Six Years After the Arab Spring: Revisiting Political Activism, Civic Engagement, and Citizen Journalism

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Six years after the sweeping wave of political change, which came to be known as the “Arab Awakening” or “Arab Spring” movements, has shaken the Arab world and many of the dictatorial regimes in it, a lot has been taking place in this volatile and dynamic region. Since the eruption of these movements back in 2011, most of the so-called “Post Arab-Spring countries” have been suffering from a far from smooth transition to democratization and reform, for a myriad of complex factors. In this presentation, Dr. Sahar Khamis revisits the complex phenomena of political activism, civic engagement, and citizen journalism, as they intersect and overlap together in shaping the equally complex realities and conditions, which have been unfolding in the Arab world since 2011. She argues that although social media initially played a crucial role in aiding the process of political transformation in this region, and in the instigation and orchestration of these movements of political change, a phenomenon commonly referred to as “cyberactivism,” six years later it becomes necessary to reexamine some of the other factors and realities, which may have contributed to the far from ideal outcomes and undesirable results in most of the so-called “Post-Arab Spring countries.” Some of these factors which deserve further investigation include the process of civic engagement and political participation, as well as the process of providing platforms for citizen journalism. In examining these factors, she highlights some of the multiple obstacles which may have limited the effectiveness of social media’s contributions to the socio-political scene in the Arab world today, as witnessed through the unfolding developments in this region in recent years. Finally, she attempts to predict some of the future prospects for these complex phenomena of political activism, civic engagement, and citizen journalism, and their potential implications, ramifications, and limitations, amid all the ongoing changes and challenges in this rapidly shifting region.