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### Predictors of Blogging Activity in Six Arab Countries

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This study explores possible determinants of blogging in the Arab world. In particular, it tests the stereotype that political motives are strongly behind blogging among survey respondents in six Arab countries. Human rights activists, scholars, and others have often speculated about the role the Internet plays in the political mobilization of Arab populations in recent years and, at the same time, how political disaffection may drive online behaviors such as blogging (see, e.g., Ulrich, 2009). Discussions of why people in the Arab world blog are long anecdotes and short on representative data. It has been claimed that blogs allow Arabs to participate in politics in a way they often cannot through other means of communication (Lynch, 2007), which, while possibly true, has not been studied as a primary motivation for blogging in Arab countries through the administration of large surveys. Based on their analysis of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blog posts during the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, Howard et al. (2012) assumed that social media were among the primary drivers of political activity and change, despite the fact that just one in five Egyptians were Internet users as recently as 2013 (Dennis, Martin & Wood). Online communication tools in Saudi Arabia, blogs among them, wrote Murphy (2015, p. 18), “constructed a whole new dimension to Saudi life by creating a social and political space where Saudis are expressing themselves more freely than ever,” but her conclusions came from interviews with a convenience sample of largely English-speaking, educated elites. In sum, the somewhat thin evidence does not generally support the supposition that the driving motives of blogging are political dissent and disaffection—in other words, that people blog because they want to express their views that detract from those of ruling class(es). But is this impression from countries outside the Middle East also true for the Arab world? The notion of whether political motives, or actually other antecedents, drive blogging in Arab countries forms our general research question on Arab blogging: What are the possible determinants of blogging and its frequency in Arab countries? This study examines predictors of blogging in six Arab countries—in a secondary analysis of population surveys of, in total, 7,525 respondents in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Lebanon, Bahrain, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates in 2013. The surveys assessed a wide variety of Internet uses, news and information consumption, and also levels of political efficacy, media trust, and attitudes toward free speech, among other cultural and political indicators. Despite

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the oft-referenced supposition that blogging in the Arab world is associated with political disaffection, results here suggest blogging is mainly connected to online engagement in general—such as sharing photos online, participating in online chats, and reading others' blogs—rather than to sociopolitical indicators. In none of five of the six countries, for example, does a sense that one's country was not "on the right track" significantly predict blogging behavior. Also, distrust of mainstream news organizations played a minimal role only.

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