

Polis – Digital Dominos?

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Tunisian Flash Mob

One of the things I am watching out for at the moment is examples of cross-border connections between dissidents in the Middle East. It is what mainstream media calls the 'Domino Effect'. There does seem to be some evidence that it's happening.

When Tunisia first rose up we were all surprised at its success. I haven't found anyone in mainstream media who predicted it directly.

Then after the success of the uprising, the first question from journalists was 'who's next?'. But I recall that most commentators said that Egypt was a quite different case.

Now that Egypt has kicked off – partly motivated by the example of Tunisia, it's worth asking to what degree satellite TV and/or social media helped initiate activism and overcomes conventional wisdom. What evidence we have is largely anecdotal but it does suggest that there was an initial, marginal psychological effect. It's the classic threat of a good example.

This plays straight into the [debate about media globalisation](#). Yes, there are new technologies such as the Internet and satellite TV that can connect distant people. But in practice, do they really have any impact? I have argued elsewhere that even [weak ties can have political outcomes](#), and that [social media may be a formative force for a new kind of networked politics](#). But does it work across borders?

Of course, the Middle East is not made up of dominos. It's made up of very distinct states with their own histories, cultures, languages and economies. So, talking to a Yemen expert yesterday, it's clear that there's plenty of dissent in that country, but it has little if any relation to external exemplars.

But perhaps looking at countries like Algiers, Libya and Iran we can see people getting communications ideas for activism from other places. It would be surprising if they weren't, as this is precisely how social media works. That's why you get a commercial T Mobile Flash Mob in London and a very brave protest Flash Mob in Tunisia (click on the photo for a link to the video).

Of course, it's how people create political movement in their own way that counts.

Like I said, I am watching this, so any interesting connections you see, please let me know, even where they show the limits as well as possibilities of networked politics.

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