

Article

Fitnah: The Afterlife of a Religious Term in Recent Political Protest

Tatyana P. Lifintseva ¹, Leonid M. Isaev ² and Alisa R. Shishkina ^{3,*}

¹ Department of Philosophy, National Research University Higher School of Economics. Myasnitskaya st., 20, Moscow 101000, Russia; E-Mail: tlifintseva@mail.ru

² Department of Political Science, National Research University Higher School of Economics. Myasnitskaya st., 20, Moscow 101000, Russia; E-Mail: isleonid@yandex.ru

³ Laboratory Monitoring for Socio-Political Destabilization Risks, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Myasnitskaya st., 20, Moscow 101000, Russia

* Author to whom correspondence should be addressed; E-Mail: alisa.shishkina@gmail.com; Tel.: +7-916-0641-087.

Academic Editor: Peter Iver Kaufman

Received: 6 November 2014 / Accepted: 16 March 2015 / Published: 20 April 2015

Abstract: The phenomenon of *fitnah* could be traced throughout history in different regions and cultures. The Arab spring events of 2011–2012 are not an exception in this context. The next outburst of protest activity occurred where it was not expected in the near future—in Ukraine. If we compare the events in the Arab countries in 2011 and Ukraine in 2013–2014, it can be concluded that in essence they fit the characteristics of *fitnah* very well, which are attributed to it by the Arabic political culture. In both cases, the *fitnah* acquired permanent character turning into anarchy and chaos (“*fouda*”). The government/the ruling power found itself unprepared for such manifestations of *fitnah* and miscalculated the threat posed by the protesters. From our perspective, in the modern world this phenomenon can be explained by the rapid development of Internet technologies that gives the opposition an opportunity to prepare a protest virtually, in an area not totally controlled by the government.

Keywords: revolution; Arab spring; *fitnah*; internet technologies; political destabilization

1. Introduction

In our studies devoted to the Arab Spring, we wrote about the fact that such events in the Arab political culture are referred to “*fitnah*” [1–3]. Basically, the word *fitnah* has a verbal form fa-ta-na, which has a range of meanings: to seduce, fascinate, captivate, *etc.* Thus, the term *fitnah* can be translated as strife, rebellion, insurrection, *etc.* It occurs in the Qur’an 30 times and always with a negative connotation, rebellion is considered “greater sin than murder” [4]. This could be largely explained by the fact that any *fitnah* by definition is a departure from “the right way” as defined in the Qur’an. “And fight them until there is no more *fitnah*” ([4], 2:193). “Kill them until no more *fitnah*” [4].

The phenomenon of *fitnah* was also reflected in the scientific literature. Thus, Fisher writes that *fitnah* is translated in Cowan and Wehr’s great dictionary as “temptation, trial; charm, charmingness, attractiveness; enchantment, captivation, fascination”, *etc.* In one passage, those—and it seems that they must be Muslims, albeit errant Muslims—who misinterpret certain Qur’anic verses are condemned for seeking *fitnah*, or discord. In other passages, *fitnah* is associated with the hypocrites, who are, almost by definition, either within the Muslim community or claiming to be so. Sometimes the reference is to people who, while not going so far as to declare themselves Muslims, have indeed made friendly overtures to the Muslim community, but who later showed hostility, or *fitnah*, against it. Fisher further explores that *fitnah* became a basic concept of great symbolic value for the early Muslim community, which was preoccupied with questions of continuity and survival—*fitnah*, or disintegration, representing of course the failure to preserve the harmony of the community [5].

Thus, as we can see, *fitnah* could refer to a quite wide range of different contexts: from political disturbances, civil wars, doctrines that could endanger the purity of the Muslim faith, tensions between secular authorities and pious minorities ([6], pp. 139–40) to the destabilizing effect of women upon society [7] (this passage is applicable both to Arab and African women who could cause disorder because of their potential vulnerability to Western habits). Therefore, the main directions of the discussions on *fitnah* are connected with its negative and divisive nature. In this paper, we try to propose a specific vision of the concept of *fitnah* referring to the issues of social interaction, especially in the digital era.

Throughout history, in different cultural and religious traditions, we can see such phenomenon as a “temptation by the revolution”. In general, it can be characterized as the expectation that monotonous “vegetation”, such as poverty, boredom, *etc.* will come to end and “The Wonderful New World” will begin in its place. The tradition of reflection about “temptation by the revolution”, in our opinion, originates from the novel “The Devils” of the famous Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky. The concept “temptation”, “seducing” (in its spiritual aspect), as well as “sin”, is inherent mainly in religions with biblical roots—Judaism, Christianity and Islam.¹

For the existence of a paradigm of “sinfulness” and, respectively, “temptation”, the developed concept of subjectivity is necessary, moreover—the idea of “personalitiness” (subjectivity) has to be the “axis” of a religious doctrine. The concept of subjectivity is inseparably with Western culture and Western philosophy, which are generated by the values of religions with biblical roots, in which personal being of God, his personal attitude (love) towards created beings and his dialogical self-explication in

¹ In this aspect we refer Islam to Western religious tradition—in opposition, for example, to Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism.

the acts of Revelation are postulated. Thus, the doctrine of God here implicates position that *being* in its absolute limit and at the top of the “value vertical” is personalistic [8,9].

Temptation (the term originates from Latin “*tentatio*”) in Judaism, Christianity and Islam means an external occasion or a “call” to sin—to break the commandment, the law, to change to the ideal, to recede from the acquired belief and the highest principles; and also the internal inclination and excitement, under the influence of vicious tendency or passion to act in the same way. So, the temptation in Christianity (as well as in other “Abrahamic” religions) has the transcendent origin. The temptation in the Old Testament tradition was comprehended as a divine punishment for a sin, as a sign of rejectedness by God, as the inclination to sin starting with the story of Eve and the Original Sin. Temptations of man were connected with the intrigues of the evil embodied in the image of a Satan. Therefore, the temptation was also the fight of the good with the evil in the soul of man. The Gospels say: “And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.” ([10], Mark 9:42). “Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!” ([10], Matthew 18:7).

Now we’re coming to Islam—“the youngest” of biblical religions. A word with important historical implications, *fitnah* is also widely used in modern Arabic. The first *fitnah* in the Arab-Muslim history dates back to 656–661 years, when the conflict between the fourth Righteous Caliph, Ali, and his deputy in Damascus, Muawiya, led to the emergence of Khawarij, and subsequently to the inter-Islam split between Sunnism and Shiism [11]. According to the Russian Arabist E.I. Zelenev, *fitnah* repeatedly occurred in modern Arab history. For example, in 1908 election campaigning trip of religious politician Rashid Rida provoked thousands of protests in Damascus. The events in Egypt in 1882 and 1919 could also be considered through the prism of traditional Arab form of protest—*fitnah* [12,13].

However, the relation to *fitnah* of Muslim political and legal thought is not so definite. For instance, Ja'fari law school (*madhhab*) categorically rejects any manifestation of turmoil, as evidenced by the activities of its founder Ja'far al-Sadiq. After the Abbasid revolution of 750, the majority of Shiites expected that al-Sadiq will head a dynasty of Alids in their struggle for power with the Abbasids, but he considered *fitnah* counterproductive and preferred to put up with the new Baghdad authorities. He did not simply refused to support, but also condemned first the anti-Omayyad uprising of his uncle Zayd ibn Ali in Kufa in 739, and then the anti-Abbasid one as well organized by his cousins Ibrahim in Iraq and Muhammad in the Hijaz, referring to the fact that turmoil is much evil for Shiite than the reign of unwanted ruler [14].

The representatives of another *madhhab*, Hanbali, allowed the violent overthrow of the ruler who encouraged people to question the faith. Its founder, Ahmed ibn Hanbal not only considered *fitnah* possible, but also called for involvement in the unrest to defend the practiced beliefs to the end [15].

Another confirmation of eclectic interpretations of *fitnah* is the perspective of Islamic law. Authoritative Muslim jurists of the Middle Ages and modern researchers have developed many classifications of offenses, among which the most widespread classification is based on the nature of the violated rights and interests. According to this classification, there is a group of offenses that represents the greatest danger to the public, infringing “the rights of Allah” (*i.e.*, the interests of the entire Muslim community)—*hudud* [16]. However, Muslim legal scholars are not unanimous in what specific offense should be included in this category of crime. Most researchers believe that these include the seven most

dangerous public acts—adultery, drinking alcohol, theft, robbery, unproven accusation of adultery, apostasy and *fitnah* [17]. However, Ibrahim al-Dasuki al-Shahavi, for example, excludes *fitnah* from this list as another authoritative Muslim jurist, Atiya Mustafa Mashrafa, does ([18], p. 144).

This very typical lack of unity on the classification of *fitnah* clearly confirms that in Islamic law there are different formal definitions; *fitnah* within the various schools is understood in different ways.

If we turn to the understanding of political activity by contemporary researchers, the book of A.A. Said and M. Abu-Nimer should be mentioned. They stress, for example, that the rapid development of the Islamic realm means the subjugation of the religion to the state, so that it is better not to consider Islam as fundamentally apolitical religion that sustains only traditional political structures. They also underline that Muslims are socially interactive individuals who act within a wide range of social frameworks, and thus, the understanding of contemporary Islam should not be limited by its history: “What could have been historically true once is not unchangeably true today” [19]. This supposition gives us enough grounds to conclude that the phenomenon of *fitnah* in the modern world is being transformed under the conditions of the changing World-system.

We can see that in the modern globalized world some religious or cultural terms and phenomena are interrelated and often overstep the bounds of a particular country, region or ethnic and cultural group. The states have faced the crisis of sovereignty and the Westphalian system is now not a determining factor of international life. The cultural transparency of new world reality is taking roots in almost all spheres of the society. That is the reason why we can use the religious concept to describe the modern political protests processes. The Arab Spring was the first and most vivid example of a new type of protest activity determined by several characteristics, e.g. Widespread use of the Internet, international reaction, *etc.* provided some features and scenarios of new protests that became common not only in the Arab countries but also in other world regions as well. The Ukrainian Maidan exemplified this new form of protests. Thus, in this paper we propose an understanding of the term *fitnah* that is not strongly attached to the religious context and its classical meaning, but instead speaks about the tendencies and scenarios of distemper in the modern world that were primarily influenced by the Arab spring events.

2. *Fitnah* in the Modern Protest Movements

If we compare the events in the Arab countries in 2011 and Ukraine in 2013–2014, it can be concluded that in essence they fit the characteristics of *fitnah* very well, which are attributed to it by the Arabic political culture. Now we should try to consider it in detail.

It is known that by the beginning of the anti-government protests on January 25, 2011 Egyptian opposition was a very fragmented group, and its range of political views was very wide—from Islamists to Naserists. Its distinguishing characteristic was the fact that opposition did not articulate coherent requirements, not to mention a program of action for the future. It is interesting that the original slogans of Cairo's Tahrir did not contain any word about the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak. By that time, the demands of the demonstrators were reduced to four main points: raising the minimum wage to 1,200 Egyptian pounds, the dissolution of parliament, the abolition of the state of emergency, the resignation of Egyptian Interior Minister Habib al-Adly ([20], p. 46).

A similar pattern was observed in Kiev, where all the same students and the middle class took place in the demonstrations not demanding the resignation of President Yanukovich, but the signing of an association agreement with the EU. At the same time, Maidan, exactly like Tahrir, absorbed highly fragmented political preferences of the protesters.

The eclecticism of protesters, their social bases and political positions significantly influenced the formation of programs, challenges, and priorities the groups faced in Cairo and in Kiev. “Even where social or ideological background is available it, for the time being, does not turn into a meaningful program of action and does not ripen to the level of doctrine. Persons involved in the *fitnah*, as a rule, couldn’t imagine the political problems they face, vaguely and emotionally articulate their goals; these people clearly lack rational comprehension of what is happening” [21]. All this could be observed in Tahrir and Maidan where protesters were not able to articulate the reasons that prompted them to go into the streets, reducing everything to abstract corruption of the president and his family, as well as difficult socio-economic situation in the country. At the same time, protesters were completely impervious to constructive understanding of the situation.

It is known that in the period of Mubarak's rule (1981–2011) Egyptian economy developed quite rapidly, showing growth in 4.5 times over 30 years [22,23], which is one of the best indicators for the countries of the Third World in these years (Figure 1) [24,25].

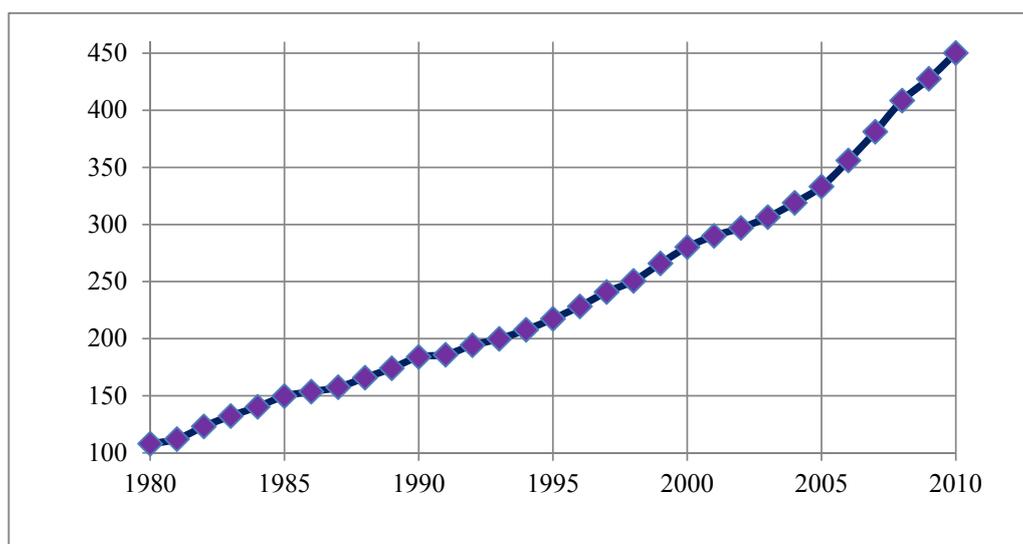


Figure 1. Dynamics of GDP (PPP)² in Egypt in 1980–2010, in billion dollars 2005. Source: [20].

Especially accelerated economic growth was observed in the last years of President Mubarak, when the new government headed by Ahmed Nazif formed in July 2004, was able to develop a reasonably efficient economic reform program that provided very noticeable acceleration in economic growth in this country ([20], p. 2).

Even in the year of the global financial and economic crisis, Egypt’s GDP did not fall but continued to grow quite rapidly. Economic growth rates still slowed slightly—from 7.2 to 4.6% per year—but

² Gross Domestic Product (at Purchasing Power Parity).

Egyptian leadership averted an economic crisis successfully. In 2010, the rates of economic growth in Egypt accelerated again.

We should keep in mind that in Ukraine economic stagnation was out of the question. Since 1999, Ukraine's GDP began to grow quite rapidly reaching 15% per year, slowing down only in 2004 because of the “Orange Revolution” and in the year of the global financial and economic crisis. In 2000–2004 economic growth rates in Ukraine were very high: two years before the “Orange Revolution”, in 2003–2004, Ukrainian economy has been one of the fastest growing economies in the world (excluding small countries). However, at that time Viktor Yanukovich was the head of the Cabinet of Ministers. Overall growth of GDP per capita in Ukraine was 2.5 times higher than the world average (Figure 2). The growth was same as in the resource-rich Russia, making Ukraine’s growth a serious achievement. Yes, this level was significantly lower than in Belarus, but there it was one of the highest in the world, comparable only with the economic miracle of the last decade—China.

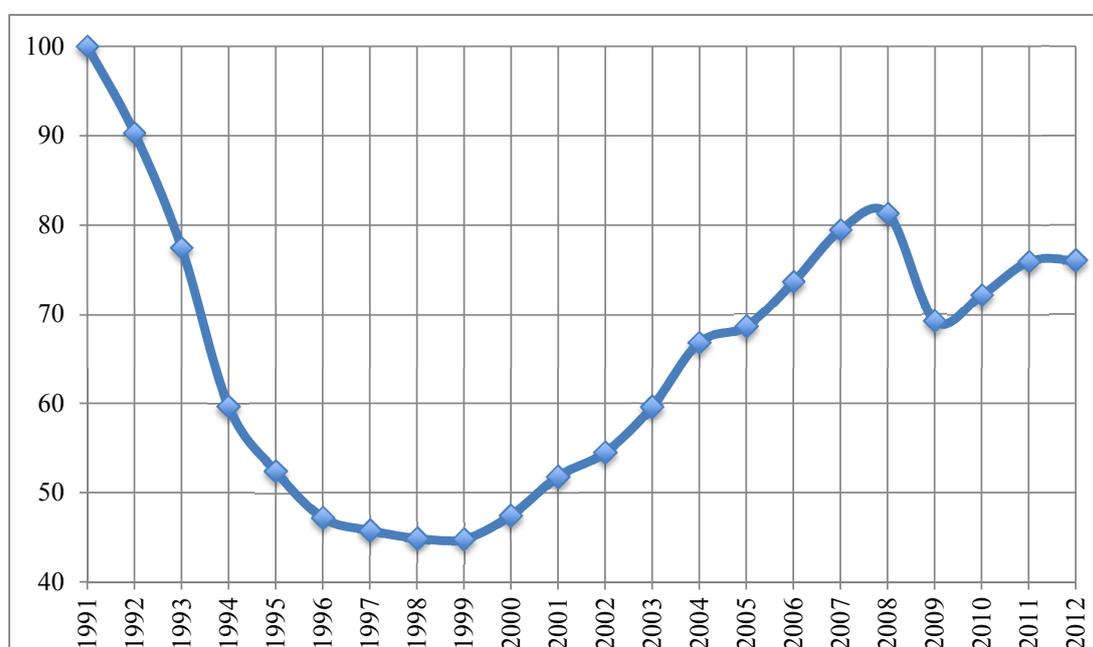


Figure 2. Dynamics of GDP (PPP) in Ukraine in 1991–2010, in billion dollars 2005.

Source: World Bank 2013.

After Viktor Yanukovich took the post of the President, country's economy continued to grow: economic growth was 6.8% per year indicating Ukraine’s withdrawal from the global financial crisis. On the graph there is visible slowing of Ukrainian GDP growth in 2012 that is actually a consequence of the second wave of recession in Europe. Yanukovich’s policy of reorientation of the country from West to East seems quite logical.

The data given above support the idea that the impoverishment of the population is not a sufficient condition for the revolutions both in the Arab world and Ukraine. However, the protesters on Tahrir and Maidan were totally unreceptive to such facts, remaining absolutely confident in critical socio-economic situation of the country, as well as that regime change could reduce the level of corruption in Egypt and Ukraine. It is interesting in this regard that the protesting crowd on Maidan was

blind to attempts to explain the economic disadvantages of signing agreements with the EU, reduction of social benefits and allowances in this context, *etc.*, which is typical for *fitnah*: specific proposals of positive character drown in the emotional outburst. A very skimpy ideological baggage of *fitnah* participants is indicative. In Egypt, as well as in Ukraine it was reduced to few slogans, the essence of which fit the sonorous “Go away...!” (Or *Irhal'* in the countries of the Arab Spring). It is not surprising that protesters, who are comprised of groups with clashing ideologies, cannot *a priori* agree on whatever program of political and socio-economic development of the state should be or how they should unite in the face of a common enemy.

E. Zelenev writes that “the scenario of preparation and conducting of distemper is usually performed by well-established schemes. Typically there first occurs local conflict... which participants perceive as the prime cause of unrest demonstrations, while real organizers carefully disguise their true objectives. Crowds are concentrated in areas of natural accumulation of people. Participants splash out to the streets and squares, divide into groups and move... to the ultimate goals of the movement or concentrate in the particular place” [20]. And already at this stage, the first mistakes of the authorities in Egypt and Ukraine can be seen. The reason for that is, first of all, the spontaneity of the events, when the streets of cities filled with crowds of people in a short amount of time. The authorities were completely unprepared for such an unforeseen contingency and, therefore, misjudged the degree of danger posed by the participants of *fitnah*. Authorities, who before suppressed protests without too much struggle, were unable to assess the situation adequately. They began to panic, deliberately overstating the degree of danger emanating from the protesting crowd. The participants of *fitnah* demonstrated willingness to use violent methods of struggle if the authorities refuse to meet their demands. *Fitnah* in this case is the last step before full-scale rebellion, but still not a “declaration” of war.

The paradox of *fitnah* lies in the fact that first who declares war is not the protesting crowd, but the power. The crowd waits, giving the authorities a chance to make the right decision and not daring to cross the invisible line separating the legality of collective protest from lawlessness of rebellion. At the same time, authorities overestimating the threat emanating from the crowd, crosses the line of what is permitted and resorts to the use of force. But even more paradoxical is that the government uses force at the most inopportune time for this—in the period of slowing protest activity. We have already mentioned that during the January events in Egypt in 2011 Hosni Mubarak had the opportunity to stay in power until September elections. Emotional address of the President on February 1, 2011 to the nation in which he stated that he will leave his post in September and will not transfer power to his son Gamal, made a huge impression on the Egyptians. Many were satisfied with it and some of the demonstrators began to disperse to their homes [2]. However, the precise moment when Tahrir began to be emptied, Gamal Mubarak launched a “Battle of the Camel” trying to take advantage of the almost empty heart of Cairo on February 2, 2011. This step of the president's son became the bifurcation point for the Mubarak regime, at which the power first declared war to protesters by using force and put into doubt all previous agreements and president's promises.

The Ukrainian government made a similar mistake. By November 30, 2013 protest activity in Ukraine began to decline and the number of protesters fell markedly. It was at this time when the Ukrainian authorities decided to use force against demonstrators, trying to disperse Euromaidan. That immediately led to a backlash—people poured into the streets of the city, increasing the number of protesters by many

times (Figure 3). During *fitnah*, the use of force by the authorities only exacerbates the situation. Victims among the protesters are “combustible material” that feeds the burgeoning protest movement. Funeral processions collect into their ranks new participants turning unrest into mass rallies that usually end with clashes with supporters of the current government [2]. Even the disconnection/shutting down of mobile and Internet connections in Cairo led to an influx of people into the streets of Cairo, in general, and on Tahrir Square, in particular. This was due to the fact that residents of the city were forced to leave their homes and join the demonstrators due to their inability to get through to their relatives [2].

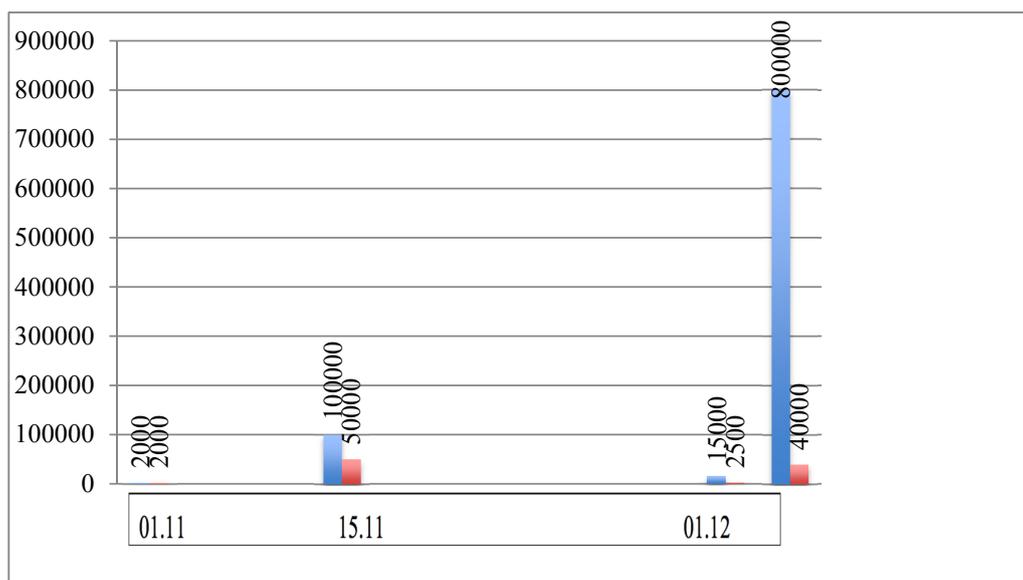


Figure 3. The number of protesters in Kiev from November to December 2013 (the opposition data segment is marked in blue, the Ministry of Internal Affairs data are marked in red). *Source:* ([26], pp. 34–35).

It is interesting that the government uses force precisely at the moment when the number of protesters reaches the level that is apparently regarded by the regime as a relatively safe for it and with which regime feels the strength to cope. However, the pre-revolutionary nature of the turmoil allows questioning the right of authorities to respond to this form of protest by repressions. Declaring war on protesters and thereby actualizing fear of reprisals after returning to the original state of the situation, the government itself is leaving demonstrators with no choice but to fight. Fear of being punished for taking part in *fitnah* is forcing its supporters to unite under the slogan “al-Shaab yurid iskat an-nizam” (People want the fall of the regime); the same demand was proclaimed by the crowd of people on Maidan after Yanukovych crossed the bifurcation point using force against demonstrators.

But declaring war on protesters and drawing the “first blood”, the authorities not only forced the demonstrators to go to the end, but finally formed its image as the repressive machine ready to resort to forceful methods to control the protests. Demonstrators themselves subsequently were armed with these tactics. The opposition to the government, which saw the negative effect from the authority’s use of force against protesters, began to use the repressive image of the authorities to continuously “feed streets with combustible material”: as soon as the number of demonstrators started to fall, or the rekindling of

protests was required, the opposition used snipers to shoot at demonstrators as a provocation. That repeatedly occurred during the Arab spring in Syria and Yemen [27], as well as in Kiev, according to one of the authors, who witnessed it in Kiev on February 20, 2014.³ During that time, in the minds of people, such steps were consistently associated with the actions of the authorities, who, in their opinion, once again provoked violent conflicts with the protesters. Interestingly, in these cases, the victims of snipers were “exhibited” for everyone to see (or records of such killings were actively spread throughout new media) in order to as much as possible cultivate the hatred of protesters against the authorities.

Why does power find itself unprepared for such manifestations of *fitnah* and miscalculates threat from protesters committing errors fatal for it? From our perspective, it can be explained by the rapid development of Internet technologies that gives the opposition an opportunity to prepare a protest virtually, in the area not totally controlled by the government.

3. Internet Technologies as a Mean of Protest Activity

The graph (Figure 4) shows that the number of Internet users in Ukraine is similar to the number of Internet users in the countries that were most affected by the antigovernment demonstrations—Egypt, Libya and Tunisia. At the beginning of the 21st century, these countries demonstrated a rapid growth in the number of Internet users, which played an important role in organizing mass demonstrations on Tahrir and Maidan.

The popularity of different network platforms used during the Arab spring and events in Ukraine is interesting (Figures 5 and 6). As it was shown in our previous research [27], the most popular social media during the events of the Arab Spring were Facebook and Twitter due to their speed of connection, anonymity and opportunities to overcome information barriers established by the government and security services. As we can see from the figures below, in 2013 in Ukraine the popularity of such resources as Facebook and Twitter has increased dramatically—just as it was, for example, in Egypt in 2011 which became the climax for the expression of protest activity. This gives us grounds to conclude that in terms of information and communication, Ukrainian events followed a similar path to the Arab Spring, and to analyze some of the most important aspects of these forms of political interaction at the present stage.

³ It is known that on February 20, 2014 in Kiev, as a result of shots of snipers from the hotel “Ukraine”, there were killed, by various estimates, up to 70 people. At that time, the author (L.M. Isaev) resided in this hotel and witnessed the events that took place that day. From 8:30 a.m. local time, the hotel was invaded by protesters and its entrance was cordoned off and came under the control of armed opposition that was located in a medical center at the first floor of the building. Immediately after the seizure of “Ukraine”, armed protesters began to conduct raids on the hotel rooms looking for the representatives of “Berkut” who, they thought, were hiding in the hotel. At about 12 a.m. local time the searches were completed. However, the protesters from the rostrum of the Maidan during the day, February 20, 2014, stated that the snipers of “Berkut” were located in the hotel “Ukraine” and were firing at protesters. That does not actually correspond to reality because since 8:30 a.m. “Ukraine” was under the complete control of the opposition. In addition, corpses of the first seven demonstrators killed on February 20, 2014, deliberately were not brought to the hotel “Ukraine” and were exhibited as victims of the government. The first floor of the hotel was divided into three parts: a place for first aid, a hospital for the severely wounded and a morgue. Throughout the day, the corpses and wounded were brought here, but for the reason mentioned above this was not made with the first oppositionists killed by snipers, and they defiantly continued to stay on Maidan.

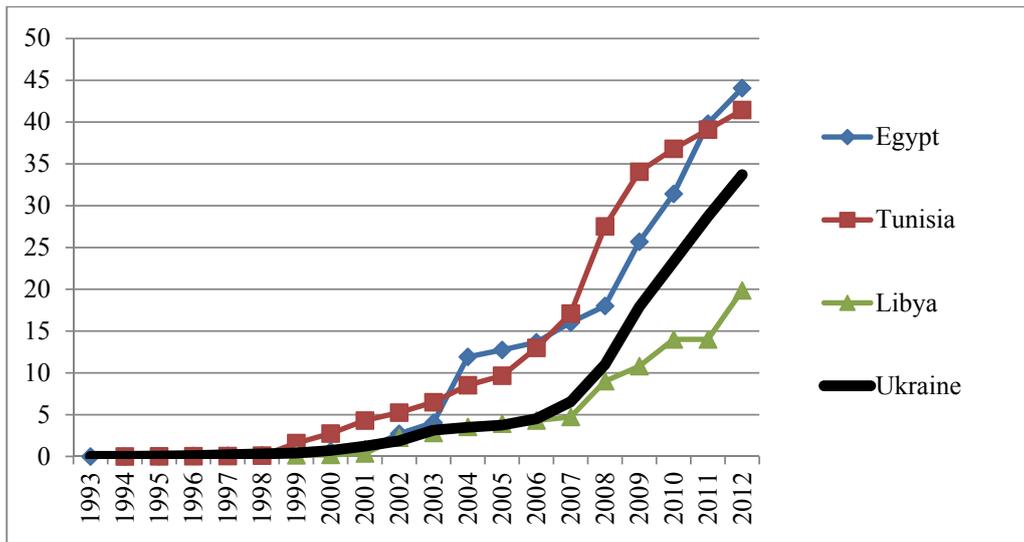


Figure 4. The number of Internet users in Ukraine and some Arab countries, per 100 people. *Source:* World Bank 2014.

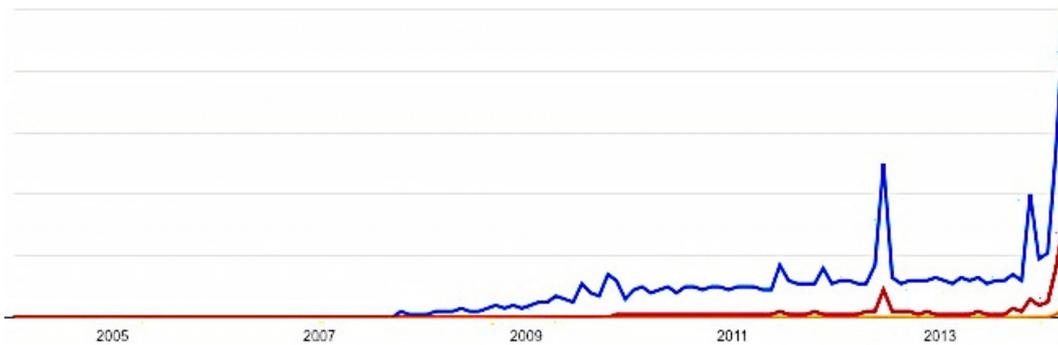


Figure 5. Dynamics of popularity of Facebook, Twitter and Google Docs (in descending order) in Ukraine by year. *Source:* Google Trends 2014.



Figure 6. Dynamics of popularity of Facebook, Twitter and Google Docs (in descending order) in Egypt by year. *Source:* Google Trends 2014.

Such characteristics of Internet space as its ubiquity, the ability to receive feedback, the lack of clearly recognizable leaders, *etc.* form an entirely new logic of social interaction compared to, for instance,

traditional media. Respectively, new forms of expression of discontent and protest activity were established. Most part of the communication in this case occurs through the so-called social media. This term is used to describe the new generation of digital networked information and communication technologies. They may be vested in a variety of forms—Internet forums, blogs, media file hosting, and so on. A key feature of this type of media is the possibility to simultaneously create the content and consume information products. As it was already mentioned above, the main functional and semantic distinction of social media from other forms of information and communication is anonymity, opportunity for feedback, and the absence of clearly defined leaders or authors (both in literary and news aspect, about which McLuhan wrote [28] and in the formation of a new type of social movements).

Protest movements organizational and preparatory phases of which were carried out in the space of social networks can be the most striking examples of usage of social media during protests. Thus, the wave of antigovernment demonstrations of 2011–2012 in the Arab world, the Occupy Wall Street movement as well as protests in some European countries actually were prepared in the absence of *recognizable* leaders. “There were neither charismatic ideologists nor representatives of trade unions or religious speakers (or they were present only at the beginning)” [29]. Of course, the mobilization of the population took place around some colorful characters, but there is no question about their charisma as leaders, if only because that Internet communication is actually impersonal, and even photos an individual are quite difficult to reconcile with his/her real appearance. As a result, protesters are often really frustrated by the fact that the demonstrators in the streets do not recognize those who conducted the preparatory stage on Facebook or Twitter.

P. Howard and M. Hussain reflecting on the degree of influence of information technology on the protest activity during the events of the Arab Spring, come to the conclusion that the first few months of protests, for example, in Tunisia or Egypt, can be divided into five or even six phases [29]. The first of them is a stage of preparation during which activists using digital media are looking for each other, they formulate a consensus on a common discontent and define certain political goals of their future actions. The second phase is a kind of trigger for further actions, and during the events of the Arab Spring it was represented by the incidents of self-immolation of the ordinary citizens desperate by regime actions. The state media usually ignored this kind of accidents, however, they were widely publicized on the Internet, and that further fueled popular discontent.

This stage was followed by a period of street protests, the preparation of which was carried out through the interactive networking. As the situation changed, there emerged the international response, and in this case, new media also played an important role in drawing the attention of international organizations and foreign news agencies to the situation in the country. Soon, this led to an outcome, in which the regimes were trying to balance between the demonstrators and the use of repressive measures to suppress the protests. The result was that governments either collapsed or were in a stalemate or even a state of civil war. In some cases, there was another phase of the events—informational confrontation in which various players continued to compete for the right to influence events through the control of revolutionary discourse.

Use of the newest media and communication technologies in the context of protest activity is also capable of expanding or increasing the mobilization resources and reducing the costs of coordination. Thus, for example, the preparation of the protests in the past has always been accompanied by serious organizational costs associated with the coordination of the information dissemination, as well as the

logistics. On the contrary, the modern mobilization is performing, as a rule, in the virtual space, where the listed actions are carried out. In addition, an important feature of this kind of mobilization is the ability to smooth the critical issues of representation of the protesters who are often rooted in socio-cultural and political traditions of a country [30]: social media offer opportunities for *ad hoc* mobilization, thus avoiding ambiguous perception of leader figure or institutional entities.

Thus, the first stage of protests was not only organized in the virtual space in anonymity and in the absence of recognizable leaders but also characterized by an undeveloped ideology: as a rule, popular discontent at this stage was not intended to overthrow the current regime but instead expressed a desire to resolve the pressing problems, such as the elimination of corruption, poverty, *etc.* Since these protests lacked a powerful and sustaining ideological force, the first protests took place rapidly, but pretty quickly declined. Additionally, a further deterioration of the situation, right up to a radical change of the political situation in the country, was entirely dependent on the actions of the government. After the attempts to disperse the already tapering off demonstrations of protesters, the latter begins to form a clear political goal—the overthrow of the regime, which served as much more powerful mobilizing factor compared to the first stage.

4. Conclusions

As we said above, the term *fitnah* is used in the Qur'an with a negative connotation. To a large extent this can be explained by the fact that in Arab political culture there exist a strong notion that large-scale *fitnah* usually develops into *fouda*—anarchy, chaos. In this regard, Zelenev notes that, if the term *fitnah* describes a particular state of consciousness of protests participants, then *fouda* rather determines the state of society affected by the turmoil [14]. Typically, this occurs at the time of resignation of the unwanted ruler. At this stage, the situation is completely out of the control of both the government and the opposition, and the crowds of protesters do not leave the city squares, even after the resignation of the head of state.

Such transition of *fitnah* into *fouda* could be observed in Tahrir and Maidan. Mubarak's resignation did not return protesters home and Tahrir continued to live its own life over the next three years during which it repeatedly became the center of pan-Egyptian protest. In this case, none of the advocates of the Egyptian revolution of 2011, whether they were Mohamed el-Baradei, Hamdin Sabahi, Ayman Nour, *etc.* were able to take control of the situation and did not wield influence on the demonstrators. Maidan was also not satisfied with the flight of Yanukovych and the seizure of power by the opponents of the Ukrainian president. Attempts of Klitschko and Yatsenyuk to encourage people to leave the streets of Kiev did not find approval among the crowd that got out of anyone's control. Now its anger turned toward the newly established government, exactly as in Tahrir, when anger after Mubarak was directed first at the military junta headed by Muhammed al-Tantawi and then at the legitimately elected President Mohammed Moursi.

In both cases, the *fitnah* acquired permanent character turning into anarchy and chaos (*fouda*). Tahrir and Maidan became not just symbols of the liberation of people from the unwanted ruler, but also a real way of life for many people who cannot imagine their existence without their constant struggle against the authorities and in whose minds the idea of “permanent revolution” is deeply rooted. Constant dissatisfaction with the power in any form becomes the main purpose of life for the protesters and finally,

they see themselves as the ultimate truth: any law, unwanted rulers or the constitution, no matter how legitimate they are, may not be accepted without their approval and should enjoy their support, otherwise they will await the fate of Egyptian President Morsi.

A military coup in Egypt on June 30, 2013 brought to power the military again, replacing the Muslim Brotherhood. The coup headed by Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi carried out a counter-*fitnah* and returned the situation to the starting position in January 2011 [31]. These events could be considered as “counter-*fitnah*” since they returned to power the same block of military, economic and bureaucratic elites who ruled the country until the *fitnah* of 2011. It is possible that Maidan in Kiev will have the same outcome. Dissatisfaction with the new power is growing day by day; assaults against Verkhovna Rada continued after the resignation of Yanukovych; the south-east of the country been covered by protests against the government that took power as a result of the coup; and the presidency in Ukraine, exactly as it is now in Egypt, is becoming one of the most unwanted posts in the country. After three years of the transition state in the country of the Pharaohs, only two candidates, Hamdin Sabahi and Abd El Fattah El Sisi, fought for the presidency; the latter became the president and his decision was largely dictated not so much by his own desire, but by the distribution of forces within the military leadership in Egypt interested in his election for the presidency [32].

Acknowledgements

The study was implemented in the framework of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) in 2015.

Author Contributions

Tatyana, Leonid and Alisa work at the National Research University Higher School of Economic studying religious doctrines and destabilizing effects of different phenomena rooted in history on the modern societies. Tatyana and Leonid proposed the theoretical approach to the understanding of *fitnah* and *temptation* in different cultures and traditions, then Leonid and Alisa applied this term to the newest political protests, especially in the light of modern information space development and contemporary political tendencies. Next, Alisa revised the paper to address the concerns of the reviewers.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. Evgeniy I. Zelenev. "Smuta, anarhiya, revolyutsiya: Arabskaya politicheskaya kul'tura na puti v budushchee [Distemper, anarchy, revolution: The Arab political culture on the way to the future]." *Aziya i Afrika Segodnya* 1 (2012): 8–12.
2. Leonid M. Isaev, and Alisa R. Shishkina. *Egipetskaya smuta XXI Veka*. Moscow: Librokom, 2012.
3. Anatoliy D. Savateev. "Antiavtoritarnye vystupleniya v arabskih stranah v svete vzaimodeystviya globalizatsii i islamskoy kul'tury [*Anti-Authoritarian Demonstrations in the Arab World in the Light of Interaction between Globalization and Islamic Culture*]." In *Protestnye. Dvizheniya v Arabskih Stranah: Predposylki, Osobennosti, Perspektivy*/otv. Edited by Igor V. Sledzevskiy and Anatoliy D. Savateev. Moscow: Librokom, 2012, pp. 47–52.
4. Ahmad Ali. *Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation*. Karachi: Akrash Publishing, 1984.
5. Humphrey J. Fisher. "Text-centred research: Fitna as a case study and a way forward for guests in the house of African historiography." *Sudanic Africa* 5 (1994): 225–60.
6. John Wansbrough. *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, pp. 139–40.
7. Donal C. O'Brien, and Christian Coulon. *Charisma and Brotherhood in African Islam*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988.
8. Tatyana P. Lifintseva. "The Buddhist Pill for Sartre's 'Nausea': Phenomenological and Hindu-Buddhist Treatments of Intentionality." *NeuroQuantology* 10 (2013): 673.
9. Tatyana P. Lifintseva. "'Sorge' of Heidegger, Sartre's 'l'être pour-soi' and Buddhist 'duḥkha': Ontological Foundations of Negativity." *NeuroQuantology* 11 (2013): 627–44.
10. The Holy Bible. *Revised Standard Version with Concordance*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.
11. Oleg G. Bol'shakov. *Istoriya Halifata [The History of Caliphate]*. Moscow: Vostochnaya Literatura, 1998.
12. Alexey M. Goldobin. *Egipetskaya revolyutsiya 1919 g. [Egyptian revolution of 1919]*. Leningrad: Izd-vo Leningradskogo Universiteta, 1958.
13. Evgeniy I. Zelenev. *Musul'manskiy Egipet [Muslim Egypt]*. Saint Petersburg: Izdat S. Peterburgskogo University, 2007.
14. Djafar al-Šadiq, and Marshall Hodgson. *Encyclopaedia of Islam: With indexes etc.* 12 vols. Edited by Peter Bearman, Thierry Bianquis, Clifford Bosworth, Emery van Donzel, Wolfhart Heinrichs, et al. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991, pp. 374–75.
15. Georgiy Miloslavskiy, Yuriy Petrosyan, Mikhail Piotrovskiy, and Stanislav Prozorov. *Entsiklopedicheskiy slovar' [Islam. Encyclopaedia]*. Edited by Lyudmila Negrya. Moscow: Nauka, 1991, pp. 30–31.
16. Leonid R. Syukiyainen. *Musul'manskoe pravo. Voprosy teorii i praktiki [Muslim Law. Issues of Theory and Practice]*. Edited by Vladimir Tumanov. Moscow: Nauka, 1986, pp. 182–83.
17. Farouk Mourad. *The Effect of Islamic Legislation on Crime Prevention in Saudi Arabia*. Rome: UNSDRI, 1980, p. 42.

18. Atyya M. Mashrafa. *Al-Qada fi-l-Islam [The Islamic Court]*. Beirut: Dar El Kotob, 1996.
19. Abdul Aziz Said, Mohammed Abu-Nimer, and Meena Sharifu-Funk, eds. *Contemporary Islam: Dynamic, Not Static*. London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 50–52.
20. Leonid M. Isaev, and Alisa R. Shishkina. *Siriya i Yemen: neokonchennyye revolyutsii [Syria and Yemen: Unfinished Revolutions]*, vol. 2. Moscow: Librokom, 2012.
21. Evgeniy I. Zelenev. *Smuta? Anarhiya? Revolyutsiya? Arabskaya politicheskaya kul'tura na puti v budushchee? [Distemper? Anarchy? Revolution? The Arab Political Culture on the Way to the Future]*. *Protest Movements in Arab Countries: Conditions, Characteristics, Perspectives*. Edited by Igor V. Sledzevskiy and Anatoliy D. Savateev. Moscow: Librokom, 2012, pp. 57–62.
22. Andrey V. Korotayev, and Yulia V. Zin'kina. "Egipetskaya revolyutsiya 2011 g. [Egyptian revolution of 2011]." *Aziya. i Afrika. Segodnya* 6 (2011): 10–16.
23. Andrey V. Korotayev, and Yulia V. Zin'kina. "Egipetskaya revolyutsiya 2011 g. [Egyptian revolution of 2011]." *Aziya. i Afrika. Segodnya* 7 (2011): 15–21.
24. Andrey V. Korotayev. "Compact Mathematical Models of the World System Development and Their Applicability to the Development of Local Solutions in Third World Countries." In *Systemic Development: Local Solutions in a Global Environment*. Edited by James Sheffield. Litchfield Park: ISCE Publishing, 2009, pp. 103–16.
25. Andrey V. Korotayev, and Daria A. Halturina. *Investitsii v bazovoe obrazovanie kak mera po predotvrashcheniyu sotsial'no-demograficheskikh katastrof v razvivayushchihsya stranah [Investment in Basic Education as a Measure to Prevent the Socio-Demographic Disasters in Developing Countries]*. *System Monitoring of Global and Regional Risks*. Edited by Daria A. Halturina, Andrey V. Korotayev and Yulia V. Zin'kina. Moscow: URSS, 2010, pp. 301–13.
26. World Bank. "World Development Indicators Online." Washington: World Bank, 2011. Available online: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.PP.KD> (accessed on 10 September 2014).
27. Alisa R. Shishkina, and Leonid M. Isaev. *Arabskiy mir v Tsifrovuyu Epohu: Sotsial'nye Media Kak Forma Politicheskoy Aktivnosti [Arab World in the Digital Era: Social Media as a form of Political Activity]*. Moscow: Lenand, 2014.
28. Marshall McLuhan. "New Media as Political Forms." In *Marshall McLuhan Unbound I*. Edited by Eric McLuhan, and Terrence Gordon. Berkeley: Gingko Press, 2005.
29. Philip Howard, and Muzammil Hussain. "The Role of Digital Media." *Journal of Democracy* 22 (2011): 35–48.
30. Zeynep Tufekci. "Capabilities of Movements and Affordances of Digital Media: Paradoxes of Empowerment." *DMLCentral*, 9 January 2014. Available online: <http://dmlcentral.net/blog/zeynep-tufekci/capabilities-movements-and-affordances-digital-media-paradoxes-empowerment> (accessed on 23 September 2014).
31. Leonid M. Isaev. "General'ny ushli, general'ny vernulis': Egipetskoy revolyutsii—Tri goda [Generals are gone, generals are back: three years of the Egyptian revolution]." *Neprikosnovenny Zapas* 1 (2014): 123–32.

32. Leonid M. Isaev, and Andrey V. Korotayev. “Anatomiya egipetskoy kontrevolyutsii [Anatomy of the Egyptian Counter-Revolution].” *Polit.Ru*, 3 February 2014. Available online: <http://polit.ru/article/2014/02/03/egypt/> (accessed on 24 August 2014).

© 2015 by the authors; licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).