New Media and Revolution: Resistance and Dissent in Pre-Uprising Syria. By Billie Jeanne Brownlee. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020. 296p. $120.00 cloth, $34.95 paper.
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Of all the Arab Uprisings, it is the Syrian Revolution that arguably caught observers most by surprise. Often described as a "kingdom of silence" where "the walls have ears," the Syrian regime was generally seen as having built a firewall against any kind of public dissent. Even the reforms initially undertaken by Syrian president Bashar al-Assad on coming to power, including reform of the media sector, are typically understood as reinforcing the regime's stability. In her new book, *New Media and Revolution: Resistance and Dissent in Pre-Uprising Syria*, Billie Jeanne Brownlee persuasively challenges this conventional narrative.

Drawing on extensive field research inside and outside Syria, Brownlee demonstrates how media reforms and new technologies gave Syrians access to "new media"—satellite TV, the internet, and social media—that gave rise to new forms of civic activism in pre-uprising Syria. In doing so, *New Media and Revolution* both enriches our understanding of the sources of mass protest in highly repressive regimes and highlights the importance of studying the origins of conflict and contention.

Brownlee argues that, during the decade leading up to the Syrian Revolution, the emergence of new media combined with growing political opportunities to give rise to new forms of online civic activism. As a result of both media reforms and new technologies, journalism —which had previously been under state control— became more independent, professional, and accountable. As media began covering previously taboo topics and inviting certain forms of reader engagement, Brownlee posits, citizens themselves became more participatory and civic-minded. In addition, the media sector spearheaded a "long framing process" that fostered a shared societal understanding of regime abuses. According to Brownlee, these developments played a pivotal role in laying the foundation for the Syrian Revolution of 2011, creating online mobilization that eventually moved offline. In addition, she argues that new media also "played a dominant role in…informing, organizing, and motivating civil participation" during the uprising (p. 38). Paradoxically, Brownlee shows that the development of new media was due in part to the Assad regime's own media reforms, as well as to international media assistance and democracy-promotion projects sometimes seen as insufficiently challenging autocratic regimes (Sarah Sunn Bush, *The Taming of Democracy Assistance*, 2015).

Brownlee develops these arguments based on extensive field research in Syria from 2009–10 and in Lebanon in 2013–14, as well as visits to Jordan and Turkey, which included 84 interviews with activists, journalists, and representatives from international organizations and NGOs. Brownlee supplements these interviews with a long-term "online ethnography" consisting of observation of online blogs, discussion forums, and social networks. Field research on activism in closed societies is always challenging, but the repressiveness of the Syrian regime, coupled with the onset of mass protests and war during Brownlee's fieldwork, makes this an especially difficult context for doing research—and, in turn, an especially impressive achievement. At the same time, as Brownlee thoughtfully discusses, this context also limits the scope and content of the research in some important ways. In particular, as Brownlee notes, many subjects preferred to be interviewed "off-the-record" and could not be cited directly in the text. As a result, perhaps, some of the qualitative evidence in the book feels quite general and lacks some of the rich detail I was craving as a reader.

Despite this limitation, *New Media and Revolution* advances our understanding of the sources of mass protest in repressive regimes—and the role of social media therein —in several ways. First, it contributes to an emerging comparative literature that focuses on alternative forms and dynamics of contention in closed societies, questions the importance of traditional "mobilizing structures" for dissent, and implicitly or explicitly points to the creative agency of individuals to organize within constraints (Diana Fu, *Mobilizing without the Masses: Control and Contention in China*, 2018; Yael Zeira, *The Revolution Within: State Institutions and Unarmed Resistance in Palestine*, 2019). In line with these works, *New Media and Revolution* argues that social media itself was a mobilizing structure, creating new "geographies of protest" where people could organize, communicate, network, and resist. In broadening the conception of "mobilizing structures" and perhaps even of activism itself, it also raises important questions about the respective roles of agency versus structure in driving protest.

Second, *New Media and Revolution* adds nuance to ongoing debates and especially to popular discussions about the role of social media in catalyzing protest. In showing that civic activism on social media existed well before the Syrian uprising, it challenges narratives that ascribe to social media a direct causal role. At the same time, it persuasively makes the case that new media produced incremental "micro-changes" in Syrian society that, over time, likely contributed to the emergence of the Syrian uprising. In doing so, it joins other recent works in demonstrating the importance of looking beyond the onset of conflict to better understand its sources and dynamics (Janet I. Lewis, *How Insurgency Begins: Rebel Group Formation in Uganda and Beyond*, 2020; Jessica

Maves Braithwaite and Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, "When Organizations Rebel: Introducing the Foundations of Rebel Group Emergence (FORGE) Dataset," *International Studies Quarterly* 64 [1], 2020). By focusing on this earlier period before the onset of mass protest and on the development of online activism then, the book also fills in an important empirical gap in the study of Syrian politics. Finally, in highlighting the role of media assistance programs in developing a more professional Syrian media and engaged Syrian public, *New Media and Revolution* also intervenes in ongoing debates about the efficacy of US and international democracy promotion, particularly in the Middle East (Sunn Bush, *The Taming of Democracy Assistance*, 2015).

New Media and Revolution also raises several questions that could be taken up by future scholarship, particularly systematic empirical research that could better substantiate some of the book's theoretical arguments. First, future scholarship could further develop the links that Brownlee begins to trace between online and offline activism. For example, it could explore the role of journalists and online activists during the initiation of mass protest, as well as the relative importance of online and offline networks for protest participation (Elizabeth R. Nugent and Chantal E. Berman, "Ctrl-Alt-Revolt? Online and Offline Networks during the 2011 Egyptian Uprising," *Middle East Law and Governance* 10 [1], 2018). Such research is important in understanding the role of online media in driving real-world activism and assessing its importance vis-à-vis other contributing factors. Similarly, further comparative research is needed to determine the conditions under which new media may or may not contribute to protest. Both the rise of new media and the political opportunities for protest that Brownlee sees as instrumental to the Syrian uprising were relatively common throughout the MENA region; yet, protests varied significantly in incidence, size, and scope (see, e.g., Sean L. Yom and F. Gregory Gause III, 2012, "Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang On," *Journal of Democracy* 23 [4], 2012). How did Syria's media landscape differ from these other contexts, and do these differences help explain the occurrence, nature, or extent of mobilization? Or are other contextual factors more important? Additional comparative scholarship is needed to answer these questions, particularly given the book's major policy implication that, by transforming the Syrian media sector, media assistance projects played an important role in catalyzing mass protest.

By challenging the conventional narrative of pre-uprising Syria as a "kingdom of silence," *New Media and Revolution* makes a valuable contribution to the study of Syrian politics and to our general understanding of the emergence of mass protest in highly repressive regimes. Befitting the book's own disciplinary pluralism, it is likely to meet with wide interest from a diverse set of scholars studying contentious politics, authoritarian regimes, Middle East politics, and social media and media studies. In addition, the book's conclusions concerning the role of media assistance programs in changing the media landscape and social fabric in Syria should be essential reading for democracy-promotion practitioners and relevant policy makers.

Global Jihad: A Brief History. By Glenn E. Robinson. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020. 264p. $85.00 cloth, $25.00 paper.

Jihadists of North Africa and the Sahel: Local Politics and Rebel Groups. By Alexander Thurston. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. 349p. $84.99 cloth, $24.99 paper.
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The two books under review superficially seem to deal with the same topic, but they are actually quite different. *Global Jihad*, by Glenn E. Robinson, is a broad historical and analytical overview of global jihad that offers an interesting and compelling theory on how to view its main subject. Alexander Thurston's *Jihadists of North Africa and the Sahel*, in contrast, takes a far narrower approach to transnational—yet simultaneously very local—politics among rebellious groups in a specific region. Both books are also very good but for different reasons.

Global Jihad consists of an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion that is, in fact, the longest chapter in the entire book, followed by a short epilogue. The introduction provides background information about the Muslim Brotherhood, the Iranian Revolution, and jihadism against the "near enemy" (i.e., supposedly apostate regimes in the Muslim world itself). It also introduces the author's idea of jihadism as developing in four distinct though overlapping waves, as well as his contention that global jihad can be seen as a "movement of rage." The rest of the book is spent explaining these four waves and why each of them represents a movement of rage.

The first chapter deals with the first wave, which the author calls "Jihadi International" (1979–90): the efforts by ʻAbdallah ʻAzzam (1941–89) to rally Arabs to the cause of jihad in Afghanistan and beyond. Chapter 2 focuses on the second wave, the "America First!" strategy (1996–2010), which refers to Osama bin Laden's (1957–2011) move away from the failed revolutionary jihads against the regimes of the Muslim world (the "near enemy") to attack the alleged source of their strength: the West (the "far enemy"). The third wave, discussed in chapter 3, is labeled "Caliphate Now!" (2003–17) and is mostly associated with Abu Musʻab al-Zarqawi (1966–2006), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (1971–2019), and the Islamic State (IS). Chapter 4 deals with the fourth wave, which Robinson calls "Personal Jihad" (2001–present); it is strongly rooted