital media often acts as a modern "two step flow" (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 2005), with information leaders first obtaining information and then passing that information on to friends and family. A major difference between the communication environment during the formation of the original two step flow hypothesis and modern communication technology is that images, videos, and sounds – not simply knowledge – may be passed on using common tools and supplied by information leaders.

However, even if communication is more easily conducted using digital tools, there is reason to resist going out into the streets. The strength of theory 2.0 actions is that it allows activists to avoid threats like violence, but they are too weak to create systemic political change. Supersizing lowers communication costs, but takes on many of the risks encountered in previous modes of activism. Lowered communication costs do not stop bullets. The end goals of high-risk mobilizations are often too uncertain and too difficult to obtain for it to make sense to risk life and limb in the streets. According to Tullock (1971), in civil wars, "[i]t will be noted that the approximate result we get indicates that the individuals would ignore the public good aspects of the revolution in deciding whether to participate *and*[3] on which side to participate. The important variables are the rewards and punishments offered by the two sides and the risk of injury during the fighting" (92). Participants involved in high-risk collective action, whether in civil wars or street demonstrations, face high risk of physical harm.

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[3] Italics in original

Digital affordances allow activists to circumvent some of these high costs by enabling them to coordinate quickly and, occasionally, anonymously. There are a number of points at which movement entrepreneurs may make use of digital technology. Last minute changes in venue or time of protest may be facilitated by mass SMS[4] or social media, messages cascading through contact lists. This same affordance may be utilized by states; both Egypt (Greenberg, 2011) and Libya ("Libya: Freedom on the Net 2012," 2012) sent SMS messages to their people demanding that they do not take to the streets, and that friends of the regime should attack those who do. Though an SMS from a state is meant to intimidate potential activists, images of an active group of protesters taking to the streets against the regime may break through the mirage of years of preference falsification, the tendency to portray a set of preferences in light of social or legal pressure while maintaining a different set of private preferences[5] (Kuran, 2010). Throughout the MENA, satellite television plays a role in filling in the gaps in information not covered in state media and unable to be transmitted via mobile phone or internet connection (Aday et al., 2012; Lynch, 2011).

During mobilizations, digital media may be used to counteract fatigue inflicted by sustained repression. Even when the internet is "shut down," activists may use mobile phones to share images and videos of various actions taken against the government. The presence of digital media and satellite television also place additional pressure on governments to refrain from repression. Information control is a form of sovereignty

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[4] Simple messaging service – colloquially, a text message

[5] Imagine someone receiving a particularly unsatisfying gift from a relative. Rather than throw that gift away, social pressures encourage the giftee to pretend that they like the gift. This practice is common without any coercion. States are able to use force and social pressure to coerce people into feigning support, making preference falsification a much more repressive and often understated element of authoritarian regimes.

which states can no longer claim (Price, 2002). Though states can manipulate local media, their efforts rarely extend to Qatari-controlled Al Jazeera or other satellite broadcasters. In addition, when activists find ways around digital information blockages, they may make images and videos of atrocities committed by the government public. While those media may help motivate local activists, they may also place pressure on the international community to take action. The international community, in turn, may pressure governments to ease their tactics, in a modified boomerang model (Keck & Sikkink, 1998).

What we see during the Arab Spring, however, is that autocratic governments pay no heed to foreign pressure as long as their power is threatened domestically. As a result, the state often loses none of its ability to raise costs on activists. Methods of political control – both overt and covert – are just as powerful in the information age as they were in previous decades.

Digital Media in the MENA Region

Strict political control may still come into play in spite of the proliferation of digital technologies or because of them. One tool which Arab Spring activists had in ample amounts is mobile telephony. Mobile telephony is the dominant platform for digital communication in the MENA region. Only five states had less than one mobile phone per two people, and these are states in which there are pervasive economic and structural deficiencies. In wealthier states, and even in some middle-income states, there is more than one phone per person. It is difficult to calculate the digital divide between people with mobile phones and those without, but data collected by the ITU

(International Telecommunication Union, 2012) indicates that most people have access to mobile telephony.

Country	Mobile Phone Penetration
Algeria	92.4%
Bahrain	124.2%
Comoros	22.5%
Djibouti	18.7%
Egypt	87.1%
Iraq	73.4%
Jordan	107%
Kuwait	160.8%
Lebanon	68%
Libya	171.5%
Mauritania	79.3%
Morocco	100.1%
Oman	165.5%
Qatar	132.4%
Saudi Arabia	187.9%
Somalia	7%
Sudan	40.5%
Syria	57.8%
Tunisia	106%
United Arab Emirates	145.5%
Yemen	46.1%

Table 1: Mobile Phone Penetration in the MENA Region, Q4 2010 (International Telecommunication Union, 2012)

Even when people own mobile phones, there are still some impediments to taking full advantage of digital affordances. Reid and Reid (2010) find that an understanding of how to use mobile tools such as SMS correctly is vital to the users' ability to leverage it. High rates of illiteracy in the MENA region ("World Bank Development Indicators: Data," 2012) makes it difficult for many mobile phone owners to take advantage tools such as the internet and SMS messaging. However, there are many other ways for

illiterate mobile phone users to communicate. Most obviously, illiterate phone users may use their mobile phone to make a call. Illiterate users may also utilize media messages such as video and pictures, or even share those media by passing their phones around.

The rise of mobile telephony has coincided with the introduction of the internet. Many first-time internet users in the MENA region take advantage of this medium on their mobile phones rather than a fixed (or wired) connection. Wireless internet connections well outnumber wired connections. There are exceptions to this rule, of course, such as Lebanon, which had no mobile internet use in Q4 2010, despite regular internet users comprising 31% of the population.

Country	Mobile Broadband Penetration	Wired Broadband Penetration	Percentage of Population which Uses the Internet
Algeria	0	2.5%	12.5%
Bahrain	21.3%	5.4%	55%
Comoros	0	0.2%	5%
Djibouti	0	0.9%	6.5%
Egypt	6.4%	1.8%	27%
Iraq	0	0	2.5%
Jordan	2.4%	3.2%	38%
Kuwait	63.5%	1.7%	38.3%
Lebanon	0	4.7%	31%
Libya	42.7%	1.1%	14%
Mauritania	3.1%	20%	3%
Morocco	1.6%	10%	49%
Oman	10.7%	1.6%	62%
Qatar	28.4%	8.2%	81.6%
Saudi Arabia	57.8%	5.5%	41%
Somalia	No data	No data	1.2%
Sudan	No data	0.4%	No data
Syria	1.3%	30%	20.7%
Tunisia	1.1%	4.6%	36.8%
United Arab Emirates	58.4%	10.5%	78%
Yemen	0	0.4%	12.4%

Table 2: Internet Penetration in the MENA Region, Q4 2010 (International Telecommunication Union, 2012)

It is also remarkable that some countries have many more internet subscriptions than people who use the internet. In Libya, for example, there are 1.7 mobile phones for every person, and 42.7% of them are subscribed to mobile broadband services. However, only 14% of the entire population uses the internet. This indicates that the distribution of internet technology is far from equitable. Overall, internet culture throughout much of the MENA region is mobile. The line between the internet and mobile telephony is obviously being blurred throughout much of the MENA region.

Facebook is by far the most popular social media platform in the region. The largest concentrations of Facebook users in late 2010 were located in the Gulf countries, but a plurality (22%) of Facebook users in the MENA are Egyptian (Salem & Mourtada, 2011a). Lotan et al (2011) have found that, during the Arab Spring, many journalists and activists acted as information relays through Twitter. However, according to Aday et al (2012), the most common clicks of Arab Spring-related bit.ly links on Twitter came from the west. In addition, there are many more users of Facebook than Twitter in the MENA region (Salem & Mourtada, 2011b). Therefore, though Twitter allows users to relay information from sources to followers, it is much more likely that the role of Facebook was more important to the mediation and organization of collective action than Twitter during the Arab Spring.

Country	Facebook Penetration
Algeria	3.99%
Bahrain	34.27%
Comoros	0.9%
Djibouti	5.24%
Egypt	5.49%
Iraq	1.26%
Jordan	17.06%
Kuwait	20.64%
Lebanon	23.11%
Libya	3.98%
Mauritania	1.19%
Morocco	7.55%
Oman	7.55%
Qatar	33.95%
Saudi Arabia	12.24%
Somalia	0.08%
Sudan	0.74%
Syria	1.07%
Tunisia	17.55%
United Arab Emirates	45.38%
Yemen	0.74%

Table 3: Facebook Penetration, Q4 2010 (Salem & Mourtada, 2011a)[6]

While wealthier states have the best access to digital media technologies, some middle and low-income states have remarkable rates of digital technology penetration, especially mobile telephony. As will be discussed in the following sections, both street protests and digital collaborations may be mediated through these technologies. The extent to which they are relied upon to accomplish collective tasks depends on both the ability of activists to use that technology to accomplish those tasks and the risks which activists face by doing so.

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[6] Unfortunately, there is no available data on Twitter subscribers in Q4 of 2010, the time period from which the rest of the data comes, which is why Twitter data has been excluded from the table. Data from the second Arab Social Media Report (Salem & Mourtada, 2011b), collected in April of 2011, indicates that Twitter use is quite limited in the MENA region.

In the following sections, I introduce three ways which states increased costs for activists. Activist resources, communication skill, and social capital all help to reduce the impact of repression, but states often have an organizational and technological advantage over citizens. Violence, concessions, and the exacerbation of domestic tensions increase the cost of collective action by raising the risk of coming into the streets as long as states are careful about how they utilize these methods of repression. This approach to contentious politics emphasizes not only political opportunities and constraints for both states and citizens, but also the variability in skill highlighted by leveraged affordances theory. Simply put, some states and citizens are more skillful at leveraging affordances than others, which greatly affects the ability to innovate during high-risk collective action. Egypt and Tunisia are particularly remarkable due to the fact that states were unable to effectively leverage violence, religious tension, or concessions against protesters.

Violence is the most overt form of repression, and it is almost inevitable in the autocratic states of the MENA region. Whereas theory 2.0 strategies may help users avoid violence, supersizing has the potential to expose them directly to it. Despite this obvious downside, there are some benefits from supersized actions. Digital media may be used to delay violent responses from the police or military via evasive event planning. Moreover, in order to achieve the desired goal of toppling a dictator, supersized actions are needed. However, activists are unable to stop an oncoming bullet with well-timed SMS messages or articulate pleas for peace on Facebook. Violence is the most direct punishment for being out in the street, and the most distinctive downside of copresence.

19

Though generally unarmed activists may be able to withstand some degree of violent repression, long term violent repression is likely to send activists seeking cover. Alternatively, if the activists see more benefits to taking up arms than going home, it is likely that repressive violence will result in civil war.

A simplistic way of discussing concessions is as negotiations meant to avoid further conflict. The cost of collective action may be raised by states opening fire on participants, but it may also be raised by the prospect of desirable concessions from the government. If activists topple the regime, they run the risk of losing out on promised concessions, and risk instability. Given a choice between making a deal and facing an onslaught of gunfire, rational people would decide whether or not these concessions are worth abandoning the tactic of mobilization. Likewise, risk-averse elites tend to concede to activists in order to avoid probable harm and ensure long-term stability (Morrison, 2011). States may attempt to increase the cost of coming to the streets by providing general concessions, and may avoid further conflict if concessions are strong enough to placate activists (Hirshleifer, Boldrin, & Levine, 2009).

Finally, ethnic and religious tensions are rife throughout the MENA. Both tribal loyalties and religious distrust fuel domestic and regional politics. Shia and Sunni conflict has shaped borders and loyalties for centuries, as the United States found out soon after the invasion of Iraq. States may have the ability to draw "defectors" to their side if there has been favoritism of one group over another. In the language of civil war, Kalyvas and Kocher (2007a) assert that strong states have leverage to influence ethnic groups to side with the state. "Actors such as strong states and foreign occupiers should be, ceteris paribus, more likely to seek out ethnic defection compared to weaker actors,

including poor postcolonial states, ethnic organizations operating within failed states, or ethnic insurgents" (1051). States may use their superior resources to make supersizing more difficult, frame various groups as antagonistic, or simply call upon one group to leverage digital tools against another.

The most pernicious threat is that states may make cooperation more difficult by lowering trust between groups of people. In this vein, I treat ethnic and religious tension as variable during conflict. Neither ethnicity nor religious differences necessitate tension, but differing identities may be capitalized upon by savvy states. As in countless conflicts, ethnically or religiously different neighbors often do not become threats until an event punctuates the equilibrium of daily life. When conflict looms, it is easy for states with ample resources to divide support for activism by framing activists as traitors or dangerous. It is even easier to do so when states can tap into long-held tensions over ethnicity or religion.

Case Selection and Presentation

In the following sections, I introduce cases which highlight the ways in which concessions, increases in ethnic tension, and violence increase collective action costs for supersized mobilizations. I cannot – nor do I try to – show that utilizing violence, raising ethnic tensions, or providing concessions stops collective action. Nor do I intend to show that a lack of one of these mechanisms immediately removes a regime. Rather, the cases explored here explain how states raise collective action costs which would have otherwise been lowered by supersizing participation through digital media. Each of the

states during the Arab Spring utilized multiple repertoires of repression in their attempt to prevent unrest, with varying degrees of skill and success.

In order to test the ways in which states utilize each of these mechanisms, I have selected illustrating cases which best display the differences in states' ability to leverage them. An ability to leverage mechanisms of repression correctly should result in increased costs of collective action, while an inability to properly leverage them should not. I will show that the successful use of these tactics was reliant on the skill of the state, the innovation of the activists, and the technologies (both military and communication) to which both had access.

Section IV: Illustrating Cases: Concessions

Concessions are a form of negotiation with a target audience. States are not forcibly removing people from the streets, but offering their citizens an alternative to continued mobilization. Supersizing presents a number of costs. Physical presence in a public place increases the likelihood that some sort of personal cost will be incurred, whether that cost is as insignificant as losing a few hours of work or as powerful as loss of life or limb. Concessions offer an alternative to coming out into the streets while they decrease the cost of doing nothing. However, the timing of these concessions also matter. If activists are able to coax concessions from political leaders through supersized mobilization, then there is an incentive to continue to mobilize (Norden, 2011).

In this section, I choose two cases: one in which concessions were provided before supersized mobilization occurred, and one in which concessions were provided after mobilizations had already started. By creating this dichotomy, I am able to show the increase in collective action costs before mobilizations. On the other hand, the ability to gain concessions after mobilizations have already begun should serve as a reason to continue to supersize. The two cases I explore, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, examines the effect of concessions on collective action costs during the Arab Spring. The Saudi government provided continual concessions before the first protesters reached the streets. For Saudis, collective action costs were increased by the promise of long-term concessions. In Jordan, where the first concessions came after protesters took to the streets, a steady stream of prime ministers were alternately appointed and sacked by King Abdullah provided little to no benefit to protesters. Moreover, the eventual withdrawal of oil subsidies decreased the costs of collective action for activists.

Before the Mobilizations: Saudi Arabia Gives Concessions Early

Though states such as Tunisia and Egypt were taken off guard by quickly supersized protests, a number of states were able to pre-empt planned protests by providing concessions. The practice of "hashtagging" a mobilization, or putting a # sign on Twitter to direct discussion on a certain topic, was a prevailing feature of the mobilizations after January of 2011. Hashtagging the "day of rage" organized a specific date when people would come out into the streets to protest. This allowed people to scale protests, but also allowed states and international media to prepare for masses of people to flood the streets.

Saudi Arabia was the most proactive in giving concessions to its citizens. While Saudi Arabia has massive oil rents, and people receive money every year from the government, Saudis are facing a housing crisis. Many people are unable to afford homes, and until recently there was no mortgage system due to a Wahhabi Sharia prohibition against charging interest on loans. Interestingly, this prohibition does not apply to other types of private loans within Saudi Arabia, creating parallel banking systems. In 2010, the housing deficit caused concerns of unrest within the Saudi government and the international community (Karam, 2010).

The Saudi government is acutely aware of its shortcomings on providing adequate housing. Rather than act on demands to provide housing loans and mortgages, however, the government cracked down on people who spoke out against the lack of adequate housing and infrastructure. Filmmakers who posted Youtube videos of the homeless or dilapidated homes were imprisoned (Hill, 2011).

Housing concessions were given in anticipation of the hashtagged protests in March of 2011. Approximately $36 billion was earmarked by King Abdullah before street protests were supposed to begin (Allam, Saleh, & Farchy, 2011). Though protests in the major Sunni areas remained small and sporadic, the government continued to provide progressively larger sums of cash. By March 18, that total cost of concessions had reached $68 billion. King Abdullah reinforced his desire to prevent street protests by praising people for staying inside. "'I am so proud of you. Words are not enough to describe you,' he said. 'You are the safety valve of this nation and you struck at that which is wrong with the truth and at treachery with loyalty ...'" ("Saudi Monarch Announces Billions in Handouts," 2011). The next week, the total concession was $93 billion dollars, and expanded to include increases in minimum wage and unemployment handouts ("Saudi Arabia to Hold Municipal Polls," 2011).

The government provided two clear paths for activists: use digital media to take to the streets and face the police, or stay inside and keep concessions. By removing the relative stability provided by the government, activists risk losing out on large concessions. In addition, the close connection between the Wahhabi religious authorities and the Saudi government created an environment in which religious authorities actively lobbied in favor of the royal family (Al-Rasheed, 2011). Uncertainty about a future without the Sauds in power, social and religious pressure, and the threat of brute force from the government made the decision to refrain from taking the streets easy for the vast majority of Saudis.

After First Protests: Jordan Provides Weak Reforms, Protests Continue

Jordan is known for being one of the most progressive states in the MENA region. The charismatic King Abdullah (not to be confused with Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah) claims to be slowly transforming the country into a constitutional monarchy, but there has been little political push in that direction. The Jordanian "day of rage" was hashtagged and designated for January 14; however, activists involved in Jordan's Arab Spring rarely called for the removal of the ruling Hashemite dynasty. According to Lynch, "when protests first broke out in response to Tunisia's revolution, the chants pointedly focused not on the monarchy but on the unpopular Prime Minister Samir al-Rifai" (Lynch, 2012, p. 120).

In response to this first wave of protests, King Abdullah sacked the Prime Minister and established a new government on February 9, 2011. He did so again – three more times. The concessions that Jordanians received have effectively resulted in a game of musical chairs. As tensions rise, King Abdullah replaces the government and introduces some measure of corruption investigation (Farrell, 2012). Protests neither scaled into large mobilizations, nor have they completely fizzled out as they have elsewhere in the Arab Spring. Instead, brief protests have launched sporadically since January of 2011.

The Hashemite royal family and King Abdullah are both relatively popular at home and in the west. The king is a favorite of western leaders, and his love for western culture is apparent. For all intents and purposes, it seems as if King Abdullah would be a strong candidate to provide the political reforms promised, even though he has not delivered on these promises. The perceived trustworthiness of the Hashemite royal family provides an incentive to hold on to the current king, and hence increases collective

action costs. He may, someday, deliver on his promise to create a constitutional monarchy – therefore, it makes more sense to keep the monarchy in place in order to receive the promised reforms than to risk instability by ousting the regime (Kadri & Kershner, 2011).

Moreover, protesters tend to be conservative. As supersizing continues, some of the most dedicated activists are still monarchists. Instead of calling for an ouster of the government, many demonstrations in November of 2012 have called for the abdication of the current king in favor of his youngest brother (Kirkpatrick, 2012b). Though Jordan's concessions may not have stopped protests altogether, the concessions have allowed for a slow boil of resentment to build rather than an explosion of demonstrations.

The lapse of oil subsidies, however, brought protesters back into the streets (Kirkpatrick, 2012a). The failure of the government to procure this particular concession decreased the collective action cost of mobilizing, since the government was no longer able to make good on its promises to keep oil prices low. As a result, there are still questions as to whether or not there will be an Arab Spring in the near future in Jordan. The prospect of concessions to come provides reason to come to the street, but not to overthrow the regime.

<u>Section V: Illustrating Cases: Ethnic and Religious Tension</u>

In the following three cases, digital media and ethnic politics enabled protesters to supersize mobilizations. However, the exacerbation of long-standing ethnic and religious conflict increased the cost of collective action, as distrust grew between various ethnic and religious groups. The examples of Bahrain and Libya show the ways in which distrust between ethnic groups raises uncertainty, and makes it difficult for even like-minded activists to coordinate. In Libya, a system of tribal patronage broke down, creating a shifting and uncertain set of tribal alliances. In Bahrain, distrust between Shia and Sunni was exacerbated by the government in order to distract activists from the goal of creating a constitutional monarchy. Finally, I present Egypt as a counter-point to Bahrain. Whereas Bahrainis were divided over perceived religious differences, Egypt was united through a larger sense of nationalism and communality.

Libya: Shifting Tribal Alliances Increases Uncertainty

In 1996, 1,200 detainees were slaughtered in Abu Salim prison (Human Rights Watch, 2009). Human rights lawyer Fathi Terbil was the sole legal representative of the prisoners' families, and was arrested in February of 2011 (Matar, 2011). A number of family members of the victims and sympathetic lawyers assembled outside of government buildings. Protests quickly grew, and tribal military leaders began to defect to their mobilized kin (Fahim & Kirkpatrick, 2011). As protests began to incorporate soldiers and weapons, simple mobilization turned into rebellion. The city of Benghazi was taken by rebels within five days of the first protest. Though mobile phones and

"hashtagging" helped to start the initial mobilizations, tribal military leaders provided protection and resources to those who went into the streets.

Muamar Qaddafi had gained power by controlling the over 140 tribal groups over his forty years of rule (Hamid, 2011). The organization of the army indicates that the consolidation of political power in Libya was tenuous at best. Early in the conflict, Seif al-Islam El Qaddafi, Muamar Qaddafi's youngest son, warned that tribal conflicts and loyalties would lead to civil war, and ultimately an Islamic emirate, unless managed (Kirkpatrick & El-naggar, 2011). Though his televised speeches were widely considered to be drivel (Lynch, 2012), he was right about the coming civil war and the tribal loyalties. When the Qaddafi regime sent brigades to shoot their kin, many of the soldiers defected.

Without NATO and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) support, it is unlikely that the unorganized tribal military and militias would have been able to overcome the strength of Qaddafi's personal military. Uncertainty about the loyalty of specific tribes raised collective action costs. In the beginning of the conflict, for example, the powerful Warfalla tribe – the largest tribe in the country – sided with the rebels (Kirkpatrick & El-naggar, 2011). Then, as the almost 100 sub-tribal clans debated which side to support, the Warfalla tribe sided with the Qaddafi regime. Though mobile phone networks alleviated the cost of organization, shifting tribal alliances made it difficult to determine friend from foe (Jamestown Foundation, 2011). Sub-Saharan Africans were distrusted because of the perception that they were loyal to the regime, and often tortured and killed by rebels because of their appearance or nationality ("Libya," 2011).

NATO intervention saved the rebels, but did not solve tribal conflict. Tribal disputes have undermined the authority of the new Libyan government, which has neither the resources nor the legitimacy to keep local disputes under control. It is difficult to say that the civil war is over when neighboring villages continue to attack each other ("Libya's clashes leave 105 dead," 2012) and tribal disputes are consistently escalated in the absence of coherent national identity and strong institutions ("Libyan tribal clashes kill at least 147 people," 2012). Political factionalism still holds back the creation of new laws (Chertoff & Green, 2012), but the formation of basic government services from scratch may provide Libyans with a way to balance tribal and national identity (Vandewalle, 2012).

Bahrain: Sustained Campaign of Misinformation Increases Distrust

Bahrain is ruled by a Sunni monarch, though its native population is predominately Shia. Sunni and Shiites have historically had no problems getting along, even though the Shia have been excluded from politics. The focus on religion in politics between Saudi Arabia's Sunni influence and Iran's Shia influence has caused Shia religious institutions to become politically active, usurping roles formerly held by secular groups (International Crisis Group, 2005). Al-Wefaq, the parliamentary opposition party, often symbolically represents the Shia population, but has no real power (Sotloff, 2010). Bahrain hosts the United States Navy's Fifth Fleet, and is connected by bridge to Saudi Arabia. As a result, it has been significantly impacted by every major event within the gulf, whether or not the tiny nation is involved in the conflict.

Iran's old claims to sovereignty over Bahrain looms large in Bahrain's domestic politics (Al-Baharna, 1973). Shiites have been framed as pro-Iran, and therefore anti-Bahrain, as a result. This tense political situation has rarely spilled over into the Shia and Sunni communities at large. The vast majority of political discourse in Bahrain, while often religiously charged, is peaceful and pluralist.

Bahrain's government, however, still treats the Shia population as a threat. In 1996, the government made unsubstantiated claims that there were terrorist groups within Bahrain called Bahraini Hezbollah which sought to cause terror and establish an Islamic state (Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, 2011, International Crisis Group, 2005). Around this time, the population of Bahrain began to increase dramatically. Between 1996 and 2011, the population of Bahrain doubled from approximately 600,000 to 1.3 million (Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, 2011, International Crisis Group, 2005, "World Bank Development Indicators: Data," 2012). Most of this growth was due to a process by which Sunni workers were drawn from India, Pakistan, and other South Asian countries in order to dilute the Shia population and prop up the Sunni monarchy. Foreign workers began extracting oil and working for the police and military while many of the native Shia remained unemployed (Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, 2011, "Bahrain," 2012). The policy of segregation and the import of cheap foreign labor have, remarkably, not radicalized the Shia, but clear efforts to dilute the Shia population have fostered a culture of non-violent resistance and peaceful protest.

Sectarian distrust did, however, distract protesters from their original goals. This is a process which happened slowly, and with the aid of government-controlled television and digital media services. When the February 14th "day of rage" began, state television

31

utilized the old frame that Shia Bahrainis are the Iranian fifth column. Many of the first

protesters arrested were Sunni, which supports the claim that protesters were both Sunnis

and Shia (Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, 2011).   In March, religious

tensions heightened with the growing perception that the police stopped asserting

authority. Sunni fear of Shia violence caused Sunnis to form community watch groups

which patrolled the streets for Shia gangs. Reactions to sectarian fear on both sides cause

tension and violence to spiral out of control. According to a government report,

> "Sectarian tensions increased when, on 7 March, threats were circulated on
> internet social media networks, such as Twitter and Facebook, against a Sunni
> woman who injured a demonstrator at the Bahrain Financial Harbor as she left the
> area after her car was stopped by demonstrators and she was harassed. In response
> to the threats of retaliation made against her, large groups of Sunni men gathered
> at her residence to protect her. These and other incidents led to a sense that the
> [government] was no longer capable of providing protection, and that Bahrainis
> would have to fend for themselves by creating popular committees and
> neighbourhood checkpoints. This sense of insecurity was heightened as groups of
> armed vandals attacked foreign workers, threatened private homes and destroyed
> private property in various neighbourhoods. The protests seemed to enter a
> different phase" (Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, 2011, p. 164).

Sectarianism caused communities to break apart. Fights began in secondary

schools between Shia and Sunni students. Though digital media were used to supersize

protests, they were also used by counter-activists in conjunction with state institutions to

repress dissent. It became commonplace for universities to include screenshots of

Facebook pages in student files, tagged by members of the opposite sect. Hundreds of student participants were expelled or arrested, but many were later reinstated; at least 100 professors were fired (Dooley, 2011; Lindsey, 2011). A Twitter group was made to name and provide contact information for Shia "traitors" so that they could be arrested, attacked, or harassed. In the beginning of protests, activists used Molotov cocktails against authorities. By mid-March Molotov cocktails were being thrown by the two sects at each other, including places of worship. Shortly before the GCC moved in to break up the movement, the movement had shown clear signs of falling apart on its own.

A Counter-Point for Bahrain: Egypt

Although Egypt is by and large a Muslim country, it has a ten percent Christian minority (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012). There are substantial tensions between the minority Christian population and Muslims. As an illustration, in 2012, seven Coptic Christians were sentenced to death in absentia for creating a documentary which insulted the prophet Muhammad ("Egypt court sentences in absentia 7 Coptic Christians, US pastor to death over anti-Islam film," 2012). A number of religious clashes and attacks have occurred in Egypt, even under the rule of dictators such as Mubarak and Nasser, who have been considered relatively friendly to the minority (Aciman, 2011; Hauslohner, 2011).

However, it would be difficult to frame the attacks on Christians as systemic. There are religious extremists on both sides that are irreconcilable, but this is true with any major ethnic or religious divide. The vast majority of Muslims and Christians coexist with few problems. Plans were presented before the revolution by a number of

religious, political, and social leaders to increase religious pluralism. These plans are now being put into action (Faour, 2012). Though many Christian Egyptians are afraid of the potential repercussions of Islamic rule (Aciman, 2011), quick legal action has been taken against those who attack Christians and churches since the abdication of Hosni Mubarak ("Coptic-Muslim clashes in Egypt," 2012, "Egypt Vows to Tackle Religious Violence," 2011).

Sociological and political factors also make it more difficult to scapegoat the Christian community for problems within the country. In Bahrain, the large Shia community is intimidating because the implementation of democratic rule could potentially mean the subjugation of Sunnis. Even if this is likely not the case, tensions were fed by longstanding state media campaigns which painted Shia as Iranian puppets. Democratic rule in Egypt is unlikely to put Christians at the helm of power. At their most powerful, Christians might create a minority party within a democratic government. When coupled with the fact that there was no coordinated campaign to raise tensions within these groups, collective action costs were not affected by religious divide in Egypt.

The Egyptian experience shows how collective action may be supersized by digital media use, but it can be channeled in innovative ways to bring communities together. In both Egypt and Bahrain, community watch groups were formed when police were pulled from duty. Because the religious tension witnessed in Bahrain was absent in Egypt, popular committees were more focused on preventing crime than protection from perceived religious enemies. These popular committees were formed on Facebook, and then supersized into organized street patrols. One popular committee, the Al-Nur al-

Mashriq Cooperative, worked with Christian groups in order to prevent vandalism and destruction of church properties (Bremer, 2011). For a brief time, digital media such as mobile telephony and Facebook allowed activists to use these popular committees to create their own political and social groups, circumventing the typical routes of government and religious institutions. It could be argued that digital media provided an opportunity structure for secular activism which would have otherwise been impossible. Bahrain created the same type of organizations, but their divisiveness increased both distrust and the cost of participation within the wider Arab Spring movement.

The threat of violence forces activists to make a cost-benefit analysis. Are the rewards of a public good greater than the possibility that I will be shot? To many, this answer is no. Activists may be able to withstand some violence, but sustained violence raises the likelihood that a social movement will either collapse or fall into civil war. As the following case studies show, state violence has the capacity to raise the cost of collective action considerably.

If a state can beat activists to the punch, so to speak, then it is possible to break up a social movement before it begins. Digital media allows activists to find each other, but also provides regimes with ample notice of an imminent mobilization. In the following four case studies, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Tunisia, I show how the threat of violence increases the costs of collective action. The case of Bahrain shows that the number of protesters may grow dramatically if left alone, but a sudden crackdown may disperse movements, even when up to one third of the country had participated. In Saudi Arabia, threats and intimidation from the government and religious institutions portended an increased the risk of violence for protesters. Egyptians were able to reduce the threat of violence through innovative uses of digital media. Finally, the defection of the military in both Tunisia and Egypt reduced the cost for protesters to come into and stay in the streets.

Bahrain: A Sudden Crackdown

In Bahrain, relatively little force was used until well after the social movement started. By reducing the cost of participation in mobilization, and then suddenly

dramatically increasing collective action costs through violence, the Bahraini government showed how quickly a revolution may be quashed.

A Facebook page called "The Youth of the February 14th Revolution" was founded a month before protests, to commemorate the 10 year anniversary of the National Action Charter. The National Action Charter decreed that the state would transform into a parliamentary monarchy, transforming the Emir into a King. Compared to the rest of the MENA region, calls for protest were rather tame. Protesters urged the regime to follow through on its promises, but did not originally aim to overthrow the regime.

On February 14th, the day when protests were planned, an estimated 6,000 people went into the streets. On that first day, a man was killed by the police; and subsequently, King Hamad allowed the protesters to occupy the Pearl Roundabout in Manama to mourn his death (Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, 2011). When it was ordered that the police should clear the roundabout on February 17th, the regime cracked down, making hundreds of arrests. Still, police violence was relatively tame on the streets, though arrestees were often tortured (Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, 2011). Authorities used live rounds, killing some protesters, but there were no direct orders to shoot. On February 19th, the military was again ordered to let protesters occupy the roundabout, and the number of protesters grew (Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, 2011).

On February 20th, general strikes occurred, and an estimated 80 percent of workers in Bahrain went on strike – including several people staffed at the Salmaniya

Medical Center (SMC), the only full service hospital in Bahrain. Over the next few days, the general strikes continued, and the protest movement soon involved up to one third of the country's population (Kristof, 2011a). On March 14th, the Jazeera Forces of the GCC, made up of a majority of Saudi troops, drove into Bahrain in order to supplement a brutal crackdown on protesters. Jazeera forces demolished the "pearl monument," a statue in the middle of the Pearl Roundabout and a symbol of the protests. Police began to arrest people for simply owning anti-regime materials. Posters depicting people who had died or were arrested in clashes with police were pulled down or defaced (Bahrain Independent Commission of Inquiry, 2011, "Bahrain," 2012; Fahim, 2012b; Kristof, 2011b).

The protests in Bahrain were relatively middle class. Several doctors and nurses from the SMC took part, and there were occasional mobilizations inside of the hospital itself. As a result, the hospital became a target for repression. Patients which seemed to have come from the streets were arrested and tortured, even if they were unconscious or wounded ("Bahrain," 2012). Over 64 doctors and nurses were arrested, and all but nine were eventually released (Fahim, 2012a). Many of the doctors who were not released had appeared in an Al-Jazeera documentary about the crackdown on the hospital. After the March 14th crackdown, mass protests were stopped. Whereas protests once involved approximately one third of the population,[7] activists can no longer muster the same type of participation.

Though small, sporadic protests continue, the harsh crackdown on protesters and the people who aided them was able to crush the national movement to reform the

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[7] Possibly one half, according to Lynch (2012)

Bahraini government. Though people had been able to find each other and organize through Facebook, and the government had initially let them do so, a sudden crackdown made the costs of supersizing too high for many of the previously enthusiastic participants.

Saudi Arabia: Intimidation and Arrests Deter Activists

The Saudi government has been relatively transparent about the often brutal ways in which it enforces rules against both digital and tangible contention. There are two repertoires which have been employed by the Saudi government to intimidate potential protesters. First, in order to prevent potentially threatening movements from forming, the Saudi government employs targeted and swift arrests using digital tools to discover planned meet-ups. Then, when activists do express opposition in public, the authorities employ arbitrary arrests, torture, and violent repression in order to quash opposition. The threat of violent punishment makes contention, both online and off, incredibly difficult. Even when protests never materialize, those threats are enough to intimidate protesters into avoiding any form of contention.

There are almost two mobile phones for every Saudi person (International Telecommunication Union, 2012). Mobile telephony has provided opportunities for like-minded Saudis to find each other in public without physically approaching each other. Bluetooth, in particular, has greatly reduced the costs of finding like-minded people. This repertoire was developed by adolescents looking to circumvent laws requiring the separation of the genders (Kraidy, 2007), and was quickly adopted by activists. However, the Ministry of Information and Culture was able to adapt to these tactics. A

man looking to meet women in a public place was notoriously lashed 70 times for using Bluetooth to do so ("Beware: Dangers of Bluetooth in Saudi...," 2010). Mobilization using Bluetooth is therefore risky, but some still attempt to use this affordance.

Events precipitating the hashtagged March 11th "Day of Rage" set the stage for swift crackdowns. On January 28, 2011, the city of Jeddah was flooded, the second case of devastating floods in a span of two years. Ten were killed, 90 percent of the roads were damaged, and thousands were evacuated. Approximately 30 people found each other through Bluetooth and took to the streets to request that the government prevent future flooding.

Methods developed to prevent people from dating strangers were adapted to prevent protesters from mobilizing. Almost immediately after the protest in Jeddah had begun, police surrounded the protesters and arrested them. Bluetooth, the same tool used to contact like-minded activists, was also used by the police to monitor and prevent activism (Alsharif, 2011; "Dozens Detained…," 2011).

Saudi Arabia has been relatively transparent about the tools it uses to track activists and to dole out punishments. Internet rules are regularly published and distributed by the Ministry of Information and Culture (Deibert, Palfrey, Rohozinski, Zittrain, & Haraszti, 2010). In early 2011, when the first protests were planned, those rules included rather mild punishments for speaking out against Saudi Arabia's political and religious authorities. These punishments include monetary fines or website blockages (Al Omran, 2011). Penalties for posting contentious content on the internet are, however, likely to be more severe. One of the few Saudi journalists who published

on the Jeddah protests, for example, fled to Malaysia and was deported back to Saudi Arabia for "insulting the prophet Mohammed" via Twitter. In Saudi Arabia, this is a capital offense (Cohen, 2012). Several blogs and Saudi newspapers have reported his release from custody (Al Omran, 2012), but this episode shows how activists may easily face death in Saudi Arabia, even when trying to flee the country.

It is easy to force compliance in the western provinces of the country, where the religious authorities and the government maintain a mutually-reinforcing relationship. Wahhabi religious institutions are often recruited to provide warnings about the religious and legal repercussions for speaking out against the government and its supporting institutions (Al-Rasheed, 2011). Leading up to the March 11th "Day of Rage," the interior ministry issued a statement announcing that "any demonstrations are illegal, and will take all measures necessary to deal with public disorder" ("Saudi Arabia prepares for 'day of rage,'" 2011). Religious leaders were recruited to hand out flyers which echoed the sentiment.

The Saudi government managed a show of force which backed its threats. Security forces were omnipresent at protest sites, providing ample intimidation for would-be protesters. According to Al-Rasheed (2011), "Reports on Saudi cities on 11 March portrayed deserted neighbourhoods [SIC] where only security agents and vehicles roamed the streets" (519). Only one protester, Khaled Al-Johani, made it to a planned protest site in Riyadh. When Al-Johani was asked if he felt betrayed that no one else had joined him, he replied, "If the youth see that there is no security presence and that they are free to talk, they will come" (Amnesty International, 2011).

Shia protesters in Eastern Province, however, were not as easily intimidated as their Sunni countrymen. The vast oil wealth of Saudi Arabia is located under Eastern Province, making it a vital part of the region. As in Bahrain, the Shia who live there are often discriminated against in favor of cheap, foreign, Sunni labor (Amnesty International, 2012a). Because of discrimination against Shia within Saudi Arabia's borders, a protest repertoire has been developed by the Shia residents. Such a repertoire is missing in the western parts of the country (Al-Rasheed, 2006).

Saudi Arabia's Shia and Sunni regions are separated both religiously and geographically by wide swaths of desert. Thus, the movements in Shia areas and the Sunni areas can be considered completely separate. As protesters in Bahrain began to gather, the Shia in Eastern Province took to the streets as well. Like the people of Bahrain, the people of Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province were repressed by intimidation, violence, and arrests. There are at least fourteen people who had been killed by the government for protesting in Eastern Province (Amnesty International, 2012b). Unfortunately, NGO's are unable to conduct full investigations into the types of violence used in clashes between protesters and police due to the region's isolation and the government's ability to keep press and NGO's out of the area. From what data is available, it is clear that over 300 people have been arrested for taking to the streets in Eastern Province. Many of those arrests were arbitrary, and many of those arrested are still detained without trial (Amnesty International, 2012a).

The close connection between Saudi and Bahraini Shia was reinforced by the timing of protests. As Bahrainis took to the streets, so did Shia Sunnis; when the Bahraini protests were clamped down on, Shia protests in Saudi Arabia quickly decreased

in frequency. In the case of Saudi Arabia's most fervent protesters, those in Eastern Province, force both at home and abroad made the cost of activism too high for sustained protest. Intimidation was enough for those in the western provinces.

Counter-Cases: In Tunisia and Egypt, the Military Backs Down

Tunisia and Egypt were remarkable for a number of reasons. Relatively peaceful demonstrators overthrew autocratic regimes. Ideologically divided citizens overthrew autocratic governments. Social media was used to arrange collective action. Most remarkably, the militaries of both states backed down. Both Egyptians and Tunisians witnessed a reduced cost in collective action when they faced little to no violence for coming out to the streets. The first few people who mobilized overcame herculean obstacles in order to build and sustain mobilizations. However, when the military backed down, the reduced costs allowed much larger crowds to form than would otherwise be possible.

Egypt.

Egyptians had a number of tools which allowed them to supersize their protests. Intelligent use of digital media allowed activists to scale from a small band of protesters into a large, nationwide social movement. This repertoire of using the internet and satellite television to mobilize had been refined during the Kefaya movement of the previous decade (Lynch, 2011, 2012; Shorbagy, 2007).

The now-famous Facebook page "We are All Khaled Said" was a source of planning, strategizing, and scaling support before protesters made it to the street. A culture of anonymity and secrecy was designed to protect participants from potential

43

punishment for involvement in anti-government activity online. Personal accounts indicate that the Egyptian government not only knew about protest plans, but attempted to subvert them. Wael Ghonim (2012), in his memoire of the Arab Spring, describes the creation of false Facebook accounts meant to deflate mobilization participation. However, there is little evidence that such tactics deterred protesters.

The details of the January 25th plans for protest were carefully hidden in order to throw intelligence agencies off activists' trails. According to Lynch (2012), "[t]he organizers cleverly distributed false information about the time and location of the protests online to fool state security, and then distributed the real information by SMS (text messages) shortly before the event. They craftily used numerous gathering points from which to converge on Tahrir to prevent the police from bottling them up in any one location" (88). The repertoire built in the previous decade of protest helped activists spread police and military thin.

When authorities gathered to meet activists at protest locations, however, they utilized heavy force. Even when faced with great risk, activists continued to come to the street, cumulating in a massive protest and bloody crackdown on January 28, 2011. According to Human Rights watch ("World Report 2012: Egypt," 2012), 846 people were killed and well over 1,000 were injured in protests during Egypt's Arab Spring. In a stunning turn, the military then defected to the protesters. Tanks accompanied protesters, and protected them from the police. In an act of desperation, the police were dispersed by the Mubarak regime (Bremer, 2011).

Sustained protests continued until Mubarak stepped down. Activists had a number of tools at their disposal with which to decrease the cost of collective action. Mobile telephony and satellite television, for example, allowed activists to scale protests to massive mobilizations. Facebook allowed activists to coordinate plans of action in order to spread forces thin. When the threat of a military crackdown was removed altogether, the government was left with few tools to raise costs on protesters.

Tunisia.

The Arab Spring started in Tunisia when Mohamed Bouazizi, a young street vendor, set himself on fire in protest of harsh treatment by local authorities. Protests quickly spread throughout Tunisia; however, there was a media blackout which made it impossible for people who watch television and read newspapers to know about the spreading protests. Digital media took the place of traditional news outlets, reaching people who would have otherwise not known about the protests spreading throughout the country. According to Moumneh (2011), "Videos of the marches taken on mobile phones and minute-by-minute messages on Twitter and Facebook updates have become the activists' primary means of communication with the outside world, to great effect." Al Jazeera soon picked up on the protests. According to Lynch (2012), "Al-Jazeera framed the Tunisian protests as a pan-Arab event and the fall of Ben Ali as an unmitigated good" (76). Protests spread throughout the country at a rapid pace.

There was some violence in the beginning of the protests. According to Hanlon (2012), "The internal security services—the police and the National Guard— responded in force. Some protests were largely peaceful, but others turned violent.

45

Police opened fire on crowds and arrested protestors, journalists and opposition party members, lawyers, and rights advocates. But the police response failed to quell the protests" (2).

However, when Tunisia's military was ordered to shoot on protesters, General Rashid Ammar and his soldiers refused (Cook, 2011). At the time, there were obvious questions as to the political goals of the military. Whereas the defection of the Egyptian military is occasionally chalked up to its independence and ability to profit by providing products and services (see Faria & Vasconcelos, 1996), the Tunisian military is strictly tied to the civilian government bureaucracy.

Without delving too deeply into the reasons behind the military's defection, it appears as though both the military and activists took great risks by going against President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Increased political risk and uncertainty for the military, which came with the decision to break with the ruling autocrat, paid dividends for protesters. The government was without armed forces to increase the physical costs of being on the streets, and the activists refused promises to hold fair elections in 2014 (Lynch, 2012). In addition, Tunisians have a strong national identity, which could not be leveraged to create distrust. All of these factors made it incredibly difficult for the government to increase the costs of collective action on protesters. If the government did not step down on January 14, 2011, peaceful protests could have continued relatively unfettered long after that date.

Section VII: Conclusion

I have shown here that, though digital affordances allow people to lower communication costs by supersizing activism, states may still increase the cost of collective action through repression. By utilizing violence, dangling attractive concessions, or stirring up ethnic and religious tensions, states force their citizens to take great risk to life and limb any time they decide to take to the streets. Earl and Kimport's (2011) leveraged affordances approach is a strong guide for measuring communication costs in their relation to contentious politics. Because of their sample, however, their approach to leveraged affordances assumed low levels of political repression both online and off.

By expanding leveraged affordances to non-permissive communication environments, the stakes of collective action becomes higher. Repression introduces more direct conflict, as states attempt to find ways to block coordination and activists' attempts to innovate in return. It is unfortunate that more data was not available on contentious politics online. While it is clear that several states attempted to shut down digital networks (Howard, Agarwal, & Hussain, 2011), and that SMS messages were sent to citizens in an attempt to discourage collective action, the operations of state information ministries are often mysterious even after a regime is toppled. A report in the Wall Street Journal (Sonne & Coker, 2011) found mass caches of personal communication in Libya, but it is unclear how the state used that data to prevent collective action.

Moreover, though my case studies are steeped in literature which firmly holds that repression increases collective action costs, interviews with activists would have shed more light on which modes of repression were most dangerous to activists. Wael Ghonim's (2012) memoire provides some insight into the cost calculations which protesters made before going into the streets, as well as their tactics, but cannot provide a broad picture of the perceived costs and benefits of supersizing collective action.

This study does, however, have wider implications for leveraged affordances scholarship. Early leveraged affordances literature takes the important step of evaluating collective action costs through the lens of shifting communication practices. The second step, which this study takes, is to identify exogenous factors which increase collective action costs. Would other states be able to apply the same types of pressure as states in the MENA region? Do democracies pressure their populations in the ways that I have explored here? My approach to affordances theory takes environment into account much more than previous scholars. Perceptions of that environment likely play a much larger role than explored in this study.

In conclusion, I have presented evidence in favor of a leveraged affordances approach that evaluates both skill at leveraging affordances and factors external to digital media use. Repression, or lack thereof, is an important variable in the study of collective action, even in the information age.

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