Social Media and Change Agents in Iran
*Perspectives from Tehran and Baluchistan*

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The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the debate with regards to how social media can be used, or not, by change agents in authoritarian regimes. The 2011 events in the Arab World again amplified the discourse on how social media can be used to coordinate protest mobilization leading to the overthrow of a non-democratic regime. However, not only have the outcomes of these events varied, but there are also other examples of countries that have not experienced a democratic revolution in the digital age. One such country is Iran. This study looks at why change agents in Iran, an authoritarian state with high levels of internet connectivity, have not been able to use social media to orchestrate such a revolution.

The study focuses on the use and perception of social media surrounding the 2009 election in Iran, as well as the pre-election period in 2013. The uniqueness of the study lies in that it focuses on how social media can be used in authoritarian regimes for both discontinuous and continuous forms of collective action. In addition, the inclusion of the perspective of the ethnic and religious minority group the Baluch deepens the analysis by looking at a possible usability gap vis-à-vis the majority population based in Tehran, the country’s capital. The study is based on semi-structured interviews carried out in Iran (Tehran and Sistan-Baluchistan) in May 2013, a social-media analysis of the Persian-language social media site Balatarin, as well as election data and election polls from various sources.

The findings from this study indicate that while on-line censorship and surveillance do not stop Iranians from using social media sites for political purposes, different levels of off-line repression impacts how the sites are used. While both Persians in the capital and Baluch in Sistan-Baluchistan use social media, they are not interacting with each other due different ways of coping with these restrictions. This limits the possibility for coordinating nation-wide discontinuous collective action (e.g. street protest). However, continuous collective action (e.g. voting), is not impacted by these different levels of off-line repression and findings indicate that Iranians in both Tehran and Sistan-Baluchistan actively seek out information on-line ahead of an election. Hence, while on-line censorships and surveillance do not exclude the use of social media for political purposes in Iran, it impacts how it can be used due to a usability gap between the majority Persian population and the minority Baluch population.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Iran, Baluchistan, collective action, change agents, authoritarian regime, democracy
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ACRONYMS

BPP – Baluchistan Peoples Party
CIA – Central Intelligence Agency
EIU – Economist Intelligence Unit
ERM-Tool – Electoral Risk Management Tool
ID – Identification
IP – Internet Protocol
IPOS – Information and Public Opinion Solutions
MI6 – Military Intelligence, Section 6
NSM – New Social Movement
SMO – Social Movement Organization
UGC – User Generated Content
UNPO – Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization
VOA – Voice of America
VPN – Virtual Private Network

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I. INTRODUCTION

The events that started in the Arab world in 2010/2011 re-sparked a global interest in studying the use of social media for political mobilization in authoritarian regimes. However, in its aftermaths, these ‘digital’ revolutions have had very different outcomes with regards to each country’s democratic transition. Despite this, few studies have moved beyond the ‘what’ and ‘how’ when it comes to social media to also include an analysis of the ‘who’, which would allow for a deeper understanding of the underlying networks and how they influence the democratic transition. In order to understand how change agents within the country perceive and use social media for political mobilization this study will take a fresh look at an authoritarian regime that has not experienced a political revolution in the digital age. The study will look at the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ but will also deepen the understanding of the ‘who’ by looking at the usability gap between a majority population based in a nation-state’s capital and a minority population based in an isolated province.

The study will combine the theoretical framework of collective action, looking at both macro- and micro-structural factors, as well as that of the use of internet for political mobilization. Collective action includes any action carried out by a group of individuals for the benefit of the collective (even those who did not participate in the activities needed to reach the aim). While the macro-dimension of collective action looks at the perceived structural conditions that exist in a polity, the micro-dimension provides insight into the rational choice of individuals with regards to their participation in the political action, or not. The theory of collective action hence provides a good base to assess both how social media is perceived and used by change agents in an authoritarian regime and why it is perceived and used in this way. The theory of the use of internet for political mobilization, on the other hand, specifically looks at how on-line activity is related to off-line political action. Hence, this theory will be used to assess the potential for off-line political impact.

For the purpose of this study, a case study approach will be used. Iran, a country led by an authoritarian regime with evidence of social media activity, will serve as the case study. While Iran has not experienced a political revolution in the digital age, it did experience a complete overthrow of the regime in 1979 and the events surrounding this revolution still impact Iranians’ perspectives on both domestic and international political affairs. While many Iranians would like to see political change in the country, the means of getting there differs between those that believe that political reform is possible within the system and those that believe that a complete overthrow of the regime is again necessary. In 2009, the presidential candidate Mir Hossein
Mousavi, who advocated for extensive reform within the system, received substantial support during his election campaign. When the election results of what was believed to be a fraudulent election were announced, his supporters took to the streets in what was coined by outsiders as the ‘Twitter Revolution’. However, despite large demonstrations in the capital, the protests did not gain momentum in the more distant parts of the country. This study was carried out right before the next presidential election in 2013, when the incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was not eligible for re-election. The study was carried out in Tehran, the country’s capital, and the province of Sistan-Baluchistan, home to the ethnic and religious Baluch minority group.

The sources used for the study includes semi-structured interviews, a social media analysis, as well as election data and polls from a variety of sources. The interviews provided a broad understanding with regards to how the change agents in the two provinces perceive and use social media for political mobilization. The social media analysis was carried out during the presidential campaign in 2013. In provided a good understanding for how social media is used for political mobilization around election campaigns in authoritarian regimes. The election data and the election polls were used to connect on-line activity with off-line political action.

This study will not only provide valuable input into how social media fits into the theoretical framework of collective action but it will also have practical implications. Previous discussion on the use of social media by change agents in authoritarian regimes seldom go beyond defining the country as authoritarian. This study, however, will use the macro-structural dimensions of collective action to embed a socio-political analysis. This gives a deeper understanding of how both the national and local context impacts the use of social media by change agents in Iran. This impact will be assessed through the semi-structured interviews during which the respondents themselves had a chance to explain how they perceived the usefulness of these on-line channels. Secondly, this study will look beyond the discontinuous form of collective action (e.g. protest mobilization) and look at how social media may be used by change agents in authoritarian regimes for continuous collective action (e.g. voting). This is often overlooked when studying the use of social media in authoritarian regimes and will help deepen the understanding of the linkages between on-line activity and off-line political action. It will increase our knowledge with regards to the potential long-term output of the use of social media by change agents in authoritarian regimes. This, in turn, will contribute to the identification of proper channels for supporting democracy activists in the country of study.
A. PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the debate with regards to the potential of using social media for political purposes in authoritarian regimes. It will do so by looking at the perception and use of social media in two different regions in Iran and by identifying different macro- and macro-conditions that impact the use of social media for political purposes in the two regions. This will lead to an assessment of the use of social media in authoritarian regimes as well as of what impact a usability gap might have on the use of social media for political mobilization. Iran was chosen as the country of study since it is a (1) country led by an authoritarian regime, (2) its citizens are already active in the social media sphere, (3) the citizens have access to satellite TV in their own language, and (4) there was an opening up of an opportunity. The regions of focus are the Province of Tehran, where the country’s capital is located, and the south-eastern Province of Sistan-Baluchistan; Iran’s least developed region and home to the Baluch ethnic and religious minority.

The aim of the study will be achieved by assessing how social media was used during the protests in 2009 and how it was perceived and used ahead of the 2013 presidential election, providing a long-term perspective of the potential use of social media by change agents. This long-term perspective will allow for a deeper analysis of how social media can be used beyond protests to impact reform in authoritarian regimes. In addition, the study will determine if a usability gap exists between the two regions studied. This will allow for an analysis of how a usability gap can impact the potential to use social media for political mobilization in an authoritarian regime. The uniqueness of the study lies both in the long-term perspective of the use and perception of social media, and in the assessment of a usability gap between the majority population and an ethnic and religious minority.

B. DEFINITIONS OF CONCEPTS

1. Social Media

The definition of social media has changed since the coining of the term in the mid-nineties. At that time, it generally meant adding a communicative aspect to on-line traditional media outlets or the development of chat applications.¹ Today, social media is generally understood to be any web or mobile-based platforms that allow for two-way interactions through user generated content.

(UGC). The most recognized examples are Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, Pinterest, Reddit and Instagram – but smaller networks as well as regional varieties exists. Examples of country specific social media sites are WEIBO and QZONE in China, SQUAR in Burma, and the Iranian site Balatarin. The sites might fill slightly different functions, from pure social networking to social news and media sharing. All taken together, it is clear that social media has become so integrated into everything we do that it is estimated that we will soon stop talking about social media as a specific phenomenon and rather focus on the global media network that connects us all.

2. **Authoritarian Regime**

An authoritarian regime is a government that concentrates the power in a leader or elite that is not held accountable to the people. However, some authoritarian regimes have adopted a “form of electoral democracy with regular, competitive, and multiparty elections”, and these regimes are sometimes referred to as ‘hybrid regimes’ as they combine democratic and authoritarian elements. Regimes that have formal democratic institutions that are officially respected may also be labelled as ‘competitive authoritarian states’ if the incumbent extensively violates the rules put in place. The minimal standards of democracy, as defined by Samuel B. Huntington, is that “its most powerful collective decision makers are selected through fair, honest, and periodic elections in which candidates freely compete for votes”. Hence, the debate around where to draw the line between authoritarian, hybrid, and democratic is somewhat complex, at least if one only looks elections.

As this study will include an analysis of the political space in which an opposition can mobilize, it is deemed important to move beyond a classification of regime type that focuses only

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on elections. Therefore, the Economic Intelligence Unit’s democracy index will be used. This index includes five categories: electoral process and pluralism; civil liberties; the functioning of government; political participation; and political culture. Based on this index, regime types are classified as full democracies, flawed democracies, hybrid regimes, or authoritarian regimes. Further, a crucial difference between the EIU index and other similar indices is that in addition to expert’s assessments the EIU also, when possible, bases its index on public opinion surveys such as the World Values Survey and the regional barometers.

C. SETTING THE STAGE: Iran’s Green Movement

The Green Movement, which was initially formed around the 2009 reformist presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi and later organized protest after what it viewed as a fraudulent election, can be defined as a social movement. A social movement is neither as structured as a political party or interest group nor as unstructured as a mass trend without goals – it is rather something in-between. Social movements usually aim to challenge the status quo; through reform, revolution, or through reversing societal developments. Commonly used tactics include mass demonstrations, sit-ins, marches, verbal appeals, etc., but there is also evidence that social movement activity may impact voter participation. In a country like Iran, where only those political parties that do not oppose the religious system of governance are allowed, the Green Movement classifies as a social movement as it challenges the current status quo, especially with regards to the clerical control of the electoral system and the lack of civil liberties.

While the current status of the Green Movement is unclear, it is obvious that the movement passed through the first two stages of social movements. A social movement can be divided up

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12 Mousavi has been in house arrest since February 2011
into four different stages: (1) emergence, (2) coalescence, (3) bureaucratization, and (4) decline. The first stage, also coined the ‘social ferment’ stage, includes ‘widespread discontent’ either outside or inside a social movement organisation (SMO). In the case of the Green Movement, the formation around Mousavi’s election campaign may be identified as the emergence stage. In the second stage, the coalescence stage, the movement has framed its message more clearly and this is the stage when “discontent is no longer uncoordinated and individual; it tends to become focalized and collective”. Hence, this is the stage of political mobilization understood through the theory of collective action, which is also the focus of this study. It is not the purpose of this study to determine if the Green Movement has entered into the third stage of bureaucratization, which involves higher levels of organization.

What is clear is that ahead of the 2013 presidential election, there were still people in Iran who identified with the Green Movement. In 2013, it was also clear that there would be a change of president as the incumbent, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, was not eligible for re-election. However, what was not clear was the possibility of a new president bringing in new ideas; ideas such as those presented by previous reformist president Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005). While many Green Movement sympathisers, based on their experience in 2009, called for a complete boycott of the 2013 elections, some argued that if Khatami, or somebody close to him, entered the race, that candidate would have their vote.

This study takes a rather broad perspective on the use of social media in both 2009 and 2013. It will not focus on the perspective of the most famous leaders of the Green Movement, most of who are either in prison or have left the country since 2009. Rather, it will look at the perspectives of movement sympathisers whom either actively participated in the protests in 2009, or whom sympathised with the cause but did not engage in any protests. It will look at how social media is perceived and used by the change agents who are still in Iran and who have experienced four years of increased on-line censorship and surveillance and off-line repression after the 2009 protests. These are the perspectives of four Persian females who identified with the Green Movement, a Persian man who served as a conscript in 2009 and attended the protest as a traffic police, a Baluch man who was studying in Tehran in 2009 but did not participate in the protest.


15 J. Christiansen 2009, p. 2

due to fears of extreme repression against minorities, and of four Baluch men who followed the protests from the distant Province of Sistan-Baluchistan but made no effort to mobilize protests in their own region. What they all have in common is their political interest in wanting to see a change in the current political system in Iran. Their perspectives will be supplemented by an analysis of the most popular Persian-language social media site Balatarin, which according to some Green Movement activists had more impact during the 2009 protest than the more famous Twitter. This will be supplemented with election data and election polls from various sources.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study aims to assess to what extent social media can be used for political participation and off-line mobilization in a context of on-line censorship and surveillance. It will be evaluated by looking at the long-term perception and use of social media in Iran as well as the impact that macro- and micro-conditions have on the use of social media for political purposes. This will be addressed by looking at the following two research questions:

**RQ1** Do social media open up new spaces for political participation and off-line mobilization in Iran or does on-line censorship and surveillance exclude the use on-line platforms?

**RQ2** Do we see a usability gap between different regions in Iran and what is the impact of such a gap?

To assess this, two groups of sub-questions will be added. While the first group addresses the different macro- and micro-conditions of these regions and how they may impact the linkages between on-line and off-line participation, the second group focuses on how social media is perceived and used in each region studied:

- What different macro- and micro-conditions impact the perception and usage of social media in the two regions?
- How does it impact the link between on-line and off-line political participation?

- What is the perception and use of social media by change agents in Tehran and Sistan-Baluchistan?
- What are the differences between the regions?

The first group analyses the differences between Tehran and Sistan-Baluchistan by looking at what macro- and micro-conditions that impact the perception and usage of the different groups as well as its impact on the linkages between on-line and off-line participation. The second group addresses how social media was used during the protests in 2009 and how the potential of using it as tool for political mobilization was perceived in 2013. In addition, it looks at the perceived reliability of social media channels by discussing whom the change agents perceive to be the actors that influence this sphere. It also addresses the differences between the perception and usage in the different regions. The combined analysis will be used to discuss to what extent the
usability gap between the Persian majority and the Baluch minority impacts the potential to use social media for political mobilization in Iran. This, in turn, will allow for an analysis with regards to if social media strengthens change agents in Iran or if on-line censorship and surveillance limits the usage of such on-line platforms.

B. METHOD OF STUDY

A single-case study will be used. A general conception about case studies is that they contain a “subjective bias” and has a tendency “to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions”\(^{18}\). However, while most previous research focused on rational choice theory, part of the theoretical framework of this study, used formal models and statistical tests; it is becoming more and more common to use case studies. This is partly due to the realization of the benefit of using case studies to address qualitative variables such as decision-making processes and historical and social contexts. In addition, proponents of the use of case studies argue that “one of the strongest means of drawing inferences from case studies is the use of a combination of within-case analysis and cross-case comparisons,” demonstrating the value of the case study approach.\(^{19}\) It should be noted that collaboration with the designers of the Tahrir Data Project, which studies how individuals who participated in the Egyptian revolution used media, during the research design of this study could facilitate future comparative studies.\(^{20}\)

There are several distinct advantages of using a case study approach. Bennett and George (2005) identify four specific advantages. Firstly, they argue that case studies can achieve ‘high conceptual validity’\(^{21}\) as there is no risk of “conceptual stretching,” which may occur when quantifying complex variables.\(^{22}\) In order to avoid ‘conceptual stretching’ during statistical research it may, on the other hand, be essential that this research is preceded by case study


\(^{20}\) “Tahrir Data Project” by the *Engine Room* Available at: https://www.theengineroom.org/projects/tds/ [Accessed Nov 5, 2012].

\(^{21}\) George and Bennet 2005, on “Advantages and Limitations of Case Studies: Casting Off the Prism of Statistical Methods”

research that can identify the relevant variables. Secondly, in-depth case study research may challenge preconceived notions, especially when studying deviant or outlier cases or during field work. This is something that may lead to the identification of new variables and hypotheses. While statistical methods may identify deviant cases that could lead to new hypotheses, any study that uses existing databases “lack any clear means of actually identifying new hypotheses”. Thirdly, case studies in general and single case studies in particular provide the opportunity to examine ‘causal mechanisms’ in detail. The mechanisms may only operate under certain conditions, and while statistical studies omit all contextual factors that are not codified in the variables, case study research cannot only capture the complexity of a particular context but also identify historical explanations. Lastly, as compared to statistical methods, case studies can document complex interactions without requiring a large sample size. Hence, since on-line political mobilization in authoritarian regimes is a rather new phenomenon, often taking place in very complex political environments, a single-case study is the most appropriate method in order to advance theory.

In order for a single case study to be as insightful as possible, there needs to be a strategic selection of the case to be studied. A random sample or a representative case might not present as much information as an ‘outlier’, which may “activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied”. According to Eckstein (1975), the potential benefit of using a single case study is highlighted by selecting a ‘crucial’, most-likely, or least-likely case to test a theory. Since it might be hard to find a crucial case, a case in which a theory that “passes empirical testing is strongly supported and one that fails is strongly impugned”, Eckstein emphasis the use of cases where a theory fails to fit a most likely case (undermining theory) but fits a least likely case (strengthening theory). Hence, to only study countries where social media savvy youths have used on-line tools for protest mobilization when overthrowing a regime will not help us understand the “deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences,” rather it will only “describe the symptoms...and how frequently they occur”. Thus, this study will focus on a negative case;

24 George and Bennett 2005, on “Deriving New Hypotheses”
25 Flyvbjerg 2004, p. 425
27 George and Bennett 2005, on “Advances in Case Study Methods”
28 Flyvbjerg 2004, p. 425
a case in which the outcome of interest (overthrow of a regime) does not occur. When selecting negative cases there is a possibility principle that states that “negative cases should be those where the outcome has a real possibility of occurring”, and hence this study will use a ‘most likely case’.

C. CASE SELECTION

Based on previous research referenced later in this study, the ‘most likely case’ needed for this single-case study should fulfil four basic criteria with regards to on-line political mobilization in authoritarian regimes: (1) the country is led by an authoritarian regime, (2) its citizens are already active in the social media sphere, (3) the citizens have access to satellite TV in their own language, and (4) there is an opening up of a dynamic opportunity. The Islamic Republic of Iran fulfils all of these criteria. Firstly, it is ranked as one of the ten most authoritarian countries in the world in the Economic Intelligence Unit’s democracy index 2012. Secondly, there exists a well-established Iranian presence on the internet in general and on social media in particular; while Facebook, Twitter and many other social networking sites are blocked in the country, it is widely used as half of Iran’s population use technologies, such as proxy servers and virtual private networks (VPN), which enables them to circumvent these bans. Some research indicates that as many as 58% of Iranians have a Facebook account. This may be compared to the 3.3 million Egyptian Facebook users, 4% of the population, in May 2010. Thirdly, even though satellite


30 “Democracy Index 2012: Democracy is at a Standstill”, Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), p. 8. The countries that are deemed more authoritarian than Iran are: Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Chad, Guinea-Bissau, and North Korea.

31 Proxy servers, aka ‘proxies’, act as intermediaries between different on-line clients. They allow for anonymity and to protect the privacy of the sender and receiver of information as the information is not sent directly from one on-line client to another.

32 A Virtual Private Network is a private network in a public network. It works like a wide area network (WAN) that you can connect to on the internet. For example, VPNs allow employees to securely access the intranet while being outside the office.


dishes are illegal, they are fairly common.\textsuperscript{36} While it is hard to estimate how many Iranian that have access to satellite TV, a survey carried out in the country by the Iran Media Program at the University of Pennsylvania demonstrated that 19\% of the respondents had watched satellite based international channels in the past week.\textsuperscript{37} Examples of satellite channels in Iran are BBC Persian, Voice of America’s (VOA) Persian News Network, and Manoto, a Europe based commercial station. Lastly, the June 2013 presidential election presented a dynamic opportunity that also allowed for an “embedded analysis of a specific aspect of the case”.\textsuperscript{38} The above conditions make Iran a ‘most likely case’ for the use of social media for successful political mobilization in an authoritarian regime.

D. BACKGROUND: THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

What is since 1979 referred to as the Islamic Republic of Iran has a proud history that stretches back for centuries. This is a country that has been invaded by both Genghis Khan and Alexander the Great, but that also presents its own national heroes such as Cyrus the Great, whose cylinder is known for being the world’s first declaration of human rights, Darius the Great, and Babak Khorramdin, who led the resistance against the Arab invasion. However, in the interest of time and space, only the last century and the coming into power and overthrow of the Pahlavi Dynasty will be discussed here.

Reza Shah, the first Shah of the Pahlavi Dynasty, came into power in 1925 after a British backed military coup against the former dynasty. He soon set out on a mission to ‘modernize’, or some would argue ‘westernize’, the country,\textsuperscript{39} and this led to clashes with the Shiite clergy already during the first decade of his rule.\textsuperscript{40} When his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, took over during World War II, it opened up a door for the progressive Iranian politician Mohammad Mosaddegh,

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{40} Rajaee, Farhang, \textit{Islamic Values and World View: Khomeyni on Man, the State and International Politics}. London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 1983.
\end{thebibliography}
who had opposed the 1925 military coup, to again enter into politics. In 1951, the Iranian parliament elected Mosaddegh as Prime Minister of Iran and he immediately set out on a mission to increase the Iranian state’s profits from its oil sector, which to a large degree was controlled by the British.\footnote{Ford, Alan W. \textit{The Anglo-Iranian Oil Dispute of 1951-1952}. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954, p. 268.}

In August 1953, Mosaddegh was overthrown in a coup d’état orchestrated by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the British Military Intelligence, Section 6 (MI6). While their involvement has for a long time been a well-known fact, it was not until 2013 that the documents became unclassified and CIA officially admitted its involvement.\footnote{Byrne, Malcom. “CIA Admits It Was behind Iran’s Coup”. \textit{Foreign Policy}. August 18, 2013. Available at: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/08/18/cia_admits_it_was_behind_irans_coup [Accessed April 12, 2014].}

The coup against Mosaddegh effectively ended the nationalistic and democratic movement in Iran and became the seed of the anti-American sentiments expressed after the fall of the highly unpopular Shah in 1979.\footnote{Gasiorowski, Mark J. and Malcolm Byrne. \textit{Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran}. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004}

The causes of the 1979 Iranian Revolution are still being debated. However, it is clear that it was a civic resistance movement that rallied all those who resisted the USA-backed absolute monarchy, and it included leftists, nationalists, and Islamists. It can therefore be described as both a conservative backlash against the westernization of the Iranian society as well as a not so conservative backlash against the social injustice in the country.\footnote{Abrahamian, Ervand. \textit{Iran Between Two Revolutions}. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982.}

At the beginning of 1978, the anti-Shah movement started to make their voice heard through different protests throughout the country and by September the Shah felt the pressure to declare martial law. Roughly one year after the start of the protests, in January 1979, the Shah and his family left the country for a two week ‘vacation’, from which they would never return. According to some accounts, during the year of protest the Shia forces became more and more dominant within the anti-Shah movement due to the Shia custom of several days of mourning for a fallen hero, events that were used to coordinate and mobilize additional protest.\footnote{Anonymous Swedish Baluch, e-mail to author, April 16, 2014.}

A few days after the departure of the Shah, Ruhollah Khomeini, a politically engaged cleric openly opposing both the Shah and the United States, returned after fifteen years in exile. Khomeini quickly united the opposition but violently excluded the leftist revolutionaries, who had helped in the final overthrow of the Shah’s military but were severely weakened due to years
of repression.\textsuperscript{46} The next step for Khomeini was the writing of a new constitution and some of the participants of the anti-Shah movement were taken by surprise by his emphasis on the need for theocratic rule.\textsuperscript{47} In November 1979, the new constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran was adopted and it instituted Khomeini as its Supreme Leader.\textsuperscript{48} This was the start of another repressive regime, and in the years to follow those who had served under the former regime, as well as leftist revolutionaries and any others that opposed the theocratic regime, were jailed, tortured, executed, or forced to leave the country.

One particular characteristic of Iran that needs to be addressed is its highly diverse population; roughly 39\% of Iran’s population belong to ethnic minorities and there are also religious minorities such as Sunni Muslims, Christians, and Jews.\textsuperscript{49} This sets Iran apart from a country like Egypt, where 99.6\% of the population is identified as ethnic Egyptian, and the Copts make up 9\% of the population.\textsuperscript{50} In the hybrid regime of Ukraine, on the other hand, 77.8\% of the population identify as Ukrainians and 17.3\% as Russians\textsuperscript{51} and in Syria, 90.3\% identify as Arab and 74\% as Sunni Muslim.\textsuperscript{52} Hence, in the comparative context the level of diversity in Iran is very high. While this subject has so far not been discussed in the discourse around the use of social media and change agents, this specific circumstance will be addressed in this study by looking at two distinct regions of Iran; the Province of Tehran, which includes the country’s capital, and the Province of Sistan-Baluchistan, home to the ethnic and religious Baluch minority. The location of the Province of Sistan-Baluchistan in Iran is illustrated in this map:

\textsuperscript{46} Abrahamian 1982


\textsuperscript{48} Note that while presidential elections are held in Iran, the ultimate power rests with the supreme leader who is not held accountable to the people through any democratic processes.


While the origins of the Baluch people are unclear, some theories claim that they arrived to present-day Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, in the 5th-8th centuries. After a failed attempt in the 15th century, the Baluch people united under the Kalat Khanate in the 17th century. The Khanate lasted into the late 19th century, when an agreement between Persia, Afghanistan, and the United Kingdom (UK) divided the region into Western Baluchistan (present-day Iran) and Eastern Baluchistan (present-day Pakistan). In contrast to the majority in Iran, who are Shia Muslims, a majority of the Baluch are Sunni and they have also preserved their own language, dress, and customs, making them both an ethnic and religious minority in the country. During the Iranian Revolution, some secular Baluch participated in the leftist groups that opposed the Shah, but the Baluch, just like other ethnic minorities in Iran, “played a peripheral role in the national effort to rid Iran of the Shah”.

Neglect, which not only stems from its geographical isolation but also from social prejudice on the part of the central government, has resulted in that Sistan-Baluchistan is the least developed province in Iran. Both the Pahlavis and the theocratic government have attempted to assimilate the Baluch, which constitute about 1-3% of the country's population, into the Iranian

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54 Anonymous Swedish Baluch, e-mail to author, April 16, 2014.

economy, but the ultimate goal has been to control the population of the region rather than to promote the well-being of its inhabitants. An illustrative example of the attempted assimilation of the Baluch is the name of the province, which has been changed from ‘Baluchistan’, to ‘Baluchistan-Sistan’, and to ‘Sistan-Baluchistan’. The Baluch themselves, who continue to refer to their homeland as ‘Baluchistan’, fear that any reference to their ethnicity will soon be dropped completely from the official name. Due to both their connection with Eastern Baluchistan and the structural discrimination in Iran, the Iranian Baluch who wish to pursue university studies in subjects not offered in Sistan-Baluchistan often study in Pakistan, where they feel less subjugated to discrimination than they would in Tehran.

While their relative geographical isolation for a long time protected the Baluch in Iran from repression, reports of repression have increased in the last few decades, even if some temporary improvements were reported during the term of the reformist former president Khatami. The only form of cultural expression that is allowed is to wear the traditional style of clothing, which resembles that worn in Pakistan and Afghanistan but which only the Baluch wear in Iran. The Baluch are systematically discriminated against when it comes to political participation as well as on the job market. Even more alarming is that the London-based organization International Voice for Baluch Missing Persons claim that about 55 percent of the 1,481 people executed in Iran between 2004 and 2009 were Baluch – a claim that would mean that the Iranian Baluch have “endured the highest concentration of death penalties handed down as a percentage of population” globally.

In 2002, an armed religious and political organization claiming rights for local Baluch was created in Sistan-Baluchistan. It is believed to be responsible for suicide bombings and kidnappings. Many Iranian Baluch, including the diaspora found mainly in Australia, Oman, Norway, and Sweden, would however prefer to see a political solution that includes Baluch self-determination in a federal Iranian state. This is also the stated goal of the Baluchistan Peoples Party (BPP), which represent the Iranian Baluch in the global Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO).


60 Zurutuza 2011, p. 1
E. SOURCES AND THEIR USAGE

For the purpose of this study, several different types of sources will be used: semi-structured interviews, a social media analysis, and election data and polls from a variety of academic portals and news accounts focusing on Iran. The interviews were carried out in Tehran and Sistan-Baluchistan in May 2013, a few weeks before the presidential election. The social media analysis was done on the Persian-language site Balatarin during the presidential campaign 2013.

The different sources complement each other to give a broad picture of the perception and use of social media by change agents in Iran in general and the two distinct groups, Persians and Baluch, in particular. The interviews with Persians was used to assess how these change agents in Tehran used social media during the protests in 2009 as well as their view of social media’s potential benefit ahead of the 2013 election. The social media analysis of Balatarin was used to assess how the site was actually used during the 2013 presidential campaign. The semi-structured interviews with the Baluch was used to assess their use of social media, or not, during the 2009 presidential campaign. It was also used to evaluate the current use and general attitude towards these communication channels among the Baluch. References to election polls and election data from various sources were used to supplement the interviews and the social media analysis.

More specifically, the semi-structured interviews provided a deepened understanding of why each group decided to engage on-line, or not. Primarily, they were used to determine if the interviewees were engaged on-line and on which social media platforms. Secondly, they looked at what the interviewees use social media for; if it was only to communicate with friends and family or if they also used them to engage in political discussions. Thirdly, they looked at the perceived reliability of these sources, which included the interviewees’ perspective of whom within or outside their communities that tend to be active on-line. While the focus is social media, previous research referenced later in this study also indicated the need to analyse the interviewees’ usage and perception of Satellite TV. Fourthly, the interviews provided information with regards to what extent the interviewees participate in off-line political activities. Finally, the interviews provided unique information with regards to the interviewees’ perception of their national and local context, information that can only be obtained through face-to-face encounters with change agents in Iran.

The social media analysis, on the other hand, provided information with regards to the use of this medium for political mobilization during the 2013 election campaign. The decision to analyse the Persian-language site Balatarin was based on its relative popularity in Iran as compared to other open source social media sites, especially Twitter. While the nature of Balatarin does not allow for a quantitative analysis that makes inferences with regards to networks ties and diffusion
of messages, it will give a more accurate picture with regards to the on-line behaviour of Persians. Specifically, the social media analysis will look at how the presidential campaign was reflected on this site, what sources that were used, and the attributes of those using the site.

1. **Semi-structured interviews**

In May 2013, a total of ten semi-structured interviews were completed; five in the Province of Tehran and five in the Province of Sistan-Baluchistan. In the Province of Esfahan, also visited, it was not possible to carry out any interviews since the Tourism Police did not allow any interaction between foreigners and Iranians. The interviews were carried out about a month before the June presidential election, with the last day of interviewing (11 May) being the last day to register as a candidate. This time was purposefully chosen as it was perceived that it would provide a favourable climate both to discuss the 2009 election as well as the views on the upcoming election. For safety reasons, it would not have been possible to carry out these interviews any closer to the time of the 2013 election. The sample size is rather small, but considering the security conditions it would not have been possible to carry out such in-depth interviews with a larger sample.

The character of the interviews did differ slightly both with regards to demographics and the nature of the interview. The interviews took between 17 minutes and 73 minutes, with an average of 32 minutes for each interview. Most interviews were conducted in English, but one interview was completely interpreted (Baluch to English) and one was partly interpreted (Persian to English). The people interviewed were between the ages of 24 and 35, and all of them had completed university studies. Four of the interviewees in Sistan-Baluchistan had studied abroad, in Pakistan or India, and one of the interviewees in Tehran had travelled extensively in Europe due to the nature of her profession. Four interviewees were women and six were male – with all interviewees from Sistan-Baluchistan being male. The latter mainly due to language barriers, more males than females speak English, and the strict division of gender within the Baluch culture, with a visiting European female being treated as a ‘third gender’ and invited to participate in the gatherings of the men. Most interviewees in Tehran, on the other hand, were female, which depended on being introduced to friends of female contacts, who generally also tended to be female. For the safety of the people interviewed, it will not be further described how the contacts were acquired.

There were several security concerns that had to be taken into account in order to be able to carry out the interviews. Most interviews took place in public places like parks, but a couple took place in the home of one of the interviewees. The locations were always chosen by the
interviewees. Several of the people being interviewed would only agree to the interview after a few hours of socializing with the researcher in order to build trust. Several interviews had to be temporarily paused due to the perceived insecurity felt by the people being interviewed, and one person directly expressed that he was scared during the interview. It is possible that this sense of fear and urgency during the interviews had an impact on some of the answers with regards to interviewees not disclosing the full extent of their on-line or off-line political activity.

Even if the number of people interviewed was very small, the interviews provided a wealth of information. Specifically, they provided insight into the news sources and social media preferred and used by the interviewees in the two different provinces, as well as information with regards to the rational-choice of participating, or not, in the demonstrations in 2009 and the potential strategies with regards to the, then, upcoming 2013 June election. The interviews were transcribed and then coded using key words focusing on the questions how, where, what, and who with regards to on-line participation as well as the perception of satellite TV. The information with regards to the off-line behaviour and the perceived social and political context was gathered from all of the different questions as all interviewees frequently referred back to this.

2. Social media

The social media analysis focused on the Iranian site Balatarin, and not on Twitter; the most commonly studied social media site in relation to Iran and the 2009 election.\(^{61}\) Mehdi Yahyanejad, one of the founders of Balatarin, identifies three reasons for why, despite its limited reach in the country,\(^{62}\) so much focus has been placed on Twitter; (1) in 2009 the content was mainly in English, (2) Twitter has a powerful Application Programming Interface, which makes it easy to measure different types of activities, and (3) the U.S. State Department’s call for the delaying of Twitter’s maintenance shutdown in June 2009 resulted in “an exaggeration of the role that it performed”.\(^{63}\) Instead, Yahyanejad argues, a greater emphasis should be put on weblogs, an


\(^{62}\) In the study “Finding a Way: How Iranians Reach for News and Information” carried out by Magdalena Wojcieszak et. al. in 2012 only 2% of the internet users used Twitter and only 40% of this small group had been using it for more than 3 years.

\(^{63}\) Yahyanejad and Gheytanchi 2012, p. 141
argument based on the fact that the Iranian blogosphere is known for being particularly vibrant; by 2006 blogs in Persian ranked tenth among all languages worldwide in the number of post.64

Balatarin, which means “highest”, was launched in 2006 and it is the most popular social media site in Persian.65 The site allows users to post their favourite blog posts, links, YouTube videos, etc., together with a small comment about the content of the link. The users will then vote on the links posted by other users and the post with the highest score will be shown at the top of the first page. It needs to be pointed out that that a high score does not necessarily indicate that the on-line community like the content of the link, but that the post might include important and/or upsetting information. For example, on the eve of the 2009 election, the Fars News Agency (close to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards) predicted that Ahmadinejad would win with over 60 percent of the vote. This announcement was linked by a user on Balatarin, who added the comment: “Is this believable: Mousavi 28 percent!! Ahmadinejad 69 Percent? (The Biggest Fraud of the Century has begun),” and received several votes.66 Currently Balatarin, just like Facebook and Twitter, is blocked in Iran. However, users can sign up for e-mail updates, which means they receive the most popular news to their inbox without having to use any type of circumvention tools.

The premises for the social media analysis were based on information gathered during the semi-structured interviews. During these interviews it became clear that there was a group within the opposition that argued for the boycott of the 2013 election, with one exception: they would vote only if the former reformist president Mohammad Khatami declared himself as a candidate. During the time of the interviews, it became clear that while Khatami would not declare himself as a candidate, another former president, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, might instead represent the Khatami camp. On 11 May 2013, half an hour before the registration of candidates closed, Rafsanjani did register his candidacy. However, on 21 May, the Guardian Council, which goes through all registered candidates and decides who will be allowed to be an official presidential candidate, disqualified the candidacy of Rafsanjani. All of the eight candidates approved by the Guardian Council were viewed as being hand-picked by the Supreme Leader and hence fairly conservative, but two candidates were considered to be slightly more moderate: Hassan Rouhani

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66 Yahyanejad and Gheytanchi 2012, p. 146
and Mohammad Reza Aref.\textsuperscript{67} While not completely unknown, Rouhani had previously been Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council where he had worked together with Khatami and Rafsanjani; it was clear that it would not be possible for him to mobilize voters solely based on name recognition. The disqualification of Rafsanjani hence provided wind in the sail for those calling for a boycott as it illustrated the control the regime has on the entire electoral cycle. However, 44 days later, Rouhani stood as the winner of the election after a massive election campaign that had involved several references to the Green Movement as well as official endorsements of both Khatami and Rafsanjani.

The social media analysis is focused on the days leading up to the 2013 presidential election in Iran. It is based on posts on Balatarin between the dates of 22 May, the day after the official announcement of candidates, and 14 June, Election Day. The posts analysed are the most popular posts that included the word “Rouhani.” The search, which was done using the search function on the Balatarin site, was initially done in Persian (روحانی), and the search results were then translated using Google Translate. For the time period identified above, there were a total of 2180 posts. The posts were then reduced by removing posts that made reference only to the Persian meaning of the name Rouhani (“clergy”, “spiritual”. etc.) or other posts that did not make any direct reference to the presidential candidate (but maybe to people with similar names) and the presidential campaign. This left 694 posts.\textsuperscript{68} In order to make the number more manageable for manual analysis, the number of posts was again reduced to posts having received 50 or more votes, leaving a total of 127 posts to analyse.

The aim of analysing the posts was to see if the rapid change in tactics by Green Movement sympathisers, from boycott to the support of Rouhani, is a trend that is visible on the site. It should be noted, that while Balatarin is very popular, this popularity seems to be limited to certain larger cities. Of the people interviewed, nobody from Sistan-Baluchistan had even heard of the site. It was, however, determined that it was the best site to analyse due to its relative popularity, its use during and after the 2009 election, and its open and accessible data.

3. Other sources

There are many challenges associated with doing research in an authoritarian regime, and one of them is the lack of accountability of the regime to provide accurate data. In case the data actually exists, the challenge is getting access to this data and if that is overcome, getting access to

\textsuperscript{67} Aref later withdrew his presidency in order to strengthen the reformist camp in the elections.

\textsuperscript{68} It is possible that some legitimate posts were deducted, but due to the limitations of Google Translate it was decided to only keep posts with a very clear reference to the election campaign.
translated data. In the case of Iran, there are both academic and privately owned research centres across the world, often with the involvement of exiled Iranians, as well as reports on Iranian politics in well-respected English-language sources such as *The Guardian*. One example of a privately owned centre is the USA-based Information and Public Opinion Solutions (IPOS); a private research and consultancy provider that conducted telephone surveys on a four day rolling basis during the 2013 election campaign in Iran. Examples of academic institutions with Iranian data are the Iran Electoral Archive at the Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna in Italy, the Iran Data Portal at the University of Princeton, and the Observatory on Politics and Elections in the Arab and Muslim World at the Autonomous University of Madrid.\(^{69}\)

When it comes to electoral data per province, it had to be retrieved from secondary sources. For the 2009 election, the British newspaper *The Guardian* presents what it claims to be official results from the Iranian Ministry of Interior in its data blog.\(^{70}\) This data was used to analyse the 2009 elections. For the 2013 elections, data per province is more scarce. The Iranian Ministry of Interior presented the data as they received it, and published the results on their homepage a few days after the election. However, links to the data were soon removed and the page was then password protected and is no longer available to the public.\(^{71}\) None of the academic institutions mentioned - Iran Electoral Archive, the Iran Data Portal, and the Observatory on Politics and Elections in the Arab and Muslim World - have published any 2013 election results. However, the Iranian Electoral Archives at the Scuola Superiore Sant’Anna references\(^{72}\) one of the few sources available: a Wikipedia page called “Iranian presidential election 2013”.\(^{73}\) This wiki-page references the homepages of the different Iranian provinces. While this source is not optimal, it is the only one available and was used to analyse the 2013 presidential election in Iran. When it comes to both elections, maps were generated using the Electoral Risk Management Tool (ERM-
Tool) from the International Institute of Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA). The percentages were rounded in order to ensure clearer maps.

**F. SOURCE CRITICISM**

The scientific value of a single-case study is partly dependent on the possibility of in-depth study, which requires access to a plurality of sources. However, an inherent weakness with regards to doing research in an authoritarian regime is the lack of reliable data. It is believed, however, that by using semi-structured interviews; directly observing social media activity; and using widely referenced knowledge resources, this challenge has somewhat been overcome. While it is recognized that the source selection is still not optimal, it is believed that it is adequate for this study.

While the use and analysis of on-line data might be a solution to overcoming some of the problems with studying authoritarian regimes, this type of data presents its own problems, especially with regards to social media. The credibility of social media might cause some problems as the authenticity of the author is a challenge, with cases being reported not only of ‘false’ pro-democracy activist participating in social media networks but also of governments pretending to be activist in order to send messages aimed at confusing and diluting the attempt to mobilization. While evidence demonstrate that the endorsement or presence of established personalities in the social media sphere through verified accounts or likewise might help overcome this problem, it might be hard to verify the accounts of leading personalities using on-line pseudonymous to avoid repercussions from an authoritarian regime. The risk of repercussions and censoring of the internet may also lead to that activists prefer to used closed social media networks and a coded language, making it hard to collect data about their social media activity. The implications for this study lies both in mistakenly including ‘false’ on-line profiles in the social media analysis as well as misclassification of posts due to ‘hidden’ messages within the posts.

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74 Information and access to the Electoral Risk Management Tool: http://www.idea.int/elections/ermtool/

75 George and Bennet 2005.


Further, the inherent weakness of using Wikipedia as a source is acknowledged. It is a collaborative website that can be edited by anybody with an Internet connection and a Wikipedia account. The verification of the data is done through a global peer-review process. Hence, it cannot be verified that the data received from the site is the official election outcome. It should also be noted that the 2009 election results used were highly contested by members of the Green Movement are not either expected to be completely accurate. Hence, both the results from the 2009 and from the 2013 presidential elections should be seen as estimates. Further, both the election data and the election polls used come from secondary, albeit highly credible, sources and it is possible that the data has been skewed. However, the margin of error used for the analysis is rather broad, and it is therefore estimated that a slight difference between the official results and the numbers used will not affect the analysis.

When it comes to survey research and semi-structured interviews in authoritarian regimes, the answers of the respondents may be influenced by the repressive context. The respondents may not feel at ease with the discussion and might not answer the questions as freely as would be the case within a context where freedom of speech is protected. This is something that has been highlighted by other researchers that have carried out both phone interviews and face-to-face interviews in Iran. Secondly, the answers with regards to participation, or not, in the 2009 protests may have been influenced by the respondents inability to recall exactly what they did at the time, as well as the many domestic and international discussions focused on the use of social media by change agents in Iran. Combined, these two considerations may have led to that interviewees understated and/or overstated their on-line and off-line political participation both in 2009 and in 2013.

Lastly, the usage of the sources and their interpretation is based on the subjectivity of the researcher. The analysis of both the semi-structured interviews as well as the social media analysis involved steps of coding of and the preconceived notions and experiences of the researcher may have influenced the coding process. This subjective coding was further complicated by the fact that the researcher does not speak Persian. During the interviews this may have led to certain linguistic and conceptual misunderstandings that might also have influenced the analysis of the answers given. When it comes to the social media analysis, the dependency on Google Translate, which uses an automated system to detect patterns of translations made by humans to make “intelligent guesses” with regards to the appropriate translation, might have influenced the


coding process and also in turn the analysis. However, in an attempt to increase the validity of the study, a Persian and a Baluch, both based in Sweden, have provided invaluable input throughout the whole study. This included; (1) the translation of the questionnaire into Persian and Finglish\textsuperscript{80} before travelling to Iran, allowing for any misunderstandings of the questions to be sorted out during the interviews; (2) the spelling of Rouhani’s name in Persian for the social media analysis; (3) input on the classification of the different Persian-language news sources; and (4) input with regards to the historical and cultural perspective of the Baluch people. For the reference of the reader, the interview questionnaire, in English, Finglish, and Persian, is found in Annex 1.

\textsuperscript{80} ‘Finglish’ refers to a mix of Farsi and English that uses Latin letters to write Persian words. It can hence be read by those not familiar with the Arabic alphabet.
III. LITTERATUR REVIEW

The use of the internet by change agents in hybrid and authoritarian states started to get noticed around a decade ago with the so-called Orange Revolution in Ukraine 2004, which “was the first (revolution) in history to be organized largely on-line”.  

The discourse has since developed to such a degree that mass media has started to name the protests based on the social network site used, as demonstrated in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year (start)</th>
<th>Nick-name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>‘First Twitter Revolution’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>‘Twitter Revolution’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>Dec 2010</td>
<td>‘Facebook Revolution’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>Jan 2011</td>
<td>‘Facebook Revolution’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>May 2011</td>
<td>‘YouTube Uprising’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Uprisings per year and nickname

The use of social media, as well as the development of the discourse, goes hand-in-hand with the transition from Web 1.0, the use of statics website, to Web 2.0, presenting a more dynamic and interactive internet allowing for interactive on-line organization of off-line activities. However, the discourse has divided scholars into two different camps, the so called ‘digital evangelists’ or ‘techno-utopians’ who preach the use of the internet as a “soft weapon for democracy”,

generally without any contextualization of its potential impact at all, and the ‘techno-dystopians’ or ‘debunkers’, presenting a more pessimistic picture.  

The first generation of technology ‘debunkers’ were Habermas (1989) and Putnam (1995), who feared that the use of mass communication tools would disassociate people from each other or that a new global on-line network would have a detrimental effect on the local networks essential for political mobilization.  

The second generation of ‘debunkers’ is personified by the young Belarussian

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scholar Evgeny Morozov, who has written and debated extensively about the overrated role of social media for protest coordination.\textsuperscript{85} Even Morozov, however, acknowledges the potential benefits of using social media and his critique is mostly related to using social media to organize the opposition in authoritarian regimes.\textsuperscript{86} While Morozov generally provides a broader picture of domestic versus international use of social media, he does emphasise the need for further analysis, by journalists and researchers alike. He argues that there is a need to identify whom and how social media is used within authoritarian regimes in order to get a clearer picture of its actual impact on political change in these countries.\textsuperscript{87}

With regards to Iran, such studies are not broadly available. The only report found that looks at different types of internet users in Iran is the study “Fights, Adapts, Accepts: Archetypes of Iranian Internet Use”.\textsuperscript{88} However, while this study categorises different types of Iranian internet users, it does not provide any demographic information of the users or their location within Iran. This might be due to the general scarcity of empirical studies focused on the different ethnic groups that live in Iran. One study from 1994, however, argues that “Although Iran’s varied ethnic groups have for centuries inhabited roughly the same geographical era and shared in some cultural traditions, relations between the centre and the periphery have never been free of tension and conflict”.\textsuperscript{89} Notwithstanding, how this translates into the use of social media by the different groups has never before been assessed.

Currently, a purely ‘digital evangelistic’ discourse is almost disappearing, instead being replaced by a focus on how social media interacts with other elements of society, such as mainstream media (television, newspapers, radio, film). This is in line with an internet discourse that is moving from Web 2.0 to Web 3.0, focusing on how the distinctive line between on-line and off-line is disappearing as all different mediums so closely interact with each other. However, there is still a distinction in the discourse, especially with regards to authoritarian regimes. But instead of the sharp line between ‘digital evangelists’ and ‘techno-debunkers’, it might be more accurate to make a distinction between ‘techno-optimists’ and ‘techno-pessimists’.


\textsuperscript{87} Morozov 2011


A. TECHNO-OPTIMISTS

1. Social media as a separate sphere

The original techno-optimist emphasised the internet as a completely new and separate political sphere. They argued that on-line spaces for dialogue and debate opened up completely new possibilities to engage citizens in the political discourse. They viewed social media in particular as a way to offer the individual citizen the possibility to communicate his/her own views, which transforms him/her from a receiver of information to a citizen that actively makes demands. From the perspective of authoritarian regimes, Babak Rahimi argues that the possibility for political dissent on the web “has opened a new domestic arena of contestation, accommodating numerous dissidents groups online” even as “politics has become more of a limited pursuit in the ‘real’ spaces of everyday life”. His analysis, however, is mainly based on dissent out of Tehran against conservative Shia groups, based in Tehran or religious cities such as Qom. He does not address if this new ‘arena of contestation’ has also given increased voice to marginalized groups in the Iranian society. Rahimi’s view of the potential of on-line spaces is also shared by Nasrin Alvani in her book “We are Iran: The Persian Blogs” in which she argues that “websites and blogs have made it possible for young Iranians to express themselves freely and anonymously”. As indicated by the title of the book, it does not either include an analysis with regards to the role of Iran’s many ethnic minorities.

2. Linking on-line activism with off-line activities

The next step for the techno-optimists was to link this on-line activism with off-line activities. According to Fox and Ramos (2012), social media provide citizens with opportunities to express and organized themselves around their political interest and this organization and activity can also manifest itself off-line. However, while their book digs deep into different types of uses in ‘Western’ societies, especially the USA, the rest of the world is covered in one chapter on Egypt.


Jordan, and Kuwait – three countries with very different political context respectively. In his article “Political activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or political participation by other means?” Henrik S. Christiansen identifies several studies that “find a positive effect of Internet activity on political participation”, an effect that could increase in the future as the links are strongest among youth.  

While Christiansen’s article is mostly based on research in democratic countries, this positive linkage between on-line activity and off-line political participation has also been transferred to the authoritarian context by Clay Shirky. In his famous piece “The Political Power of Social Media,” published in Foreign Affairs around the same time as the outbreak of the so-called ‘Arab Spring’, Shirky argues that there has been too much focus on removing on-line censorship on “outside Web sites, such as Google, YouTube, or that of The New York Times”. He instead favours an increased focus on ensuring the open access to “media that allow citizens to communicate privately among themselves” as he argues that that “social media have become coordinating tools for nearly all of the world’s political movements”. To illustrate this, Shirky mentions Philippines, Moldova, Spain, Belarus, and Iran as examples, noting, however, that the actual impact of the use of social media by change agents in these countries was very different, but that the reason for this is hard to determine since “empirical work on the subject is hard to come by”.

3. Internet as a unifying force

Techno-optimists have also argued that on-line platforms have helped to unify opposition movements in various countries. Rasha A. Abdulla argues that even if the Egyptian revolution started long before 2011, it was the on-line platforms, which also “played a vital role as a democratic model,” that was the main “catalyst” of the 25 January revolution as “Facebook and Twitter were instrumental in organizing, motivating, and directing these crowds as to where to go and what to do”. Abdulla does highlight that only 25% of the ethnically homogenous Egyptians

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96 Ibid

97 Ibid

had access to the internet at the time of the revolution, but argues that Facebook and Twitter directed this crowd.\(^99\) She does not mention the possibility of a usability gap within this group, something that in retrospect could be what influenced the events after the revolution.\(^100\)

As Shirky rightly points out, there are still few empirical studies with regards to the use of social media by change agents. One study carried out in Singapore in 2013, which included 26 well-known bloggers, concludes that “internet technologies enable activists to communicate and work in like-minded activities in pushing for political and social change” and also claim that the study confirm that on-line platforms “bring people from diverse backgrounds together in cyberspace and cultivate a shared collective goal”.\(^101\) This study, however, only included well-known bloggers, likely to already use on-line tools in similar ways. Howard and Hussein also highlight the unifying aspect of on-line tools in their 2013 book *Digital Media and the Arab Spring* when they argue that “Dissident existed in these countries long before the internet. But digital media helped turn individualized, localized, and community-specific dissent into a structured movement”.\(^102\) When comparing the impact of the use of social media in the different countries in the region, however, Howard and Hussein do not go far beyond a general argument about connectedness: “The countries with the most tech-savvy civil society groups, such as Tunisia and Egypt, removed their dictators with few casualties, while the countries with the weakest technology infrastructure, such as Libya, Syria, and Yemen, were locked in protracted civil wars”.\(^103\) Nevertheless, Howard and Hussein also argue that Egypt “has the largest internet-using population in the region, second only to that of Iran”,\(^104\) but without making any attempt to explain why digital media has not led to a democratic revolution in the latter country.\(^105\) Just like

\(^99\) Ibid

\(^100\) Abou-Zeid, Perihan. “Presidential Elections in Egypt with a focus on Social Media”. Presentation made at International IDEA workshop on ‘Tools for citizen participation’ at the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Bern, Switzerland, 19 September 2012.


\(^103\) Ibid, p. 32

\(^104\) Ibid, p. 20

\(^105\) For some reason Howard and Hussein includes Iran into a group of countries they refer to as ‘Arab countries’ and argue that what all of the countries included in the study have in common is a “common set of languages, similar if not shared media systems, consistently authoritarian regimes, and rapidly increasing levels of technology diffusion” (p. 10). This indicates a lack of contextual understanding since Iran has different language(s) (even if they use the Arabic alphabet), media system, and history and culture. On page 20, Howard and Hussein duly acknowledge that “Iran is technically not part of the ‘Arab World’,” but do not seem concerned with regards to how this conceptual stretching might have impacted the results of their comparative study.
Abdulla and other authors in the field, Howard and Hussein do not only emphasize the use of on-line platforms to organize for a greater cause, they also associate this with a specific greater cause, namely democracy.

4. Linking social media with other media systems

The importance of the ‘media system’ that links social media activity with broadcast media is something that has been emphasized by the techno-optimist as of late. This might be considered a breaking point for this group, as it completes the transformation from being digital activists, or utopians, to focusing on the positive influence that social media can have in an already established system. According to a 2011 text by Babak Rahimi, this is both an expected and necessary development of the use of social media to ‘form dissent’. He argues that just as the televised media did not create a decline of social capital when people instead creatively adapted to this new medium “it is not the internet itself that limits or enhances civil life, but rather the way it is operated, developed, and creatively transformed by users”. This view, as compared to earlier notes about Twitter deserving the Nobel Peace Prize, establishes once and for all that the internet is not the mobilizing agency, people are. Rahimi, however, does not make any distinctions within the group of users that he refers to as “bloggers and civic associations” and simply argues that the Green Movement was “a social movement of diverse cultural, religious, and socioeconomic makeup”.

While activists from Egypt have emphasized a lesson learned with regards to the need to combine social media with face-to-face meetings to manage a successful election campaign, most of the discussion with regards to the adaptation of social media has related to interaction with broadcast media. Preliminary research about the Arab Spring, for example, have shown that social movements were dependent on traditional media to convey its message to the general public; that it was the regional satellite networks Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya that picked up on the

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108 Pfeifle 2009.

109 Rahimi 2011, p. 164

110 Ibid, p. 166

111 Abou-Zeid 2012.
information found in the social media sphere, sometimes directly from the diaspora, and transmitted it and created resonance for the message among the public.\textsuperscript{112} A study from Singapore revealed that a “reciprocal relationship exists between new and traditional media”,\textsuperscript{113} and in Mexico, were the ‘Yo Soy el 132’ movement’s main message was demanding an end to corporate monopolization of the media, Cohen (2012) ironically argues that “ultimately an effective tweet or Facebook post relies on links to already well-established credible [media] sources”.\textsuperscript{114} However, this interaction may go both ways. In the case of Egypt, the respected US-Egyptian global spokesperson Mona Elthaway published an article in \textit{Washington Post} six months before the revolution in which she endorsed the credible use of social media channels.\textsuperscript{115} With regards to Iran, in a 2012 piece by the founder of the Persian-language site Balatarin, Mehdi Yahyanejad, it is argued that “the Balatarin social-networking site, along with satellite-TV programs that echoed the voice of the Balatarin community, acted as ‘liberation technologies’ because they allowed for the rapid and uncensored broadcasting of news and information”.\textsuperscript{116} Yahyanejad provides a detailed account of how information spread across different on-line media and satellite TV, but does not address to what extent the different means of communication may have had different target audiences within the country.

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
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\bibitem[Salvatore2011]{Salvatore 2011, p. 10}

\bibitem[Yahyanejad and Gheytanchi2012]{Yahyanejad and Gheytanchi 2012, p. 141.}

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B. TECHNO-PESSIMISTS

1. From the accessibility to the usability gap

In contrast to the earlier ‘techno debunkers’, present day techno-pessimists do not necessarily think that on-line tools have a direct negative effect on off-line behaviour, but they do emphasise the need to be cautious with regards to its potential benefits. While the digital divided, feared to increase class divisions both nationally and internationally, is still a concern, the discourse has substantially developed in the last few years. While this discourse historically focused on the accessibility gap, more recent research shifts the focus to the usability gap; instead of only focusing on access to the internet, or other communication tools such as mobile phones, the focus is instead on what people can, or cannot do, with this access. For example, you might have access to the internet, but the cost, speed, cultural factors, repression, and on-line censorship and surveillance may inhibit you from using it frequently or/and to its full potential.

When it comes to mobile phones, a study carried out among the Berber community in Morocco by Leslie Dodson et al identified cultural, technical and gender-based barriers to using this communication tool. Hence, there are many different aspects to take into account and the spread of internet access and other communication technologies across the globe does not necessarily translate into efficient and/or equal usage. However, the discussion of the usability gap seems to not yet have reached the discourse focusing on the use of social media by change agents in authoritarian regimes.

2. The limited potential of social media in authoritarian regimes

While the techno-optimist view the on-line sphere as a new and free platform for political communication and organization, the techno-pessimists emphasize that this sphere can be equally used by the regime to control the citizenry. Lerner (2010), for example, argues that “websites and blogs are not a free platform for expression, and cannot avoid many of the restraints that

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118 See for example the work of the “Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa (CIPESA)”, http://www.cipesa.org/

authoritarian governments have successfully placed on social movements in the past”. While recent global developments demonstrate that both democratic and authoritarian regimes are using on-line tools to monitor citizens, the internet users in authoritarian regimes are not afforded the possibility given in a democratic state with regards to demanding transparency and accountability. Hence, the next question then becomes how the regime’s presence in the on-line sphere impacts how citizens use on-line platforms. According to Morozov, for example, “a Twitter revolution is only possible in a regime where the state apparatus is completely ignorant of the Internet and has no virtual presence of its own”. Even the founder of Balatarin, Mehdi Yahyanejad, admits that a planned protest in Tehran in December 2009 failed exactly because “the Iranian government knew the intentions of the Green Movement supporters well in advance and prepared for them”. While he attributes this failed attempt to use social media to organize a protest on insufficient preparations, it also demonstrates the ability of the government of Iran to adapt to developments within the country. None of the above scholars, however, address how the off-line repression of authoritarian regimes might impact on-line use.

3. The use of the internet for anti-democratic purposes

Techno-pessimists also insist on that on-line tools can be used for non-democratic purposes. Morozov points out that authoritarian regimes “eagerly exploit cyberspace for their own strategic purpose”. However, as previously mentioned, this may hold through both for authoritarian and democratic states. Accounts from Iran and Turkey emphasise how both governments use on-line platforms such as Twitter to track down the opposition and to spread false rumours. According to Lerner (2010), “technical innovations on both sides – that of free speech and that of online internet control – are in close competition”. In the case of Syria, this has led to a situation in


123 Yahyanejad and Gheytenchi 2012, p. 151

124 Morozov 2009b, p. 12.


126 Lerner 2010, p. 560.
which the oppositional forces feel confident that the regime will not close down the internet as it would also make it impossible for the regime to try to track their activities. However, it is not only the government that uses the internet for non-democratic purposes; other groups of society that do not promote democracy might also be present. One example is the Iranian blogosphere. A study carried out by John Kelly and Bruce Etling concludes that ‘reformist/secular’ blogs only represents one section of the Iranian blogosphere, which also includes other groups they classify as ‘conservative/religious, Persian poetry and literature, and mixed networks’. Kelly and Etling’s study is a step in the direction of breaking down internet users in Iran into different categories, even if it could have benefited from including a minority perspective.

4. Linking social media with other media systems

Combining the above arguments, techno-pessimists conclude that on-line platforms are not a reliable news source as both self-censorship on the part of democracy activists and the presence of malignant forces on-line may distort the information. Here Morozov is again one of the harshest critiques arguing that broadcast media that base its news reports on English language information found on on-line platforms are simply not willing to put in the hours necessary for real investigative reporting. Esfandiari, on the other hand, questions why during the 2009 protests in Iran “no one seemed to wonder why people trying to coordinate protests in Iran would be writing in any language other than Farsi”. However, Esfandiari (2010) does not address the fact only 63.3% of Iranians speak Farsi as their first language. According to Gladwell (2010), this focus on using on-line platforms as a news source also impacts the reporting in that it shifts the attention away from what he considers to be the real subject at hand: “where activists were once defined by their causes, they are now defined by their tools”. Morozov emphasise the need to deepen our understanding of what role on-line platforms actually play in “particular

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129 Morozov 2009b, p. 11

130 Esfandiari 2010

131 Gladwell 2010
political and social environments” and argues that in order to advance this knowledge, we have to “study the role that the internet didn’t play as well as the reasons for it”.

C. SCHOLARLY CONTRIBUTION

The scholarly contribution of this study is twofold. Firstly, this study goes beyond the definition of a state as authoritarian. As the previously mentioned studies indicate, the internet presents a contested political space and it is not only the knowledge of activist that is constantly developing, but also the knowledge of the regimes to both censor content and to track activists – even if these two interests sometimes come into conflict with each other, as in the case of Syria. In order to understand how this control, or the perception of the same, impacts the use of social media by change agents in authoritarian regimes we need to, as argued by Morozov, have a deeper understanding of the social and political context. In this study, this is achieved not only by analyzing the usage of on-line platforms but also by including face-to-face interviews with citizens from very distinct regions of the country, which helps contextualize the analysis. Hence, this study will go beyond identifying Iran as an authoritarian regime, taking into account the heterogeneity of the population and the different historical and political factors that exist and that may impact the use of social media.

Secondly, this study goes beyond only looking at how social media is used by change agents in the case of a discontinuous form of collective action (e.g. protest mobilization). While most previous studies do not even include a deeper analysis with regards to the role of the events that ignited protest – famous examples are the self-immolation of Mohammed Boazizi in Tunisia, the torture and murder of Khaled Said in Egypt, and the role of electoral fraud in the Color Revolutions and Iran - this study looks at the continuous use of social media even in the case that such an event would not occur. While the use of social media for continuous collective action (e.g. during an election campaign) is well documented in democratic states, most studies of authoritarian regimes tend to focus on protest mobilization without taking in the account the long-term usage and its impact on reform in a country. For example, while most studies on the use of social media in Egypt focus on the protest mobilization surrounding January 25th no studies are found with regards to if, and how, social media was used by change agents during the electoral campaign leading up to the fraudulent parliamentary elections in November/December 2010. Hence, this study goes beyond only looking at how social media is used by change agents for protest mobilization, to also look at how it may be used in the long-term to influence reform.

132 Morozov 2009b, p. 14
in authoritarian regimes. This allows for a deeper understanding of how social media may be combined with other elements of society.

Most importantly, however, is how this study contributes to the discourse by combining the above elements. It is by understanding this interaction that we can get a clearer picture with regards to the effectiveness of on-line democracy activism and its link with off-line political impact. In the end, both techno-optimists and techno-pessimists highlight the need for more empirical studies in order to understand how social media is used by change agents inside authoritarian regimes. This study aims to fill this gap and to deepen our understanding of how social media can be used for collective action in authoritarian regimes. However, in order to do this and move the discourse forward, we need to look beyond issues of accessibility and also assess the long-term usability of social media among diverse groups of society. This study does this not only through the “most curious and demanding” way of analysing non-English on-line content, but also through combining this on-line research with off-line face-to-face meetings, which allows for a study of “the role that the internet didn’t play as well as the reasons for it”.

\[ \text{Ibid, p. 11} \]

\[ \text{Ibid, p. 14} \]
IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study focuses on change agents; people who already participate, or have the potential to participate, in social movements. While the goals and structure of social movements can differ substantially, what all social movements have in common is that the aim is collective rather than private. The collective may be a category of persons or an entire population, including those that did not contribute to reaching the goal. Due to their collective nature, social movements can be understood through the theory of collective action. For the purpose of this study, this theory is supplemented by theories focused on the use of the internet for political mobilization.

A. COLLECTIVE ACTION

Collective action essentially refers to any action aimed at improving a group’s conditions, be it a matter of status or power. Tilly (1976) divides collective action into two categories as he looks at its historical development in Western Europe: continues forms and discontinues forms. He argues that the first category has developed from craft guilds and the collective appeal to a landlord to its twentieth century form of elections, political parties, associations, pressure groups, trade unions, etc. The discontinuous form has developed from peasant revolt, tax rebellion and mutiny, towards less violent forms such as organized strikes, mass meetings, and demonstrations and marches on the capital. He primarily contributes these developments to the creation of nation states and organizational changes such as industrialization and urbanization.

One paradigm within social movement theory, the New Social Movement (NSM) paradigm, puts emphasis on that any analysis of social movements needs to be on two levels: the macro-level and the micro-level. The macro-level focuses on the political analysis of a particular context, including structural opportunities for collective action. The micro level of collective action focuses on relationships within the mobilizing force, including the initial decision of an individual to actively contributing to reaching the collective goal.

1. Macro-structural conditions for collective action

While collective action may occur in both democratic and authoritarian countries, it is much more problematic in the latter. While democratic societies provide legitimate political space for


collective action, such as freedom of speech and of association, collective action in authoritarian regimes faces substantial obstacles. These obstacles include a higher risk of involvement and the lack of adequate information as well as information channels to organize collective action. Despite this, research “has shown not only the possibility for mobilization under authoritarianism but in many cases successful mobilization.”

The successful mobilization may in turn partly depend on the opportunities that the current context presents. Lofland (1993) divides these opportunities up between ‘dynamic opportunities’ and ‘structural opportunities’. Dynamic opportunities, he argues, may be events such as acts of violence, contested elections, or other forms of gatherings attracting fewer or more participants than anticipated, while ‘structural opportunities’ focus on the wider context, and according to Tarrow (1988) these opportunities can be subjective and based on perceived opportunities. When it comes to ‘structural opportunities,’ most research has so far been done on Western democracies, and is not always applicable in authoritarian regimes. Oberschall (2000), however, identifies four types of what he calls ‘necessary conditions of challenge,’ especially applicable when the aim is transition to democracy: (1) shared dissatisfaction with life conditions, (2) a shared discontent of the policy of the regime, (3) political opportunity such as division within the regime and international support for dissidents, as well as (4) the capacity to act collectively, including having access to means of mass communication. The importance of opportunity, constraints, resources, and power within collective action has been especially discussed by resource mobilization scholars, of which one strand emphasizes rational choice theory.

2. Micro-structural conditions for collective action

The ‘free rider problem’ is a major obstacle for collective action at the micro-level formulated by Olson (1965): “Why should rational, self-interested individuals participate in collective action when each individual’s impact on large-scale collective action is negligible and the benefits of

138 Breuer et al. 2013, p. 5.
142 Oberschall 2000, p. 28.
collective action are public and free?" The answer to this question, formulated by resource mobilization theorists, is that a rational individual will participate if the right incentives are given. These incentives can be the individual’s expectations related to the number of participants, one’s own contributions to the probability of success, and the probability of success if many people participate. When it comes to state repression and its effect on the rational choice of individuals, some argue that “severe levels of repression decrease collective action while low to medium levels escalate it”. However, these perspectives assume that all human behaviour is based on a rational economic cost-benefit analysis, and it has therefore received a lot of criticism. The critics believe that more emphasis should be put on the importance of interaction and ‘mutual conditional cooperation’ in a community that leads people to pledge that ‘I’ll cooperate if and only if you do’.

There are several theories of what type of group (network) that is the most effective for collective action. Earlier research on collective action found that a more heterogeneous group, with several diverse actors, facilitates collective action as it increases the possibility of mobilizing a ‘critical mass’ that will initiate action. However, more recent theoretical analysis point to that under certain circumstances, heterogeneity might “polarize a group into opposing camps rather than coalescing members towards a unified collective action” and in line with this, differently perceived costs of participating (cost heterogeneity) can also have a negative effect on collective action. Heckathorn (1993) argues that the importance of group heterogeneity depends on the context, and more specifically he argues that heterogeneity augments collective action when the “temptation to free-ride is great or the benefits uncertain”. This, he argues, means that increased heterogeneity can promote social change by “weakening existing social power and by

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151 Ibid, p. 347
fostering the organization of the powerless” and that the opposite is true for within-group homogeneity.  

There is also ample research with regards different types of network ties (strong, weak, informal, or formal) and how this, for example, affects collective action with regards to the diffusion messages, or frames, within a system. One particular kind of diffusion looks at how media may contribute to the diffusion of information, or messages, with regards to social movement activity.  

Rational choice theorists, as well as some of their opponents, believe that ‘communicative rationality,’ which refers to the “role that political entrepreneurs can play in solving collective action problems by changing preferences, attitudes, and beliefs”, can solve the collective action problem. The concept is based on that by raising ‘validity claims’, a speaker can ‘rationally motivate’ a person to act in a certain way. While some argue that communicative rationality may involve both ‘strategic manipulation’ and discursive methods of reaching agreements, Habermas (1984) distinguishes between the two in his theory of ‘communicative action’, which “emphasizes the interaction in which two or more subjects seek to reach an understanding concerning their shared situation”. Hence, if the ‘validity claims’ are agreed upon through a communicative process, also referred to as a ‘framing process,’ then the free rider problem of collective action can be overcome without falling into the trap of ‘strategic manipulation.’

Benford and Snow (2000) define three major ways that collective action frames may be developed, generated, and elaborated: discursive processes, strategic processes, and contested process. The first process include a constant dialogue, both oral and written, between a group

152 Ibid, p. 347


155 Miller 1992, p. 26


of people in order to articulate a frame and later amplify the agreed on message by highlighting an issue, event or belief in a very simple message. The strategic process includes a more deliberative process of framing a message and tying it to other relevant issues that might give it a strategic advantage. Lastly, the contested process refers to the constant process in society of presenting different versions of reality, which presents challenges to the framing process through the form of counter framing by opponents, inactive bystanders, and by a non-supportive media. For successful political mobilization it is also important that the message creates what Benford and Snow (2000) define as ‘resonance’ and ‘relative salience’ among the target audience. Resonance is related to consistency, empirical credibility, and general credibility of the message, and ultimately the people behind the message. Relative salience, on the other hand, is related to how the frame articulators and their message is viewed, and resonates, within the particular cultural context.

B. POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AND THE INTERNET

Defined broadly, political mobilization is “the activity of rousing masses of people both to express themselves politically and also to undertake political action”.

While most earlier research on political action focused on electoral participation, Verba et al. (1963, 1995) early on promoted a broader definition of political participation including everything from voting and other forms of electoral activity (e.g., campaign work, financial contributions, etc.) to contacting public officials, communal activity, attending protest, or the formal or informal engagement in local issues. Brady (1999) furthered that definition by defining political participation as “actions by ordinary citizens directed toward influencing some political outcome”.

The magnitude of studies of electoral participation has, however, led to a large quantity of theories focusing on political mobilization for elections. Norris (2003) divides theories on voter participation into three groups, with each group placing more or less emphasis on different aspects of political mobilization for elections. The three broad categories are (1) the legal conditions that frame the electoral system; (2) the ‘resources’ (education, socio-economic status, time etc.) and the ‘motivation’ (attitude towards politics) of the electorate; and (3) the ‘mobilizing agencies,’ such as religious groups, voluntary associations, social networks and families, friends.

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and colleagues, and the news media. More recently, it has been widely discussed how internet usage impacts off-line political participation.

When it comes to on-line activity and off-line political participation, Norris (2003) identifies two broad categories, the ‘mobilizing theories’ and the ‘reinforcement theories.’ ‘Mobilizing theorist’, in line with the techno-optimists, claim that “net activism represents a distinctive type of political participation,” and as such enhances and possibly diversifies political participation. The ‘reinforcement theories’, in line with the techno-pessimists, view the internet as a tool that may even reinforce the differences in the level of participation of groups with different resources and motivations. On the other hand, other researchers have argued that the internet only activates those who are already active off-line or, looking from a different perspective, that if the internet does indeed activate citizens, it does so in a useless way since on-line activity do not have an off-line political impact. Finally, in his overview of studies focused on the effect of on-line engagement on off-line participation, H. Christiansen (2011) argues that there is not much ground for arguments of a negative link between the two and that a positive, albeit weak, link tend to exist.

C. THEORETICAL MOTIVATIONS

Previous research on the use of social media stresses the importance of the environment in which on-line mobilization takes place by pointing to its limitations in authoritarian regimes. At the same time, one could argue that even in authoritarian regimes, social media present new opportunities with regards to network structure and the framing and diffusion of messages; both


167 H. Christensen 2011
key elements to overcoming the free rider problem. In the framing process, social media cannot only provide citizens with opportunities to express and organize themselves around their political interest, it can also make it possible for citizens to provide an instant response to counterframing and reach a larger audience with its message, be it a deliberately strategic message or not. The diffusion of messages can also have an impact on the perceived structural conditions that may present an opportunity for the transition to democracy. At the same time, as argued by scholars such as Morozov, authoritarian regimes can use these structures to quell any attempt at coordination. This emphasizes the need for a combined analysis of macro-structural conditions with a micro-level analysis of how collective action framing through social media can, or cannot, overcome the collective action problem.

So far, not much research has combined an analysis of both macro- and micro-conditions of collective action with research on the role of internet as a mobilizing agency for off-line political action. This is especially true with regards to non-democratic countries. While some studies have combined a deeper macro-level analysis with internet studies, Soon’s 2013 article “Collective Action going Digital,” focusing on Singapore, is one of few studies combining macro- micro- and internet studies. However, while Soon focuses on on-line political action others argue that it is the link between on-line coordination and off-line political action that makes “the internet an intriguing element in the development of social movement theory”. This study will address this link, and at the same time build upon previous research with regards to macro- and micro-conditions of collective action as well as the role of internet for off-line political action in authoritarian regimes.

168 Fox and Ramos 2012
169 Abou-Zeid 2012
170 For example Lerner 2010
171 Soon 2013
172 Lerner 2010, p. 559
V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to determine if social media open up new spaces for political participation and off-line mobilization in Iran or if on-line censorship and surveillance excludes the use of such platforms. In addition, the inclusion of two different regions in the study will make it possible to determine if there is a usability gap in this regard within the country. To this end, this chapter first looks at the perception and use of social media in Tehran and Sistan-Baluchistan respectively, ending with an analysis of the differences between the two regions. In order to understand the use and perception of social media in these regions, we look at how social media was used in 2009 and how it was both perceived and used ahead of the presidential election in 2013. One key element of this analysis is to look at how reliable social media is viewed as a news source, which is tied to whom is perceived to use these on-line platforms. As indicated by earlier research on the subject, the perception of satellite TV and its reliability is also of importance. Secondly, the differences between the two regions will be analysed by looking at the different macro- and micro-conditions in the two regions. This is followed by an analysis of the linkages between on-line and off-line participation in the two regions of study, identifying both similarities and differences.

A. THE PERCEPTION AND USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

This section looks at the perception and use of social media in each region studied. It ends with an analysis of the differences between the two regions. The division of the analysis into two separate regions and the analysis of the differences highlights the specific use and perception of each region. This will diversify our understanding of the use of social media in Iran, as most previous studies only tend to focus on Tehran or other major Shia dominated cities.

1. Perception and use of social media by change agents in Tehran

The interviewees and the Green Movement

Of the people interviewed in Tehran, all had some kind of experience from the protests in 2009. While the four women had all participated in the protests because “most of (the) people participated in demonstrations”, the male interviewee had carried out his conscription service in the military at this time. He described the overwhelming support for Mousavi within his unit, and also how he had served as traffic police during the protests, recollecting that “both parties...”

173 Persian Female, 30 years
(the government and the people) were satisfied by our service”.

Three of the interviewees claimed to still identify with the Green Movement, while one said that she had lost interest after the disappointing developments in the last four years. The male interviewee, who had served as a traffic police, said he did not identify with the Green Movement as he believed that it was not representative of society but rather represented a small group of middle class youth. This sentiment was shared among the other interviewees, one who expressively state that “I think many revolutions (there is a) middle class hero but one of the problems (is) that the Green Movement is completely silenced because we couldn’t connect all the people in all the cities”.

There were also concerns expressed with regards to that after the house-arrest of Mousavi, the Green Movement has no clear leader and that this has impacted its decline. One interviewee expressed that people are afraid to lead the movement due to the repression of the regime, while another argued that the movement does not need a leader because “each person can be a leader for themselves”.

The perception and use of social media in Tehran during the 2009 protests

To understand how social media was used in Tehran during the post-election protests in 2009, it is important to understand the atmosphere surrounding the weeks leading up to the election. Several interviewees who had participated in the Mousavi election campaign described the pre-election period as free and equal:

We went on the streets and we talked to people, we talked to people about the election…we are choosing Mousavi and these are our reasons, we all talked to each other, this was a very good way to communicate with people, even people who don’t use internet or satellite…but after that, we couldn’t talk to people, we couldn’t trust anybody

(Persian Female, 24 years old)

It was a very lovely atmosphere. We were equal. The fans of Mousavi and the fans of Ahmadinejad, the fans of Karroubi, we were all talking together an it was a lovely atmosphere in Tehran…but on the exact day after the announcement of Ahmadinejad, I could not believe it, the police were everywhere, all armed, and we couldn’t talk

(Persian Female, 30 years old)

These statements indicate that the atmosphere in Tehran changed very quickly, and that people had to try to find new means to communicate within a short period of time. As described before, a segment of the Iranian population were already avid users of social media sites and the

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174 Persian Male, 30 years

175 Persian Female, 24 years

176 Persian Female, 25 years
interviewees described how Mousavi’s supporters quickly turned to social media to communicate and coordinate protests.

Three of the people interviewed described in detail how social media was used during the 2009 protests. All three of them mentioned Facebook as a key tool and one person perceived that the use of Facebook was safer than the use of cell phones because it was harder to control by the government since it is “located in another country” and the widespread use of VPNs leading to different Internet Protocol (IP) addresses, which makes it “harder to track”. One person said that she appreciated how Facebook and Twitter had been used, but that this was through hearsay as she personally did not have access to these sites. She instead referred to the usefulness of weblogs, which she believed “were very informative”, and she also stressed the usefulness of the site Balatarin. Another interviewee also mentioned the popularity of Balatarin during the protests, but she also added that she did not believe that it was the most trustworthy source of information compared to other social media sites. While Facebook was the most frequently mentioned site, Twitter and Google Reader were also mentioned. One interviewee expressively described how the comment field of Google Reader was used to decide on when and where to meet the next day to demonstrate and how she had been part of sharing this information with her network.

Other than social media channels, interviewees mentioned the use of regular telephone lines to communicate with, and receive news from, relatives abroad. Text messaging was also mentioned by most of the interviewees; however it was described as an unsecure method as right after the announcement of Ahmadinejad as the winner of the 2009 election, the government started to screen messages for any references to Mousavi and his campaign as well as for any mentions of times and meeting places. The role of satellite TV, mainly BBC Persian and Voice of America (VOA), was described very differently by the interviewees. While several did not have access to satellite TV, which is illegal in Iran, and argued that it only broadcasted the biased view of the Iranian diaspora, one interviewee did believe that satellite channels had played an important role during the 2009 protests:

177 Persian Female, 25 years
178 Persian Female, 30 years
179 Persian Female, 24 years
180 Ibid
181 Ibid
We got the news from BBC, just BBC, very important. And especially because the protest was in Tehran…people in other cities they were aware of what was happening in Tehran just by satellite

(Persian Female, 24 years)

However, the same interviewee also emphasized the use of the non-technological method of spreading information about the protest by writing messages on the walls of the city detailing where the next protest would be held. She argued that “we are not just the internet, we are real, we are on the streets, and we are living here.”

In sum, social media did play a role in the protests in 2009 but even among this small sample, the description of its use differed. Of the four interviewees that took active part in the protests, three mentioned that they received information from social media sites, whether it was Facebook, Google Reader or Balatarin, and two described having taken part in sharing this information with their networks. One of the interviewees mentioned that social media sites were useful for those already engaged in the Mousavi campaign before the election, and the fifth interviewee, the traffic police, drew parallels between the participants in the protests and the limited accessibility and usability of social media among the working class population. It remains unclear if the more conventional methods, such as writing on the walls, had any success in reaching this segment of society.

The perception of social media in Tehran in 2013

During the four years since the last presidential election, the government has increased on-line censorship and surveillance in Iran. This in itself is evidence of the importance of this tool for change agents in Iran. However, one interviewee drew parallels with the Egyptian revolution and argued that the use of social media cannot have the same impact in Iran as the government itself has experienced carrying out a revolution and knows the importance of stopping the flow of information:

182 Persian Female, 24 years

183 Persian Female 30 years, Persian Female 25 years, Persian Female 24 years

184 Persian Female 25 years, Persian Female 24 years

185 Persian Female 30 years

186 Persian Male 30 years

Technology (internet), it is effective in so many countries, but in Iran no, because this government knows what to do… I think politicians in Egypt did not think about what was hitting them, but here they know, because this is the way that they come into power

(Persian Male, 30 years)

Despite the censorship, however, all of the people interviewed frequently used the internet to stay informed. Most of the interviewees stated that internet was a good source of information and that the reason for increased censorship is to stop the flow of information in and out of the country. However, several stated that when it comes to interaction, they preferred to do it face-to-face, as it was perceived as safer. The constant cat-and-mouse game between the government censorship and the use of proxies were viewed somewhat differently by the interviewees. While one interviewee, the former traffic police, was convinced that the government was ahead of the game and that the internet “is in their full control and they know what you are doing, even if they will not use it right now”, two of the interviewees, the two youngest, were convinced that the tables were turned, and one expressed “Always we get problem, but they can’t do anything about that”, while another stated that:

The speed of internet, they reduced the speed of internet and it was terrible, you know, many proxies didn’t work, but people always find a way. I don’t know how, but for example, every day they introduce new proxies.

(Persian Female, 24 years)

Despite their fears, all of the interviewees did have an account on at least one social media site. All but one had an active Facebook account that they used to interact with their friends. Two of the interviewees however emphasised that Facebook was only something to be used “for fun” and not for any political discussions. Two Facebook users stated that it was both a good news source and a tool to communicate with their friends on political matters. One of them, however, said that she believed that using Facebook is not any safer than going to a park and to openly discuss politics, but it is more accessible. The one person without a Facebook account

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188 It is clear that both the Persians and the Baluch interviewed tended to refer to different tools in rather broad terms such as ‘technology’. This term seem to refer to anything from a good quality product, as a synonym of ‘internet’ and to describe social media. This use of the word is probably indicative of both language and conceptual misunderstandings and will most likely seem even more confusing when taken out of the context of the discursive dialogue. I will therefore, when necessary, try to clarify by adding a specification in parenthesis.

189 Persian Male 30 years, Persian Female 30 years, Persian Female 28 years

190 Persian Male, 30 years

191 Persian Female, 24 years

192 Persian Male 30 years, Persian Female 30 years

193 Persian Female 25 years, Persian Female 24 years

194 Persian Female, 25 years
stated that this was because she accessed internet at her workplace, where she could not install the VPNs required to circumvent the ban of the site. This same person also expressed a more positive view of Balatarin, as account holders are sent e-mail updates of the activity on the site rendering the government’s blockage of the site useless for those only using it as a news source. In the end, three out of the five people interviewed had an account on Balatarin, even if they did not use it as frequently as their other social media accounts. While all of the interviewees were aware of the existence of Twitter, nobody stated that they had a personal account there.

With regards to the potential of using social media to mobilize in 2013, the interviews presented a mixed picture. Not surprisingly, the two same interviewees that perceived that the users were always ahead of the government when it comes to finding new ways to circumvent on-line censorship were also the once that saw the potential to use social media for political mobilization in 2013. One of them argued that “(the internet) is one of the best ways to communicate about politics in Iran”. Two of the interviewees argued that face-to-face meetings were the only possible way to discuss politics and to coordinate any political mobilization, while the most sceptical interviewee, again the former traffic police, argued that the government would “exterminate you” the minute you tried to mobilize, whether off-line or on-line. These latter statements do indeed indicate that censorship to some degree kill content. One of the proponents of the use of social media, on the other hand, argued that the conventional practice of writing messages on the walls was no longer possible due to the security situation, indicating that she believed that on-line discussion was still safer than off-line engagement. With two out of five interviewees arguing that social media was indeed a suitable venue for political discussion and mobilization in 2013, the next step was to assess how social media was used during the election campaign that ensued a couple of weeks after the interviews.

The use of social media during the presidential campaign 2013

As previously described, the social media site Balatarin was analysed as its open source nature makes it assessable to researchers. The interviews also re-affirmed the previous information of that Balatarin was more widely used within Iran than other open source social media sites, such as Twitter. In order to assess if the use of the site Balatarin did play a role in the political debate

195 Persian Female, 30 years
196 Persian Female, 24 years
197 Persian Male, 30 years
198 Persian Female, 24 years
in Iran during the election campaign 2013, data was collected from the site starting the day after the announcement of the approved candidates (22 May) up until Election Day (14 June). This time frame also included three presidential debates (fig. 2). The last day of the interviews, was 11 May, which was also the last day to register as a candidate.

**Time line of the Iranian Presidential Election 2013**

![Time line of the Iranian presidential elections 2013](image)

**Figure 2**: Time line of the Iranian presidential elections 2013

The Balatarin analysis provide insight into three different aspects that are of interest for this study; (1) how is the social media used by change agents for political mobilization, (2) who is most likely to use social media to communicate, organize and mobilize, and (3) how reliable are independent websites/networks perceived in comparison with official news outlets. The first question was analysed by dividing the top 127 posts into positive, negative, and neutral. The negative posts are those that clearly promote a boycott of the election, the positive posts are those that clearly encourages a vote for Rouhani, that directly associates Rouhani with Khatami, Rafsanjani and/or Mousavi, or other official endorsements of Rouhani. ‘Neutral’ indicates all other types of posts, including neutral news accounts, list of candidates, election polls, and any other posts that do not clearly fall into the first two categories. When classifying a post, both the content of the linked article/blog posts, etc. as well as the comments posted on Balatarin by the person who added the link were taken into account. The second question was analysed by collecting attribute data for the top 38 users (those with at least 2 posts receiving 50 or more votes). This included information on how long they have been active on Balatarin and if they tended to have a positive, negative, or neutral attitude towards Rouhani. Lastly, the view of independent websites/networks versus official news agencies was analysed by looking at the top sources of the 127 posts and if they linked to official news sites or to independent websites/network, as well as the geographical base of these sites.

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199 For description on how top post were selected, see section 'Sources and their usage' on p. 17
From the top 127 posts analysed on Balatarin, we can see how the presidential campaign is reflected with regards to the use and reference to the name ‘Rouhani’; the moderate candidate who gained a lot of support within a very short time span. The first distinct mention of him with regards to positive or negative attributes, as compared to just identifying him as a presidential candidate, came right before the first presidential debate on May 31. The mentioning of his name, in positive or negative terms, between 30 May and 14 June (Election Day) is demonstrated in figure three.

**Mentioning of Rouhani’s Name on Balatarin between May 30 and June 14, 2013**

**Figure 3:** Positive and negative mentions of Rouhani collected from Balatarin between 30 May and 14 June, 2013

**Source:** www.balatarin.com, 30 May - 14 June 2013. Fig. generated by author using Excel.

This correlation does indicate that users of Balatarin also followed the national debate on state TV during the presidential campaign. The peak of positive posts on 12 June does not correlate with any of the presidential debates. It does, however, correlate with election polls released by the foreign-based company IPOS, cited in, among other places, a publication by the Observatory on Politics and Elections in the Arab and Muslim World at the Autonomous University of Madrid.200

The June 12, 2013 poll cited indicated that Rouhani had sailed up as the top candidate with 31.7% of the votes, compared to 24.4% of his closest competitor.201 This indicates that the users of Balatarin follow and use a combination of both official national sources as well as independent international sources.

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200 Observatory on Politics and Elections in the Arab and Muslim World. More information available at: http://www.opemam.org/node/42

There is no indication of that active users of Balatarin changed their view with regards to Rouhani during the election campaign; those who tended to be negative to begin with stayed negative throughout the election campaign. This can either indicate the limited potential for using Balatarin to drastically change active users minds or that active users of Balatarin are those who are already politically engaged and hold a firm stance. There was also a group of people who mixed positive, negative, and neutral posts throughout the presidential campaign, seemingly using the site to share information rather than to actively promote a specific stance (fig. 4).

**Top Balatarin user’s dispersion of posts between May 30 and June 14, 2013**

![Figure 4](image.png)

**Figure 4:** A top user’s dispersion of positive, negative, and neutral posts collected from Balatarin between 30 May and 14 June, 2013

**Source:** www.balatarin.com, 30 May-14 June 2013. Fig. generated by author using Microsoft Excel.

Reliability of social media and satellite TV

During the interviews it became clear that the questions with regards to agency and reliability are closely interlinked. This holds true not only for social media, but a major complaint about satellite TV was that the programmes were done by exiled Iranians, and “they cannot understand us, because most of the journalist, only their parents are Iranian”. One respondent, however, thought that channels like BBC Persian can get accurate news “if they want to” as even though it is illegal, they probably have informants on the ground in Iran. None of the interviewees made any reference to that satellite channels can collect accurate news through on-line sources and all of them thought they could be informative at best, but not contribute to mobilizing the population in the country, or as one interviewee put it:

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202 Persian Female, 28 years

203 Persian Female, 25 years
I think they cannot understand us, even when they are Iranian, because they are not (here). I hear some of them said people in Iran should protest about everything, and I think how would you feel about coming here and do it yourself? Please do not order something that is not possible

(Persian Female, 28 years)

This distrust with regards to information from the outside did not only apply to Satellite TV. One interview expressed that “Iranian people are very sensitive to the forces from outside”\(^{204}\) and told the story of a respected activists who had to leave the country after being tortured by the regime, and how people immediately stopped following him on-line since he “doesn’t have that influence that he had inside the country”.\(^ {205}\) Another interviewee mentioned that he assumes that anything that goes on in Iran is by default orchestrated by outside players.\(^ {206}\) This distrust of people outside the country could also be one of the explanations for the popularity of Facebook over the site Balatarin, as most users on the latter site use nicknames and it is hence harder to verify their whereabouts, or as expressed by one interviewee:

I trust Facebook more than Balatarin because there I can see who wrote, members of Balatarin are a little different…many of them live in the United States, sometimes they write their imagination. But people on Facebook, most of the time are more relevant, you can trust them more. On Facebook, most people use their real name

(Persian Female, 24 years)

Hence, according to the interviewees, no outside forces, whether official TV networks or individual users of social media sites can be completely trusted unless they also had an off-line presence inside the country. This is, however, somewhat contrasted by the information gathered from Balatarin were websites based outside of the country are equally popular as websites based inside the country (Table 2). This could of course also be explained by the interviewees’ estimation that several of the people active on Balatarin are themselves based abroad.

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\(^{204}\) Persian Female, 30 years

\(^{205}\) Ibid

\(^{206}\) Persian Male, 30 years
Ranking of different websites based on their number of mentions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News Agency</th>
<th>Mentions</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radio Farda</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Persian Language arm of Radio Free Europe, funded</td>
<td>Czech Republic and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran Green Voice</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Green Movement Website</td>
<td>US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roozoonline</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Reformist website</td>
<td>France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBC Persian</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>BBC's Persian Service</td>
<td>Britain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalame</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Mousavi's Website</td>
<td>Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rahsa News</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Reformist Website</td>
<td>Iran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gooya News</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Independent website</td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Zamaneh</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dutch-funded radio-website</td>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saham News</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Karoubi's Website</td>
<td>Iran</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Most popular news agencies, and their description and base country, based on number of mentions among top posts on Balatarin

Source: www.balatarin.com, 22 May-14 June 2013.

While the interviewees did follow websites/independent networks from abroad, they all emphasized the need for caution when doing so. Two of the interviewees responded that they followed Satellite TV to get information about ‘other cultures’ or ‘technology’ that exists in other countries. While the interviewees did follow websites/independent networks from abroad, they all emphasized the need for caution when doing so. Two of the interviewees responded that they followed Satellite TV to get information about ‘other cultures’ or ‘technology’ that exists in other countries. The male interviewee said that he gets his information from both national TV (‘10% is true’) and from satellite TV (‘10-20% is true’) in order to get both perspectives. He did not get any news from social media, which he considered to only be ‘for fun.’ Another interviewee, who still thought that the internet was the best way to get information, expressed that:

I think all media, they try to put some information into your mind, and this is your responsibility to find which of them is right, and which of them is not right. I like to know the news from every channel, but we should be wise, if you are not, they can brain-wash you

(Persian Female, 28 years)

In general, the interviewees seemed to be equally sceptical to news from official news sources as to news from on-line platforms and social media sites. This can be seen as a healthy reflection by people who have grown up in a country with heavy censorship of the media, which has thought them to question everybody’s intentions. One interviewee even questioned the independence of Satellite TV networks both with regards to their own government and with regards to the regime in Iran – “it seems they are connected to the Mullahs, to the government…because BBC is a very big company…why would they risk their reputation to support us? We are just people, we have

207 Persian Male 30 years, Persian Female 28 years
208 Persian Male, 30 years
nothing”.\(^{209}\) The same interviewee expressed that she does indeed trust the information that is on Balatarin, but only after she was able to personally verify some news she had read on the site:

(On Balatarin) there was a title saying, ‘in this park, there was a murder and a man was killed just because he didn’t want to give his bag to the thief’. I asked some people who live near that park, and I said, oh my God, that is true. And after that I rely somehow on that site because I think they do not have to lie about things.

(Persian Female, 30 years)

If we look at the popularity of official sites and independent networks respectively on Balatarin, we also see a rather balance approached. Most links to official sites are from Europe, which tend to be the base of several Persian-language official websites, while the balance between official sites and independent networks based inside Iran reflect the statements of the interviewees with regards to the importance of trying to find a balanced picture by accessing several different sources (fig. 5).

**Type of source and region on Balatarin May 22 – June 14, 2013**

![Mentions and Base of Top 9 Sources](image)

**Figure 5:** Dispersion between region and type of source of the top 9 sources used on Balatarin.

**Source:** www.balatarin.com, 22 May- 14 June 2013. Fig. generated by author using Microsoft Excel.

As we have established that there is a link between reliability and agency, and especially the off-line presence of the agency, the next step is to further explore who is active on-line. We can do this by analysing the attributes of the top 38 users on Balatarin during the 2013 election campaign. This data will tell us how long people have been on Balatarin and if there is a correlation between the length of membership and their view of the candidacy of Rouhani. As previously indicated, users on Balatarin often mixed positive, negative and neutral posts, however, a few stick out by having only positive and/or negative posts. The latter are classified as

\(^{209}\) Persian Female, 30 years
positive or negative users, while users who mix are named ‘neutral’. In figure six, we see the average number of membership per months for the different categories:

![Membership in months](image)

**Figure 6:** Average number of months as a member on Balatarin for users classified as neutral, positive, or negative.

**Source:** www.balatarin.com, accessed 20 June 2013. Fig. generated by author using Microsoft Excel.

We can see that the average membership for those who were clearly negative to the candidacy of Rouhani is twice as long as the average. This indicates that a long-term engagement, and probably more specialized knowledge with regards to the use of anti-filtering software, could be necessary in order to take a stronger anti-government stance even when on-line. As one interviewee put it; in order to engage on-line “you have to be very updated on technology, on software, and you have to know what is right now the programs for anti-filtering”.\(^{210}\) It should be noted that only one of the top users had been a member since the inaugural year of 2006, and this user was classified as ‘neutral.’ Hence, long-term engagement did not directly correlate with a more critical stance.

In sum, despite the increased levels of on-line censorship and surveillance during the last four years, all of the interviewees maintained an on-line presence on blocked sites. The risk of using these sites for political purposes was however acknowledged by all of them, and the perceived security provided by the use of VPNs and anti-filtering software impacted what they used the sites for. Two of the interviewees admitted to only using the site ‘for fun’, while one interviewee described accessibility as a problem to using the sites.\(^{211}\) Further, the analysis of Balatarin demonstrated how the site was used by active members during the 2013 pre-election period. We see that the rapidly increased popularity of Rouhani is reflected on the site and that the members

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\(^{210}\) Persian Male, 30 years

\(^{211}\) See discussion on pp. 49-50
are following both domestic and international media. However, we see no indication of that the most active users of Balatarin tended to change their mind with regards to their political stance during the election period. What we do see is that a more firm and regime-critical stands tended to be taken by the more experienced users. Finally, it is obvious that the most important factor with regards to reliability is not whether a source is an official news agency or an independent website, but rather the quality of the information that the source provides.

2. Perception and use of social media by change agents in Sistan-Baluchistan

Interviewees and the Green Movement

Of the people interviewed in Baluchistan, two had attended university in India, two in Pakistan, and one in Tehran. All but the last one, who had been in Tehran during the protest, had been back in Sistan-Baluchistan by the time of the 2009 protests. None of them had engaged in any off-line activities at this time. The man who studied in Tehran had a Master’s degree in Political Science, and the others held degrees in Computer Science, History, and Literature. The group obviously belong to the middle class of their society – and hence represents the group identified by the interviewees in Tehran as the group that is most likely to participate in protests against the government and to be active users of social media. Consequently, the only thing that set them apart from their fellow Iranians in Tehran is their geographical isolation and their status as an ethnic and religious minority; a status that subjugates them to structural discrimination leading to a deep felt grievance towards the regime. However, none of interviewees expressed that they identified with the Green Movement.

Social media during the 2009 protests

All of the people interviewed had been well aware of the protests going on in Tehran after the 2009 presidential election, but none had made any attempt to participate or mobilize protest in their own province. The interviewees received information about the protests either through eye-witness account (the man who studied in Tehran), satellite, or social media:

If you see after the election in 88 (2009), I think Facebook and Twitter were the most social networks that helped a lot of the people in Iran to get the news, movies, pictures that what's going on in Iran after the elections

(Baluch Male, 30 years)

Several expressed that their reasons for not participating in the protest was that it would not make any difference, but almost all of the interviewees also expressed the fear of repression.
While they recognized the repression of Persians, they believed that the repression against the Baluch for participating or organising any street protest would be extreme as the government “have their own special policy for Baluch people”. They also recognized that this ‘policy’ has instilled such fear in people that it would be hard to break the fear-barrier for street protests among the people of Sistan-Baluchistan. It was not, however, only a matter of geographical location and repression of the people in the province that stopped people from participating. One of the interviewees, who studied in Tehran at the time of the protests and became an eyewitness to the same, admitted that while he sympathized with the aim of the protests he did not participate due to fears of harsher than average punishments:

At that time, I was there (Tehran), and I was a student there but I did not go myself to that demonstration because I am a Baluch, and that gives me problem, two times more than other people, for that reason I did not involve myself in that demonstration

(Baluch Male, 35 years)

While none of the interviewees identified with the Green Movement and expressed indifference with regards to the different 2009 presidential candidates, arguing that no matter what government that came into power the repression of the Baluch people would continue, two men did reflect on what the better option for the Baluch people could be. Both of them spoke in favour of the reformist former president Khatami, and one expressed that in 2009 most of the people in Sistan-Baluchistan felt that if Mousavi came into power “the pressure on the Baluch society could be less than before”. This preference for Mousavi in the 2009 election was also demonstrated by the Baluch at the ballot box (fig. 7), and hence, it is clear that in one of the regions where Mousavi received the most votes, nobody took to the streets to demonstrate against the alleged fraudulent election results despite closely following the large-scale protests that took place on different social media sites.

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212 Baluch Male, 30 years

213 Baluch Male 30 years, Baluch Male 31 years

214 Ibid
The perception and use of social media in 2013

The interviewees in Sistan-Baluchistan expressed a sense of frustration over the increased levels of on-line censorship and surveillance during the last four years. While the interviewees acknowledge that it might be hard for the government to completely control the internet, they saw the substantial efforts made by the government to do so as a sign of that they deemed it necessary to control the internet in order to control the people of Iran. While the internet was seen as one of few options to breach the isolation of the people in the province, there was also a sense of frustration with regards to the underdeveloped infrastructure for internet connection in Sistan-Baluchistan, and the dependency on the government in order to improve this:

Baluchistan is the end of Iran, you know the southernmost part of Iran and you get less equipment to use internet…the only way here is to use the internet that the government brought to the people, if they shut down this way we have no other way to connect to the world

(Baluch Male, 30 years)

However, one interviewee argued that since the internet is used by so many sections of society, including researchers and doctors, it would essentially be impossible for the government to completely restrict it as it would be “the end of Iran”.

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215 Baluch Male, 29 years
The interviewees acknowledged that they were aware of the need for different ‘anti-filtering systems’ to access blocked sites, but it was also described as a very cumbersome process. Several of them described in detail how they had used social media sites while studying abroad, but how the censorship in Iran had severely restricted their usage once they moved back. A couple of them indicated that due to the on-line surveillance, social media could only be used for non-political activities:

Because scared of everything, I have no political communication in Iran and also outside Iran but I have used social media and internet to communicate with my relatives and friends only

(Baluch Male, 35 years)

Two acknowledged to having had their own weblogs, focused on the right of the Baluch and Baluch culture and history respectively, while living abroad. However, the weblogs had almost immediately been blocked in Iran and upon their return to the country they had not managed to find the time to circumvent the blockages to maintain their blogs. The same was true for their accounts on social network sites, with Facebook being the most popular. They also expressed concern with regards to the surveillance of Facebook and explained that they would only consider discussing political matter on Facebook if they used fake IDs. However, one interviewee argued that even if they use fake IDs, the discussion about politics related to Baluchistan is very vibrant on Facebook. He encouraged people to go to Facebook and search for “Baluchistan or Baluchistan issues and you will see there that many people are writing and giving the news”.216

There were still doubts with regards to the security, but as one interviewee put it: “it (safety) is not a guarantee, but we have lots of issues and we have to share our issues and problems with everybody”.217 However, one interviewee expressed deep fear with regards to any kind of communication:

I am afraid of everything…when I am talking to you I am afraid, I am afraid because everything is restricted. Social media is filtered, also Facebook, I am afraid to communicate with other people but I have no choice but to trust in meetings like this (gathering in a Baluch family home)

(Baluch Male, 35 years)

When it comes to the site Balatarin, none of the people interviewed in Sistan-Baluchistan had ever heard of it. However, a couple of people made reference to the site Kalaume, which is the official website of Mousavi providing the latest news from a reformist perspective.

Most of the interviewees expressed indifference with regards to the upcoming elections in 2013. While the candidates were yet not known, four of them said that they did not expect that

216 Baluch Male, 30 years
217 Baluch Male, 31 years
any candidate would support the Baluch people while one again mentioned Khatami in somewhat positive terms.\textsuperscript{218} When asked what a presidential candidate would have to do in order to gain their confidence, they all said that if the presidential candidate actually visited the province, it would have an impact on them. They stressed that Ahmadinejad had not once visited the province during his eight years as president. However, several of them alluded to that the elections were not likely to be fair and free anyway. Despite these statements, and despite the fact that the candidacy of Rouhani was not announced until 22 May he, just as Mousavi four years before him, received massive support at the ballot box in Sistan-Baluchistan (fig. 8). This does indeed indicate a scenario of that even if the Baluch interviewed tend to be very infrequent users of social media sites; they seem to be quite informed with regards to which candidate to favour in the elections, even if that candidate may only be the best out of several bad options for them.

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure8.png}
\end{center}

\textbf{Figure 8:} Percentage of votes for Rouhani 2013 per province.

\textbf{Source:} http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian_presidential_election,_2013, map generated by author using International IDEA’s ERM-Tool (See ‘Other sources’)

\textbf{Reliability of social media and Satellite TV’}

The importance of the link between agency and reliability was also emphasized by the interviewees in Sistan-Baluchistan. The need to first have an off-line relationship before connecting on-line was expressed by all interviewees, or as one interviewee put it: “Through

\textsuperscript{218} Ibid
Facebook they trust will come by time, people can see (each other) in real life 2-3 times, and after that you get to know the person”. One interviewee expressed fear over the government setting up fake IDs to lure people into traps on-line, and gave this a reason for why off-line relations are necessary:

I can only trust my friends, they were my classmates, they are mine, we are doing job in some places; I trust them... sometimes it happened, we made some anonymous ID, not original ID, with different name, and we go to Facebook and we share our ideas

(Baluch Male, 30 years)

When it comes to Satellite TV, it was viewed as a more trustworthy source than national TV and more easily accessible that on-line sites. However, none of the interviewees believed that Satellite TV channels reflected the reality on the ground in their broadcasts; they all believed that instead there was a focus on events and political groups in Tehran.

They (BBC Persian) just talk about the political policy of the people of Tehran; they are just zooming on that political group in Tehran. For example, many things happen in Baluchistan, but they are not broadcasting it. It happened many times, there are many Iranian websites that I have sent e-mail, I have given the news, but they didn't broadcast. We have to know the reasons why they are not broadcasting

(Baluch Male, 29 years)

In the end, all of the interviewees expressed that while the internet is not safe and they are sceptical to the news provided by the satellite channels, they are dependent on these mediums to break their isolation. However, the focus seems to be on issues related to the Baluch people, rather than a broader discussion with regards to how to reform Iranian politics. Nevertheless, the election results demonstrate that the Baluch passively gathered information about the presidential candidates in order to assess which candidate that would benefit the Baluch the most.

3. Differences in perception and use of social media

The aim of this section is to distil how the usage and perception of social media by change agents in Sistan-Baluchistan differ from that in Tehran. This section will do so by establishing an overview with regards to the general differences of how change agents in Sistan-Baluchistan and Tehran use social media. From the below table (Table 3) we can see that while there are certainly some differences between the groups with regards to their knowledge of social media platforms and the perceived usefulness of satellite TV, nine out of the ten people interviewed do have a presence on Facebook.

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219 Baluch Male, 29 years
Overview of social media and satellite use among people interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Facebook</th>
<th>Balatarin</th>
<th>Satellite</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persians</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 24 yrs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, but don't trust it</td>
<td>Yes, very useful</td>
<td>Google, Weblogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 30 yrs</td>
<td>No, no access to VPNs</td>
<td>Yes, very useful</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Prefer face-to-face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 25 yrs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes, but not nuanced</td>
<td>Yes (on-line), somewhat useful</td>
<td>Google, Kalame, Weblogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 28 yrs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Never heard of it</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Prefer face-to-face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 30 yrs</td>
<td>Yes, for fun</td>
<td>No, not a nuanced site</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>National TV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 29 yrs</td>
<td>Yes, infrequent and no politics</td>
<td>Never heard of it</td>
<td>Yes, to get outside info</td>
<td>Kalame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 35 yrs</td>
<td>Yes, infrequent and no politics</td>
<td>Never heard of it</td>
<td>Yes, to get outside info</td>
<td>Prefer face-to-face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 33 yrs</td>
<td>Yes, with fake ID, infrequent</td>
<td>Never heard of it</td>
<td>Yes, to get outside info</td>
<td>Satellite phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 30 yrs</td>
<td>Yes, both personal and with fake ID</td>
<td>Never heard of it</td>
<td>Yes, to get outside info</td>
<td>Cell phones, Kalame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 31 yrs</td>
<td>Yes, with fake ID, infrequent</td>
<td>Never heard of it</td>
<td>Yes, to get outside info</td>
<td>Satellite internet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|         | 9     | 3     | 8     |

**Table 3**: Interviewees' membership, use and perception of Facebook, Balatarin and satellite TV, as well as list of other communication methods mentioned

**Source**: Interviews kept by the author.

However, there are two differences that indicate that the perceived similarity here might be smaller than it first appears. Firstly, most of the interviewees in Sistan-Baluchistan reported a very infrequent use of Facebook due to the effort it took to circumvent the censorship. They also expressed frustration with regards to a very underdeveloped internet infrastructure in the region. Hence, they reported lower levels of frequency of accessibility, impacting usability, than their counterparts in Tehran.

Secondly, while both groups expressed concern over the increased levels of on-line surveillance, it impacted their on-line behaviour differently. While both groups put a lot of emphasis on the linkages between off-line relations and on-line connections, as well as its impact on reliability, they had different ways of addressing this linkage. While the group in Tehran insisted on the higher level of reliability of social media accounts in the person’s real name, the solution from the Baluch side was to use with fake IDs on-line, even if they knew the off-line identity of the person they communicated with. These different behavioural patterns on-line,
combined with the large geographical distance between the groups, certainly impacts the potential of the two groups to together use social media platforms for political mobilization.

B. DIFFERENT CONDITIONS AND ITS IMPACT

This section will explore the different macro- and micro-conditions of the regions and how they impact the linkages between off-line and on-line political participation. The discussion presented here will contextualize the analysis of the usage and perception of social media by change agents in Iran by moving beyond the mere definition of the country as authoritarian, highlighting the differences between the two regions in the study. These differences will help to analyse the different types of on-line and off-line behaviour of the two groups and the linkages between the two.

1. Macro-structural conditions and differences

In order to understand the use of social media by change agents in Iran, we need to look at the ‘structural opportunities’ and how they impact collective action and subsequently the potential, or not, for on-line coordination of collective action. The current context of Iran at least somewhat presents the macro level pre-conditions for collective action presented by Oberschall (2000). The extensive lack of civil liberties leads to that the discontent is widely shared and there is also international support for dissidents. The massive support for Mousavi in the 2009 election does indicate a shared desire for political change, but the non-participation of the Baluch in the ensuing protest demonstrated that the perceived structural opportunities for change through discontinuous collective action differed between the people in Tehran and the people in Sistan-Baluchistan. It could be argued that it is this perceived difference of structural opportunity that impacts the fourth necessary pre-condition: the capacity to act collectively, including having access to means of mass communication. While the perceived potential of using social media to organize collectively did differ some between most of the interviewees, whether Persians or Baluch, we do see some general distinctions with regards to how they organize on-line and how it impacts the reach of their organization. While the Baluch interviewees admitted that due to the on-line surveillance, they would not discuss politics on-line unless they used a fake ID, the use of your real name on social media platforms such as Facebook was crucial in order for the interviewees in Tehran to find your claims to be credible. This would indicate that despite fulfilling most of the ‘necessary conditions of challenge’ identified by Oberschall (2000), Persians and Baluch in Iran are not able to use on-line communication tools to overcome the off-line
division between the different groups in the country. Hence, in this case social media is not serving as a unifying tool that may be used to coordinate discontinuous collective action, and this impacts the capacity of Iranian citizens to act collectively.

Until now, most research on social media and change agents in authoritarian regimes has focused on a discontinuous form of collective action; e.g. mass protest. However, in Iran we see that even if the protests in 2009 did present a break in the pattern, the long-term continuous form of collective action, (in this case electoral support for a certain candidate) is more prominent in Tehran and it also exists in its contemporary form in Sistan-Baluchistan. As identified by Tilly (1976), the different forms of collective action, the continuous and the discontinuous, have developed remarkably in the last century; a development that Tilly attributes to industrialization and urbanization. In the case of Sistan-Baluchistan, we see that the development described by Tilly holds true for a continuous forms of collective action, i.e. participation in elections. However, with regards to the discontinuous form, which according to Tilly has developed from peasant revolts to mass meetings and demonstrations, we note that the transition is not complete; even if secular leftist Baluch participated in the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and street protests do sometimes occur in the province,220 there is also the contemporary presence of an armed resistance group. This indicate that not even the minimal level of political space necessary for the modern form of discontinues collective action exist in the province.

When it comes to the Persians, we see two distinct groups: the opposition, those wanting to overthrow the regime (discontinuous), and the reformists, those looking for radical change within the current structure (continuous). With regards to the 2013 presidential election, those who emphasised a boycott of the elections would fall into the first group, and those who wanted change and decided to vote for Rouhani would fall within the second group. Several of the interviewees argued that the outcome and after-play of the 2009 election had transformed them from reformists to oppositional. Notwithstanding, the high 2013 voter-turnout rate as well as the findings from the Balatarin analysis indicates that most did in the end cast their vote, i.e. they showed preference for the continuous form of collective action. While this might surprise outsiders as the possibility of change within the system might seem small compared to the overthrow of the regime, the power of new ideas and perspectives that can slightly open up the system should not be overlooked. It should not either be unheeded that Iran experienced a


complete overthrow of an authoritarian regime in 1979; a revolution that was co-opted by the current regime. Hence, in this context it might be more plausible to frame a message for collective action that proposes change, reform, within the current political system. It was ultimately only the perception of fraudulent elections in 2009 combined with pre-election engagement among many youth in Tehran that together led to large-scale protests in the city.

In the end, part of the division between the Persians and the Baluch is explained by the very different levels of development, both with regards to social, economic, and cultural rights as well as civic and political rights, of the two regions. This does not only affect the accessibility of the internet in the region, as identified by the interviewees, but also its usability. According to Tilly (1976), development patterns affects how collective action develops and in the end the collective action that ‘goes digital’ is only a reflection of the collective action that exists off-line. It should be noted that several of the interviewees in Sistan-Baluchistan stressed that going out to protest would be ‘useless’ or that it would be too dangerous, yet the people living in Sistan-Baluchistan showed massive support for reformist candidates at the ballot box. Hence, it is not only accessibility that impacts the perception and use of social media for collective action in Iran, but also macro-conditions such as historical background and development patterns.

2. Micro-structural conditions and differences

From a micro-structural perspective, there are two distinct obstacles for country-wide discontinuous collective action in Iran. Firstly, the divisions between the Persian and the Baluch is amplified by the perceived cost of participating in protests. The Baluch people interviewed mentioned several times the special treatment of the Baluch people, and what they called the ‘Baluch Policy’ of the regime.222 They all perceived that the repression against the Baluch was much harsher than the repression against the Persians.223 When it comes to on-line experiences, this was demonstrated by the interviewee who had maintained a weblog focused on Baluch culture and history, without engaging in any political discussion.224 According to the study of the Iranian blogosphere carried out by Kelly and Etling (2008), this blog should not fall into the category of the ‘reformist/secular’. Despite this, the weblog, which this Baluch man maintained from India, was quickly blocked in Iran. This indicates that the on-line censorship against the Baluch, just as the off-line repression, does not only relate to their engagement in political

222 Baluch Male, 30 years

223 See discussion on p. 59 with regards to Baluch (Male 35 years) who was in Tehran during protests

224 See discussion on p. 61
matters, but also with regards to any reference to their history and culture. For the Baluch interviewed, this was one example of how the regime has a special policy of repressing Baluch organization and communication, whether it is on-line or off-line. Hence, in the case of Iran, it seems to hold true that it is not only the existence of repression, but also the level of (perceived) repression, that impacts collective action.

Secondly, the two groups defines success differently. For example, during the 2009 protests the Persians seemed to regard the probability of success higher than their Baluch counter-parts. While both groups expressed the desire to return to the reformist policies of the Khatami era, it was clear that the Baluch would not consider anything to be a successful outcome unless they were granted self-rule in a federal Iranian state; they believed this was the only way to curtail the structural discrimination against them. None of the interviewees in Tehran mentioned this possibility; even if some hinted at the need to include minority groups in the protests, none of them discussed possible long-term solutions to their marginalization. While heterogeneity might be seen as facilitating collective action as it makes it easier to mobilize a ‘critical mass’, it might also have a polarizing effect. In the case of the people interviewed, the different definitions of success between the two groups were so different that they can be deemed to be completely polarized at the outset. Heckathorn (1993) is right that if the two groups would be able to unite, they could together impact the status quo in the country. Nevertheless, the different on-line behaviour of the two groups, as well as their weak off-line ties, has a severe negative impact on the possibility for formulating a common vision of success.

In order to frame a common vision of success and overcome the cost heterogeneity through Habermas’ theory of ‘communicative action’, the Persian and the Baluch population would have to engage in one of the methods for collective action framing identified by Benford and Snow (2000); discursive, strategic, or contested. Both the discursive and the strategic processes

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225 Two interviewees in Baluchistan (Baluch Male 29 years, Baluch Male 33 years) expressively said that there was no point of protesting as it would not make any difference; the other three mentioned that they did not protest because the issues did not resonate with them. One interviewee from Tehran (Persian Male, 30 years), also hinted at a low probability of success

226 One interviewee in Baluchistan (Baluch, Male 31 years) expressively made this linkage between Khatami and the need for a federal Iranian state to safeguard the rights of the Baluch.

227 This especially relates to the discussion with regards to participation in the protests 2009, discussed on page 46 for Persians and on page 58 for Baluch.


229 Habermas 1984
indicate a constant dialogue between groups of people. While this dialogue may be written and carried out on-line, Benford and Snow (2000) also indicate the need for oral communication. While some on-line platforms certainly provide opportunities for oral communication, the feedback from the interviewees indicate that both Persians and Baluch believe that at least part of such an oral dialogue needs to be carried out face-to-face.\textsuperscript{230} Considering their lack of off-line connections, and the geographical distance between Tehran and Sistan-Baluchistan, it would be hard to formulate a message this way.

The contested framing process, on the other hand, relates to how different versions of reality are constantly presented in a society. In Iran, there are several contested versions of reality that both the Persians and the Baluch tend to follow; the official dialogue of the regime, the dialogue of the diaspora through different Satellite TV networks, and the reformist dialogue through websites such as Kalame.\textsuperscript{231} Based on the interviews and the top sources identified on Balatarin, it is clear that the messages of the regime do not tend to create much resonance among either group. When it comes to satellite TV networks, comments from both groups indicate that the resonance of the message is weakened due to the people behind the messages, namely exiled Iranians who are perceived to have limited knowledge of day-to-day issues.\textsuperscript{232} That said, the website of BBC Persian was one of the most used sources on Balatarin, and BBC Persian was also described as one of few news sources among the Baluch interviewees, indicating that it is afforded higher levels of credibility than state TV.\textsuperscript{233} The news source that resonate the most among both groups is the reformist website Kalame, which is the official site of Mousavi. The site was mentioned by interviewees from both groups as a reliable news source.\textsuperscript{234} However, it is also clear that the relative salience of Kalame was higher among the Persians than among the Baluch. The Baluch people interviewed expressed that even if Mousavi would have been a better option, they did not feel strongly enough about his election campaign to engage in any protests as “the elections wasn’t for us”.\textsuperscript{235}

In addition, when it comes to using social media platforms for framing messages, there are limits of credibility, especially when it comes to the doubts expressed with regards to the people

\textsuperscript{230} See discussion with regards to reliability, discussed on p. 53 for Persians and on p. 62 for Baluch.
\textsuperscript{231} See Table 3 on p. 64
\textsuperscript{232} See discussion with regards to reliability, discussed on p. 53 for Persians and on p. 62 for Baluch.
\textsuperscript{233} See Table 3 on p. 64
\textsuperscript{234} Ibid
\textsuperscript{235} Baluch Male, 31 years
behind the messages. For example, Persians do not trust Balatarin as they are not sure of who is behind a certain message. The Baluch, on the other hand, have such fears of encountering false government profiles on-line that they often refrain from using their real names when setting up any social media accounts (at least if they intend to use the account for the political discussions necessary for a framing process).

In sum, different levels of repression, perceived or not, against Persians and Baluch impact the on-line behaviour in such a way that it has proven very hard to use on-line tools to frame common messages. The different levels of repression might not come as a surprise if one considers that the ultimate goal of the Baluch is a federal state in which their religion, culture and history is respected, as this certainly presents a threat to the Shia theocracy in Tehran. Hence, even if the Baluch middle class has access to on-line tools, the usability of these tools is severely affected by both on-line surveillance and off-line repression. This means that the interaction necessary to create enough resonance within the Iranian society to make people look beyond a basic cost-benefit analyses is non-existent and the lack of meeting points both on- and off-line is continuing to polarize these two groups of the Iranian society.

3. Impact on linkages between off-line and on-line participation

The importance of off-line meetings points for Persians and Baluch become even more relevant when we look at the linkages between on- and off-line participation in Iran. As described by the Persian interviewees; those who first engaged off-line in the 2009 political campaign of Mousavi, later also engaged on-line to coordinate off-line protests (fig. 9). In the case of the Baluch, essentially no off-line political action took place before Election Day, and consequently: even if they used on-line news sources to inform themselves about the candidates and admitted to following the developments of the protests on Facebook, they did not engage in the on-line discourse or in the off-line protests. Based on the flow of action for Persians to participate in off-line protest, the non-participation of the Baluch in these protests should come as no surprise notwithstanding the cost heterogeneity. The Baluch interviewees did also indicate that in order

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236 See quote by Persian Female, 24 years on p. 54

237 Baluch Male, 30 years

238 Babak Rahim (2011) describes a similar sequence of events that took place already during Mousavi’s campaign when Mousavi’s supporters were quickly able to organize a new event rally using mobile phones and Facebook after permission had not been granted for the first event site (p. 159).

239 Some Baluch did actively participate in the Mousavi campaign, but it was not close to as widespread as in Tehran. An example of a Baluch participant in the Mousavi campaign was the blogger and political activist Sakhi Rigi, who was later convicted of "acting against national security" and "propagating against the regime." His on-line writings were used as evidence against him. See more at: http://www.unpo.org/article/12919#sthash.qKiJvFT9.dpuf
for them to fully support a presidential candidate, this candidate should not only speak about the rights of the minorities but also visit the province to increase its credibility among the Baluch people. This again underlines the importance of off-line relations, whether with other activists or with presidential candidates.

**Overview of off-line and on-line engagement among Persians in 2009**

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 9:** Overview of linkages between off-line and on-line engagement in 2009 among Persians interviewed

**Source:** Compiled by the author based on interviews kept by author

What is clear is that the Baluch participated in the actual election and used on-line platforms as sources of information. However, when it comes to political mobilization for elections in Iran, there are unofficial factors at play. While voting is not officially compulsory, each voter gets a stamp in their national identification booklet. These stamps and the importance, or lack thereof, were discussed by both Persians and Baluch interviewees. While a Persian interviewee discussed how people who previously had no stamps in their booklets – a sign of defiance towards the regime – did vote for Mousavi in 2009, a Baluch interviewee stressed how highly educated but unemployed Baluch believed that the stamp would help them land government jobs. This interviewee also mentioned that when a Baluch has no stamps in her/his booklet, he/she may be accused of sympathizing with the armed resistance groups. Hence, relatively high levels of voter participation should come as no surprise in Sistan-Baluchistan.\(^{240}\) The question is rather with regards to for whom the Baluch voted and why, as once you have received a stamp, you may still cast a blank or illegible ballot.

\(^{240}\) No exact numbers with regards to provincial voter turn-out are available, but in the country in general the voter-turnout was quite high (Karimi and Murphy 2013)
Even if the Baluch did not participate in numbers in the Mousavi campaign, the high percentage of votes for Mousavi in Sistan-Baluchistan indicate that the Baluch actively sought out information to identify their preferred candidate. From the interviews we can deduce that the Baluch received this information from Facebook, independent websites, satellite TV, and most likely also from off-line conversations with their peers. Hence, even if the Baluch for the most part did not actively engage in these on-line discussions, they were passive listeners. While most internet users tend to be passive listeners, this is an example of change agents being passive in one on-line sphere but active in another. Because the Baluch do actively engage on-line when it comes to issues directly related to the situation of the Baluch. This discussion is mostly carried out with fake IDs and as a way to spread information about the Baluch both domestically and internationally. It seems like this discussion presents a case of when on-line platforms are seen as a unique political space for dialogue and ‘represent a distinctive type of political participation’ hailed by the early techno-optimists (fig. 10). This type of on-line participation exists among Persians as well, and was the reason for why they were able to shift from off-line participation in the election campaign to the on-line coordination so quickly in 2009. However, the on-line presence of the two groups does not mean that the internet serves as a unifying medium as the different on-line spheres in which Persians and Baluch are active do not tend to overlap, even when they are located on the same social media network. The Baluch follow the Persian discussion, but they do not generally engage in it. Hence, the question is not only how on-line activity and off-line participation link, but also with regards to links, or lack thereof, between different on-line spheres of interaction.

**Overview of off-line and on-line engagement among Baluch in 2009**

![Overview of off-line and on-line engagement among Baluch in 2009](image)

**Figure 10:** Overview of linkages between off-line and on-line engagement in 2009 among Baluch interviewed

**Source:** Compiled by the author based on interviews kept by author
Looking at the 2013 election campaign, the behaviour among the Baluch seem to have stayed the same, while it changed slightly for the Persians; the interviews indicated a lower level of off-line engagement and no dynamic opportunity presented itself. However, the data collected from Balatarin reveals that on-line information sharing seemed to have translated into votes at the ballot box for the winning candidate Rouhani. This adds to the argument that on-line activities seem to have an off-line political impact. The interviews and the data collected indicate the potential to use social media channels to mobilize both Persian and Baluch voters in favour of a particular candidate; an off-line activity for which the problem of cost-heterogeneity does not exist and includes special incentives for participation.

In essence, the problem is not that internet usage has a negative impact on off-line participation, but rather that it is not able to alone overcome the gap that exists between the Persian and the Baluch in order for the latter group to engage in off-line activities beyond voting. In order for social media channels to have an impact on overcoming this gap in Iran, a first step would be to ensure that the spheres of distinct on-line participation overlap. Only this way can a discursive framing process occur that ensures that the Persians and the Baluch share a common understanding of both the current conditions (structural opportunities) as well as the goal (definition of success). Currently, the different on-line behaviours of the groups, partly influenced by different levels of repression, inhibit the formation of such a framing process.
VI. CONCLUSIONS

This case study of a ‘most likely case’ for the use of social media for political purposes in an authoritarian regime provides insight into the debate between techno-optimist and techno-pessimists. It does so by analysing to what extent social media open up new spaces for political participation and off-line mobilization in Iran and the impact of a usability gap. The analysis is based on a thorough study of how social media was used and perceived by change agents in two regions in Iran in 2009 and 2013 as well as an assessment of the impact of different macro- and micro conditions. The main sources of the study are semi-structured interviews, carried out in Iran in May 2013, and a social media analysis of the Persian-language site Balatarin, carried out during the pre-election period in May/June 2013.

A. THE USE AND PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN IRAN

This study first looked at the perception and use of social media in Tehran and Sistan-Baluchistan respectively. It focused on two events: the 2009 presidential election and the 2013 presidential election. The perception of social media is based on the semi-structured interviews, and in the case of Tehran, these interviews are complemented by a social media analysis carried out in the 2013 pre-election period. Of the people interviewed in Tehran, all had some kind of experience from the protests 2009, while none of the interviewees in Sistan-Baluchistan had engaged in these protests.

Firstly, information presented in the section focused on the use and perception of social media in Tehran241 demonstrates that social media did play a role in the 2009 protest, but the exact role it played was described differently among the interviewees. Three main perceptions identified were: (1) social media was as in general a good tool to organize the protest; (2) social media was a good tool for those already engaged in Mousavi’s election campaign, and (3) social media was not an optimal tool as it excluded a large segment of society, mainly the working class, from the information flow.242 Hence, this provides a mixed response with regards to the positive links between on-line and off-line activities, but also highlights both a usability gap (it only worked for those already engaged) and an accessibility gap (the working class did not have the same access). Further, information in this section also demonstrated that even if the on-line

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241 See discussion starting on p. 45
242 See discussion on p. 48
censorship and surveillance had increased between 2009 and 2013, all interviewees still had membership on blocked sites. The most popular site was Facebook, followed by Balatarin. None of the people interviewed had a Twitter account. Hence, the on-line presence of authoritarian regimes does not automatically omit the potential for change agents in authoritarian regimes to use social media. However, on-line censorship and surveillance did impact what they used the accounts for; several did not feel comfortable discussing political matters on-line and several mentioned that face-to-face dialogue was preferable when possible. Several, but not all, also expressed that they preferred Facebook over Balatarin due to the anonymity of the latter site.

The use of social media in 2013 was analysed by looking at the Persian-language site Balatarin. This analysis provided evidence of on-line engagement in political matters as posts during the 2013 pre-election period reflected the rapidly increased popularity of Rouhani during the weeks leading up to the election. However, the main purpose of the site seems to have been information sharing in order to impact the opinion of passive users. The information shared came from several different sources, domestic and international, and the most important factor with regards to perceived reliability of the information was the quality of information rather than if it came from an official news agency or an independent website. Combined with the information gathered in the interviews, it can be concluded the credibility of information was closely tied to if the source had an off-line presence in the country. For this reason, and in accordance with the techno-pessimists, almost all the interviewees expressed doubts with regards to the accuracy of the news presented on Satellite TV.

Secondly, information presented in the section on the perception and use of social media in Sistan-Baluchistan showed that this was the province where Mousavi received the second highest percentage of votes in 2009, 52% compared to Tehran’s 46%, and that the Baluch had closely followed the protest on social media and via satellite TV. Despite this, none of the

243 Carieri et. al. 2013
244 See discussion on p. 49-50
245 See discussion on p. 57
246 See discussion on p. 54
247 See discussion starting on p. 53
248 See discussion starting on p. 58
249 Mousavi received the highest percentage of votes in the Province of Fars (58%), with Tehran coming in fifth with 46%. See fig.7 on p. 60.
250 See discussion on p. 58
interviewees had participated in the protests. The reasons given for this was indifference and a perceived higher cost associated with participation due to their status as an ethnic and religious minority.\textsuperscript{251} Hence, while on-line censorship and surveillance did not stop the Baluch from passively gathering information from social media, the off-line repression stopped them from taking action on the information received. However, cost heterogeneity is not part of the equation when voting, and again in 2013, when all of the people interviewed had expressed indifference to the elections a month before they took place,\textsuperscript{252} Rouhani received 73\% of the votes in the province: the highest percentage in Iran.\textsuperscript{253} The Baluch interviewed said that the increased on-line censorship and surveillance did impact how they used social media; they preferred to establish contacts off-line and to use fake IDs when signing up for on-line accounts.\textsuperscript{254} Yet, on-line platforms were also viewed as the only tool available to them to break their isolation, and to gather information with regards to presidential candidates.\textsuperscript{255}

In sum, this study reveals that on-line censorship and surveillance in Iran impacts the perception and use of social media by change agents in two different ways. Firstly, on-line surveillance impacts how social media accounts are set up. While the people interviewed in Tehran highlighted the importance of using real names on-line in order to ensure credibility, the Baluch people interviewed emphasized that they preferred to use fake IDs due to their fear of government repression. This indicates that different levels of off-line repression also impact on-line behaviour. However, both groups, who also reported different levels of frequency of accessibility,\textsuperscript{256} preferred off-line encounters. Secondly, on-line censorship and surveillance do not have as much impact on passive usage. This study shows that passive usage, such as information gathering on-line, can have a real impact on off-line political outcomes. Hence, we should not underestimate the power of non-interactive websites and satellite TV, especially with regards to their potential role in a contested framing process.

\textsuperscript{251} See discussion on p. 59
\textsuperscript{252} See discussion on p. 61
\textsuperscript{253} See fig. 8 on p. 62
\textsuperscript{254} See discussion on p. 61 and p.63
\textsuperscript{255} See discussion on pp. 61-62.
\textsuperscript{256} See discussion on p. 64
B. DIFFERENT CONDITIONS AND ITS IMPACT

This study analysed the perception and use of social media by looking at the different macro- and micro-conditions for collective action and how it impacts the linkages between on-line and off-line participation. Firstly, in the section looking at macro-structural conditions and differences, it is noted that Iran fulfils almost all the criteria identified for collective action with the aim of transition to democracy. However, one exception is the capacity to engage in discontinuous forms of collective action due different perceptions of existing structural opportunities. This difference in perception could partly be explained by the different development patterns in Tehran and Sistan-Baluchistan, something that impacts their perception of the potential success of discontinuous collective action. The perception of the discontinuous form of collective action in Tehran is also negatively affected by the historical background of the country.

Secondly, the section on micro-conditions and differences emphasises the impact of off-line repression on the use of social media for collective action. Essentially, the different levels of off-line repression impacts how the different groups cope with on-line censorship and surveillance. This, in turn, impacts the potential to use social media to frame common messages and visions of success, and to overcome the cost-heterogeneity for collective action through increased interaction between the groups.

Thirdly, the section analysing linkages between on-line and off-line participation demonstrates that different on-line coping strategies lead to that the on-line spaces for political participation are just as separate as the off-line political spaces. This means that the communication channels needed to frame the goals of collective action are not guaranteed only because there is a high-level of connectivity and use of social media within a country. Hence, while internet usage does not necessarily have a negative impact on off-line political participation, it does not either automatically present a new political space that Persians and Baluch can use to overcome their off-line historical, cultural, and geographical separation.

In sum, this study demonstrated that it is not only accessibility that impacts the potential use of social media in authoritarian regimes, but also that historical backgrounds, contextual differences, and off-line repression impacts its usability. It demonstrates that different macro- and micro-conditions lead to different on-line coping strategies, which in this case meant the

257 See discussion on p. 65
258 Oberschall 2000, p. 28
259 See discussion on p. 67
260 See discussion on p. 70
creation of separate on-line political spaces. This implies that it is not only important to study the linkages between on-line participation and off-line activities, but also between different on-line political spaces. Further, this study also demonstrate that on-line censorship and surveillance leads to that off-line relations are still very important to build trust; off-line relations are often a pre-requisite for on-line connectivity. Hence, since social media use by change agents is dependent on a variety of macro- and micro conditions, any analysis of its use in authoritarian regimes needs to go beyond the definition of a state as authoritarian and also take into account the historical and contextual barriers to collective action and how this influences both the use and the perception of social media.

C. SOCIAL MEDIA IN IRAN: THE USABILITY GAP AND POLITICAL SPACE

The main questions that this study has aimed to answer is whether social media open up new spaces for political participation and off-line mobilization in Iran and the potential impact of a usability gap. What we see is that while on-line censorship and surveillance do not stop people from using on-line platforms, it does influence how these platforms are used. How the on-line platforms are used, in turn, differs within the country as different groups have different coping mechanisms to deal with censorship, surveillance and varying levels of off-line repression. The main finding of this study is therefore that: while on-line censorship and surveillance do not stop people from using social media for political purposes in Iran, different coping strategies limits the potential for social media to act as a unifying medium.

Usability gap and its impact

In essence, what we see in Iran is a dependency on off-line relations for on-line connectivity. This indicates that the relationship between on-line activism and off-line political participation is reverse and when we trace this linkage backwards, we also find that separate off-line political spaces, due to repression, cultural, historical and geographical differences, lead to separate on-line political spheres. Hence, social media does not act as a unifying force since it is not a separate sphere in itself; rather it may consist of several different spheres that do not necessarily overlap. This is not only due to on-line censorship and surveillance, but also due to varying levels of off-line repression. While on-line censorship leads to cumbersome processes of accessibility, off-line repression, and the different levels of it, impacts the usability, which in the end has a major impact on the potential use of social media, especially for the coordination of discontinuous collective action.
In sum, when it comes to the discontinuous forms of collective action in Iran, on-line censorship and surveillance leads to that the internet does not serve as unifying force of different segments of society, which is necessary to overcome cost-heterogeneity. That said, the different political spheres may present spaces for localized political debate and protest mobilization. Hence, while social media do open up new spaces for discontinuous collective action in Iran, the potential impact of this is limited by the fact that on-line discourse and coordination tends to be localized and does not serve as a unifying force among change agents in the country.

**On-line Political Space**

When it comes to the continuous collective action, there are opportunities for a contested framing process. This study demonstrates that more subtle, even passive, continuous on-line engagement may contribute to a contested framing process that in the end has more impact than an active protest mobilization discourse. In this study, we see how the Baluch transform their passive use of social media channels to having a real off-line political impact at the ballot box. The Persians’, on the other hand, actively used social media (Balatarin) in the days leading up to the 2013 presidential election. While causation between on-line behaviour and off-line voting patterns cannot be established, the correlation between the two is striking, especially considering the 2013 election during which the general attitude and motivation to vote for Rouhani changed very rapidly both in Tehran and Sistan-Baluchistan. It is argued that; the only way that Rouhani, a Shia clergy, could reach so much support in such a short period of time among the Sunni dominated Baluch is through on-line channels and satellite TV. Further, the starch resistance to participating in the elections expressed by the Persians interviewed only two weeks before the presentation of the candidates, and the eventual turn-out in favour of Rouhani, indicate a rather rapid spread of information with regards to his candidacy. In the end, the Baluch passive use and the Persian more subtle on-line engagement during the election campaign is likely to have a more lasting impact on the political development of the country than the highly reported on protests in 2009 that failed to spread beyond middle-class youth.

Understanding these different patterns has very concrete implications. Previous research has identified that understanding the role of different networks in the pre-democratic state is crucial for any eventual democratization process and the creation of sustainable democracy. In Egypt, for example the April 6th Movement that was behind the revolution did not have the national

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network necessary in order to mobilize voters for the presidential election – and consequently the Muslim Brotherhood, which had spent years in developing off-line networks, won the 2012 presidential election.\textsuperscript{262} Hence, an understanding of the off-line relationships and how they translate, or not, into on-line networks (connected or not) and the use of these networks (passive or active) is important when considering how to support democracy activists in authoritarian regimes.

In sum, social media do open up spaces for political participation in Iran despite censorship and surveillance. However, how these spaces can be used is impacted by varying levels of off-line repression leading to cost-heterogeneity. Hence, the contextual differences within the country lead to a usability gap that impacts the potential to use social media for nation-wide discontinuous forms of collective action. In other words, ‘how’ social media is used and ‘what’ it can be used for depends on ‘who’ is using these channels within a country context. Notwithstanding, the passive usage of on-line forums allows for using social media to mobilize nation-wide support for continuous collective action for which no cost-heterogeneity exits. The success of Hussain Rouhani in the 2013 presidential election is evidence of this. This indicates the importance of basic websites and Satellite TV, especially if they manage to represent the cultural diversity of Iran, when deciding upon support for democracy activist in Iran.

\footnotesize{Abou-Zeid 2012}
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IX. ANNEX

Questionnaires used for the semi-structured interviews in English, Finglish, and Persian respectively:

1. DEMOGRAPHICS
   Man/Woman Age: Self-identification (Persian, Baluch, etc.):

2. ROLE
   When did you become politically engaged and why? Did you play a role in the 2009 protests? Do you see yourself as part of the Green Movement? If yes, how do you see your role today? If no, how do you define yourself politically?

3. ENABLING FACTORS
   What social, political, and technological factors do you believe would be the most important for enabling a democratic revolution in Iran at this point in time?
   a. Could this happen without the internet? (If not named, ask if events in Tunisia or Egypt impact this perception)
   b. Could this happen without the support of other news channels? (If not named, ask about BBC Pers and VOA Pers)

4. COMMUNICATION
   Do you now engage with other people on political matters that you did not know before becoming interested in politics? How do you get in touch with these people? What are the most important factors for allowing you to trust who to engage with?

5. ORGANIZATION
   How do you communicate with others that you know share your political views (reformists/opposition)? If not through online tools, why not?

6. TRANSNATIONAL COORDINATION
   Have you communicated/worked with activists (Iranian or foreign) or social movements outside of Iran? How have you communicated with them? If not through online tools, why not? If not, what do you think would be the best way to do so?

7. TRANSNATIONAL COMMUNICATION
   How would you characterize the movement of information in and out of Iran.
   a. Outgoing information
      i. The most powerful information traveling out of Iran and what would be the purpose? (If not mentioned, safety? international pressure?)
      ii. Do you believe it would be effective? Which channel would be the most effective?
   b. Incoming info
i. What would be any meaningful info coming into the country? What would be the most important purpose? (if not mentioned, meaningful to know there is support from the outside? Get information on what is happening in Iran?)

ii. Do you believe it would be effective? Which channel would be the most effective?

8. COMMUNICATION OTHER NEWS CHANNELS

Do you or anybody you know who share your political views work/cooperate with any independent broadcast news channels? If yes, how do they communicate with each other? If not, do you believe that such cooperation would be possible in the near future? Do you think that this type of cooperation is important/valuable? Why?

9. REALIABILITY

Do you think that social media is reliable as an alternative news source? If no, why not? If yes, why?

10. ACCESS

Do you/would you have access to Internet-based media (to find or share information) if the Iranian Internet is shut down? If yes, how and how effective do you think this access would be?

11. ADAPTATION

Are the threats of on-line activity increasing as the elections come closer? If yes, how do you think it has changed and how would you define them now? Has it affected your use of the internet in any way?

12. TOOLS

What would be needed to start a social mobilization like in 2009? What are the most important tools that people can use for social mobilization in Iran? How familiar are you with these tools? Do you have access to these tools?

13. STRATEGIES

Are you aware of any strategies that will/could be used by the opposition before, during, after the elections to communicate its message? What do you think that message is/should be? How do you think any messages should be communicated? Why?

14. OTHER CONTACTS

Are there any other actors you think we should be asking about this? Look for on-line (Twitter, Facebook, Blog)?
1. Etikette fişleri

Jeşiat (zan/Mard)
Ser
Tümüyleşir gizemi

2. İşgal

Che zamanla varede fişlet işi sadows ve çerpiye. Dur eteriye 1388 sheket dezintad: Ayn khod ra jepi az jepi boli serbo münbih? Agar bali, mukadis khod ra skinnos chegöme semin? Agar bali, fişlet işi sadows ve chegöme tellir miykin? 

3. Aymenle kümnek komandne

Che ayn amaxa ejeşjek, simi ve teşecişi re nohezini anvusun kümnek komandlaye yek esreheleber democrati dar iihe الجزیره dar Iran miykin?

a. Bedoonie internet enkına pozır has (. (agaa esheere nasib, beppers ke aya in neghe neazor tavir gafrhe efegbehe toues ve neazor has?))

Aym bedooni kümnek heynsef cemal haye klubnati enkına pozır has (agaa esheere nasib, beppers rejeb BBC persian ve VOA Persian).

4. Ertelatief

Aya dar menomle mexere siisi bu kasa dar eredeb hatii ke gahlb ez shekgi fişletetan nezihelekhad:Chegöme baham dar eredebet? Ayni axעי eetmeletan be axudi ke baham fişlet miykin elisi?

5. Sarmalde

Chegöme be axudi ke eletb ve neghehe nazaratetan rikshhia miykin eredebet bar ghatar miykin? Agaa az taribbe abzare online nist, cheri na?

6. Hamahkandey faranelli

Aya bu fix over (che irani eglehe liari) ya jenehe haye madeni kerarj az iran dar tonos boodh xa? Az che ceri leger agaa az taribbe online nobode, cheri. Agaa nis, che sani be axudi seke bekeri belayar na rih has?

7. Ertelatief faranelli

Neghri entegal eletb be iran ve az iran ra chegöme tooali miykin?

a. Eletbhe az iran:

i. Ghodjazantur, re nohezini eletbhe ba az iran kerarj miykinen darj az hastan va lafshenin elisi? (agaa esheere nasib, amnaziya: feselke bezmahaladek?)

ii. Aya fex miykin miykinen darj gozar baylad? Keram rih miykinen messor position bulbad?

b. Eletbhe az iran:

i. Che ne eletbhe dikhhe kekeri misalaya? Hadafe asle nahe elisi?

ii. Fekr miykin miykinen darj gozar baylad? Keram rih messor position rih has?

8. Ertelatief ba diger kanal haye klubhine


9. Ghubariye etmiinun

Aya fex miykin miykinen resmka ejetom goziositye ghubariye etmeleteran namhebe klubhine hastan? Agaa na, cheri. Agaa boli, cheri?

10. Dastressi

Dar soorre eht shodan internet. Aya shona destresi be resmka ejetom unend, ya destresi kholem? Agar bali, chegöme? Chegöme in destresi miykinen messor baylad?

11. Entekhabh

Aya khayar hangi fashlet haye online ba nazifik shodan be entekhabat ziad miykin? Agar bali, chegöme fex miykin in taghe meke va hala ra toosfi konid. Aya ba oya nizhreye esetofeyak shona az internet tarife dizhine ast?

12. Absorba

Che chachka menomle naz hastan bariye shoro yek jebam ve ya heynsef ejetom, mesay 1388? che abzay haye molheen hastan bariye heynsef ejetom dar irani? Chegaham ba in abzay ba xashiy darid? Aya ba xashiy dastresi darid?

13. Strategy

Aya az hur noh strategy ke mohedalifin ghahl, dar heine va basde entekhabat etefade miykinen va ya esefade khadem karab nahe resumden paymanen esetl darid? Shona khodemnta fekr miykinin in payam che khadem bood? Fekr miykinin hur payam chegöme haye enteghe dovhad? Cheri?

14. Afnade digay

Aya shokloke digay hest ke shoma fekr miykin dar in menom miykinen be mo kümnek koned? Blog, facebook ya sitk haxi che?
1. اطلاعات فردا

2. نظر

3. فردا

4. اطلاعات

5. پژوهش‌های

6. اطلاعات

7. اطلاعات

8. اطلاعات مثبت

9. اطلاعات

10. دسترسی

11. اطلاعات

12. اطلاعات

13. استاندارد

14. استاندارد

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