Dr Halim Rane (Griffith University)

Title

Social Media and the Diffusion of Ideas among Social Movements in the Arab Revolutions Halim Rane and Sumra Salem

Abstract

Since the beginning of 2011 the world has witnessed popular uprisings against long-standing regimes in the Middle East and North Africa. Indeed more political change occurred in the first three months of 2011 than the previous 30 years. To date this has resulted in the toppling of Tunisia's Ben Ali regime, a re-shuffling of the Jordanian government, and the toppling of Egypt's Hosni Mubarak. At the time of writing, the regime of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi is struggling to retain power in the face of a rebel insurgence backed by a UN enforced no-fly zone. The regimes in Bahrain, Syria and Yemen continue to face daily protests. It is argued that the Tunisian revolution of January 2011 was the catalyst for popular uprisings in Egypt, Yemen, Libya and elsewhere in the region. A process of diffusing ideas about political change evolved into social movements for freedom and democracy. Using diffusion theory and social movement theory, this chapter examines the impact of the Tunisian revolution on the corresponding movements for freedom and democracy in Egypt, and subsequently, Egypt's impact on Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, and Syria. Our research is based on analysis of social media including blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and comments on mass media sources posted by online activists in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya and Syria. In its examination of the lessons Egyptian online activists learnt from those in Tunisia and subsequently taught to others in the region, this chapter will focus on the transmission of ideas concerning freedom, democracy, Islamism, national unity, the use of non-violence, and the reactions of Western political leaders. It argues that while a high level of identification between the social movements in the various countries selected for analysis is present, the extent to which ideas are adopted and are successful depends on domestic as well as broader geopolitical contexts.

Biography

Dr Halim Rane is the Deputy Director of the Griffith Islamic Research Unit and a Senior Lecturer in the School of Humanities at Griffith University. Dr Rane is the author of numerous articles and books concerning the Middle East, Islamic and Muslim issues including Islam and Contemporary Civilisation: Evolving Ideas, Transforming Relations (Melbourne University Press, 2010); Islam and the Australian News Media (Melbourne University Press, 2010); and Reconstructing Jihad amid Competing International Norms (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Ms Sumra Salem is a regular contributor to online media concerning Middle East issues. She has a Bachelor's degree in international relations with honours and wrote her honours thesis on the role of Egypt in U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.