

Social Media's Political Role Got its Start in the Middle East | Popular Science

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Reporter Ayman Mohyeldin got an unexpected call from a source at the end of 2015, in the weeks following coordinated terrorist attacks in Paris that shocked the world. “You know the picture of the French attacker?” he remembers his source asking, “I have all of the data on his cell phone if you want it.”

Mohyeldin's source wasn't some daring spy with fierce hacking skills. A year earlier, one of the ringleaders of the attack, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, had been in the Syrian city of Ruqqa when his iPhone broke. Like anyone else, Abaaoud visited a local repair shop to patch his phone, where a technician also downloaded the phone's hard drive—standard practice to back up the data. And like an unknown (but surely not insignificant) number of phone techs, he'd kept the backup in case it ever proved useful.

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