

## **The Power of a Hashtag: Twitter as a Political Tool Against Oppressive Regimes**

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### **Abstract**

Over the last ten years, the microblogging platform Twitter has taken mainstream media by storm, allowing users to publish updates to the globe via any mobile device. Tweets are often trite and mundane, but they have the capability to define, make, and break the news. This can happen in regions that are ruled by oppressive regimes. Living under an oppressive regime often means information is biased and/or difficult to disperse. With online tools such as Twitter, which can bypass internet restrictions via speech to text options through phone calls, activists' voices can be heard. This research analyzes the role of Twitter as a political tool during recent waves of resistance against oppressive regimes in Egypt, Tunisia, China, Turkey and Iran. By using content analysis of tweets relating to certain hashtags of political movements within these regions, this research will discuss the effectiveness of Twitter as a political tool against oppressive regimes. The result is that people who may feel helpless under the oppressive ruling of a regime now have an outlet that can inspire hope, change, and revolution.

### **1. Introduction**

Twitter began as a simple side project for Jack Dorsey, an engineer who just wanted a way for people to share real-time status updates. This idea eventually evolved into allowing 140 characters or less for users to update status from both computers and phones and they were to be called Tweets. Not only did it allow for the typing of 140 characters, but it also allowed users to call in a tweet and a program could translate their speech to text. Users are able to choose whether or not they want to incorporate location services and have the capability to upload pictures and videos alongside their 140 characters. All of this is available to anyone who could access it at no cost, making it a very valuable tool to many. What no one at Twitter could ever have imagined was that these Tweets would be able to impact the entire globe. Celebrities, politicians, news outlets, and the common citizen use Twitter and are able to spread and receive information around the globe. It is used for social marketing, promoting, achieving internet fame, creating online personas, and perhaps most importantly, the ability to spread information across the globe at an extreme speed.

This paper will demonstrate through a qualitative study the impact that Twitter has had by being able to spread information in such an accessible way, especially within oppressive regimes. This would be supporting the idea that Twitter is a political tool that increases transparency across the world by spreading news and information, providing hope and morale, allowing global solidarity, and allowing usage during times of internet restrictions/blackout.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Existing Data On Twitter Being Used As A Political Tool

One's typical thoughts when it comes to Twitter is not revolution, however in Tunisia circa 2010 the use of Twitter and other forms of social media ended up assisting with overthrowing a regime. This event in Tunisia ignited the Arab Spring after thousands began to share the video of a young merchant setting himself on fire in front of a municipal building. Focusing mainly on Tunisia and Egypt, Philip N. Howard, Aiden Duffy, Deen Freelon, Muzammi M. Hussain, Will Mari, and Marwa Masiad (2012) compiled a large database of information collected from Twitter that proves the claim that it can be a powerful political tool. The research suggests three key findings: 1) Twitter played an essential role in shaping political debates during the time period in which the Arab Spring occurred; 2) a surge in online conversations about revolution prefaced large protests that took place; and 3) the use of Twitter helped disperse ideas of democracy across national borders. The methods used in order to reach these conclusions came from a content analysis of Twitter feeds in which three million tweets were collected by their use of the hashtags: #algeric, #egypt, #feb14, #morocco, #sidibouzid, and #yemen.

The Tweets were then identified through their relevancy, location, date, time, and age of user. These findings provide evidence that would confirm the use of social media being a tool to achieve freedom within an oppressive regime. Not only does that suggest it as a tool for freedom but by default it also suggests that it is a tool for democracy advocates outside of oppressive regimes. This example is crucial if one were to inspire new technological advances that provided people in oppressive regimes more political power via Twitter. The problem with this study is that it is isolated to just the Arab Spring and more instances within other oppressive regimes are needed to confidently claim Twitter can be an effective political tool. Despite the fact that it is isolated, it does show that there can be a correlation between Twitter in the political sphere against oppressive regimes.

Another study that dances around the idea of Twitter being used as a political tool is a study by Chang Sup Park (2013) that looks as twitter being a something that can greatly influence people to be politically engaged. This largely has to do with the power dynamics, or "opinion leadership", that exists on most social media sites, not existing on Twitter. This study asserts that 80% of the the most popular tweets were created by ordinary people rather than those of typical opinion leaders such as celebrities, professors, comedians, politicians, etc.. This statistic is crucial because this means that the tweets of those individuals living under oppressive regimes have the capability to spread information to a large audience without having to hold a high social media status. Contrary to the typical opinion leader, Twitter allows a new kind of opinion leader to be created if they are able to produce information and content that attracts the publics attention. This would be helpful in explaining why individuals living under oppressive regimes create hashtags associated with related content in order to reach the the rest of the word. By using the hashtags a large database of information, which otherwise wouldn't be portrayed on mass media, is curated and passed around by ordinary people encouraging others to participate and be politically engaged. This makes their voices feel unheard, and this is an important part of Twitter being a political tool not only as a means of spreading news, but as a tool that can provide hope.

### 2.2 Twitter As A Tool Providing Hope

The use of Twitter doesn't always result in freedom, so does this mean that it isn't an effective political tool if the ultimate goal of freedom isn't reached? Particularly in the case of the Moldovan political revolution in 2009, social media, including Twitter, was heavily used but it did not result in freedom. In a piece written by Rita Safranek (2012), a content analysis of Facebook, Livejournal, and Twitter was done to suggest this was how the population of Moldova was organizing. The number of demonstrators within the region appears to grow from 10,000 to 300,000 after an increase in mentioning the location of the protest on various forms of social media. The result of this use of social media did not result in a change of leadership; however, it did provide the population with being able to spread their news across the world. The people within these populations then were provided a sense of hope that others would know and also provide assistance.

This suggests that social media, such as Twitter, may not be an effective political tool in removing oppressive regimes, but it can provide hope. Issues that arise when making the assertion that Twitter proving hope is a type of political tool is subjective, consequently- how can one measure hope? Not only this, but can one effectively argue that providing hope is even a political tool?

## 2.3 When Twitter Seems To Be The Most Useful

Historically, research has proved that democracy plays a key role in improving government respect for human rights. Twitter can provide insights to these governments by providing political competition and accountability but, in a theoretical study done by Jenifer Whitten-Woodring (2009) the effects differ according to the level of democracy and autocracy (i.e. oppressive regimes). This study asserts that within oppressive regimes, social media such as Twitter lowers government respect for human rights because individuals report on government violations and since the government has a lack of vulnerability to public opinion they use the voices of the oppressed to keep them submissive. Thus, oppressive regimes don't find Twitter a powerful enough political tool whereas democratic governments do find it powerful. Since Twitter would not be an institutional outlet to push for reform, and oppression is that powerful, then the costs of not protesting might outweigh the cost of protesting.

This is a compelling argument to make amid several studies that claim Twitter can be an effective political tool against oppressive regimes. It is important to note this study because it is a theoretical belief many individuals may hold and opens it up to studies that exist or can be done that use a methodological approach and collect data sets that prove governments within oppressive regimes are actually affected by Twitter. If this theory proves to be true, then one can lean away from social media and find a true political tool for populations living under oppressive rule.

## 2.4 Networking The Social Networks Within Oppressive Regimes

Living under the rule of oppressive regimes, it is commonplace to have restrictions placed on internet usage, or not having the internet at all. These restrictions clearly limit the use of social media but they also have the implication that social media threatens the regime. Countless examples of internet blackouts have been occurring within oppressive regimes, but when social media is the only thing that is being restricted it raises the question of it being a threat, and why would it be a threat? By monitoring the evolution of global information infrastructure within regimes, one could monitor when social media was being used and at what points it was restricted or absent. According to Hyunjin and Stuart J. Thorson (2012) a study was done by using a combination of bandwidth metrics and centrality indicators that showed the internet bandwidth growth and proved its centrality happens in a patterned way. That is to say the emergence of social media such as Twitter and political evolutions seem to occur simultaneously. These researchers claim their findings cannot show a correlation between social media and political change, but it shows the potential power. It also brings about the idea that social media such as Twitter can be used as a political tool by being able to predict civil unrest.

These tools of understanding the timing at which surges in social media and civil unrest occur may not be the one that people living directly in oppressive regimes can use, but it would be a tool that people outside of the regimes could use to help. An idea similar to this comes from a study done by Ruchika Ganar and Shrikant B. Ardhapurkar (2016) that uses sentimental analysis of user's social media to show at what rate the civil rest will happen or not. Twitter data is fetched and then filtered by using a content based algorithm to discover different categories that they might belong to such as politics, social issues, terrorism, etc. After this is done, the researchers make the claim that the information can be used to predict civil unrest when there are surges in differing groups. This study provides excellent framework in designing a data set that can be exclusive to populations within oppressive regimes such as filtering the tweets coming from the area under different categories. These categories might include the mentioning of a ruler's name, the location of a protest, etc. and then the amount and the date posted can be used to predict the population's next move. This prediction could be helpful in that outsiders have the opportunity and time to intervene and assist.

## 2.5 Politicians' Use Of Twitter

Since politicians are constantly trying to get across their motives without interference such as filtering or alterations, Twitter can provide a way to do this. Many politicians actually indorse the use of twitter such as Newt Gingrich who said: "Using Twitter to bypass traditional media and directly reach voters is definitely a good thing" (Oliphant 2009, pg. 2). Spreading the news on Twitter allows for as much or as little coverage as they'd like, making this use of social media an essential political tool. In a study by John H. Parmelee and Shannon L. Bichard a content analysis was completed to support the idea of politicians using Twitter as a political tool. This study looked at the political parties in America by examining popularity of certain hashtags, their origins, and their motives. They found several different uses of Twitter being a political tool such as: gaining support for petitions, continuing conversations that news outlets

may have been brief on, providing a location for news to spread on first, idea dissemination, and mobilizing their followers. Another study that looks at Twitter's use by politicians comes from Will J. Grant Brenda Moon, and Janie Busby Grant in 2010. This study looks at Australian politicians and the results are quite similar. By using a quantitative analysis of the utilization Twitter by Australian politicians the study suggests that politicians are using Twitter with the intent of political engagement.

If these are things that political leaders in America and Australia can use, then one could make an assumption that so can anyone else, i.e. individuals living under oppressive regimes. The same outcomes can be achieved by their use of hashtags just as politicians in America, only their usage would be more impactful in times of internet blackouts since it would be a means of communication when otherwise there wouldn't be one.

## 2.6 Hashtag Significance During Political Revolutions Against Oppressive Regimes

The use of hashtags on Twitter have been used as markers for political revolutions since it's emergence in the social media world. By using a hashtag individuals are now getting a voice to comment on important issues, or as Edna Zhou calls it, participatory journalism. Something that is a part of participatory journalism is citizen journalism which is when "the people are responsible for gathering content, visioning, producing and publishing the news product" without the involvement of paid employees (Nip 2006). This means that compared to other means of news reporting, the audience has changed from a one source to many sources to many sources reaching to many sources. Something like this would be helpful for individuals living in oppressive regimes because it means they can spread what they believe to be the real news and potentially reach further audiences when often the news from those areas comes from biased sources with ill intentions. The tweets that come from these people also allow for real-time news reports, so news is spread in the moment and doesn't have time to be manipulated and altered to be pro-regime.

In an article by NPR in 2009 that highlighted the use of the hashtag #IranElection, the claim was made that it served as something the Iranian people used to rally together during their political revolution to overthrow their ruler, but more importantly it allowed the outside world to rally by doing things such as giving moral support. This goes back to the idea of Twitter being a political tool in that it provides hope. Outside of sharing news and spreading hope, a study done on counter speech by Joseph Reagle in 2015 shows that some hashtags serve the purpose of building community during political revolutions against oppressive regimes. An example of this would be the hashtag #SirtimiziDönüyoruz (#weturnourbacks) from Turkey that women used to ban together against their president. Women came together to raise awareness towards their president as well as lifting one another up.

## 3. Data And Methods

In asking the question: Can Twitter be an effective political tool for people living in oppressive regimes, it would make the dependent variable people living in oppressive regimes. In this study the researcher looked at different hashtags in correlation with political movements in the populations of China, Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia, and Iran. The aims of looking at these populations are to discover if the use of Twitter can affect the actions of the regime or the population in which they originated with. In order to correlate Twitter and regime/population actions this study looked at internet restrictions that were placed in relevancy to the time the hashtag was being used.

Twitter is a reasonable data source due to the site mapping of timestamps, location, and ways it can be accessed in areas which may have internet restrictions. Twitter provides a large source for populations within oppressive regimes to voice opinions and potentially take action. With Twitter being such a large site containing billions of tweets programs have been made with the capability to sort through these tweets. This study planned to implement a simple systematic random sample generator in order to capture a Twitter data source. After collecting the data, a content analysis was performed with some set coding but also including grounded theory coding since each hashtag has unique qualities. After a content analysis was completed of each tweet within the hashtag groups, the individual tweets under each hashtag were compiled as a group looking for commonalities unique to that specific hashtag, and finally all the tweets under all hashtag groups were compiled for an overall synopsis. Along with Twitter data, this study also used existing data that provided insight on internet restrictions and regime actions that can be used to find if a surge in Twitter usage happens around the same time.

The content analysis done on the data from Twitter was done by searching tweets that used hashtags related to regime resistance. In table 1. the following the hashtags for each population are listed:

Table 1. Hashtags by Country

Hashtag's Country Of Origin	Hashtags Being Used In This Study
China	#OccupyHongKong, #UmbrellaRevolution
Turkey	#NATOStopErdogan, #sirtimizidönüyoruz
Iran	#IranElection
Egypt	#Egypt, #Jan25
Tunisia	#SidiBouzid

For each hashtag there are a specific set of coding as mentioned above that each will include which were: time posted, location it was tweeted from, language tweeted in, main language from the area it was tweeted from, whether or not it was positive towards the regime, internet accessibility from their location, and profile type. What is meant by “profile type” is that when the researcher clicks on the user’s profile, it was determined whether the account is personal (meaning they used this hashtag to tweet but also post personal things such as what they had for lunch), political (meaning exclusively political related tweets and retweets, nothing personal found), or journalist (these profiles had journalist written exclusively in their bio and the tweets were snippets of their work).

These tweets inevitably included tweets from areas outside of the selected countries, however all of the hashtags being used originated within each individual country and thus if they extend outside of their own population it is still viable because it was conceived from their own efforts. Tweets that are not translated to English also needed to be translated. This was done by the use of the automatic translation system that Twitter provides. The date that marks the date the hashtag started also had to be found along with establishing an end date to stop gathering data from this hashtag. This end date was determined by the dates of the ends of the revolutions associated with each hashtag.

To find out if Twitter can be used as a political tool it was also necessary to define what the researcher means by “political tool”. Political Tools are the processes and systems that help carry out actions a person or group needs to perform. This can be something like sharing what is believed to be the true news, providing a morale booster so change doesn’t seem impossible or useless, sharing images to persuade others of a specific point of view, a way to warn others of opposing groups, or something that helps overcome an obstacle set in the way of a person or group. Something else that needs to be done is establish a historical background for each hashtag so that they can correctly be analyzed. Some of these hashtags were briefly mentioned in the theoretical background section of this paper, however; they need some expanding.

For the hashtag #Jan25 this marked the date of the start of the Egyptian revolution to overthrow their oppressive ruler, Hosni Mubarak. The hashtag #Egypt was also used in correlation to this revolution. For the next hashtag, #Sidi-bouzid, its origins came from the death of a young merchant who set himself ablaze in front of a municipal building in the city of Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia which sparked the revolution to overthrow their ruler Ben Ali. For the hashtag #IranElection, its use started after Iran’s ruler, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won their national election for a consecutive term despite not having as many votes as his incumbent. This led the population to revolt to overthrow him because they believed he won with fraud. For the hashtag #sirtimizidönüyoruz, this is a Turkish phrase which means “we turn our backs”. The origin of this hashtag came about when Turkey’s leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, made several misogynistic comments towards the women of Turkey so they took to social media to “turn their backs” against him. #NATOStopErdogan also stems from backlash against Erdoğan, occurring after he initiated several attacks on Kurdistan and the population called on NATO to stop him since Turkey is a member of NATO. The final two hashtags, #OccupyHongKong and #UmbrellaRevolution stem from the same revolution against China’s ruler Xi Jinping. #OccupyHongKong started as a student movement against China’s nomination system which spread to even larger protests across all of Hong Kong. During these protests, protesters were treated violently by police and used umbrellas to shield themselves, thus the origin of #UmbrellaRevolution.

#### 4. Analysis/Findings

To begin the findings section, each group of tweets under the hashtags were analyzed beginning with #Jan25 (see figure 1 for an example of the codebook that was used for every hashtag, not including codes unique to specific hashtags).

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	#JAN25	T @EGLiveNews: An Egyptian ope	Still, shots of tea	RT @norashalat:lnk#	مكتبة الاسكندرية#	
2	Date	February 25 2011	January 24 2011	January 25 2011	January 27 2011	February 25 2011
3	Location	U.S.	Canada	Egypt	U.S.	Egypt
4	Accessibility	Full	Full	Full	Full	Limited
5	Language	English	French	English	English	Arabic
6	Positive towards Regime	NO	-	-	-	-
7	Negative towards Regime	YES	-	-	-	-
8	Dark Humor	-	-	-	-	-
9	Wanting help	-	-	-	YES	-
10	Offering help	-	-	-	-	-
11	Spreading News	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
12	Hopeful	-	-	-	-	-
13	Profile Type	Personal	Political	Journalist	Personal	Personal

Figure 1. Codebook example for #Jan25.

When analyzing this hashtag the first noticeable finding was that sixty percent of the tweets using #Jan25 were news related. This meant that over half included content like article links, videos, location information for protests, censorship updates, etc. This would be something supporting the notion that Twitter is a political tool because it provides a way to spread news across the region as well as national borders since the Tweet locations expanded beyond Egypt. The next significant finding associated with #Jan25 was that sixty-six percent of the Twitter profiles the researcher labeled as political were created during the origin of this hashtag which would be in January 2011. While it's possible that the creation of these accounts are simply coincidental, it is still suggestive of people acknowledging the power of Twitter as a political tool and creating accounts.

The next hashtag analyzed was #Egypt who also had a significant amount of news related tweets which composed fifty-three percent of these tweets. This is an interesting finding in relation to #Jan25 since they both are birthed from the same revolution. This raises the question of why the majority of these tweets are news related. It could be because this region experienced an internet restriction during the emergence of these hashtags and individuals in this regime wanted to find a way to tell the world their version of the news and not the regimes. This idea could be supported further with the finding that thirty-three percent of #Egypt tweets specifically mention censorship. In figure 2 an example of a tweet spreading both news and mentioning censorship is shown.



Figure 2. News and censorship tweet.



Figure 3. #sirtimizidönüyoruz tweet example.

Also something to brought to attention with this example is the user's purposeful tagging of major news outlets, usage of the English language, as well as the use of both of the hashtags; all tactics to gain maximum exposure. In the case of both of these hashtags it can be suggested that Twitter was used as a political tool by spreading news as well as being a place users could find ways to tweet to in times of internet restrictions.

After #Egypt came analyzing #sirtimizidönüyoruz. This hashtag was outstanding in that it experienced a unique level of negative tweets. Unlike the other hashtags in this study whose negative tweets dealt with pro-regime sentiments, this hashtag dealt with sexist and misogynistic tweets. An example of one of these negative tweets comes from a user called ResellerBerlin who tweeted: "#sirtimizidönüyoruz Lol how stupid. I tought i can see some nice bootys but it is allways the same Crap from the Erdogan-Haters ...". The significance of this form of negativity could be that hashtags with feminist origins are not taken as seriously due to existing misogyny in a country whose dictator promotes it, after all that is why the hashtag was started in the first place. Despite the negative tweets analyzed they did not make up the majority, with sixty percent of the tweets containing #sirtimizidönüyoruz were composed of positive messages and images towards women (see figure 3).

Another outstanding finding was that sixty-seven percent of these tweets came from personal accounts, implying a more intimate connection to the people. It shows a motivation to post despite threats to their safety, how extreme the unrest is, and the power twitter has to give the voiceless a voice. In the case of this hashtag Twitter can be supported as a political tool by providing women with a sense of community, a way for individuals across the globe to offer their solidarity, and a way to bring attention to Turkey's ruler's misogynistic comments.

The next hashtag analyzed which also comes from Turkey was #NATOSTopErdogan. Forty-seven percent of the tweets containing this hashtag were calling out higher authorities for their corruption and voicing their mistrust against them. Surprisingly, this applied to both Erdogan and NATO, for example one tweet exclaimed: "All @nato members are killers like #Erdogan #natostoperdogan #natostoperdogan #natostoperdogan #natostoperdogan". This speaks to the fear instilled in the people living under this regime, the results of simply tweeting something such as this could result in jail time and potentially death which may also explain the next finding. The next finding for #NATOSTopErdogan was that out of the twelve known locations for these tweets, ten were from countries whose nation language isn't English, yet the tweets were in English. The limited location information suggests users tweeting in safety by not providing a location as well as using English being suggestive of Western countries being able to provide them with more power if their news is spread to them. Another finding that is reoccurred within this hashtag was that thirty-three percent of the political profiles were created during the origin of this hashtag. Twitter can be supported as a political tool by this hashtag by users being able to safely share news by hiding their locations as well as users using it to tweet in English and reach Western countries. One tweet even went as far as saying Erdogan hated Twitter because of the voice it provided people with: "Erdgogon

hates Twitter and social media because it won't bow to his ambitions or narrative. #NATOStopErdogan #Twitterkurds #syria".

Next in the analysis process came #OccupyHongKong, one of the more recent hashtags in our time. Forty percent of these tweets included images of positivity towards the hashtag as seen in figure 4. Image usage within these hashtags didn't start occurring until more recent years, showing Twitter evolving as well as being a political tool with the capability of users to share images. Something else to note in figure 4 is that beside the username, the user chose to also include an umbrella emoji, alluding to #umbrellarevolution.

Figure 4. Tweet from the Occupy Hong Kong Hashtag



Another finding occurring in this study came up in this hashtag which is usage of personal profiles. Sixty-seven percent of the tweets containing #OccupyHongKong came from personal profiles.

#UmbrellaRevolution, which also came from the same political revolution as #OccupyHongKong, also contained a recurring finding with fifty percent of the political profiles in this sample being created during the emergence of the hashtag. Another recurrence was the use of hiding tweet location with a rather large amount, forty percent, not providing a location. Despite these recurring themes, unlike other hashtags in this study, #UmbrellaRevolution had a larger amount of tweets that weren't in English with forty percent being in Chinese. This raises the question of why the people under this regime may chose not to reach out to Western societies. Perhaps they are simply wanting to reach others within the region or it could be indicative of Western relations with China and the population not being open to Western intervention. Something else to note is that the umbrella emoji seen in figure 4 is also seen being used in usernames tweeting with this hashtag.

For the hashtag #IranElection forty percent of the tweets contained messages of perseverance which was not found in other hashtags suggesting this revolution to overthrow Ben Ali was exceptionally taxing on people and hope may have started to lose traction, inspiring an increase in perseverance related tweets. Going along with this idea is that fifty-three percent of these tweets were positively directed at the people living under this oppressive regime rather than simply being tweets of solidarity they were messages specifically for the people living under the regime (see figure 5).



Figure 5. Positive tweet under the hashtag for the Iran Election

The final hashtag analyzed in this study was #SidiBouzid. Under this hashtag an overwhelming forty percent of accounts, regardless of profile type, were created during the origin of this hashtag which was March 2009. Something else being seen with these hashtags is not including a location which forty percent of the tweets containing #SidiBouzid also did not include a location, however; of that forty percent, sixty percent were in Arabic. Much like the other hashtags who used an anonymous hidden location, it can be assumed it was done for safety. What is unique with this hashtag is that instead of being in English, the tweets without a location were in Arabic for the most part insinuating their audience was not Western countries. Or another possibility is that these people do not know English well enough to be capable of using the voice to text option during the internet blackout that was occurring during this hashtag.

After looking at these hashtag samples individually, all of the tweets were compiled for an overall analysis. In this analysis it was found that only four percent of the tweets were positive towards the regime, while sixty-eight percent were negative towards the regime, and twenty-eight percent were neutral which for the most part meant they were just retweets of news articles reported unbiased information on the revolutions. The majority of the tweets used in this study were in English with a large percentage of seventy-eight. Tweets that related to sharing news made up forty-two percent of the total sample. Another interesting finding was that of the total sample, thirty-three percent of the tweets mentioned internet censorship in their region. The final finding for the tweet sample as a whole was that thirty-four percent were made up of positive messages including things like: positive messages for the people including: solidarity, inspirational sayings, spreading ideas of revolution, and meetings times for rallies.

## 5. Findings And Implications

As for what all of this data for each of the samples within these hashtags suggests, there are several interesting ideas to support Twitter being a political tool for people living under oppressive regimes. The first of these, and perhaps the most important, is that Twitter was providing these populations with an outlet to voice their dissatisfaction. Another main finding was the amount of tweets that used English suggesting that people are trying to spread their ideas of revolutions to more powerful western societies whose main language is English. Not only are these Western societies perceived to have the power to interfere, they also have free use of the internet and media, meaning they can share ideas when populations living under oppressive regimes cannot. There's also the idea unless something has the attention of the Western world that it will go overlooked, so perhaps this was a way of trying to give their revolutions of importance. In relation to the internet restriction, every hashtag experienced this shortly after its emergence. This could be a coincidence or it could more of a punishment for the revolution itself and not so much directed at Twitter, however; the perseverance of users who found ways to tweet during these restrictions suggests people living under the oppressive regime's perception of Twitter being a political tool. The creation of accounts specifically during the emergence of a hashtag insinuates people acknowledging the use of Twitter as a political tool as well. The use of personal profiles as opposed to political profiles show the effects the regimes have on individuals and their motivation to post despite threats to their safety show how extreme the unrest is and the power twitter has to give the voiceless a voice.

Outside of being a political tool people living under the oppressive regimes can use, Twitter can be a tool for these people by being used by individuals who do not live under these regimes. This can be through things like positive messages that were spread to people living under the regimes to continue fighting and to not give up. People from other countries also made posts that voiced their solidarity. Another interesting implication from this study comes from the evolution of tweets as the ones in later years began to include more images such as memes, and more links to sites like FB. This suggests the evolution and possibilities Twitter has to be an even dynamic political tool in the future.

## 6. Conclusion

Since the emergence of these hashtags, the regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and Iran have been dismantled and replaced and Tunisia is now a constitutional democracy. The fight still continues in China and Turkey, and new fights have emerged in Egypt and Iran, however; the use Twitter helped start revolutions within all of these countries and continues to be a political tool for people living under oppressive regimes. As far as further use with this study, it can be used as a foundation for new studies to look at more hashtags and regimes and the effects Twitter has on them. It could also be used to make Twitter more accessible in times of internet blackouts by acknowledging the need for it. It also sparks the idea that Twitter can be monitored by the use of the hashtags and predictions can be made about the starts of revolutions. Finally preventative measures can be taken by creating a type of alert system operated through Twitter. As more tweets are being reported with reports of violence an alert can be sent out to people in those locations to prevent harm and potentially casualties.

Whether it provides a way to organize meetings, boost morale, spread news across the world, provide an outlet amidst an internet blackout, or simply reassurance that they are not alone by viewing images of solidarity across the world. This study set out to show Twitter can be a political tool because often things can seem hopeless for people living under oppressive regimes because power is taken away from the people. While it may not seem conventional, reassurance, hope, and morale are political tools because it's a reminder of our humanity and what we should be fighting for. This study can't prove that Twitter is a political tool strong enough to single handedly topple an oppressive regime, but it can support the idea of it being used as a political tool nonetheless for the populations living under the oppressive regimes.

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