

INTERNET AND THE DIFFUSION OF CONTENTIOUS
POLITICS ACROSS NATIONAL BORDERS

By

THOMAS LASSI

Bachelor of Science in Political Science

Luleå Tekniska Universitet

Luleå, Sweden

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INTERNET AND THE DIFFUSION OF CONTENTIOUS
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Thesis Approved:

Dr. Peter Rudloff

Thesis Adviser

Dr. Nikolas Emmanuel

Dr. Timothy Peterson

Dr. Sheryl A. Tucker

Dean of the Graduate College

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In late 2010 and early 2011 political protests in North Africa and the Middle East were initiated in several different countries by citizens who staked their claims and expressed grievances against their respective national governments. In Tunisia, citizens took to the streets in order to protest a regime under the leadership of long-time President Zine El Aidine Ben Ali. Their efforts resulted in Ben Ali's resignation and escape from the country. In Egypt, protests directed against the regime of Hosni Mubarak led to the toppling of Mubarak's regime, just 18 days after the start of large-scale protests in Egypt (Peterson 2011). In Syria, the government attracted the world's attention after it resorted to brutal tactics that have resulted in the death of Syrian anti-government protesters (Koelbl 2011). These three episodes have all been included in a phenomenon commonly referred to as the Arab Spring; a wave of protests movements that spread across parts of the Arab world in late 2010 and the first months of 2011. Media outlets were quick to attribute the spread of these protests to the existence of populations with access to the internet that aided them in initiating and carrying out their protests. Furthermore, a lot of buzz has been made discussing how access to the internet fed the anger underlying the protests in these states (For example, see Glanz and Markoff 2011; Saletan 2011). The above begs the question: What effect does the internet have on the diffusion of political protests across national borders?

Commenting in *Foreign Affairs*, Lisa Anderson argues that the Arab Spring had fundamentally different patterns and origins in the various countries in which it occurred. Anderson (2011) reminds us that, long before the internet was even invented, a similar wave of political unrest occurred in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya as far back as 1919. Without the internet, how did these protests seemingly spread across national borders in the same region as the ‘Arab Spring’? These historical examples give us reason to consider the issue of whether we are too quick to attribute certain phenomena to modern communications technology and lead us to the following question: Is the internet really playing a significant role in the diffusion of political protest across national borders? These are the questions that I address in this thesis in order to fill a gap that has been largely neglected within the existing political science literature.

While some research has been conducted on the impact of the internet and how it aids national and transnational organizations in achieving their goals, not much has been done on the diffusion of protests and contentious episodes across national borders. Consider the following examples of research on protests from the past 15 years. Rheingold (2003) investigated the role that the modern communications played in the removal of President Ferdinand Marcos from power in the Philippines. Citizens in the Philippines used text messaging and online communities in order to quickly organize protests against the regime. The online communities aided the anti-government movement in the country and provided a significant contribution to the organization of protests against the regime (Rheingold 2003). Other examples of studies on a national level have also focused on how modern communications aid groups in circumventing the regime in order to organize opposition in other countries (See for example Rahimi 2003;

Morozov 2009; Hirschkind 2010; George 2005). While Rheingold and these other examples have conducted exemplary studies, they all primarily examined the role of the internet and communications technologies in a national context.

Other scholars turned their attention in another direction and studied how activists from around the globe utilize the internet in order to make claims on transnational organizations. Several studies have been written on cases such as the 'Battle of Seattle' in which activists from all over the world expressed their grievances against the World Trade Organization (See for example Gill 2000; Levi and Olson 2000; Levi and Murphy 2006). Van Laer and Van Aelst (2010) also show, followed by Walgrave and colleagues (2011), how the internet is transforming social movements in general and how it promotes transnational connections between various groups and causes. Scholars have also paid attention to how the global justice movement cooperates across national borders in order to make claims on transnational organizations such as the World Trade Organization (Bennett 2003).

Two strands of research that is concerned with the internet and contentious episodes thus seem to emerge. Within the first group, scholars have studied the role of the internet in organizing anti-government groups in order to avoid detection by the regime, often with the ultimate goal of toppling them. The second group has focused on transnational groups and their use of the internet in organizing transnational groups and protests against transnational organizations. Scant attention has been paid by both groups as to whether the internet contributes to a general diffusion of protest across national borders in the absence of formal organizations and where groups have divergent targets for their claims.

Consider the following example. In the ‘Battle of Seattle’, transnational groups came together in order to protest against a single actor: the World Trade Organization. The groups that organize these types of protests against transnational organizations, or major state powers, have been the subject of study by scholars within political science and sociology. However, the issue of whether the internet will make such protest diffuse across national borders in the absence of formal organizations has not been investigated. This is the gap that I am to fill by examining the diffusion of contentious episodes regardless of the role of whether formal structures are in place through which organized activists can spread their claims across national borders. In other words, I focus solely on how the internet affects the probability of a diffusion of political protest across national borders.

By highlighting the impact of the internet on diffusion of conflicts across national borders this study fills a void identified by Tarrow and Tilly (2007) who called for further research concerning the “contested role” of the internet (Tarrow and Tilly 2007, p. 196) in contentious politics. This thesis sheds light on a phenomenon that has been taken for granted by many, especially in the media, but that has been empirically investigated by few scholars. To the author’s knowledge, no quantitative study has previously been conducted on this topic by scholars within political science and this thesis will provide the scholarly community with a stepping stone for future research.

I provide a theoretical basis for why we would expect the internet to contribute to the spread of political protest across national borders. From this framework I develop a number of different hypotheses that are tested through quantitative, statistical analysis on the period from 1990 to 2005. The results of the empirical analysis provide us with a

word of caution regarding our assumptions about the correlation between internet usage and protest. The analysis does not find any evidence for the hypothesis that an increase in internet usage is correlated with an increase in political protest in the countries that are included in the study. Instead, the empirical result from this initial large-scale study on the topic suggests the opposite: an increase in internet usage is correlated with a decrease in political protest. I therefore argue that we should be careful not to overestimate the influence of the internet on the diffusion of political conflicts.

This thesis is structured as follows. First, a literature review is conducted with a focus on the relevant literature within contentious politics and the transnational diffusion of contentious politics. Second, I turn to the theory section. In the theory section I examine the theoretical basis for my hypotheses. Third, the research design section is introduced with its focus on how the hypotheses will be operationalized and tested. In the fourth chapter I present the findings that are produced by the empirical analysis. I close the thesis with a conclusion where I discuss the results, what it means for the topic of contentious politics, as well as suggestions for future research paths on this topic.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

I choose to place the protests in Tunisia, Libya, Iran, and other places around the world under a category of events labeled ‘Contentious Politics’. This is a term that itself warrants some explanation. By ‘contentious politics’ I am referring to interactions where actors make claims that bear on someone else’s interests where governments are the targets, objects of claims, or third parties to the claims. These claims can either be made peacefully, for example through organized protests, or violently through riots or revolutions. This creates a broad category of events that can be included in the scope of this paper. For the purpose of this study I choose to narrow my attention to those instances where contentious politics take the form of protests, demonstrations, riots, and revolutions. The literature review will proceed as follows: In the first section of the literature review I turn my attention to the concept of contentious politics in order to explain what it is and to provide examples of contentious episodes. The review will then move on to focus more narrowly on the diffusion of contentious episodes across national borders after which I then turn my attention to the limited scholarship that is available concerning the internet and contentious politics. I then close the literature review with a brief summary of the literature that has been discussed.

Contentious Politics

Contentious politics is a concept that has been used by scholars such as Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow, and Doug McAdam in their quest to study various episodes where people make claims on governments, organizations, or other individuals (See for example Tilly and Tarrow 2007; Tarrow 1994; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001; Tilly 2003). The concept has been defined as:

“interactions in which actors make claims that bear on someone else’s interests, leading to coordinating efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs” (Tarrow and Tilly 2007, p.202)

Through this definition scholars have been able to include a host of different phenomena such as political protest, social movements, revolutions, and civil war under the rubric of contentious politics. It has been claimed that similar mechanisms and processes should be active in all of these episodes, even though they are different in kind, where collective action, politics, and contention interact with each other (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, chapter 1-2; Tarrow and Tilly 2007). Contentious politics is far from a new phenomenon. In Cambridge, England, back in 1785 Thomas Clarkson became one of the world’s first professional organizers of collective claim-making when he, together with other anti-slavery advocates, advocated for the abolishment of slavery in Britain. The British anti-slavery activists made claims on authorities and initiated various performances in order to stake their claims and create awareness of their stance. Clarkson’s initiative also helped launch the world’s first transnational movement when opposition to slavery diffused to other countries (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, p. 1-2). A more recent example, which also happens to have a more violent nature, of a contentious episode is found in France where the North African population set fire to cars in 2005 in

order to express their grievances and dissatisfaction with their situation and the French government (Murphy 2005).

Since the 1960s, new movements have started to emerge that are distinctly different from the movements that operated in the past. In examining these new transnational movements, scholars have found that they exhibit a remarkable vitality and frequently make claims that stretch beyond the boundaries of the nation-state (Della Porta and Tarrow 2005, p.1-3). Through social, cultural and geopolitical changes collective claim-making transformed from a mainly national dimension into a transnational dimension where movements now conduct claim-making across national boundaries directed at both national governments but also at international organizations. This transformation did not happen overnight. It developed during the latter half of the 20th century when organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, and the European Union emerged and tied state governments closer together through interdependence (Keohane and Nye 1977). When these new entities developed it provided activists with new targets for their collective claim-making, targets which they shared with activists in other countries. This has led observers and scholars to talk about concepts such as a 'global civil society' where activists from all across the world co-ordinate in order to express their grievances against transnational organizations and national governments such as the United States (Della Porta 2005). Recently, scholars have started to pay closer attention to how actors from different countries get in contact with each other and engage in joint contentious action. But how do issues diffuse between different sites and what are the mechanisms that make

such diffusion possible? I will now turn my attention to how scholars have treated the diffusion of contentious politics.

Diffusion of Contentious Politics

Scholars within political science have not been foreign to the idea that contentious episodes have a potential to diffuse between different locations. In the following section, I provide a number of different examples that touch upon this point. The purpose of doing so is twofold. First, it demonstrates the fact that diffusion of contentious politics is an established concept with an extant literature that this study speaks to and builds upon in order to advance knowledge within political science. Second, this review will illustrate the void within the literature that this study attempts to fill through its theoretical and empirical contributions.

In Mark Beissinger's seminal work on the disintegration of the Soviet Union he captures the diffusion of contention that occurred across different ethnicities and their respective regions within the country (Beissinger 2002). Beissinger examines how different nationalities within the former Soviet Union staged protests that diffused from nationality to nationality in the beginning of the 1990s. When one nationality within the Soviet Union decided to demand more autonomy from the central government other nationalities quickly followed in their footsteps and did the same. In this case, it is likely that the decision by one group to stake their claims got the ball rolling and inspired other groups to follow suit. While Beissinger's study of the Soviet Union is a commendable scholarly work, his main concern is with different nationalities that reside within the same state (Beissinger 2002). In other words, not only did they reside within the same

state, but the target for all of the different groups was also the same. Thus, while Beissinger's efforts produced an excellent scholarly study on the diffusion of contentious politics within the Soviet Union, it does not say much about the diffusion of conflict across national borders when different actors make claims on different targets.

Another example of diffusion can be found in the United States. College students at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, decided to build 'shantytowns' in order to protest the apartheid state in South Africa. Their protest gained national media attention and over forty shantytowns appeared on campuses all across the United States in a fairly short period of time (Soule 1997, 1999). While the diffusion of these shantytowns certainly received aid from modern media and communications, the main focus of the study was not on the influence of the internet in the diffusion of these protests. In addition, just like Beissinger's study of the Soviet Union, this diffusion mainly took place within one country, and a specific population (college students) within that country. While both of these studies are concerned with the diffusion of contentious politics, they say little about the diffusion about contentious episodes across national borders.

Other scholars within political science have paid attention to transnational diffusion. Tilly and Tarrow (2007) direct our attention to a movement that spread across national borders in an earlier era. When Thomas Clarkson decided to protest against slavery in England he probably did not have the intention of becoming one of the first professional organizers of collective claim-making in the world. Clarkson, together with other anti-slavery activists, advocated for the abolishment of slavery in Britain and made claims on authorities through various performances in order to further their claims and create both awareness and support of their position. According to Tilly and Tarrow

(2007), the British anti-slavery movement became the first transnational social movement when opposition to slavery diffused to other countries. While in this case a movement diffused across national borders, the claims that were being made in both the United Kingdom and abroad was largely the same. To a certain extent, the actors were also the same. For example, Tilly and Tarrow (2007) point to the fact that Clarkson and other activists traveled abroad in order to spark raise awareness for their cause.

When it comes to more violent forms of contention, for example in the form of civil war, scholars have demonstrated that there is a regional clustering of civil war. States that border other states where civil war is occurring are much more likely to experience political turmoil themselves (Gleditsch 2007; Marshall and Gurr 2003). In order to explain why civil wars tend to diffuse across national borders scholars have put forward a number of different arguments. One argument suggests that issues and actors span national borders (Gleditsch 2005) while other scholars argue that conflict in one country will create a “demonstration effect” that inspires actors in other states to engage in collective claim-making against their own governments (Kuran 1998). Other scholars attribute the diffusion of contentious politics and political conflict to factors such as population movements (Salehyan and Gleditsch 2006). These studies are all concerned with the spread of political conflict across national borders within cases where the actors not necessarily have to be the same or share the same goals. However, like all of the other studies surveyed above there is a lack of attention paid to whether modern communications, such as the internet, have played any role in the diffusion of these conflicts.

As evidenced by the multiple examples provided above, transnational diffusion of contentious episodes has been studied by scholars in the recent decades. However, there is a significant lack of attention within the literature that deals with the issue of how modern communications, especially the internet, affect the diffusion of political conflict across national borders (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, p. 196). The existing literature deals primarily with how the internet aids in claim-making against supranational organizations (Bennett 2005; Samuel 2004) and not with how riots and protest diffuse across national borders. While the internet is a largely neglected factor in the literature, some work has been conducted on the influence of the internet on contentious politics. I will now turn to a study of that scholarship in order to demonstrate how scholars have considered the internet in their studies.

Internet and Contentious Politics

Within the scholarly literature on contentious politics a majority of the research on the influence of the internet has been conducted by scholars studying social movements and organized activists within the global justice movement. At a very basic level, digital communications, for example in the form of the internet, are considered to have a potential for reducing time constraints and communication costs. This is argued to enable citizens and organizations to stay in touch with each other and to maintain more contacts than in the past (Wellman 2001; Wellman et al 2003). By staying in touch, individuals will be better equipped to maintain and expand their own networks of personal and organizational connections. Scholars` have described this phenomenon as a way of creating ‘weak ties’ (See for example Haythorntwaite and Wellman 2002).

One of the themes in the scholarship has circulated around the scarcity of resources that characterize a majority of social movements that engage in collective action (Fisher and Boekkooi 2011). For these social movements, the existence of the internet, e-mail, and list servers have the potential of reducing the costs. By reducing costs, these movements and organizations are able to distribute their message and bring attention to their cause even though they might have scarce resources (Fisher 1998; Almeida and Lichbach 2003). The argument here is fairly straightforward: if the cost for organizing is low, it should be easier for social movements to organize citizens and the number of protests should go up. An illustration of this can be found in a study by Danitz and Strobel (1999) where they argue that the internet enabled prodemocracy activists to communicate with each other in a cheap and efficient manner.

Some scholars argue that a reduction in costs and time constraints is the only major effect facilitated by the use of the internet. In this view, the internet does little besides amplifying communication between, or within, political groups (Agre 2002). Along these lines, Tilly (2004) compares the invention of the internet to previous inventions such as the telegraph when he advises us to be cautious about assuming that the internet will revolutionize the way in which contentious politics and collective action is conducted. Previous inventions, like the telegraph, have had similar functions where they made communication cheaper and tied groups closer together with each other, but they did not fundamentally change the way in which they operated. According to Tilly, simple technological determinism and hyperbole should be avoided (Tilly 2004, chapter 5).

There is however a partially deviating view of the internet and its role in collective action which argues that the internet is transforming collective action and that we need to formulate new theories of how the underlying processes of the internet. Scholars who take this position believe that the internet has a much larger potential than previous technological inventions to transform the way in which claim-making and collective action take place. Bennett (2003) argues that the previous scholarship regarding the internet and its potential focused too much on conventional organizations such as political parties and other hierarchically structured groups. Instead, he argues, we should focus our attention on how the internet affects loosely structured forms of activism and activists that stake claims on not only states, but also at multinational organizations and transnational corporations. The internet has thus provided transnational activists with a tool that they can use in order to organize opposition to organizations that operate in multiple countries, something that in the past almost remained unfeasible for most of these organizations (Bennett 2003). These activists are also able to operate independently from formal organizations by using the internet (Bennett et al 2008).

Another effect that has emerged from the spread of the internet is that it has enabled political activists to expand their operations and to participate in multiple protest events. While in the past time constraints and long distances made it difficult to retain multiple ties and engagements, the internet today permits individuals to simultaneously fight for several causes and to become involved in different movements (Walgrave et al 2011). However, as a word of caution Bennett (2003) also highlights an argument which claims that collective action based on digital media will create loosely structured movements that are difficult to coordinate and sustain and that online activity also has to

be combined with offline activity in order to create sustainable movements. This might indicate that collective action which is based on online communication is less effective in the long run than offline organizations and movements.

On a national level, attention has been paid to the influence of the internet in a host of different studies. One practical example of successful use of the internet in coordinating collective action can be found in the case of MoveOn.Org. Scholars have shown how MoveOn.Org used the internet in order to broaden public opinion and revitalize communicative action (Carty 2010). Meanwhile, Fandy (1999) instead directs our attention to how the internet helped activists in Saudi Arabia to spread their message while avoiding the barriers set up by the Saudi government. In yet another example, Norris (2002) examined the importance of information access and spread of the internet in authoritarian states such as China. While these studies provide us with some information regarding the internet's potential in aiding national activists, it says little about the role of the internet in transnational activism.

The area of transnational activism and collective action is however one of the areas in which the role of communication technologies and internet has started to be examined. Here, focus lies on understanding how the internet aids individuals in organizing and sustaining collective action even when it involves large geographical distances. In this transnational perspective, Bennett (2003) contends that the internet and digital media have transformed transnational contentious politics. To him, it appears like the internet facilitates the creation of vast webs of global activist networks that can launch transnational collective action and claim-making with relative ease (Bennett 2003). This argument is illustrated in a study conducted by Lichbach and Almeida

(2001). These two authors noted that during the ‘Battle of Seattle’ protests were simultaneously held in at least eighty-two cities around the world and that these protests were not organized centrally by the campaign coalition in Seattle. Instead, tactics and timing was communicated through the internet to activists on all of the different sites where protests took place (Lichbach and Almeida 2001). Furthermore, several scholars (Garrido and Halavais 2003; Martinez-Torres 2001; Van Laer and Van Aelst 2010) have examined how a local rebellion, the Zapatista movement, in Mexico quickly gained international fame and support through a global network through effective use of the internet.

But while these examples all show a belief in a potential for the internet to aid in facilitating protests, some scholars still advise us to be cautious in assuming that the internet fundamentally transforms and enhances the likelihood of vast webs of activists that create contentious episodes (see for example Tilly 2004; Bennett 2005). While generally optimistic about the internet’s potential in enabling activists and social movements, Bennett (2005) argues that we need to be aware of the fact that it is a combination of an online and offline relationship between individuals, activists, and groups within social movements that has the ability to make a movement powerful.

Summary

From the literature review, it is possible to discern a number of different ways in which the internet affects contentious politics and actors who engage in collective claim-making. The internet has been shown to facilitate communication, make it more cost-efficient to organize groups, allow individuals to create multiple engagements, enable

individuals and groups to cooperate over large distances, as well as revitalizing communicative action domestically within a country. Throughout this review, a picture has started to appear in which scholars have devoted considerable attention to how social movements and transnational activists are able to use the internet in order to effectively promote their cause. However, while these studies indicate that activists are finding new ways to organize and that transnational activism is increasing, they largely neglect the phenomenon of diffusion of protest between different countries. Little has been said about events such as the Arab Spring where protests appeared to spread from country to country and citizens ended up toppling their governments. The different movements in the two countries exhibited different origins and expressed different grievances (Anderson 2011). The claims made against the regime in Tunisia were made by different actors compared to the claims directed at the regime of Mubarak in Egypt. So how did the protests in Tunisia affect the protests that later took place in Egypt? And what was the role of the internet in that process?

The studies that have been reviewed above do not provide us with much information that aids us in answering these questions. This illustrates the theoretical gap that this study sheds some light upon. For scholars and policy makers alike, the issue of how protests diffuse across countries appear should be important. If protests and political unrest occurs in one country, how should policy makers, politicians and citizens in other countries expect that it will affect their own situation? These are the questions that motivate this study and that haven't been adequately been answered by past research. In a world that is often described as being closer than ever before due to globalization,

domestic events in foreign countries might confront policy makers with new challenges in the 21st century.

CHAPTER III

THEORY

Introduction

In order to fill the gap within the literature it is first necessary to establish a theoretical linkage between the internet and contentious episodes. In order to narrow the scope of the thesis down to something that is more manageable, I will primarily be concerned with those contentious episodes that have been treated as protest events within the literature. This still includes various forms of riots, demonstrations, and revolutions that have been included in datasets in past studies. The causal relationship that connects the internet to the transnational diffusion of contentious episodes will here be made explicitly clear.

This theory section will proceed as follows. First, I will define a number of important concepts that have been mentioned previously in the thesis such as ‘contentious politics’ and ‘contention’. This discussion will help to clarify the boundaries for the phenomena that this thesis is concerned with and those phenomena that are beyond the scope of this project. Next, I connect the independent and dependent variables that lay the foundation for the following hypotheses and empirical tests. After this I move to a formulation of four different hypotheses which are supported by the previous literature and the way in which media has portrayed episodes such as the Arab Spring.

What is “contentious politics”? Included in the term are phenomena such as social movements, political protest, revolutions, and civil wars. Admittedly, these different phenomena have mostly been treated as distinctly different types of events in most of the scholarly literature. However, some scholars have argued that it is possible to bring all of these different types of events together under the same term, contentious politics, because they share the same underlying mechanisms. Contentious politics has been defined as combining the concepts of contention, collective action, and politics (Tarrow and Tilly 2007). Together these concepts make up contentious politics. Since the scholarship within contentious politics and social movements is closely related to the topic of this thesis, I choose to place this work within this scholarly tradition.

The first component of contentious politics is that of contention. When claims are made that bear on someone else’s interest contention arises. The parties making collective claims can be individuals, groups, and even institutions (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, pp.4-5). The second component is that of collective action. Churches, voluntary associations, and neighbors who clear weeds from vacant lots are all engaging in a form of collective action. The third component, politics, refers to all those things that agents of government such as politicians and bureaucrats are tasked with doing. When we interact with agents of governments we operate within the realm of politics. For example when we apply for a driver’s license or show our passport to immigration officers. However, in these instances there is no contention involved since the actors do not make claims on the interests of others. In a similar vein there is no collective action involved since applying for a driver’s license is not usually anything done by a group with collective goals but by

individuals (Ibid.). When you combine the three components, we find episodes that can be placed under the rubric of contentious politics.

This definition of contentious politics is a fairly apt description of the events that have been described in the introduction and literature review. In this study, I am not interested in the acts of individuals when they act in relation to the government as single individuals. The phenomena which I choose to place my focus on are the acts of individuals in various groups who choose to make demands upon political actors in a visible manner, for example through protest. Whether these groups have a formal or informal structure is therefore left aside for the purpose of this study. To be explicit, I focus on how the internet affects contentious episodes and their diffusion across national borders. Consider a theoretical scenario in which Group A decides to stage protests in country A. After witnessing these protests, Group B in Country B decides to organize protests of their own against their government or other organizations within their own country. In this scenario, events that take place outside the arena of domestic politics will still have an impact on the political stability and events within Country B. Some observers believe that this is the story behind the Arab Spring and the diffusion of protests across countries in Northern Africa and the Middle East. Another way through which it is possible to visualize the term ‘contentious politics’ is by substituting it with ‘political conflict’. Political conflict can appear both in nonviolent forms, such as peaceful protest, or violent forms, such as revolutions or civil wars. I use the two terms interchangeably.

If we assume that events such as the various protests found in the Arab Spring are connected, then we are required to formulate a causal explanation for why this diffusion might take place.

The Demonstration Effect

One possible explanation has been described as the “demonstration effect” (Kuran 1998). When events happen in one country, news and information regarding those events will be dispersed across the world by various methods (mainly television, radio, newspapers, and the internet). Thus, citizens of one country might be able to receive information of developments in another country that they can apply to their own situation. One example of a type of demonstration effect can be found in the scholarly work on democratization. Linz and Stepan (1996) argue that individuals reflect upon previous events and apply them to their own situation. They argue, for example, that the Portuguese revolution strongly influenced conservative politicians in Spain who had no intention of suffering the same fate as their counterparts in Portugal. Likewise, Prince Juan Carlos of Spain is likely to have been influenced by developments in Greece where his brother-in-law lost the throne due to his ambivalence toward democracy (Linz and Stepan 1996, p. 76). These examples seem to indicate that people indeed learn from what happens in other countries and that they also can apply those lessons to their own situation. However, Linz and Stepan did not have as their primary goal to investigate the process through which individuals in Portugal and Spain learned from each other and therefore barely touched upon the subject.

In order for a diffusion to take place, it seems reasonable to assume that something like a demonstration effect has to take place. Central to this effect is the ability of citizens in different countries to actually obtain information about events in other countries. In the past, information diffused through travelers, merchants, and newspapers. In more recent times people started to obtain information thanks to technological advancements such as the telegraph, the radio, and television. Today, modern communications such as the internet allow people to obtain information at will, at any time. For example, citizens of one country are able to turn on their computer and bring up their web browser after which they are presented with a mountain of news items, blog posts, and social media that can provide them with information about the world around them. The internet also allows its users to stay in contact with large numbers of people across large geographical distances, something that was largely absent in past technological advancements. Modern communications and transportation technologies have managed to compress time and space, making our world much more tightly connected than in the past. It is therefore reasonable to assume that a demonstration effect is likely to take place between countries in the world today. The question is whether the demonstration effect has a significant impact on the diffusion of contentious episodes, and more specifically, what role does the internet play in this? With this background, the research question is stated as follows:

What is the effect of the internet on the diffusion of contentious episodes across national borders?

I here present a theoretical framework which provides an argument as to why we might expect that the internet will contribute to the diffusion of contentious episodes

across national borders. This argument will largely fit the conventional wisdom that was promoted by the media around the Arab Spring where they placed an emphasis on the importance of modern communications technologies.

The internet and diffusion of contentious episodes

The argument in support of the internet as a contributing factor for the diffusion of political conflict has a number of different parts: 1) the internet reduces time constraints and 2) to reduce the cost of communicating with others as well as the cost of obtaining information (Lupia and Sin 2003; Wellman 2001). Let us take a closer look at these two, arguably related, but still separate components. First, the internet has the potential to reduce time constraints which not only will allow information to travel faster within countries, but also between countries. In the context of the demonstration effect, this means that information will be able to travel faster across borders. In the past, the diffusion of information itself used to take a considerable amount of time. Just within the United States news could take several days to travel from Washington D.C to Philadelphia, whereas today information can travel within seconds between California and New York with the help of a mouse-click. The effect of faster diffusion of news across large areas allows citizens to take part of news within a relatively short time of the events occurring. A person who is thinking about engaging in contentious politics is more likely to be prompted to do so by events that have taken place fairly recently. Reading about events that took place the same day or week should be vastly different from reading about events that took place a year or more ago. 'Fresh' news tend to be more exciting than old and people can view them as being more relevant to their own situation.

Because of the above, contentious episodes should be able to spread quicker over vast geographical areas, creating a momentum that will sustain the contentious episodes. Episodes that manage to gain some form of momentum is likely to have a greater probability to continue dispersing across vast areas when people get swept up in a, with a lack of a better term, ‘revolutionary’ mood. The internet should also make it is easier to organize large clusters of protesters in a short amount of time since it has the capacity of reaching out to a larger number faster than other forms of communication.

Consider the example of the Arab Spring. Citizens in other North African and Middle Eastern countries were able to go online with in order to watch the protests in Tunisia and Egypt take place in real time through streaming services on the internet. While it also should be recognized that cable news channels and other forms of media can provide citizens with the same type of information, one important difference persists. When it comes to cable news channels, for example Al Jazeera, the viewers are at the mercy of the editors and owners of the cable news channels for what information they will be able to access. When individuals go online, they are able to choose their information more freely and without the influence of cable news channels. When receiving information online it is possible for individuals to choose what type of information they want to receive. It is also possible the get this information instantly from blogs, streaming news, forums, and other channels of communication with friends who are involved in the protests.

While the internet reduces time constraints and disperses information faster over vast geographical areas, it also reduces communication costs for individuals and allows for access to multiple sources of information. The internet provides individuals with

access to a host of different news sources, chat rooms, communities, and various types of social media for a relatively cheap cost. Especially in developed countries it is becoming more common that individuals have access to the internet and that they use this access in order to stay in touch with friends and to receive news and to meet new people (Dutton et al 2005). One effect stemming from this fact and that can be found in the literature, is the belief that the internet can function as a facilitator of civic participation. Scholars have found empirical evidence for a civic participation theory (See for example Shah et al 2005). When civic participation increases, it also indicates that people will be more susceptible to participation in contentious events and that they actively will seek out, either offline or online, information regarding ways to become engaged. Movements such as Occupy Wall Street and the Tea Party Movement used the internet in order to get out the message and organize contentious episodes across the United States. On Twitter and Facebook, both movements reached out and attempted to engage individuals who otherwise might not ever have heard about the issues that these different groups worked for or against.

Since the internet makes it cheaper to stay in contact with friends and acquaintances, it also provides a channel for individuals to maintain long distance relationships (Walgrave et al 2011). When individuals can stay in touch with a more dispersed network of friends they will also be able to receive first-hand information from other countries. For example, if a contentious episode takes place in Athens, Greece, it is today more likely that individuals in other countries, such as Portugal, can receive first-hand information about the episode in Greece, ask personal questions, and thus relate the events to their own situation. This might either take place through personal friends or

through online forums and communities. Contrast this scenario to the passive act of just watching the evening news broadcaster read the news and report on current events. The two scenarios are likely to produce different experiences for those who take part in them. This sets the internet apart from other communications technologies such as the telephone, in which you only can talk to one person at a time, and news media such as television. The argument that there is something specific about the internet that affects the way in which actors organize contentious episodes is nothing new. This argument has been promoted by scholars within the research field of contentious politics in the past (See for example Tilly 2004). However, while other communication technologies also allowed for long-distance ties, the internet can be argued to provide a new form of communication where people now are able to remain in contact with multiple individuals (Wellman et al 2003) through a host of different methods. It is today possible for someone in Africa to stay in touch with someone in North America through email, social media, direct messaging, and other methods. The internet, through services like Skype, also makes it cheaper to make calls to other individuals dispersed around the world.

These different factors all seem to combine in making the internet a relevant factor for diffusion of contentious episodes through its potential for enhancing the demonstration effect. The internet allows for a faster dispersion of information while also providing this information, and interpersonal ties, for a relatively cheap cost. Note how this argument is not based on the existence of transnational organizations and instead builds on individual access to information and individual ties across nations, setting this argument apart from the previous literature.

Why do people protest?

The argument that has been presented above provides a story for how the internet contributes to a demonstration effect, creates ties between individuals, and how it quickly disperses information across large geographical distances. But the question of why that at all matters has still not been adequately answered. Why would the above lead to a diffusion of contentious events such as protests? In order to answer this question, I will now turn my attention to the part of the literature that attempts to provide reasons for why people choose to participate in contentious events such as protests, demonstrations, and revolutions.

Rational choice scholars such as Opp and Kittel (2010) argue that the action of political protest is dependent upon a number of different factors, of which one is political discontent. Based on the original theory of collective action (Olson 1965), political discontent does not lead to protest because single individuals will not be able to influence the effect of a protest or its outcome. Thus, protest should be highly unlikely. However, several scholars have argued that when individuals become aware of the fact that they can join together with others in large groups they will start to perceive their influence on the political process as higher than zero (Muller and Opp 1986; Opp and Kittel 2010). It might also be the case that individuals decide to contribute to the common cause because they feel obliged to do so by moral and social incentives (Opp 1989). When an individual see that other individuals are out protesting and participating in various forms of contentious politics, for example against an oppressive government, that might lead them to feel obliged to participate. Consider this in the context of the discussion of the internet that was conducted earlier. The internet provides individuals with a window through

which they can see that they are not alone in holding their specific beliefs and attitudes. In fact, the internet can enable them to connect with a larger group and to become more inclined to participate in contentious episodes.

Other scholars have focused on deprivation and grievances (Gurr 1970; Turner and Killian 1972; Smelser 1963). What these scholars have in common is that they all posit a strong relationship between grievances, or deprivation, and the emergence of social movements that engage in contentious action. These scholars thus focus upon what might be best labeled as mass psychology in order to explain why groups choose to engage in collective action. While it is likely that latent grievances always exist, it is also true that we do not always see political protest. Therefore, an issue that still is up for debate in the scholarly community is the different factors that have to exist in order for grievances to actually transition into collective action. Again, the internet can provide us with a partial explanation of this issue. Through internet access, citizens from around the world will be able to gather information on what is going on in other countries. One type of information that they will be able to receive is how protests and other forms of contentious episodes in other countries improve the standard of living and create freedoms for those people. Through that information, people might decide that they, too, want to improve their own situation and that engaging in collective action can be one way through which they can achieve it.. This might for example be the case in the Arab Spring where the population of Egypt saw the Tunisians overthrow their government in order to improve their situation. The Egyptians then promptly decided to follow suit in order to reap the same rewards as the Tunisian population. However, it is also possible to make the argument that the internet can contribute to a decrease in collective action and

protests. If people receive news that informs them of how protests and revolutions in other countries have failed to overthrow their government, or in other ways proved unsuccessful, it is possible that people simply will decide that it is not worth engaging in collective action since they are likely to fail anyway.

The goal with this study is however not to verify or falsify theories about individual rebellious behavior and collective action. The theories that have been briefly discussed above are merely meant to illustrate that there are plausible theoretical explanations as to why the internet might prompt individuals to participate in contentious episodes. So while the issue of why people choose to protest is relevant and fascinating, it is not within the scope of this study to provide an answer to that question. Instead, I aim to provide one piece to a larger puzzle of the factors that affect how protests diffuse between different sites. I will now turn my attention to a set of hypotheses that will be tested in the empirical section of the paper.

Hypothesis 1: Countries with a large number of internet users will be vulnerable to the diffusion of contentious episodes from other countries

The prediction that this hypothesis provides is fairly straightforward and based on the previous discussion. When a country has a large number of citizens that are connected to the internet, the probability of contentious episodes diffusing to that country from other places around the globe should increase. I would here like to address a criticism that already exists within the literature. Tilly (2004) expresses doubts about the possibility of the internet to significantly alter the way in which contentious episodes are created. Rheingold (2003) concludes that the ability to access modern technology, in the form of

the internet and cellular technology played a critical part in the removal of President Ferdinand Marcos from power in the Philippines. Tilly (2004) instead argues that the existence of modern technology and online communities did not fundamentally change the process through which the protests diffused within the Philippines. Instead, they merely enhanced mechanisms already exhibited by previous technologies. This is a valid criticism of the idea that the internet fundamentally transforms the way in which contentious episodes diffuse. However, the theory is not that the internet fundamentally transforms the diffusion of contentious episodes. I am merely arguing that it enhances the demonstration effect, while perhaps doing that to a greater extent than previous technologies have been able to.

The relationship between the internet and diffusion that is posited in the first hypotheses might however be too simple; therefore I also introduce a number of additional hypotheses below that include other factors which also are likely to affect the diffusion of contentious episodes.

First, we need to consider that different forms of contentious performances and repertoires exist in different sites. One type of contention that is natural in one country does not necessarily have to be natural to citizens of another country on the other side of the globe (Tarrow and Tilly 2007, p.11). Contentious performances are the familiar and standardized ways in which political actors make collective claims on some other set of political actors. Performances evolve over time and are different from place to place. For example, Thomas Clarkson and his anti-slavery activists started the tactic of sending in mass petitions to the government listing their demands. Petitioning itself was not anything new, but the way in which Clarkson and his collaborators used it was

completely new for collective claim making (Tarrow and Tilly 2007, p.12). While one type of performance is frequently used in a country it doesn't necessarily need to be used in another (Tarrow and Tilly 2007, p. 16-21). For example, the performances that are being conducted in the United States are likely to differ widely from the performances that are conducted in China. While the reasons for this might be numerous, chief among them is the difference in rights granted to the citizens by their respective government. While Americans retain the rights to peaceful assembly and to petition politicians the Chinese population lacks this right. Certain performances that are allowed in one country can be banned in another, making it difficult for individuals to apply the lessons learned from other countries to their own situation.

However, not all countries are dissimilar in their repertoires. The repertoires exhibited by Canadians and Americans tend to be largely similar even though they are two different countries. Geographically proximate countries, like the United States and Canada, are more likely to share the same repertoire than two countries that are far apart. This provides the ground for our second hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2: Countries with a large number of internet users will be vulnerable to the diffusion of contentious episodes from geographically proximate countries

The example of the United States and China also touched upon the issue of regime type, something that is commonly referred to within previous literature. For example, Tilly (2004) urges us to look at the political structure within a country in order to predict whether contentious episodes will arise or not. Depending on the political structure, opportunities to engage in contentious action might vary between countries.

Tarrow and Tilly (2007) argue that it is more likely that contentious episodes will take place in democracies where the political opportunity structure provides ample opportunity for citizens to engage in political activism. In highly autocratic states where the government has the capacity to oppress the people opportunities for political action will be lower than in a democracy. Tarrow and Tilly (2007) do not address or test relevance of this argument in relation to modern communication technologies. In line with these authors, I assume that it is likely that the internet will be more effective to diffuse contention to democracies than it is to diffuse contention to non-democracies. The reason is fairly straightforward: authoritarian governments are able to censor and moderate access to information in a way that democratic governments cannot, or generally choose not. Governments in states like Iran and China have been shown to quickly adapt to the age of modern communications and have developed methods through which they can filter, or edit, information that they don't believe that the masses should be aware of. So even though political conflicts might arise abroad that has the potential to spark political conflicts in other countries, it is less likely to do so if those countries are non-democratic. This is due to the control of information that autocratic leaders are able to exercise within their states. From this two additional hypotheses follow:

Hypotheses 3: Contentious episodes are more likely to diffuse to democratic countries than to non-democratic countries.

Earlier I engaged in a discussion of the various events that are included in the term 'contentious politics'. I include different types of contentious episodes ranging from peaceful political protests to full-blown civil wars. However, is it reasonable to expect that the internet will affect the diffusion of these types of events equally, or will the

internet be more likely to influence certain types of contentious episodes? To put in another way: would a political demonstration arranged by a domestic group, such as the National Rifle Association, inside the United States diffuse across national borders and create protest in other countries to the same extent as, admittedly unlikely, presence of a civil war within the United States? Even though both of the hypothetical scenarios qualify as contentious episodes, I would here like to argue that the diffusion of peaceful and violent contentious episodes should exhibit different patterns.

Again, my argument is fairly straightforward: political protests, such as peaceful demonstrations and marches, are more likely to diffuse across national borders via a demonstration effect than more violent episodes such as civil wars. In order to support this argument I borrow from the rational choice school of thought. When individuals are faced with the decision to either stay home or take part in contentious collective action a rational decision will take place in which the benefits and costs of participating are compared with the costs and benefits of remaining inactive. Under conventional assumptions, engaging in contentious behavior will be fairly costly, especially when we consider rebellious behavior (See for example Salert 1976; Muller and Opp 1986). The benefits of participation in a violent uprising have to outweigh the costs in order for individuals to engage in them. However, it is also likely that it is less costly, and thus easier, to participate in contentious politics when the costs are low. This might be the case when it comes to peaceful political protests. Many of the participants in these forms of events only have to show up in order to show their support and their costs might be minimized to an hour of their day. Contrast this to more violent episodes where there might be a danger of severe physical harm and strict repercussions. In non-democratic

states, governments might have the capacity to punish individuals who not only participate in violent forms of contentious politics, but also those who participate in peaceful protest.

For the diffusion of contentious politics I expect that the logic above will have one main effect. I expect that diffusion is more likely to occur in cases of nonviolent protests. Individuals who receive information regarding contentious episodes in other countries through the demonstration effect will be more likely to engage in nonviolent forms of contentious politics because it simply is cheaper than to engage in violent forms. I also expect that the internet will have a greater effect on the spread of peaceful forms of contentious politics than on violent forms. I argue that this is the case because it should be harder to convey the benefits of engaging in political conflict through the internet than it would be in person. The intensity and passion that can be conveyed at some form of meeting, for example a rally, is higher than what you can transmit through a computer or a mobile device. Scholars such as Bennett (2003) argue that online relationships alone aren't enough to maintain interpersonal relationships and that offline interaction is especially important in order to build strong ties between people. Therefore, I don't expect the internet to be able to convey the necessity for violent political conflict in a way that will overcome the perceived costs associated with it. This leads to the fifth, and last, hypothesis that will be tested in this study:

Hypothesis 4: Contentious episodes that are peaceful in nature are more likely to be triggered by a high number of internet users than violent contentious episodes.

The argument that has been forwarded in these pages is fairly simple. I expect that a large number of internet users in one country will be correlated with an increase in contentious politics. The hypotheses that have been presented above provide us with testable propositions that we can examine. I will now move on to the research design which describes the way in which the empirical test will take place.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

The empirical test of the hypotheses introduced in the theory section is conducted through statistical analysis of quantitative data. Because of the nature of the dependent variable, a count, a Negative Binominal Regression will be used. The empirical analysis will allow us to falsify, or confirm, the hypotheses that have been presented earlier. However, it is worth keeping in mind that the results of the empirical analysis in no way represent the final say on whether the internet affects the diffusion of contentious politics across national borders. Instead, this project should be viewed as one of the first comprehensive attempts to uncover the causal relationship between the internet and protest in the modern world. The purpose of the research design is to clearly lay out the way in which the statistical analysis will be conducted and the conceptualization of the different variables that will be tested. The research design section of the thesis will proceed as follows. First, I will continue the discussion regarding the unit of analysis that was introduced earlier in earlier pages. Second, I will engage in a discussion and conceptualization of the dependent variable within this paper. Third, the independent variable will be discussed. Fourth, the various controls variables that also are theorized to affect the diffusion of contentious politics will be surveyed and included in the analysis.

Unit of Analysis

The explicit purpose of this paper is to investigate how the internet affects a country's vulnerability to protests that take place abroad. Do a high number of internet users make protests more or less likely when protests take place in other states? Because this project has this purpose, and is structured in a cross sectional time series dataset, the natural unit of analysis is defined as the country-year. For example, Germany in 1994 is counted as one observation while Germany in 1995 is counted as another observation. This decision places some limitations on the scope of this project that are worth pointing out here. For example, while the individual motivations of people engaging in contentious politics are worthwhile topics of study it is not a primary goal of this project to evaluate different claims that have been made about individual motivations for engaging in contentious politics. Evaluating individual motivations to engage in contentious politics would require the study to take mixed levels of analysis, in this case individual and state levels of analysis. The decision to not take into account individual levels of analysis is based on two fairly straightforward reasons. First, it is my goal to keep the statistical analysis as simple and clear as possible. Therefore, the decision has been made to only focus on country level variables. Second, the paper aims to investigate the general relationship between the internet and diffusion of contentious politics. However, the available data is best described as scarce and the data that is used in this paper is only focused on the country level analysis. Collecting individual level data would require extensive data gathering that is outside the scope of this project.

It will however note that motivations for engaging in contentious politics in no way are irrelevant for this subject and that the assumptions that have been made in this

study do not exist in a vacuum. If a statistically significant relationship is suggested to exist between the internet and contentious politics future research should conduct a closer examination of why this is. That one plausible explanation has been introduced in this project does by no means mean that other explanations do not exist.

Time Period

The study spans the years between 1990 and 2005. This is partly due to data limitations, and partly due to the limited spread of the internet before 1990. The starting point is determined based on the observation that the internet had a fairly limited spread before 1990. Therefore, it is not very likely that the internet played any noticeable role in the 1980s or earlier. The end date, 2005, is chosen because of data limitations.

Dependent Variables

First, it should be noted that contentious politics is a fairly broad term that can cover many different types of events. In order to conceptualize contentious politics in this paper I choose to define it as those protest events where people gather in order to direct their claims at governments. This conceptualization can still include a host of different types of events. For example, I am able to include riots, anti-government demonstrations, as well as other types of violent and nonviolent events. The theory section hypothesized that different mechanisms might be at place for violent and nonviolent contentious episodes. Because of this, the possibility of separating events into violent and nonviolent is a priority. It is also desirable that the dependent variable capture the number of protest events within a country instead of simply noting whether a contentious episode takes

place or not. These are the criteria that have been taken into consideration during the selection of an appropriate dataset.

One dataset that contains all of the appropriate characteristics described above is the Murdie and Bashin (2011) dataset. Between 1991 and 2005 this dataset identifies over 70 000 protest events, 50 000 violent and 20 000 nonviolent protest. These events were identified by relying on the IDEA framework which bases its observations on daily events reported through Reuters Global News Service. I choose to use this dataset because it has a number of important strengths that raise our confidence in this dataset. First, because this dataset has considerable global reach which increases the chances of observing protest events around the globe¹. Second, this dataset does not set an arbitrary threshold for when events should be included or not. Because the dataset does not use an arbitrary threshold, which might produce a selection effect, it includes a remarkable number of over 70 000 protest events across the globe. Third, this dataset also includes a degree of disaggregation of the different variables that is not generally found in other datasets dealing with protests.

The dataset is based on counts of contentious episodes based on the aforementioned Reuters Global News Service. For example, if one (1) contentious episode occurred in India during the year 2002 that is coded as a one (1) for that year. If two (2) contentious episodes occurred that would instead be coded as a two (2). These contentious episodes are further disaggregated into two subcategories: violent and nonviolent episodes. Based on the theory-section, this disaggregation is necessary in

¹ Reuters Global News Service has offices in over 200 different locations across the globe which makes it a fairly reliable provider of news reports from all over the

order to test whether the internet affects the diffusion of nonviolent and violent contentious episodes differently.

Independent Variables

Recall that the theory and hypotheses state that the number of internet users will be correlated to the spread of contentious politics between states. Thus, the independent variable should therefore capture the number of internet users in a country. The data for the independent variable is extracted from the World Bank and their dataset, named World Development Indicators (WDI). Specifically, the measure for “Internet Users (per 100 people)” is extracted from WDI in order to measure the number of people with internet access within a country. This measurement, since it is proportional, accounts for the size of the size of the population and is comparable cross-nationally. This provides a significant advantage over true number measurements. Consider the following example. In the United States, 10 million internet users would be a small minority of the entire population which is over 300 million. In Sweden, 10 million internet users would include the entire Swedish population. The example shows that 10 million internet users in one country will not necessarily be the same as 10 million internet users in another. A measurement that takes into account the level of internet usage in relation to the size of the general population is better suited for this project and the variable that has been extracted from the WDI meets these requirements.

The Main Statistical Model

A number of different models will be used in order to investigate our various hypotheses. The main model, which the other analyses will be based on, is provided

below together with an explanation of the various control variables that are included in the study.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{PROTEST} = & B0 + B1 \text{ INTERNETUSERS} + B2 \text{ PROXPROTEST} + B3 \\ & \text{LAGPROTEST} + B4 \text{ POLITY2} + B5 \text{ GDPCAPITA} + B6 \text{ UNEMPLOYMENT} + \\ & B7 \text{ POPULATION} + B8 \text{ URBANPOPULATION} \end{aligned}$$

In this model, domestic protest appears as the dependent variable and internet users have been inserted as the main independent variable. The protest variable is extracted from Murdie and Bashin (2011) and the internet data is extracted from the World Bank's Development Indicators. Both of these variables have received extensive discussion above, and I therefore now shift my attention to a discussion of the various control variables that are specified in the above model.

First, it is possible that contentious episodes are more likely to diffuse among countries that are geographically proximate. In the Arab Spring, protests against the regime started in Tunisia and spread to other countries that are geographically proximate in North Africa and the Middle East. Within the literature on civil war, studies have previously found that countries that are located in regions suffering from civil war have a heightened risk of experiencing detrimental effects to their own public health and economic growth (For example, see Murdoch and Sandler 2004). In order to account for this I exclude all observations where countries do not have geographically proximate protests taking place. Two countries are considered proximate if the distance between the

capitals of the two countries is 400 miles or less. This distance is chosen in order to adopt conventional measurements already existing in the literature².

LAGPROTEST attempts to capture the history and tradition of contentious politics within a country. If a country has experienced a large number of protests in the past, for example within the past 12 months, the population might have included public demonstrations and contention in their repertoire of contentious politics. It then follows that if public protest is included in the repertoire that a population is more likely to use it in order to voice their opinions (Tarrow and Tilly, 2007). LAGPROTEST attempts to capture this by accounting for the number of contentious episodes within a country in the previous year. In the statistical analysis, TOTALPROTEST is lagged in order to create LAGPROTEST.

The next variable, POLITY2, accounts for the level of democracy and autocracy within a country and is extracted via the EUGene Software. The Polity data in EUGene is based on the Polity IV dataset (Marshall et al 2010). The dataset contains measurements for the level of democracy and autocracy for each state between 1800 and 2010. Democracy and autocracy are both scored on a scale from -10 to +10 and a composite measurement is created by subtracting the autocracy score from the democracy score in the dataset. Thus, a higher polity score indicates a higher level of democracy in the state.

Another factor possessing the ability to affect the emergence of contentious episodes is the standard of living within a state. It might be the case that an affluent population isn't very likely to take to the streets in order to protest against the

² 400 miles is the longest distance found in the Direct Contiguity dataset that is included in the Correlates of War Project (Stinnett et al 2002)

government. Meanwhile, a population that is experiencing economic hardship will be more likely to engage in contentious politics in order to improve their own situation. Therefore, I include a GDP per capita measurement in the study. The GDP data is extracted from Gleditsch (2002) and labeled as GDPCAPITA. The natural logarithm of the variable is used in the statistical analysis. A related measure for the standard of living and economic hardship within a country can be the level of unemployment. A control variable labeled UNEMPLOYMENT is therefore introduced based on data from the World Bank.

States with a larger population are more likely to experience a higher number of protest events compared to states with a smaller population. If there are more people within a country there will be a greater opportunity to form groups that can engage in collective action. Therefore, the variable POPULATION is included in the model. The data is extracted from the National Material Capabilities Data, which is a part of the Correlates of War Project (Singer et al 1972). In the statistical analysis, the natural logarithm of the POPULATION variable is used. Anecdotal evidence from the Arab Spring and other protests also suggests that protests might be more likely in urban areas. Therefore I include a variable labeled URBANPOPULATION in order to account for large urban populations. The urban population data is also retrieved from the National Material Capabilities Data after which the variable is created by taking the urban population of a country over the total population in order to create a proportional measurement.

While the internet has a potential to contribute to the diffusion of contentious episodes, hypothesis four argued that the effect will be different for violent and

nonviolent episodes. Arguably, the risks associated with participation in peaceful demonstrations are lower than those associated with participation in a revolution against a government. Therefore, the dependent variable is separated into two parts for a test of the fourth hypothesis: violent and nonviolent protest.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

The main model was tested using data from Murdie and Bashin (2011). In short the results do not find robust support for the hypothesized relationship between the number of internet users and the number of contentious episodes within a country.

Table 1 – All Protests

VARIABLES	(1) All Protests	(2) Geographically Proximate
INTERNETUSERS	-0.007*** (0.001)	-0.009*** (0.001)
PROXIMATEPROTEST	0.001*** (0.000)	
LAGPROTEST	0.008*** (0.000)	0.008*** (0.000)
POLITY2	0.001 (0.003)	-0.004 (0.003)
logGDPCAPITA	0.358*** (0.025)	0.389*** (0.025)
logPOPULATION	0.466*** (0.012)	0.465*** (0.012)
URBANPOPP	0.207** (0.069)	0.214** (0.070)
UNEMPLOYMENT	0.035 (0.002)	0.033*** (0.002)
Constant	-5.577*** (0.269)	-5.706*** (0.270)
Observations	2,482	2,463
Pseudo. R-squared	0.164	0.162

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

After dropping observations due to gaps in the data the primary model is left with 2482 country-year observations and the second model with 2463 observations. The analysis was performed using a Negative Binomial Regression (nbreg in STATA). The following discussion will discuss the results in relation to the four different hypotheses, starting with hypothesis 1.

The first hypothesis posited a positive correlation between the number of internet users within a country and the diffusion of contentious episodes. Using the Murdie and Bashin (2011) protest data the empirical analysis displays a negative relationship between political protest and the level of internet users. This model includes all countries, regardless of whether they had a geographically proximate country that experienced protest or not. This finding is statistically significant at the 0.001 level. The first hypothesis cannot be said to receive any empirical support from the analysis provided by the first model. In the second model, I dropped those countries that lack geographically proximate protests. This brought the total number of observations down to 2463. Again, the internet appears to have a negative effect on the likelihood of protest. These results do not provide support for the hypothesized relationship introduced in the theory section. In fact, these results provide indicate that the conventional perception of the internet and its effect on contentious politics is dubious at best, and completely wrong at worst.

For the second hypothesis the second model provides us with some insight. For those countries that have geographically proximate protests outside their borders, the internet displays a statistically significant and negative correlation to the number of protests. This finding is statistically significant at the 0.001 level. For the second hypothesis, this finding is problematic since it posited that the internet would have a greater potential to influence the diffusion of geographically proximate protests.

Both models indicate that a history of protest is positively correlated to the presence of contentious episodes within a country in any given year, in line with that we would expect. For

both models, this relationship is found to be statistically significant at the 0.001 level. This indicates that a tradition of engaging in contentious episodes is an important factor for determining whether people will decide to engage in contentious episodes in the future. While this control variable isn't included in any of the hypotheses that have been specified above, it conforms broadly with the discussion by Tarrow and Tilly (2007). Tarrow and Tilly argue that a history of contentious episodes and repertoires is a main contributing factor to the incidence of political protest.

As for the third hypothesis, it is not obvious from the empirical result if we should reject or accept the hypothesis. Model 1 indicates that an increase in democracy is correlated with an increase in protest, just as hypothesis 3 predicted. This finding is not statistically significant. In the second model a negative correlation exists between the level of democracy and the level of political protest. Again, this finding is not statistically significant and no clear relationship can be determined from these two models.

Something should also be said about the remaining control variables. Two variables were included in order to account for economic conditions and hardship within a country: unemployment and GDP per capita. The unemployment variable produced the expected result in both of the models. When unemployment is high it appears like the population is more willing to engage in contentious episodes such as protest. While this finding only remains statistically significant in one of the two models, the correlation still exhibits the same sign in both models. When unemployment is high, it might be the case that grievances against the government grows and creates fruitful ground for contentious episodes to take place. When using GDP per capita as a measurement for prosperity and economic conditions the relationship that is displayed by both models show a positive and statistically significant relationship. As GDP per capita increases, so does the number of contentious episodes. This surprising finding speaks against the hypothesized relationship that I introduced earlier in the theory section. Furthermore, I find the expected

relationship between population and protest, as well as between urban population and protest. These findings are statistically significant in both models. Countries with larger populations are more likely to experience protest events than less populous nations. Likewise, countries where a larger proportion of the population lives in urban areas are more likely to experience political protest than those with a more rural population. The result, then, exhibits the expected relationship that was posited in the research design. That the finding is statistically significant and holds across both models gives us reason to assume that this relationship is robust and that it would show up in other studies as well.

Table 2 – Violent Protests

VARIABLES	(3) All Observations	(4) Limited Observations
INTERNETUSERS	-0.004** (0.001)	-0.006*** (0.001)
PROXPROTEST	0.001*** (0.000)	
LAGPROTEST	0.010*** (0.000)	0.010*** (0.000)
POLITY2	-0.006 (0.004)	-0.010* (0.004)
logGDPCAPITA	0.233*** (0.032)	0.255*** (0.031)
logPOPULATION	0.430*** (0.016)	0.426*** (0.016)
URBANPOPP	0.357*** (0.092)	0.359*** (0.093)
TOTALUNEMPLOYMENT	0.041*** (0.003)	0.040*** (0.003)
Constant	-4.748*** (0.341)	-4.794*** (0.342)
Observations	2,482	2,463
Pseudo. R-squared	0.145	0.143

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

I make a slight alteration to the dependent variable in order to test the fourth hypothesis. Instead of including a general protest-variable on the left-hand side of the equation I split it into

one violent and one nonviolent variable. These two variables are then tested with the help of four separate models. Models 3 and 4 use violent protests as their dependent variables while models 5 and 6 use peaceful protests as their dependent variables. The analysis is conducted with Negative Binominal Regression (nbreg in STATA). This is most appropriate approach to statistical analysis of this data since the dependent variable is a count of protest events.

Model 3 includes all observations in the dataset, regardless of whether the countries in question have geographically proximate taking place in neighboring states. Model 4 only includes those observations where countries have protests taking place in their near abroad. First, when analyzing violent protests, it should be noted that the number of internet users is found to not have a positive effect on the level of protests within a country. As in the models that used a single category as a measure for protests, I find a negative relationship between the number of internet usage and protest. In both models, this relationship is statistically significant. It thus seems like the results from the first two models also hold when only violent protests are included in the dependent variable. For the second hypothesis, these two models provide further evidence against it. When violent protests are used as the dependent variable the results show that proximate protests seem to have a significant effect. This effect does however appear to be negatively correlated with the incidence of protest. Earlier results from models 1 and 2 thus receive further validity through these two models.

The third hypothesis receives no support from either model 3 or model 4. In model 3, there is a negative relationship between the level of democracy and the number of contentious episodes that takes place within a country. This finding is not statistically significant. However, model 4 also shows a negative correlation between a higher level

of democracy and violent contentious episodes. In this case, the finding is statistically significant. Considering these results, it is hard to claim that there is much, if any, empirical support for the third hypothesis.

As in the first two models, models 3 and 4 find that a history of protest within a country significantly increases the probability of protest in any given year. This finding is robust across both models at the 0.001 level. The remaining control variables produce results that are in line with the previous models. Again, it seems like an increase in GDP per capita is positively correlated with an increase in the number of contentious episodes that take place within a country. This finding confirms the results from the previous models. Both population variables exhibit a positive, and statistically significant, relationship with the dependent variable. The unemployment variable also produces the expected result with a high level of unemployment being correlated with an increase in protests.

I will now turn to the results from the models that examined nonviolent protests (See below). As in the discussion about violent protests, I will turn first to hypotheses 1 through 3 before I turn my attention to hypothesis 4. For nonviolent protests, the relationship between the number of internet users and protests again turn out to be problematic for the first hypothesis in the study. Both the fifth and sixth models display a negative relationship between internet users and protest, with both models exhibiting a statistical significance at the 0.001 level. The number of internet users does not appear to have a positive relationship with protest and this finding is consistent for both violent and

nonviolent protest. Every model that has been presented so far has found a negative relationship between the number of internet users and protests.

Table 3 – Nonviolent Protest

VARIABLES	(6) All Observations	(6) Limited Sample
INTERNETUSERS	-0.013*** (0.001)	-0.015*** (0.001)
PROXPROTEST	0.001*** (0.000)	
LAGPROTEST	0.005*** (0.000)	0.005*** (0.000)
POLITY2	0.015*** (0.003)	0.012*** (0.003)
logGDPCAPITA	0.578*** (0.027)	0.612*** (0.026)
logPOPULATION	0.532*** (0.012)	0.541*** (0.012)
URBANPOPP	0.022 (0.047)	0.023 (0.048)
TOTALUNEMPLOYMENT	0.018*** (0.003)	0.016*** (0.003)
Constant	-8.871*** (0.291)	-9.113*** (0.289)
Observations	2,482	2,463
Pseudo. R-squared	0.193	0.191

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

In relation to the third hypothesis these two models combined produce interesting results. In both of these models, the level of democracy is positively correlated with peaceful political protest. This result is both stable and statistically significant across both models. This finding is consistent with the theoretical framework of ‘political opportunity structure’ that has been advocated by scholars such as Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow (2007). In a democracy, citizens have more channels through which they can engage in peaceful contentious politics. While an authoritarian state might choose to quell protests

and marches, a democratic state usually allows protests and demonstrations to take place in order to allow the citizens to express their opinion (Tilly and Tarrow 2007, Chapter 3). According to these results, democracies seem to be more likely to allow peaceful protest than violent protests.

It is now possible to say something about the fourth hypothesis that was introduced earlier in the paper. The fourth hypothesis suggests that a large number of internet users might be more closely related to peaceful protest than it is to violent protest. The empirical analysis in this study does not find any support for this hypothesis. A large number of internet users display a negative correlation with both violent (models 3 and 4) as well as peaceful (models 5 and 6) protest.

As for the control variables there are no major changes from previous models. A history of contentious episodes and protests seem to be influential in determining the probability of protest in any given year. This result is robust over all of the tested models. For GDP per capita, both models again show that an increase in GDP per capita seems to be correlated with an increase in the number of protests. Both models 5 and 6 find this relationship to be statistically significant. This finding has been consistent throughout the study and raises some questions that demand our attention in the future. I will return to this in the conclusion.

A large population is shown to have a statistically significant and positive effect on the occurrence of peaceful domestic protest in both models. While a large urban population also displays a positive correlation in both models it remains statistically insignificant. There is thus no great difference in the results from these two models and

the previous models that have been tested. It appears like having a large urban population contributes to the emergence of violent political protests, while having a large urban population isn't as strongly related to peaceful political protest. Unemployment is positively correlated with the incidence of peaceful protest in both models and also continues to display consistent statistical significance. The higher the unemployment level, the more political protests we tend to see.

Additional controls and robustness checks

A number of additional controls are now introduced in order to gauge the confidence that we can place in the results that just have been presented. These variables were not introduced earlier in the study for two separate reasons. First, model 7 significantly bring down the number of observations and I have therefore chosen to present this model as an additional robustness check.. Second, model 8 is introduced because of coding decisions that were made when the data was originally collected. These two models are introduced in order to show that the results do not significantly change because of the removal of 'special cases' within the dataset. Because the previous models, regardless of whether they included all observations or those that are limited to countries with geographically proximate protests, provided us with largely the same results I have chosen to only run the following analyses on the entire sample.

First, model 7 is introduced in order to test a plausible argument that can be made regarding the internet and individuals' ability to effectively use it in order to gather information. The argument states that in order for a population to be able to acquire information through means such as the internet, the population in question has to be

literate in order to understand the information that is provided. An educated population, as indicated by a higher level of literacy, might also have a greater interest in events abroad than those populations with a high degree of illiteracy. Therefore, I retrieved data for literacy from the World Bank and added it to the study. Due to the many gaps in the data it severely brings down the number of observations. Literacy is included as a control variable in model 7, found below in table 4.

Table 4 – Additional checks

VARIABLES	(7) Murdie	(8) Murdie
INTERNETUSERS	-0.021*** (0.005)	-0.007*** (0.001)
PROXPROTEST	0.000* (0.000)	0.001*** (0.000)
LAGPROTEST	0.009*** (0.001)	0.008*** (0.000)
POLITY2	0.043*** (0.008)	0.001 (0.003)
logGDPCAPITA	0.678*** (0.095)	0.361*** (0.025)
logPOPULATION	0.429*** (0.030)	0.466*** (0.012)
URBANPOPP	0.511 (0.359)	0.201** (0.068)
TOTALUNEMPLOYMENT	0.024*** (0.007)	0.035*** (0.002)
LITERACY	-0.008* (0.004)	
Constant	-7.494*** (0.810)	-5.611*** (0.269)
Observations	226	2,472
Pseudo. R-squared	0.171	0.164

Standard errors in parentheses
 *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05

In addition, model 8 is an alternative model of model 1. The Polity IV Project has identified cases of “interruption”, “interregnum”, and “transition” within their data. In the Polity2 score that has been used in other models, the scores for these regimes have been transformed into conventional polity scores in the data set. It is however possible that this coding decision affects the results of the analysis. Therefore, model 8 drops these special cases from the analysis.

The analysis provides us with evidence that indicates that literacy is negatively correlated with the incidence of protest. That is to say, as literacy increases the number of protests decreases. This finding is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. However, due to a lack of data the number of observations in model 7 drops to 226.

As for the hypotheses that have been discussed earlier, introducing literacy into the model does not change the relationship between internet users and political protests that has been noticeable in previous models. A large number of internet users still seems to have a negative correlation with political protest, or unrelated if the results are interpreted with some skepticism. Hypothesis one is thus still not supported. Geographically proximate protests still remains as an explanatory factor and is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. It is however worth noting that the constant here is extremely low and the effect of geographically proximate protests is not likely to be that great.. Hypothesis 2 does thus not receive support even when literacy is included as a control variable. Hypothesis 3 receives stronger support than in previous models. Introducing literacy in the model creates a robust and statistically significant relationship between the level of democracy and political protests. According to model 7 more democratic states will experience more political protests than their less democratic

counterparts. Compared to models 1 and 2, this model retains the same signs for population and urban population.

The results of a removal of a number of special cases, based on the coding within the Polity IV dataset, are also on display in table 4. There are very few substantive differences in the results between the original models (1 and 2) and the new model (8). The decision to transform special cases such as interregnum into conventional polity scores does thus not seem to substantively impact the results in this study.

Summary of results

In this section, I briefly summarize the results that have been presented in this section of the thesis. The different hypotheses are discussed in order.

Hypothesis 1: The results are consistent throughout all of the models that I have presented here: I found no support for the hypothesis which stated that a large number of internet users would be correlated with an increase in political protest through diffusion. Whether we are discussing violent or peaceful protests, a negative relationship is displayed in all of the different models with all of the models also displaying a statistical significance for this relationship. This finding suggests that the internet does not automatically become a determining factor that increases the number of protests within a country. Not even among countries that experience political protest in neighboring states does the internet appear to be positively correlated to political protests. However, this does not necessarily mean that the internet cannot be a contributing factor to organizing protests and other contentious events. Instead, I would argue that these results suggest

that we have to pay closer attention to how and by whom the internet is used instead of using general measurements for internet usage.

Let me provide an example of this point. Within a country, political protests and organized opposition against various governments is likely to be led by some form of elites within that country. While modern technologies played an important role in the Philippines and the overthrow of President Marcos (Rheingold 2003), the role of elites in organizing and leading the rebellion should not be understated (Tilly 2004). Thus, if elites have access to the internet and are able to retrieve information about events, tactics, and strategies from abroad, that might be enough to disperse this information among the local population in order to organize protests. The data that was gathered and used in this project for internet usage is exclusively on a country-level and thus cannot examine this phenomenon. What I can say, is that a simple increase in the number of internet users will not simply lead to an increase in the number of contentious episodes within a country, at least not with the variables that have been used in this study. These results simply do not support such a theory.

Hypothesis 2: Similarly to the first hypothesis, I do not find any support for the second hypothesis. While geographically proximate protests appear to be a contributing factor to the diffusion of protest, the internet is not found to be a statistically significant factor for those protests. While there is no support for the thesis that the internet aids in the diffusion of geographically proximate protests, the finding that geographically proximate protests remain a statistically significant factor should merit further attention and research by scholars within the discipline.

Hypothesis 3: The third hypothesis receives some support in the empirical analysis that has been conducted here. While the finding isn't robust across all of the models, the evidence indicates that a higher level of democracy seems to be correlated with a higher level of contentious episodes. In particular, this conclusion seems to fit on nonviolent contentious episodes. A plausible explanation is that peaceful protesters are likely to be allowed in democratic states while more authoritarian states might want to quell dissident and limit free speech. For violent protests, democratic states also seem to have a low tolerance level, as exhibited in the negative correlation between democracy and protest that is found in the analysis. All in all, the third hypothesis receives some weak overall support in the analysis while it seems to be correct when describing peaceful protests.

Hypothesis 4: The theory stated that the costs of involved in violent contentious episodes are likely to be higher than the costs of engaging in peaceful contentious protests. Hypothesis 4 posited that a large number of internet users might have more potential for inducing people to engage in peaceful protest than in violent protest. Based on the analysis, this does not seem to be the case. Across the models that attempted to test this relationship, a negative correlation between the number of internet users and political protest, violent and nonviolent, appeared. It does not seem like a high number of internet users make peaceful protests more likely than violent protests.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have examined the relationship between the internet and the diffusion of contentious episodes. Conventional wisdom suggests that the internet has played an important role in the diffusion of contentious events. This was allegedly seen in the Arab Spring where new outlets praised the potential of the internet to diffuse protests and bring down oppressive regimes. Based on this proposition, and previous research on the topics of the internet and contentious politics, I created a causal explanation for how the internet might contribute to the diffusion of contentious politics. I took into account various aspects on how the internet might influence individuals, historical examples of diffusion, and research on how the internet affects social movements. This theory was later tested through a statistical analysis with extensive protest data. The findings in this paper give us no reason to accept the claim that the internet plays an important role in the diffusion of contentious episodes across national borders. Instead, the relationship between internet usage and contentious politics appear to be much more complicated than journalists and conventional wisdom have assumed. In fact, the results indicate a negative relationship between internet usage and the diffusion of contentious episodes. For those who have been inclined to argue that the internet will usher in a new era of revolutions and government overthrows, these results are problematic.

For future research there are two possible roads that seem especially worthwhile for exploration. First, one possibility is to investigate the different ways in which the internet promotes diffusion. For example, is the internet only a contributing factor to the diffusion of contentious episodes if it used as a tool by formal organizations? Since this study only concerned itself with general measurements for internet usage formal organizations and their activities were largely left outside the scope of the study. The second possibility is that scholars of contentious politics ought to take a step back and investigate other factors, besides the internet, that contribute to the diffusion of contentious episodes. What is the effect of refugees, multinational corporations, international institutions, and globalization in general on the spread of contentious episodes? These are questions that scholars of contentious episodes ought to be concerned with in the future.

However, it is worthwhile to keep in mind that this is just an initial investigation on this topic. While this study has shed some light on the influence of the internet on contentious episodes, and cast doubt on conventional wisdom, it is merely an initial step in expanding our understanding how contentious episodes diffuse in the modern world. It is still possible for the internet to play a role in the diffusion of contentious politics, but that relationship is likely to be complicated and conditioned by variables that are beyond the scope of this initial study. Political scientists, sociologists, and others would be well advised to start to identify those cases in which the internet has contributed to a diffusion of contentious episodes in order to examine under what conditions the internet aids in the diffusion of contention across national borders. In addition to scholars within the academic community, policy makers and politicians should be interested in seeing more

research on this area. Stable governments have an interest in remaining stable, and would be well served by identifying those factors that makes contentious episodes diffuse across national borders.

Among the other findings in this study I will mention a couple of them here. First, no obvious connection between geographically proximate protests and domestic protests was found in this study. This finding indicates that there are other factors in addition to geographical proximity that will create a diffusion of contentious episodes. Chief among these, and one that was not included in the study, is culture. While many countries that are geographically close to each other share the same cultural foundation, there is also a lot of variation. How well do contentious episodes spread between countries of the same culture? And perhaps even more importantly, how does it spread between countries exhibiting different cultures? For example, the Arab Spring appears to have spread among countries in North Africa and the Middle East. While these countries exhibit a similar culture, which does in no way mean that the culture is exactly the same in all of the countries that are commonly included in the ‘Arab Spring’. So why did large-scale protests emerge in Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria but not in Algiers, Morocco and Saudi Arabia? These questions have not been given adequate answers in this study and provide fruitful ground for future research.

Second, democratic regimes seem to be more prone to experience contentious episodes. While this finding is not found to be statistically significant across all the models presented, the evidence clearly indicates that this is the case. Democracies, which tend to be more open societies, allows for more channels through which people can voice their dissatisfaction with their respective governments. This finding is in line with

theories surrounding political opportunity structures (Tarrow and Tilly 2007) that have been introduced in the social movement literature.

On a closing note, it seems like Charles Tilly (2004) was right when he warned us about simple technological determinism and hyperbole. The internet does not seem to be the magical answer to why protests spread in the contemporary world, and we should continue to search for those factors that cause contentious episodes to diffuse across national borders.

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VITA

Thomas Lassi

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: INTERNET AND THE DIFFUSION OF PROTEST ACROSS NATIONAL BORDERS

Major Field: Political Science

Biographical:

Education: BSc

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in political science at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2012.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in political science at Luleå University of Technology, Luleå, Sweden in 2009.

Professional Memberships: APSA, Pi Sigma Alpha

Name: Thomas Lassi

Date of Degree: May, 2012

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: INTERNET AND THE DIFFUSION OF CONTENTIOUS POLITICS
ACROSS NATIONAL BORDERS

Pages in Study: 69

Candidate for the Degree of Master of Arts

Major Field: Political Science

Scope and Method of Study: Quantitative analysis of all countries between 1990-2005

Findings and Conclusions:

This thesis examines how the internet affects the diffusion of contentious politics across national borders. This is done by building a theory linking the internet to the diffusion of contentious politics that is tested through an empirical analysis. Contrary to conventional wisdom, this thesis shows finds no evidence for the theory that an increase in internet users leads to an increase in diffusion of contentious politics across national borders. Other factors are likely to affect the internet's role in the diffusion of contentious politics and future research should focus on identifying those factors.

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