

## What Was Social Media's Role in the Arab Spring?

**What was the Arab Spring?** In 2011 a wave of democratic popular protests swept across dictatorships in the Muslim nations of North Africa. This movement was called the Arab Spring by journalists covering the events.

**How did the use of social media lead to the overthrow of Muslim nations?** Protesters used Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to connect and organize supporters for their cause and to build international support in such a way that could not be accomplished through state-run media outlets.

Read the excerpts to learn more about the role of social media in the movement known as the Arab Spring.

### PRIMARY SOURCE

This excerpt from *New York Times* journalist Anthony Shadid describes the Syrian regime's attempts to regain control of Homs amidst a revolution fueled by the use of social media. The article "In Assad's Syria, There Is No Imagination," was published on November 8, 2011. Shadid died of an asthma attack in February 2012 while on assignment in Syria.

Bashar seemed to think he was different. . . .

For a time, his seeming humility brought a measure of support his father never enjoyed . . . But Bashar believed his own **aura**<sup>1</sup>. In those days, he declared his state immune from the upheavals of Egypt and Tunisia. He insisted that his foreign policy, built rhetorically on **enmity**<sup>2</sup> with Israel, opposition to American **hegemony**<sup>3</sup> and support for the kind of resistance preached by Lebanon's Hezbollah, reflected the sentiments of an Arab world long humiliated by its impotence.

Even today, eight months after an uprising and a ferocious crackdown that, by the United Nations' count, has killed more than 3,000 people and, by the Arab League's estimate, put more than 70,000 in jail, people who have seen Bashar contend that he still doesn't recognize the severity of the challenge.

As in Iraq, Syria's neighbor to the east, the clichés of superficial analysis that preceded tumult now threaten to come true: Us or chaos. The regime posed as the guardian of Syria's diversity, even as the House of Assad and its lieutenants relentlessly stirred that diversity so as to divide and rule. Pitting community against community, never in a more pronounced way than now, it may finally bring forth the civil war that it long claimed it was the **bulwark**<sup>4</sup> against.

In their ambition at least, the Arab revolts and revolutions were about a positive sort of legitimacy: democracy, freedom, social justice and individual rights. They remain an unfulfilled promise, but no one in Egypt, Tunisia or Libya is really afraid to speak anymore. The **cacophony**<sup>5</sup> that has ensued is the most liberating feature of rejuvenated societies. It already echoes in parts of Syria. When I was in Hama this summer, a city still scarred by memory and for a brief moment freed from security forces, youths embraced their new space by protesting every couple of hours in streets made kinetic by the allure of self-determination. They demonstrated simply because they could. In Homs, a city whose uprising could prove Syria's demise or salvation, youths drawn from an eclectic array of leftists, liberals, nationalists, Islamists and the simply pissed-off articulated the essence of courage: They had come too far to go back.

"In the end, I'm a person now," a young activist named Iyad told me in Homs. "I can say what I want. I love you if I want to love you, I hate you if I want to hate you. I can denounce your beliefs or I can support them. I can agree with your position or disagree with it. But I'm a person now." He dragged on his cigarette, and we shared more tea. "We're not waiting to live our lives until after the fall of the regime," he went on. "We started living them the first day of the protests."

<sup>1</sup> **aura**: a distinct atmosphere or quality surrounding a person, place, or thing

<sup>2</sup> **enmity**: an extremely unfriendly or hostile feeling toward something

<sup>3</sup> **hegemony**: dominance by one country or social group