



## Democracy is more than just deposing a dictator

**(CNN)** -- As waves of protest and turmoil wash over the Middle East, Filipinos are celebrating the 25th anniversary of their "people power" revolution that ousted the dictator, Ferdinand Marcos.

So what can the people of Philippines teach the people of Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain and Libya about handling democratic change? Here's the short answer: The overthrow of a tyrant is probably only the beginning of a series of upheavals and crises.

Marcos was forced from power and into exile on February 25, 1986, after the military switched sides and swung behind massive street demonstrations. But that support was short lived and the Philippines was soon rocked by a series of bloody coup attempts against the new pro-democracy President Cory Aquino. In one attempt, her son and now president, Benigno "Noynoy" Aquino III, almost died in an ambush by rebel soldiers.

The involvement of the military in the overthrow of the dictator can be a turning point for a people power movement. Played out wrongly, it can quickly metamorphose into another form of dictatorship and lead to the rise of neo-oligarchs and cronies. But done right, it can bring progress if the security forces work with, and not against, civilian rule.

Mrs Aquino weathered the putsches against her and served out her full term with the backing of army chief Gen. Fidel Ramos. He then succeeded her as president after forming his own political party and winning elections. Although criticized for appointing too many retired generals to his Cabinet, he delivered economic gains and stability.

But then came then came a new set of setbacks. The Asian financial crisis struck in 1997 and one year later, Joseph Estrada, a former action movie hero, was overwhelmingly elected president. His administration was characterized by plunder and massive corruption that, once exposed, led to a new round of street uprisings known as "People Power 2."

Estrada was jailed, tried and eventually convicted. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo took over the top job but her 10-year presidency was also marred by allegations of graft, electoral fraud and human rights abuses. She likewise suppressed two attempts to topple her by a group of junior military officers who had complained of corruption in the government and the military itself.

Attempts to impeach her were blocked by her allies in the House of Representatives who were recipients of pork barrel largesse. Anti-Arroyo protests were sometimes met by violent dispersals and whistleblowers ended up being the ones prosecuted. Rumors were rife that she was planning to amend the constitution so she could extend her time in power. However, street demonstrations led by no other than Mrs Aquino galvanized opposition against change.

Mrs Aquino died in 2009 and her passing generated wide support around her son, Noynoy. He won the presidency in 2010 in what many regard as the rebirth of democracy through peaceful and fair elections.

Here are some lessons learned in Manila that might now resonate in Tunis and Cairo:

Firstly, overthrowing a dictator does not by itself create a democracy. But it can create a huge power vacuum. In that uncertain climate, coup attempts and instability can open the way for the coming of a new repressive regime. It's essential that civilian authority over the military is put into place as soon as possible and that chain of command within the ranks is kept intact to ward off the danger of civil war and anarchy. The civilian bureaucracy must start to function again quickly so that the military is not tempted to wade into in civilian affairs.

Secondly, civilian leaders cannot simply put their own friends and relatives into positions within the government. This can lead to cronyism and corruption. Allowed to degenerate further, the situation can produce oligarchy and dictatorship. Masquerading under the guise of "democracy," institutions that should serve the greater good only watch out for the interests of rich and powerful elites.

Thirdly, citizens must continually rally around pro-democracy forces. In a corrupt environment, honest reform-minded leaders and their supporters can find themselves the targets of marginalization and even assassination. It is heart breaking that so many activists, social workers, lawyers, doctors, journalists and whistleblowers have lost their lives in the past quarter century since Marcos.

Building a democracy is not the sole role of elected or appointed government officials. It is the collective responsibility of every citizen to make their leaders accountable. It goes well beyond simply kicking out a dictator or ousting corrupt politicians. It takes years of courage and perseverance to stand up for freedom and justice.

The Philippines has paid a high price since the ouster of Marcos. But now Filipinos can hold their heads high. Today, their democracy is alive and stronger than ever.

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.cnn.com/2011/OPINION/02/25/casanova.philippines.democracy>

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

© 2008 Cable News Network

# Why Egypt Should Worry China

Barry Eichengreen



Share 288

143

Share 70

2011-02-08

Why Egypt Should Worry China

BERKELEY – A strictly economic interpretation of events in Tunisia and Egypt would be too simplistic – however tempting such an exercise is for an economist. That said, there is no question that the upheavals in both countries – and elsewhere in the Arab world – largely reflect their governments' failure to share the wealth.

The problem is not an inability to deliver economic growth. In both Tunisia and Egypt, the authorities have strengthened macroeconomic policy and moved to open the economy. Their reforms have produced strong results. Annual growth since 1999 has averaged 5.1% in Egypt, and 4.6% in Tunisia – not Chinese-style growth rates, to be sure, but comparable nonetheless to emerging-market countries like Brazil and Indonesia, which are now widely viewed as economic successes.



Rather, the problem is that the benefits of growth have failed to trickle down to disaffected youth. The share of workers under the age of 30 is higher in North Africa and the Middle East than in any other part of the world. Their economic prospects are correspondingly more limited. University graduates find few opportunities outside of banking and finance. Anyone who has traveled to the region will have had an experience with a highly literate, overeducated tour guide.

With modern manufacturing underdeveloped, many young workers with fewer skills and less education are consigned to the informal sector. Corruption is widespread. Getting ahead depends on personal connections of the sort enjoyed by the sons of military officers and political officials, but few others.

It may stretch credulity to think that a high-growth economy like China might soon be facing similar problems. But the warning signs are there. Given the lack of political freedoms, the Chinese government's legitimacy rests on its ability to deliver improved living standards and increased economic opportunity to the masses. So far those masses have little to complain about. But that could change, and suddenly.

First, there is the growing problem of unemployment and underemployment among university graduates. Since 1999, when the Chinese government began a push to ramp up university education, the number of graduates has risen seven-fold, but the number of high-skilled, high-paying jobs has not kept pace.

Indeed, the country is rife with reports of desperate university graduates unable to find productive employment. Newspapers and blogs speak of the "ant tribe" of recent graduates living in cramped basements in the country's big cities while futilely searching for work.

GET CLICKY

In part, these unfortunate outcomes reflect the inflexibility of China's education system. Students spend their entire four years at university studying a single subject, be it accounting or computer science. As a result, they have few skills that can be applied elsewhere if the job they expect fails to materialize. There has also been a tendency to push students into fields like engineering, even though the Chinese economy is now beginning to shift from manufacturing to services.

Thus, China needs to move quickly on education reform. It needs to provide its university students with more flexible skills, more general training, and more encouragement to think critically and creatively.

Moreover, there is the problem of less-skilled and less-educated migrants from the countryside, who are consigned to second-class jobs in the cities. Not possessing urban residency permits, they lack even the limited job protections and benefits of workers who do. And, because they may be here today but gone tomorrow, they receive little in the way of meaningful on-the-job training.

The migrants' predicament underscores the need to reform *hukou*, China's system of residency permits. A handful of provinces and cities have gone so far as to abolish it, without catastrophic consequences. Others could usefully follow their lead.

Finally, China needs to get serious about its corruption problem. Personal connections, or *guanxi*, remain critical for getting ahead. Recent migrants from the countryside and graduates with degrees from second-tier universities sorely lack such connections. If they continue to see the children of high government officials doing better, their disaffection will grow.

The ability of disaffected youth – university-educated youth in particular – to use social media to organize themselves has been on powerful display recently in Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere. Last month, it was still possible for the Egyptian government to halt all Internet traffic and for the Chinese authorities to block the Chinese word for "Egypt" from its Twitter-like service *Sina*. But in social media, as in banking, the regulated tend to stay one step ahead of the regulators. Such shutdowns will be increasingly difficult to enforce.

If Chinese officials don't move faster to channel popular grievances and head off potential sources of disaffection, they could eventually be confronted with an uprising of their own – an uprising far broader and more determined than the student protest that they crushed in Tiananmen Square in 1989.

**Barry Eichengreen is Professor of Economics and Political Science at the University of California, Berkeley. His most recent book is *Exorbitant Privilege: The Rise and Fall of the Dollar*.**

Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2011.  
www.project-syndicate.org

You might also like to read more from [Barry Eichengreen](#) or return to [our home page](#).

Like 288 people like this.

Share 288

143

Reprinting material from this website without written consent from Project Syndicate is a violation of international copyright law. To secure permission, please contact [distribution@project-syndicate.org](mailto:distribution@project-syndicate.org).



# The Twitter Devolution

Far from being a tool of revolution in Iran over the last year, the Internet, in many ways, just complicated the picture.

BY GOLNAZ ESFANDIARI | JUNE 7, 2010



Before one of the major Iranian protests of the past year, a journalist in Germany showed me a list of three prominent Twitter accounts that were commenting on the events in Tehran and asked me if I knew the identities of the contributors. I told her I did, but she seemed disappointed when I told her that one of them was in the United States, one was in Turkey, and the third -- who specialized in urging people to "take to the streets" -- was based in Switzerland.

Perhaps I shattered her dreams of an Iranian "Twitter Revolution." The Western media certainly never tired of claiming that Iranians used Twitter to organize and coordinate their protests following President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's apparent theft of last June's elections. Even the American government seemed to get in on the act. Former U.S. national security adviser Mark Pfeifle **claimed** Twitter should get the Nobel Peace Prize because "without Twitter the people of Iran would not have felt empowered and confident to stand up for freedom and

democracy." And the U.S. State Department **reportedly** asked Twitter to delay some scheduled maintenance in order to allow Iranians to communicate as the protests grew more powerful.

But it is time to get Twitter's role in the events in Iran right. Simply put: There was no Twitter Revolution inside Iran. As Mehdi Yahyanejad, the manager of "Balatarin," one of the Internet's most popular Farsi-language websites, **told the *Washington Post*** last June, Twitter's impact inside Iran is nil. "Here [in the United States], there is lots of buzz," he said. "But once you look, you see most of it are Americans tweeting among themselves."

A number of opposition activists have told me they used text messages, email, and blog posts to publicize protest actions. However, good old-fashioned word of mouth was by far the most influential medium used to shape the postelection opposition activity. There is still a lively discussion happening on Facebook about how the activists spread information, but Twitter was definitely not a major communications tool for activists on the ground in Iran.

Nonetheless, the "Twitter Revolution" was an irresistible meme during the post-election protests, a story that wrote itself. Various analysts were eager to chime in about the purported role of Twitter in the Green Movement. Some were politics experts, like the *Atlantic's* **Andrew Sullivan** and **Marc Ambinder**. Others were experts on new media, like **Sascha Segan of *PC Magazine***. Western journalists who couldn't reach -- or didn't bother reaching? -- people on the ground in Iran simply scrolled through the English-language tweets posted with tag **#iranelection**. Through it all, no one seemed to wonder why people trying to coordinate protests in Iran would be writing in any language other than Farsi.

A pristine instance of this myopia was a **profile**, published in Britain's *Guardian* newspaper, of Oxfordgirl, a Twitter blogger who was described as "a key player" in Iran's postelection unrest. "Before they started blocking mobile phones, I was almost coordinating people's individual movements -- 'go to such and such street,' or 'don't go there, the Basij are waiting,'" she was quoted as saying. It's a riveting story -- but the reporter failed to ask how Oxfordgirl managed to communicate with residents of Tehran via cell phone when the Iranian government shut down the whole city's mobile network, as it always did on days of protest.

Oxfordgirl was ultimately more successful at gaining publicity for herself than at helping any protesters in Iran. Compare her **10,000 Twitter followers** with the 300 followers of a Karaj-based Green activist (who prefers not to be identified or to have his Twitter page publicized). The activist tweets in Persian, which few Western journalists can read, and he is often a source of valuable information about the mood in the country.

The story of Oxfordgirl gives a clue about the real role that Twitter played. There is no doubt that she helped spread news about the Iranian protests -- often very quickly. Twitter played an important role in getting word about the events in Iran out to the wider world. Together with YouTube, it helped focus the world's attention on the Iranian people's fight for democracy and human rights. New media over the last year created and sustained unprecedented international moral solidarity with the Iranian struggle -- a struggle that was being bravely waged many years before Twitter was ever conceived.

But an honest accounting of Twitter's role in Iran would also note its pernicious complicity in allowing rumors to

spread. It began with the many unsubstantiated reports from the protests. In the early days of the post-election crackdown a rumor quickly spread on Twitter that police helicopters were pouring acid and boiling water on protesters. A year later it remains just that: a rumor. Other Twitter stories were quickly debunked, like the suggestion that circulated in late June that Mousavi had been arrested at his home in Tehran.

Twitter followers of #iranelection also helped quickly name Saeedeh Pouraghayy -- who was allegedly arrested for chanting "Allah Akbar" on her rooftop, only to be raped, disfigured and murdered -- a new "martyr" of the Green Movement. Her tragic story quickly made the rounds on Twitter and other social networking websites. Mousavi and his aides even reportedly attended a commemoration ceremony that was held for her in Tehran.

Yet the whole story turned out to be a hoax. Pouraghayy later appeared on a program on Iran's state television and said that on the night when she was supposedly arrested, she had escaped by jumping off her balcony. In the intervening two months, she said was being treated at the home of the person who found her in the street. A reformist website later wrote that the Iranian government had planted the story in order to cast doubt on opposition claims about the rape of post-election detainees and pave the way for further arrests of opposition leaders. Twitter, it seems, can serve the purposes of Iran's regime as easily as it can aid the country's activists.

To be clear: It's not that Twitter publicists of the Iranian protests haven't played a role in the events of the past year. They have. It's just not been the outsized role it's often been made out to be. And ultimately, that's been a terrible injustice to the Iranians who have made real, not remote or virtual, sacrifices in pursuit of justice.

Like

858 people like this.

Save big when you **subscribe to FP**

BEHROUZ MEHRI/AFP/Getty Images

*Golnaz Esfandiari is a senior correspondent with Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty.*

 **COMMENTS (16)** | [SHOW COMMENTS](#) | [LOGIN OR REGISTER](#) | [REPORT ABUSE](#)

[FOLLOW US ON TWITTER](#) | [VISIT US ON FACEBOOK](#) | [FOLLOW US ON RSS](#) | [SUBSCRIBE TO FOREIGN POLICY](#)

[ABOUT FP](#) | [MEET THE STAFF](#) | [FOREIGN EDITIONS](#) | [REPRINT PERMISSIONS](#) | [ADVERTISING](#) | [CORPORATE PROGRAMS](#) | [WRITERS' GUIDELINES](#) | [PRESS ROOM](#) | [WORK AT FP](#)

[SERVICES: SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES](#) | [ACADEMIC PROGRAM](#) | [FP ARCHIVE](#) | [REPRINT PERMISSIONS](#) | [FP REPORTS AND MERCHANDISE](#) | [SPECIAL REPORTS](#) | [BUY BACK ISSUES](#)

[PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [DISCLAIMER](#) | [CONTACT US](#)



1899 L STREET NW, SUITE 550 | WASHINGTON, DC 20036 | PHONE: 202-728-7300 | FAX: 202-728-7342  
FOREIGN POLICY IS PUBLISHED BY THE SLATE GROUP, A DIVISION OF THE WASHINGTON POST COMPANY  
ALL CONTENTS ©2011 THE SLATE GROUP, LLC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



FREE GIFT

WITH YOUR SUBSCRIPTION

**THE Clash of  
Civilizations?  
THE DEBATE**Subscribe to *Foreign Affairs*  
Join the Debate With This Digital ReprintFOREIGN  
AFFAIRS

Published by the Council on Foreign Relations

March/April 2011

RESPONSE

## From Innovation to Revolution

Do Social Media Make Protests Possible?

Malcolm Gladwell and Clay Shirky

AN ABSENCE OF EVIDENCE

Malcolm Gladwell

While reading Clay Shirky's "The Political Power of Social Media" (January/February 2010), I was reminded of a trip I took just over ten years ago, during the dot-com bubble. I went to the catalog clothier Lands' End in Wisconsin, determined to write about how the rise of the Internet and e-commerce was transforming retail. What I learned was that it was not. Having a Web site, I was told, was definitely an improvement over being dependent entirely on a paper catalog and a phone bank. But it was not a life-changing event. After all, taking someone's order over the phone is not that much harder than taking it over the Internet. The innovations that companies such as Lands' End really cared about were bar codes and overnight delivery, which utterly revolutionized the back ends of their businesses and which had happened a good ten to 15 years previously.

The lesson here is that just because innovations in communications technology happen does not mean that they matter; or, to put it another way, in order for an innovation to make a real difference, it has to solve a problem that was actually a problem in the first place. This is the question that I kept wondering about throughout Shirky's essay-and that had motivated my *New Yorker* [article \[1\]](#) on social media, to which Shirky refers: What evidence is there that social revolutions in the pre-Internet era suffered from a lack of cutting-edge communications and organizational tools? In other words, did social media solve a problem that actually needed solving? Shirky does a good job of showing how some recent protests have used the tools of social media. But for his argument to be anything close to persuasive, he has to convince readers that in the absence of social media, those uprisings would not have been possible.

MALCOLM GLADWELL is a Staff Writer for *The New Yorker*.

SHIRKY REPLIES

Malcolm Gladwell's commercial comparison is illustrative. If you look at the way the Internet has affected businesses



such as Lands' End, you will indeed conclude that not much has changed, but that is because you are looking at the wrong thing. The effect of the Internet on traditional businesses is less about altering internal practices than about altering the competitive landscape: clothing firms now have to compete with Zappos, bookstores with Amazon, newspapers with Craigslist, and so on.

The competitive landscape gets altered because the Internet allows insurgents to play by different rules than incumbents. (Curiously, the importance of this difference is best explained by Gladwell himself, in his 2009 *New Yorker* [essay \[2\]](#) "How David Beats Goliath.") So I would break Gladwell's question of whether social media solved a problem that actually needed solving into two parts: Do social media allow insurgents to adopt new strategies? And have those strategies ever been crucial? Here, the historical record of the last decade is unambiguous: yes, and yes.

Digital networks have acted as a massive positive supply shock to the cost and spread of information, to the ease and range of public speech by citizens, and to the speed and scale of group coordination. As Gladwell has noted elsewhere, these changes do not allow otherwise uncommitted groups to take effective political action. They do, however, allow committed groups to play by new rules.

It would be impossible to tell the story of Philippine President Joseph Estrada's 2000 downfall without talking about how texting allowed Filipinos to coordinate at a speed and on a scale not available with other media. Similarly, the supporters of Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero used text messaging to coordinate the 2004 ouster of the People's Party in four days; anticommunist Moldovans used social media in 2009 to turn out 20,000 protesters in just 36 hours; the South Koreans who rallied against beef imports in 2008 took their grievances directly to the public, sharing text, photos, and video online, without needing permission from the state or help from professional media. Chinese anticorruption protesters use the instant-messaging service QQ the same way today. All these actions relied on the power of social media to synchronize the behavior of groups quickly, cheaply, and publicly, in ways that were unavailable as recently as a decade ago.

As I noted in my original essay, this does not mean insurgents always prevail. Both the Green Movement and the Red Shirt protesters used novel strategies to organize, but the willingness of the Iranian and Thai governments to kill their own citizens proved an adequate defense of the status quo. Given the increased vigor of state reaction in the world today, it is not clear what new equilibriums between states and their citizens will look like. (I believe that, as with the printing press, the current changes will result in a net improvement for democracy; the scholars Evgeny Morozov and Rebecca MacKinnon, among others, dispute this view.)

Even the increased sophistication and force of state reaction, however, underline the basic point: these tools alter the dynamics of the public sphere. Where the state prevails, it is only by reacting to citizens' ability to be more publicly vocal and to coordinate more rapidly and on a larger scale than before these tools existed.

CLAY SHIRKY is Professor of New Media at New York University and the author of *Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age*.

Copyright © 2002-2010 by the Council on Foreign Relations, Inc.

All rights reserved. To request permission to distribute or reprint this article, please fill out and submit a [Permissions Request Form](#). If you plan to use this article in a coursepack or academic website, visit [Copyright Clearance Center](#) to clear permission.

---

**Return to Article:** <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67325/malcolm-gladwell-and-clay-shirky/from-innovation-to-revolution>  
[Home](#) > [Response](#) > [From Innovation to Revolution](#)

**Links:**

[1] [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa\\_fact\\_gladwell](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell)

[2] [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/05/11/090511fa\\_fact\\_gladwell](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2009/05/11/090511fa_fact_gladwell)

[Print](#)

Tuesday, February 22, 2011 1:51 PM GMT

## Social Media sites like Twitter deserve Nobel for pro-democracy protests in Egypt, Libya & China?

By Samyuktha Krishnappa

Even as the discussion over whistleblower website WikiLeaks' 2011 Nobel Prize run continues, there seems to be another internet-based contender emerging strong for the next year's Peace Prize race. Internet - specifically social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter - have emerged as the global champions for facilitating the pro-democracy protests across the Middle East, North Africa and now in the Asian giant China between 2010-end and early-2011.

Social media helped advocates of democracy organize widespread protests across the Arab World, consequently attracting the ire of the authorities. As internet and electronic communication came under censorship across the protests-hit nations, there was a global uproar against the steps taken to gag freedom of expression.

In attempt to overthrow autocrats, Arab World raises concerns on freedom and rights Democracy, human rights, freedom of expression have all come to the forefront in the wake of the attempted communication blockade during the anti-government protests in Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Iran, Libya among other Arab World nations.

The latest country to join the wave of protests inspired by Tunisian 'Jasmine Revolution' is China, where the authorities managed to muzzle the uprising even before it took off.

Tunisia uprising began in 2010 and ended successfully with the ouster of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. The revolution sparked off a wave of anti-government protests in Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Iran, Libya among other Arab World nations. The Egyptian movement against President Hosni Mubarak also ended in success after less than twenty days of protests.

But before the resignation of the President came the ugly face of government crackdown which included the January 28 internet blackout in Egypt. Learning that the uprising was organized through platforms like Twitter and Facebook, the Egyptian authorities blocked internet, besides disrupting mobile phone services in a bid to thwart the dissidence. With the demonstrators of the other countries also following the footsteps of the Egyptian protests, all the other countries that were hit by the pro-democracy protests also imitated the Egyptian authorities. Iran sabotaged the opposition-fueled protests by slowing down broadband speeds, jamming mobile services, and blocking websites by keyword filtering. Iran, Yemen and Bahrain intensified the communication blockade by gagging the mainstream media as well.

China joined the list of Tunisia-inspired countries on Sunday when activists called for a 'Jasmine' revolution, which was also planned and organised online. It was, however, suppressed within two hours after police and security forces descended at the discussed protest sites ahead of the demonstrators. Although the Tunisia-inspired revolt wilted, it intensified the concerns on the freedom of expression besides stringent security review of the internet in countries such as Iran, North Korea and China.

**The Nobel Committee's beliefs: Democracy, Freedom of Expression takes center-stage**

Democracy and related issues of freedom of expression and human rights have always taken the center-stage for the Norwegian Nobel Committee, which chose to award the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize to the Liu Xiaobo "for his long and non-violent struggle for fundamental human rights in China." Xiabo was awarded with world's top accolade despite strong opposition from the communist country which sees pro-democracy and human rights activists as dissidents.

"The Norwegian Nobel Committee has long believed that there is a close connection between human rights and peace. Such rights are a prerequisite for the "fraternity between nations" of which Alfred Nobel wrote in his will," the [Norwegian Nobel Committee said in a statement](#).

Keeping in line with these beliefs of the Nobel Committee, a [Norwegian parliamentarian nominated anti-secrecy website WikiLeaks for the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize](#). Justifying his choice in a blog post, Snorre Valen said WikiLeaks was "one of the most important contributors to freedom of speech and transparency."

"It is always easier to support freedom of speech when the one who speaks agree with you politically. This is one of the "tests" on liberal and democratic values that governments tend to fail. For instance, western governments have a long history on tolerating oppressive regimes that are "friendly-minded". Internet companies assist China in censoring search engines. And many countries respond to Wikileaks' obvious right to publish material that is of public interest, by seeking to "shoot the messenger"," Snorre Valen, a member of the Socialist Left party, begins his blog post, titled 'Why I nominated WikiLeaks for the Nobel Peace Prize'.

In fact, Twitter was considered for the honor in 2009 for its help in facilitating communications during election protests in Iran.

### **How social media championed democracy**

Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube among others have been the backbone of the protests spanning across the Middle East, North Africa and Asia.

The Egyptian protest took off with the [April 6 Youth Movement](#) on Facebook. In Bahrain, [True Royal Democracy](#) followed on Facebook, while in Iran, Activist Saeed Valadbaygi maintained a commentary on the protests on the social networking site, called [Revolutionary Road by Saeed Valadbaygi](#).

Libyan protesters used Twitter to organize protests with hashtags like #Feb 17. Chinese organizers posted on sites such as Boxun.com as well as Twitter with hashtags like #cn220.

Popular video and photo sharing websites such as YouTube and Flickr became the grounds for people to post reports on the ground realities of the protests. These outlets rose to prominence due to the fact that the authorities also tried to gag local and international media.

Social media, therefore, served two purposes by assisting the mobilization of the protests besides acting as a credible outlet for information from the countries while the consequent censorship brought up world-wide concerns on freedom of expression. Even the United States, which portrays itself as the biggest supporter of democracy and the protector of freedom of expression, mulled an 'internet kill switch' in the wake of the Egyptian revolt.

However, following the crackdown in Iran, the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton vowed to push for global Internet freedom.

"There is a debate underway in some circles about whether the Internet is a force for liberation or repression. But as the events in Iran, Egypt and elsewhere have shown, that debate is largely beside the point," Clinton said.

In the wake of the Sunday unrest, even China has been forced to call for 'a system of public opinion guidance on the Internet.' In a speech, President Hu Jintao called on the nation to "enhance and complete management of information on the Internet" and to "establish a system of public opinion guidance on the Internet."

Political rhetoric and motives aside, internet continues to play a dominant role in the fabric of society. Friend to the common-man, foe to the authorities, Internet and Social Media make a strong case for themselves for the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize.

# THE Nation.

Published on *The Nation* (<http://www.thenation.com>)

## Can Egypt's Internet Movement Be Exported?

Ari Melber | February 18, 2011

“Official Washington had no appetite for regime change in Egypt,” notes Evgeny Morozov, a leading skeptic of the power of digital uprisings, “while Silicon Valley managed to contribute to undermining Mubarak.”

As the world has now seen, the resilient protestors who gathered in Cairo were continuously broadcast, and often organized, through social networks built in Palo Alto. Yet Morozov, an author and agitator who has met with democracy activists in Cairo, cautions against downloading the wrong lessons from Egypt, as he recently explained in an interview with *The Nation*.

Egypt's transformation does not illuminate our understanding of how most dictators combat web uprisings, he argues, because Egypt did not really fight the web in the first place.

“Egypt hasn't been trying to control the web all that much,” Morozov says, “other than beating up bloggers.” He has a point. Mubarak's crackdown on the Internet was tardy, clumsy and counterproductive. [Shutting down the web two days into the uprising](#) [1], Mubarak was too late to disrupt the virtual networks materializing in the streets, yet the extreme measure revealed his regime's panic. Likewise, the decision to abduct Wael Ghonim, the activist Google executive, after his Facebook group topped 300,000 people revealed little comprehension of social media. Choosing to target Ghonim, of all people, ensured a large, networked constituency would follow the prominent case – both within and beyond the country. (Over 860,000 people now back the [Arabic Facebook group](#) [2] he started, with another 85,000 following its [English counterpart](#) [3]). Many other dictators, however, are savvier than Mubarak.

From Iran to China, authoritarian governments have already modernized their oppressive systems with proactive online filtering, censorship and other thuggery. [China filters individual content](#) [4], scrubbing reports of protests from the web, while [Iran](#) [5] has blocked entire websites, including Facebook, the *Huffington Post* and blogging platforms like LiveJournal. Just this week, [Iran cracked down further](#) [6] on opposition websites and mobile phone service, after a wave of protests spread from Egypt's example. Egyptian protestors' effective use of social media may not be very replicable elsewhere, applying Morozov's theory, because its wired uprising snowballed within a country still operating on a “19th century kind of authoritarianism.” Most reformers in the region must battle an upgraded authoritarianism that is already weaponizing the web, a central warning in Morozov's new book, *The Net Delusion*. The methodical tome is a skeptical assault on “Internet Freedom,” and after Egypt's revolution, it's drawing [attention from diplomats and organizers](#) [7] on both sides of the dictator divide.

Morozov critiques “Internet-centrism” – the tendency to focus more on visible technological tactics than recondite root causes – and unloads on just about every smart-sounding bromide you've ever heard about the web reforming politics or repressive regimes. Social networks do not just help dissidents fight their

dictatorships, he warns, they also help dictatorships track and arrest their dissidents. The US State Department is not simply tapping the wisdom of tech companies to inform foreign policy, it risks being undermined as these firms erect a parallel diplomacy made of code, not cables. The U.S. talks about new training programs for a few digital activists [8] in the Middle East, Morozov acidly observes, but it could do more for freedom if it stopped training and giving aid to a few dictators in the same neighborhood.

The same transparent, accessible online organizing tools that enable activists to publicize and share information about protests can be used by authoritarian regimes to track and crack down on those getting involved. Pictures from Iran's 2009 protests spread online in real time, and drew pivotal attention to the nation's unrest. Yet months later, the Iranian police used 38 of those close-up photos, he reports, to help Iranians identify dozens of their fellow citizens. Those activists were then arrested, based on some of their own grassroots agitprop. Thus Iran melds citizen informants, a traditional authoritarian tool, with the latest in crowdsourcing, turning benign photos from a protestors' cell phone into another source of intimidation.

The strongest policy argument in *The Net Delusion*, however, is not about the innovation of oppression or trendy skepticism towards web activism (see Gladwell, Malcolm [9].) It is the unconventional and welcome call for the US government to reassess its rosy view of the prized technology sector, which is now yoked to the geopolitics of several democracy uprisings.

Related issues at the State Department are piling up: The Obama administration has been leading corporate tech delegations to tout innovation in the Middle East; one American diplomat famously bragged about successfully convincing Twitter to reschedule site maintenance during the Iranian protests, implying a nationalistic bent to a supposedly neutral platform, and Hillary Clinton touts cyberdiplomats practicing "21st Century Statecraft," an adjunct team that operates, according to Morozov, without the traditional "oversight" at Foggy Bottom. This week, she doubled down on the agenda with a major address on "Internet Rights and Wrongs [10]," which touted social media platforms and called out Syria and Iran as online oppressors, but failed to mention the censorship [8] of an American ally like Saudi Arabia.

This approach is technological "naiveté," Morozov warns, and the U.S. may wind up with the short ends of two different sticks. After Egypt, foreign governments may cynically view our tech agenda as a soft launch for regime change. Meanwhile, he argues, American tech companies still care more about free markets than free people. Thus the country takes a hit for playing tough, when it's actually getting played.

"For Facebook," Morozov posits, "getting into China matters much more than saving Egypt or Tunisia." He finds it odd that anyone expect a company "run by venture capitalists" to promote "freedom and human rights."

Here it is crucial, especially for activists and policymakers, to distinguish between Facebook *the company* and Facebook *the platform*.

Egyptians used the platform because Facebook was a popular way to demonstrate support for demonstrations – it has more users in Egypt than any other Middle Eastern country. They did not use it because the company backed the uprising or the right to assemble. Quite the opposite. As a company, Facebook's rules and architecture *actually impeded* organizers in Egypt. And its corporate policy is lukewarm on reform.

"The turmoil in Egypt is a matter for the Egyptian people and their government to resolve," Facebook noted in a meek statement on the seventh day of protests. Then, worse than rhetoric and neglected in recent media coverage, the company actually shut down one of the top Egyptian protest groups in December. The group's administrators were using pseudonyms to avoid government retaliation [11], according to Harvard researcher Jillian York, a violation of Facebook's rules. One of those anonymous administrators turned out to be Ghonim, the Google executive who was later abducted. At the time, the

group's supporters protested Facebook and got it reinstated; soon they were back to protesting much bigger adversaries.

That was not an isolated skirmish for Facebook as a company. In contrast to Google, Facebook has refused to sign the [Global Network Initiative](#) [12], a compact devoted to preventing web censorship by authoritarian governments and protecting individual privacy, based on the standards in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (Both of those goals cut into the profits generated from doing business in closed societies and monetizing users' information.) It is technically possible, of course, [for Facebook to require Westerners](#) [13] to use their real identities, while affording some protection to users risking their lives to fight police states. So far, the company has usually declined.

These are key tradeoffs, especially as the pseudo-public forums of privately held companies play a pivotal role in international uprisings. Lately, a lot of Western media commentary has focused on the fashionable question of whether Egypt was (or wasn't!) a digital uprising, as if apportioning the proper people-to-tech ratio for credit is an urgent priority. For reformers and governments, however, the core policy questions are closer to Morozov's concerns, even if his book is more of a dystopian warning than a white paper. After all, in asymmetric conflicts between oppressive regimes and the people whom they oppress, it is no surprise that the authoritarians will try to refract innovations for their agenda. What is striking, instead, is that when facing down Goliath, some protestors found a hole to exploit before their oppressors caught up.

In the end, one can point to many factors that helped trigger Egypt's uprising. The big ones are obviously "offline," real-world social conditions. There is also no doubt, however, that another trigger was the threat of a citizen turning the tools of surveillance back on the state: The martyred Khaled Said had video of police corruption in June, when Egyptian police grabbed him from an Internet café and beat him to death. In turn, the *sousveillance* of Said's corpse was another trigger, as illicit pictures of his disfigured face, snapped on a cellphone in the morgue, went viral online. And then came the Facebook trigger: First Ghonim helped form the famous solidarity group as a riposte to those pictures. Then other groups responded, and helped spread the street protests. In each of those cases, the trigger was a network – the mere threat of using one, or the act of growing one to mobilize more people. The answer to whether Egypt-style uprisings succeed in other countries will depend, at least in part, on how those networks are operated by American companies, and how they respond to pressure from governments around the world.

**Source URL:** <http://www.thenation.com/article/158717/can-egypts-internet-movement-be-exported>

#### Links:

[1] <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/16/technology/16internet.html?src=busln>

[2] <http://www.facebook.com/ElShaheed>

[3] <http://www.facebook.com/elshaheed.co.uk>

[4] <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/china>

[5] <http://opennet.net/research/profiles/iran>

[6] <http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/113449/20110217/iran-protests-pro-democracy-anti-government-internet-media-egypt-tunisia-hillary-clinton-broadband-c.htm>

[7] <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/01/135519.htm>

[8] <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-12475829>

[9] <http://techpresident.com/blog-entry/malcolm-gladwell-does-egypt>

[10] <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/02/156619.htm>

[11] <http://jilliancyork.com/2011/01/27/how-are-protestors-in-egypt-using-social-media/>

[12] <http://www.globalnetworkinitiative.org/>

[13] <http://gawker.com/#!5752904>



← Back to Original Article

## In Tunisia, social media are main source of news about protests

*Despite strict censorship, protesters, aided by activists outside the country, are using blogs, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other online media to mobilize and spread information.*

January 15, 2011 | By Nathan Olivarez-Giles, Los Angeles Times

In Tunisia's state of unrest, protesters are using blogs, Facebook, Twitter, WikiLeaks documents, YouTube and other methods to mobilize and report on what is going on.

The weeks of demonstrations, including the deaths of at least three and as many as 20 people, have been largely ignored by the majority of media outlets until recent days.

The Internet has been the largest source of news about the protests, and much of it has been provided by the demonstrators themselves, despite Tunisia's strict censorship of the Web.

Given the nature of the Internet, information about the protests ranges from propaganda to documenting the reality on the streets.

More than 3,000 videos on YouTube have been tagged with the words, "Sidi Bouzid," the city where many of the protests have taken place and where Mohamed Bouazizi, 26, engulfed himself in flames last month after police seized his unlicensed produce stand and left him out of work and unable to find a job.

Thousands of tweets have been sent about the protests, so many that "Tunisia" was a trending topic in San Francisco early Friday.

"We might be able to provide thoughtful analysis after all the events of Tunisia unfold," said Carolyn Penner, a Twitter spokeswoman.

"But, right now, along with the rest of the world, we sit back and watch in awe at how people are using Twitter and other platforms to provide on-the-ground perspective during this highly developing and potentially historical moment," she said.

Despite rigid censorship, the protesters have been aided by such external online activists as the collective known as Anonymous, according to the blog NDItech DemocracyWorks.

"Allies of the regime have reportedly engaged equally enthusiastically, utilizing phishing, censoring and hacking against activists," said the nonprofit group, which advocates for democracy worldwide.

Social media in particular have been a major battleground between the government and those demonstrating against it.

The "hactivist" group Anonymous has sided with protesters in Tunisia and posted multiple videos on YouTube about the situation, including graphic images of violence.

Some warn against giving the Web and blog groups too much credit, especially for prompting President Zine el Abidine ben Ali to flee. He had been in power for more than two decades and was a major focus of about four weeks of massive demonstrations against widespread unemployment and corruption in the African country.

Laila Lalami, a Moroccan writer based in Los Angeles, wrote on Twitter, "Please stop trying to give credit to WikiLeaks, or Twitter, or YouTube for the toppling of Ben Ali. The Tunisian people did it."

Later, she tweeted, "The Internet facilitates communication, but it alone doesn't keep people in the streets for four weeks."

*nathan.olivarezgiles@latimes.com*

FREE GIFT

WITH YOUR SUBSCRIPTION

**THE Clash of  
Civilizations?  
THE DEBATE**

Subscribe to *Foreign Affairs*  
Join the Debate With This Digital Reprint



**FOREIGN  
AFFAIRS**

Published by the Council on Foreign Relations

January/February 2011

ESSAY

## The Political Power of Social Media

Technology, the Public Sphere, and Political Change

Clay Shirky

*CLAY SHIRKY is Professor of New Media at New York University and the author of [Cognitive Surplus: Creativity and Generosity in a Connected Age](#) [1].*

On January 17, 2001, during the impeachment trial of Philippine President Joseph Estrada, loyalists in the Philippine Congress voted to set aside key evidence against him. Less than two hours after the decision was announced, thousands of Filipinos, angry that their corrupt president might be let off the hook, converged on Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, a major crossroads in Manila. The protest was arranged, in part, by forwarded text messages reading, "Go 2 EDSA. Wear blk." The crowd quickly swelled, and in the next few days, over a million people arrived, choking traffic in downtown Manila.

The public's ability to coordinate such a massive and rapid response -- close to seven million text messages were sent that week -- so alarmed the country's legislators that they reversed course and allowed the evidence to be presented. Estrada's fate was sealed; by January 20, he was gone. The event marked the first time that social media had helped force out a national leader. Estrada himself blamed "the text-messaging generation" for his downfall.



Since the rise of the Internet in the early 1990s, the world's networked population has grown from the low millions to the low billions. Over the same period, social media have become a fact of life for civil society worldwide, involving many actors -- regular citizens, activists, nongovernmental organizations, telecommunications firms, software providers, governments. This raises an obvious question for the U.S. government: How does the ubiquity of social media affect U.S. interests, and how should U.S. policy respond to it?

As the communications landscape gets denser, more complex, and more participatory, the networked population is gaining greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action. In the political arena, as the

protests in Manila demonstrated, these increased freedoms can help loosely coordinated publics demand change.

The Philippine strategy has been adopted many times since. In some cases, the protesters ultimately succeeded, as in Spain in 2004, when demonstrations organized by text messaging led to the quick ouster of Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar, who had inaccurately blamed the Madrid transit bombings on Basque separatists. The Communist Party lost power in Moldova in 2009 when massive protests coordinated in part by text message, Facebook, and Twitter broke out after an obviously fraudulent election. Around the world, the Catholic Church has faced lawsuits over its harboring of child rapists, a process that started when *The Boston Globe's* 2002 exposé of sexual abuse in the church went viral online in a matter of hours.

There are, however, many examples of the activists failing, as in Belarus in March 2006, when street protests (arranged in part by e-mail) against President Aleksandr Lukashenko's alleged vote rigging swelled, then faltered, leaving Lukashenko more determined than ever to control social media. During the June 2009 uprising of the Green Movement in Iran, activists used every possible technological coordinating tool to protest the miscount of votes for Mir Hossein Mousavi but were ultimately brought to heel by a violent crackdown. The Red Shirt uprising in Thailand in 2010 followed a similar but quicker path: protesters savvy with social media occupied downtown Bangkok until the Thai government dispersed the protesters, killing dozens.

The use of social media tools -- text messaging, e-mail, photo sharing, social networking, and the like -- does not have a single preordained outcome. Therefore, attempts to outline their effects on political action are too often reduced to dueling anecdotes. If you regard the failure of the Belarusian protests to oust Lukashenko as paradigmatic, you will regard the Moldovan experience as an outlier, and vice versa. Empirical work on the subject is also hard to come by, in part because these tools are so new and in part because relevant examples are so rare. The safest characterization of recent quantitative attempts to answer the question, Do digital tools enhance democracy? (such as those by Jacob Groshek and Philip Howard) is that these tools probably do not hurt in the short run and might help in the long run -- and that they have the most dramatic effects in states where a public sphere already constrains the actions of the government.

Despite this mixed record, social media have become coordinating tools for nearly all of the world's political movements, just as most of the world's authoritarian governments (and, alarmingly, an increasing number of democratic ones) are trying to limit access to it. In response, the U.S. State Department has committed itself to "Internet freedom" as a specific policy aim. Arguing for the right of people to use the Internet freely is an appropriate policy for the United States, both because it aligns with the strategic goal of strengthening civil society worldwide and because it resonates with American beliefs about freedom of expression. But attempts to yoke the idea of Internet freedom to short-term goals -- particularly ones that are country-specific or are intended to help particular dissident groups or encourage regime change -- are likely to be ineffective on average. And when they fail, the consequences can be serious.

Although the story of Estrada's ouster and other similar events have led observers to focus on the power of mass protests to topple governments, the potential of social media lies mainly in their support of civil society and the public sphere -- change measured in years and decades rather than weeks or months. The U.S. government should maintain Internet freedom as a goal to be pursued in a principled and regime-neutral fashion, not as a tool for effecting immediate policy aims country by country. It should likewise assume that progress will be incremental and, unsurprisingly, slowest in the most authoritarian regimes.

## THE PERILS OF INTERNET FREEDOM

In January 2010, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton outlined how the United States would promote Internet freedom abroad. She emphasized several kinds of freedom, including the freedom to access information (such as the ability to use Wikipedia and Google inside Iran), the freedom of ordinary citizens to produce their own public media (such as the rights of Burmese activists to blog), and the freedom of citizens to converse with one another (such as the Chinese public's capacity to use instant messaging without interference).

Most notably, Clinton announced funding for the development of tools designed to reopen access to the Internet in countries that restrict it. This "instrumental" approach to Internet freedom concentrates on preventing states from censoring outside Web sites, such as Google, YouTube, or that of *The New York Times*. It focuses only secondarily on public speech by citizens and least of all on private or social uses of digital media. According to this vision, Washington can and should deliver rapid, directed responses to censorship by authoritarian regimes.

The instrumental view is politically appealing, action-oriented, and almost certainly wrong. It overestimates the value of broadcast media while underestimating the value of media that allow citizens to communicate privately among themselves. It overestimates the value of access to information, particularly information hosted in the West, while underestimating the value of tools for local coordination. And it overestimates the importance of computers while underestimating the importance of simpler tools, such as cell phones.

The instrumental approach can also be dangerous. Consider the debacle around the proposed censorship-circumvention software known as Haystack, which, according to its developer, was meant to be a "one-to-one match for how the [Iranian] regime implements censorship." The tool was widely praised in Washington; the U.S. government even granted it an export license. But the program was never carefully vetted, and when security experts examined it, it turned out that it not only failed at its goal of hiding messages from governments but also made it, in the words of one analyst, "possible for an adversary to specifically pinpoint individual users." In contrast, one of the most successful anti-censorship software programs, Freegate, has received little support from the United States, partly because of ordinary bureaucratic delays and partly because the U.S. government is wary of damaging U.S.-Chinese relations: the tool was originally created by Falun Gong, the spiritual movement that the Chinese government has called "an evil cult." The challenges of Freegate and Haystack demonstrate how difficult it is to weaponize social media to pursue country-specific and near-term policy goals.

New media conducive to fostering participation can indeed increase the freedoms Clinton outlined, just as the printing press, the postal service, the telegraph, and the telephone did before. One complaint about the idea of new media as a political force is that most people simply use these tools for commerce, social life, or self-distraction, but this is common to all forms of media. Far more people in the 1500s were reading erotic novels than Martin Luther's "Ninety-five Theses," and far more people before the American Revolution were reading *Poor Richard's Almanack* than the work of the Committees of Correspondence. But those political works still had an enormous political effect.

Just as Luther adopted the newly practical printing press to protest against the Catholic Church, and the American revolutionaries synchronized their beliefs using the postal service that Benjamin Franklin had designed, today's dissident movements will use any means possible to frame their views and coordinate their actions; it would be impossible to describe the Moldovan Communist Party's loss of Parliament after the 2009 elections without

discussing the use of cell phones and online tools by its opponents to mobilize. Authoritarian governments stifle communication among their citizens because they fear, correctly, that a better-coordinated populace would constrain their ability to act without oversight.

Despite this basic truth -- that communicative freedom is good for political freedom -- the instrumental mode of Internet statecraft is still problematic. It is difficult for outsiders to understand the local conditions of dissent. External support runs the risk of tainting even peaceful opposition as being directed by foreign elements. Dissidents can be exposed by the unintended effects of novel tools. A government's demands for Internet freedom abroad can vary from country to country, depending on the importance of the relationship, leading to cynicism about its motives.

The more promising way to think about social media is as long-term tools that can strengthen civil society and the public sphere. In contrast to the instrumental view of Internet freedom, this can be called the "environmental" view. According to this conception, positive changes in the life of a country, including pro-democratic regime change, follow, rather than precede, the development of a strong public sphere. This is not to say that popular movements will not successfully use these tools to discipline or even oust their governments, but rather that U.S. attempts to direct such uses are likely to do more harm than good. Considered in this light, Internet freedom is a long game, to be conceived of and supported not as a separate agenda but merely as an important input to the more fundamental political freedoms.

#### THE THEATER OF COLLAPSE

Any discussion of political action in repressive regimes must take into account the astonishing fall of communism in 1989 in eastern Europe and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Throughout the Cold War, the United States invested in a variety of communications tools, including broadcasting the Voice of America radio station, hosting an American pavilion in Moscow (home of the famous Nixon-Khrushchev "kitchen debate"), and smuggling Xerox machines behind the Iron Curtain to aid the underground press, or samizdat. Yet despite this emphasis on communications, the end of the Cold War was triggered not by a defiant uprising of Voice of America listeners but by economic change. As the price of oil fell while that of wheat spiked, the Soviet model of selling expensive oil to buy cheap wheat stopped working. As a result, the Kremlin was forced to secure loans from the West, loans that would have been put at risk had the government intervened militarily in the affairs of non-Russian states. In 1989, one could argue, the ability of citizens to communicate, considered against the background of macroeconomic forces, was largely irrelevant.

But why, then, did the states behind the Iron Curtain not just let their people starve? After all, the old saying that every country is three meals away from revolution turned out to be sadly incorrect in the twentieth century; it is possible for leaders to survive even when millions die. Stalin did it in the 1930s, Mao did it in the 1960s, and Kim Jong Il has done it more than once in the last two decades. But the difference between those cases and the 1989 revolutions was that the leaders of East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and the rest faced civil societies strong enough to resist. The weekly demonstrations in East Germany, the Charter 77 civic movement in Czechoslovakia, and the Solidarity movement in Poland all provided visible governments in waiting.

The ability of these groups to create and disseminate literature and political documents, even with simple photocopiers, provided a visible alternative to the communist regimes. For large groups of citizens in these countries, the political and, even more important, economic bankruptcy of the government was no longer an open secret but a

public fact. This made it difficult and then impossible for the regimes to order their troops to take on such large groups.

Thus, it was a shift in the balance of power between the state and civil society that led to the largely peaceful collapse of communist control. The state's ability to use violence had been weakened, and the civil society that would have borne the brunt of its violence had grown stronger. When civil society triumphed, many of the people who had articulated opposition to the communist regimes -- such as Tadeusz Mazowiecki in Poland and Václav Havel in Czechoslovakia -- became the new political leaders of those countries. Communications tools during the Cold War did not cause governments to collapse, but they helped the people take power from the state when it was weak.

The idea that media, from the Voice of America to samizdat, play a supporting role in social change by strengthening the public sphere echoes the historical role of the printing press. As the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas argued in his 1962 book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, the printing press helped democratize Europe by providing space for discussion and agreement among politically engaged citizens, often before the state had fully democratized, an argument extended by later scholars, such as Asa Briggs, Elizabeth Eisenstein, and Paul Starr.

Political freedom has to be accompanied by a civil society literate enough and densely connected enough to discuss the issues presented to the public. In a famous study of political opinion after the 1948 U.S. presidential election, the sociologists Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld discovered that mass media alone do not change people's minds; instead, there is a two-step process. Opinions are first transmitted by the media, and then they get echoed by friends, family members, and colleagues. It is in this second, social step that political opinions are formed. This is the step in which the Internet in general, and social media in particular, can make a difference. As with the printing press, the Internet spreads not just media consumption but media production as well -- it allows people to privately and publicly articulate and debate a welter of conflicting views.

A slowly developing public sphere, where public opinion relies on both media and conversation, is the core of the environmental view of Internet freedom. As opposed to the self-aggrandizing view that the West holds the source code for democracy -- and if it were only made accessible, the remaining autocratic states would crumble -- the environmental view assumes that little political change happens without the dissemination and adoption of ideas and opinions in the public sphere. Access to information is far less important, politically, than access to conversation. Moreover, a public sphere is more likely to emerge in a society as a result of people's dissatisfaction with matters of economics or day-to-day governance than from their embrace of abstract political ideals.

To take a contemporary example, the Chinese government today is in more danger of being forced to adopt democratic norms by middle-class members of the ethnic Han majority demanding less corrupt local governments than it is by Uighurs or Tibetans demanding autonomy. Similarly, the One Million Signatures Campaign, an Iranian women's rights movement that focuses on the repeal of laws inimical to women, has been more successful in liberalizing the behavior of the Iranian government than the more confrontational Green Movement.

For optimistic observers of public demonstrations, this is weak tea, but both the empirical and the theoretical work suggest that protests, when effective, are the end of a long process, rather than a replacement for it. Any real commitment by the United States to improving political freedom worldwide should concentrate on that process -- which can only occur when there is a strong public sphere.

## THE CONSERVATIVE DILEMMA

Disciplined and coordinated groups, whether businesses or governments, have always had an advantage over undisciplined ones: they have an easier time engaging in collective action because they have an orderly way of directing the action of their members. Social media can compensate for the disadvantages of undisciplined groups by reducing the costs of coordination. The anti-Estrada movement in the Philippines used the ease of sending and forwarding text messages to organize a massive group with no need (and no time) for standard managerial control. As a result, larger, looser groups can now take on some kinds of coordinated action, such as protest movements and public media campaigns, that were previously reserved for formal organizations. For political movements, one of the main forms of coordination is what the military calls "shared awareness," the ability of each member of a group to not only understand the situation at hand but also understand that everyone else does, too. Social media increase shared awareness by propagating messages through social networks. The anti-Aznar protests in Spain gained momentum so quickly precisely because the millions of people spreading the message were not part of a hierarchical organization.

The Chinese anticorruption protests that broke out in the aftermath of the devastating May 2008 earthquake in Sichuan are another example of such ad hoc synchronization. The protesters were parents, particularly mothers, who had lost their only children in the collapse of shoddily built schools, the result of collusion between construction firms and the local government. Before the earthquake, corruption in the country's construction industry was an open secret. But when the schools collapsed, citizens began sharing documentation of the damage and of their protests through social media tools. The consequences of government corruption were made broadly visible, and it went from being an open secret to a public truth.

The Chinese government originally allowed reporting on the post-earthquake protests, but abruptly reversed itself in June. Security forces began arresting protesters and threatening journalists when it became clear that the protesters were demanding real local reform and not merely state reparations. From the government's perspective, the threat was not that citizens were aware of the corruption, which the state could do nothing about in the short run. Beijing was afraid of the possible effects if this awareness became shared: it would have to either enact reforms or respond in a way that would alarm more citizens. After all, the prevalence of camera phones has made it harder to carry out a widespread but undocumented crackdown.

This condition of shared awareness -- which is increasingly evident in all modern states -- creates what is commonly called "the dictator's dilemma" but that might more accurately be described by the phrase coined by the media theorist Briggs: "the conservative dilemma," so named because it applies not only to autocrats but also to democratic governments and to religious and business leaders. The dilemma is created by new media that increase public access to speech or assembly; with the spread of such media, whether photocopiers or Web browsers, a state accustomed to having a monopoly on public speech finds itself called to account for anomalies between its view of events and the public's. The two responses to the conservative dilemma are censorship and propaganda. But neither of these is as effective a source of control as the enforced silence of the citizens. The state will censor critics or produce propaganda as it needs to, but both of those actions have higher costs than simply not having any critics to silence or reply to in the first place. But if a government were to shut down Internet access or ban cell phones, it would risk radicalizing otherwise pro-regime citizens or harming the economy.

The conservative dilemma exists in part because political speech and apolitical speech are not mutually exclusive. Many of the South Korean teenage girls who turned out in Seoul's Cheonggyecheon Park in 2008 to protest U.S. beef

imports were radicalized in the discussion section of a Web site dedicated to Dong Bang Shin Ki, a South Korean boy band. DBSK is not a political group, and the protesters were not typical political actors. But that online community, with around 800,000 active members, amplified the second step of Katz and Lazarsfeld's two-step process by allowing members to form political opinions through conversation.

Popular culture also heightens the conservative dilemma by providing cover for more political uses of social media. Tools specifically designed for dissident use are politically easy for the state to shut down, whereas tools in broad use become much harder to censor without risking politicizing the larger group of otherwise apolitical actors. Ethan Zuckerman of Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet and Society calls this "the cute cat theory of digital activism." Specific tools designed to defeat state censorship (such as proxy servers) can be shut down with little political penalty, but broader tools that the larger population uses to, say, share pictures of cute cats are harder to shut down.

For these reasons, it makes more sense to invest in social media as general, rather than specifically political, tools to promote self-governance. The norm of free speech is inherently political and far from universally shared. To the degree that the United States makes free speech a first-order goal, it should expect that goal to work relatively well in democratic countries that are allies, less well in undemocratic countries that are allies, and least of all in undemocratic countries that are not allies. But nearly every country in the world desires economic growth. Since governments jeopardize that growth when they ban technologies that can be used for both political and economic coordination, the United States should rely on countries' economic incentives to allow widespread media use. In other words, the U.S. government should work for conditions that increase the conservative dilemma, appealing to states' self-interest rather than the contentious virtue of freedom, as a way to create or strengthen countries' public spheres.

## SOCIAL MEDIA SKEPTICISM

There are, broadly speaking, two arguments against the idea that social media will make a difference in national politics. The first is that the tools are themselves ineffective, and the second is that they produce as much harm to democratization as good, because repressive governments are becoming better at using these tools to suppress dissent.

The critique of ineffectiveness, most recently [offered](#) [2] by Malcolm Gladwell in *The New Yorker*, concentrates on examples of what has been termed "slacktivism," whereby casual participants seek social change through low-cost activities, such as joining Facebook's "Save Darfur" group, that are long on bumper-sticker sentiment and short on any useful action. The critique is correct but not central to the question of social media's power; the fact that barely committed actors cannot click their way to a better world does not mean that committed actors cannot use social media effectively. Recent protest movements -- including a movement against fundamentalist vigilantes in India in 2009, the beef protests in South Korea in 2008, and protests against education laws in Chile in 2006 -- have used social media not as a replacement for real-world action but as a way to coordinate it. As a result, all of those protests exposed participants to the threat of violence, and in some cases its actual use. In fact, the adoption of these tools (especially cell phones) as a way to coordinate and document real-world action is so ubiquitous that it will probably be a part of all future political movements.

This obviously does not mean that every political movement that uses these tools will succeed, because the state has not lost the power to react. This points to the second, and much more serious, critique of social media as tools for political improvement -- namely, that the state is gaining increasingly sophisticated means of monitoring,



interdicting, or co-opting these tools. The use of social media, the scholars Rebecca MacKinnon of the New America Foundation and Evgeny Morozov of the Open Society Institute have argued, is just as likely to strengthen authoritarian regimes as it is to weaken them. The Chinese government has spent considerable effort perfecting several systems for controlling political threats from social media. The least important of these is its censorship and surveillance program. Increasingly, the government recognizes that threats to its legitimacy are coming from inside the state and that blocking the Web site of *The New York Times* does little to prevent grieving mothers from airing their complaints about corruption.

The Chinese system has evolved from a relatively simple filter of incoming Internet traffic in the mid-1990s to a sophisticated operation that not only limits outside information but also uses arguments about nationalism and public morals to encourage operators of Chinese Web services to censor their users and users to censor themselves. Because its goal is to prevent information from having politically synchronizing effects, the state does not need to censor the Internet comprehensively; rather, it just needs to minimize access to information.

Authoritarian states are increasingly shutting down their communications grids to deny dissidents the ability to coordinate in real time and broadcast documentation of an event. This strategy also activates the conservative dilemma, creating a short-term risk of alerting the population at large to political conflict. When the government of Bahrain banned Google Earth after an annotated map of the royal family's annexation of public land began circulating, the effect was to alert far more Bahrainis to the offending map than knew about it originally. So widely did the news spread that the government relented and reopened access after four days.

Such shutdowns become more problematic for governments if they are long-lived. When antigovernment protesters occupied Bangkok in the summer of 2010, their physical presence disrupted Bangkok's shopping district, but the state's reaction, cutting off significant parts of the Thai telecommunications infrastructure, affected people far from the capital. The approach creates an additional dilemma for the state -- there can be no modern economy without working phones -- and so its ability to shut down communications over large areas or long periods is constrained.

In the most extreme cases, the use of social media tools is a matter of life and death, as with the proposed death sentence for the blogger Hossein Derakhshan in Iran (since commuted to 19 and a half years in prison) or the suspicious hanging death of Oleg Bebenin, the founder of the Belarusian opposition Web site Charter 97. Indeed, the best practical reason to think that social media can help bring political change is that both dissidents and governments think they can. All over the world, activists believe in the utility of these tools and take steps to use them accordingly. And the governments they contend with think social media tools are powerful, too, and are willing to harass, arrest, exile, or kill users in response. One way the United States can heighten the conservative dilemma without running afoul of as many political complications is to demand the release of citizens imprisoned for using media in these ways. Anything that constrains the worst threats of violence by the state against citizens using these tools also increases the conservative dilemma.

## LOOKING AT THE LONG RUN

To the degree that the United States pursues Internet freedom as a tool of statecraft, it should de-emphasize anti-censorship tools, particularly those aimed at specific regimes, and increase its support for local public speech and assembly more generally. Access to information is not unimportant, of course, but it is not the primary way social media constrain autocratic rulers or benefit citizens of a democracy. Direct, U.S. government-sponsored support for

specific tools or campaigns targeted at specific regimes risk creating backlash that a more patient and global application of principles will not.

This entails reordering the State Department's Internet freedom goals. Securing the freedom of personal and social communication among a state's population should be the highest priority, closely followed by securing individual citizens' ability to speak in public. This reordering would reflect the reality that it is a strong civil society -- one in which citizens have freedom of assembly -- rather than access to Google or YouTube, that does the most to force governments to serve their citizens.

As a practical example of this, the United States should be at least as worried about Egypt's recent controls on the mandatory licensing of group-oriented text-messaging services as it is about Egypt's attempts to add new restrictions on press freedom. The freedom of assembly that such text-messaging services support is as central to American democratic ideals as is freedom of the press. Similarly, South Korea's requirement that citizens register with their real names for certain Internet services is an attempt to reduce their ability to surprise the state with the kind of coordinated action that took place during the 2008 protest in Seoul. If the United States does not complain as directly about this policy as it does about Chinese censorship, it risks compromising its ability to argue for Internet freedom as a global ideal.

More difficult, but also essential, will be for the U.S. government to articulate a policy of engagement with the private companies and organizations that host the networked public sphere. Services based in the United States, such as Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, and YouTube, and those based overseas, such as QQ (a Chinese instant-messaging service), WikiLeaks (a repository of leaked documents whose servers are in Sweden), Tuenti (a Spanish social network), and Naver (a Korean one), are among the sites used most for political speech, conversation, and coordination. And the world's wireless carriers transmit text messages, photos, and videos from cell phones through those sites. How much can these entities be expected to support freedom of speech and assembly for their users?

The issue here is analogous to the questions about freedom of speech in the United States in private but commercial environments, such as those regarding what kind of protests can be conducted in shopping malls. For good or ill, the platforms supporting the networked public sphere are privately held and run; Clinton committed the United States to working with those companies, but it is unlikely that without some legal framework, as exists for real-world speech and action, moral suasion will be enough to convince commercial actors to support freedom of speech and assembly.

It would be nice to have a flexible set of short-term digital tactics that could be used against different regimes at different times. But the requirements of real-world statecraft mean that what is desirable may not be likely. Activists in both repressive and democratic regimes will use the Internet and related tools to try to effect change in their countries, but Washington's ability to shape or target these changes is limited. Instead, Washington should adopt a more general approach, promoting freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of assembly everywhere. And it should understand that progress will be slow. Only by switching from an instrumental to an environmental view of the effects of social media on the public sphere will the United States be able to take advantage of the long-term benefits these tools promise -- even though that may mean accepting short-term disappointment.

Copyright © 2002-2010 by the Council on Foreign Relations, Inc.

All rights reserved. To request permission to distribute or reprint this article, please fill out and submit a [Permissions Request Form](#). If you plan to use this article in a coursepack or academic website, visit [Copyright Clearance Center](#) to clear permission.

**Return to Article:** <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67038/clay-shirky/the-political-power-of-social-media>

[Home](#) > [Essay](#) > The Political Power of Social Media

Published on *Foreign Affairs* (<http://www.foreignaffairs.com>)

**Links:**

[1] <http://us.penguin.com/nf/Book/BookDisplay/0,,9781594202537,00.html>

[2] [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa\\_fact\\_gladwell](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell)

## Statement: Hillary Clinton on internet freedom

[Print](#)

By Hillary Clinton

Published: January 21 2010 18:59 | Last updated: January 21 2010 18:59

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Remarks by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on Internet Freedom, January 21, 2010

The Newseum, Washington, D.C.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you very much, Alberto, for not only that kind introduction but you and your colleagues' leadership of this important institution. It's a pleasure to be here at the Newseum. The Newseum is a monument to some of our most precious freedoms, and I'm grateful for this opportunity to discuss how those freedoms apply to the challenges of the 21st century.

Although I can't see all of you because in settings like this, the lights are in my eyes and you are in the dark, I know that there are many friends and former colleagues. I wish to acknowledge Charles Overby, the CEO of Freedom Forum here at the Newseum; Senator Richard Lugar\* and Senator Joe Lieberman, my former colleagues in the Senate, both of whom worked for passage of the Voice Act, which speaks to Congress's and the American people's commitment to internet freedom, a commitment that crosses party lines and branches of government.

Also, I'm told here as well are Senator Sam Brownback, Senator Ted Kaufman, Representative Loretta Sanchez, many representatives of the Diplomatic Corps, ambassadors, chargés, participants in our International Visitor Leadership Program on internet freedom from China, Colombia, Iran, and Lebanon, and Moldova. And I also want to acknowledge Walter Isaacson, president of the Aspen Institute, recently named to our Broadcasting Board of Governors and, of course, instrumental in supporting the work on internet freedom that the Aspen Institute has been doing.

This is an important speech on a very important subject. But before I begin, I want to just speak briefly about Haiti, because during the last eight days, the people of Haiti and the people of the world have joined together to deal with a tragedy of staggering proportions. Our hemisphere has seen its share of hardship, but there are few precedents for the situation we're facing in Port-au-Prince. Communication networks have played a critical role in our response. They were, of course, decimated and in many places totally destroyed. And in the hours after the quake, we worked with partners in the private sector; first, to set up the text "HAITI" campaign so that mobile phone users in the United States could donate to relief efforts via text messages. That initiative has been a showcase for the generosity of the American people, and thus far, it's raised over \$25 million for recovery efforts.

Information networks have also played a critical role on the ground. When I was with President Preval in Port-au-Prince on Saturday, one of his top priorities was to try to get communication up and going. The government couldn't talk to each other, what was left of it, and NGOs, our civilian leadership, our military leadership were severely impacted. The technology community has set up interactive maps to help us identify needs and target resources. And on Monday, a seven-year-old girl and two women were pulled from the rubble of a collapsed supermarket by an American search-and-rescue team after they sent a text message calling for help. Now, these examples are manifestations of a much broader phenomenon.

The spread of information networks is forming a new nervous system for our planet. When something happens in Haiti or Hunan, the rest of us learn about it in real time – from real people. And we can respond in real time as well. Americans eager to help in the aftermath of a disaster and the girl trapped in the supermarket are connected in ways that were not even imagined a year ago, even a generation ago. That same principle applies to almost all of humanity today. As we sit here, any of you – or maybe more likely, any of our children – can take out the tools that many carry every day and transmit this discussion to billions across the world.

Now, in many respects, information has never been so free. There are more ways to spread more ideas to more people than at any moment in history. And even in authoritarian countries, information networks are helping people discover new facts and making governments more accountable.

During his visit to China in November, for example, President Obama held a town hall meeting with an online component to highlight the importance of the internet. In response to a question that was sent in over the internet, he defended the right of people to freely access information, and said that the more freely information flows, the stronger societies become. He spoke about how access to information helps citizens hold their own governments accountable, generates new ideas, encourages creativity and entrepreneurship. The United States believe in that ground truth is what brings me here today.

Because amid this unprecedented surge in connectivity, we must also recognize that these technologies are not an unmitigated blessing. These tools are also being exploited to undermine human progress and political rights. Just as steel can be used to build hospitals or machine guns, or nuclear power can either energize a city or destroy it, modern information networks and the technologies they support can be harnessed for good or for ill. The same networks that help organize movements for freedom also enable al-Qaida to spew hatred and incite violence against the innocent. And technologies with the potential to open up access to government and promote transparency can also be hijacked by governments to crush dissent and deny human rights.

In the last year, we've seen a spike in threats to the free flow of information. China, Tunisia, and Uzbekistan have stepped up their censorship of the internet. In Vietnam, access to popular social networking sites has suddenly disappeared. And last Friday in Egypt, 30 bloggers and activists were detained. One member of this group, Bassem Samir, who is thankfully no longer in prison, is with us today. So while it is clear that the spread of these technologies is transforming our world, it is still unclear how that transformation will affect the human rights and the human welfare of the world's population.

On their own, new technologies do not take sides in the struggle for freedom and progress, but the United States does. We stand for a single internet where all of humanity has equal access to knowledge and ideas. And we recognize that the world's information infrastructure will become what we and others make of it. Now, this challenge may be new, but our responsibility to help ensure the free exchange of ideas goes back to the birth of our republic. The words of the First Amendment to our Constitution are carved in 50 tons of Tennessee marble on the front of this building. And every generation of Americans has worked to protect the values etched in that stone.

Franklin Roosevelt built on these ideas when he delivered his Four Freedoms speech in 1941. Now, at the time, Americans faced a cavalcade of crises and a crisis of confidence. But the vision of a world in which all people enjoyed freedom of expression, freedom of worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear transcended the troubles of his day. And years later, one of my heroes, Eleanor Roosevelt, worked to have these principles adopted as a cornerstone of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They have provided a lodestar to every succeeding generation, guiding us, galvanizing us, and enabling us to move forward in the face of uncertainty.

So as technology hurtles forward, we must think back to that legacy. We need to synchronize our technological progress with our principles. In accepting the Nobel Prize, President Obama spoke about the need to build a world in which peace rests on the inherent rights and dignities of every individual. And in my speech on human rights at Georgetown a few days later, I talked about how we must find ways to make human rights a reality. Today, we find an urgent need to protect these freedoms on the digital frontiers of the 21st century.

There are many other networks in the world. Some aid in the movement of people or resources, and some facilitate exchanges between individuals with the same work or interests. But the internet is a network that magnifies the power and potential of all others. And that's why we believe it's critical that its users are assured certain basic freedoms. Freedom of expression is first among them. This freedom is no longer defined solely by whether citizens can go into the town square and criticize their government without fear of retribution. Blogs, emails, social networks, and text messages have opened up new forums for exchanging ideas, and created new targets for censorship.

As I speak to you today, government censors somewhere are working furiously to erase my words from the records of history. But history itself has already condemned these tactics. Two months ago, I was in Germany to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The leaders gathered at that ceremony paid tribute to the courageous men and women on the far side of that barrier who made the case against oppression by circulating small pamphlets called samizdat. Now, these leaflets questioned the claims and intentions of dictatorships in the Eastern Bloc and many people paid dearly for distributing them. But their words helped pierce the concrete and concertina wire of the Iron Curtain.

The Berlin Wall symbolized a world divided and it defined an entire era. Today, remnants of that wall sit inside this museum where they belong, and the new iconic infrastructure of our age is the internet. Instead of division, it stands for connection. But even as networks spread to nations around the globe, virtual walls are cropping up in place of visible walls.

Some countries have erected electronic barriers that prevent their people from accessing portions of the world's networks. They've expunged words, names, and phrases from search engine results. They have violated the privacy of citizens who engage in non-violent political speech. These actions contravene the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which tells us that all people have the right "to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers." With the spread of these restrictive practices, a new information curtain is descending across much of the world. And beyond this partition, viral videos and blog posts are becoming the samizdat of our day.

As in the dictatorships of the past, governments are targeting independent thinkers who use these tools. In the demonstrations that followed Iran's presidential elections, grainy cell phone footage of a young woman's bloody murder provided a digital indictment of the government's brutality. We've seen reports that when Iranians living overseas posted online criticism of their nation's leaders, their family members in Iran were singled out for retribution. And despite an intense campaign of government intimidation, brave citizen journalists in Iran continue using technology to show the world and their fellow citizens what is happening inside their country. In speaking out on

behalf of their own human rights, the Iranian people have inspired the world. And their courage is redefining how technology is used to spread truth and expose injustice.

Now, all societies recognize that free expression has its limits. We do not tolerate those who incite others to violence, such as the agents of al-Qaida who are, at this moment, using the internet to promote the mass murder of innocent people across the world. And hate speech that targets individuals on the basis of their race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation is reprehensible. It is an unfortunate fact that these issues are both growing challenges that the international community must confront together. And we must also grapple with the issue of anonymous speech. Those who use the internet to recruit terrorists or distribute stolen intellectual property cannot divorce their online actions from their real world identities. But these challenges must not become an excuse for governments to systematically violate the rights and privacy of those who use the internet for peaceful political purposes.

The freedom of expression may be the most obvious freedom to face challenges with the spread of new technologies, but it is not the only one. The freedom of worship usually involves the rights of individuals to commune or not commune with their Creator. And that's one channel of communication that does not rely on technology. But the freedom of worship also speaks to the universal right to come together with those who share your values and vision for humanity. In our history, those gatherings often took place in churches, synagogues, mosques and temples. Today, they may also take place on line.

The internet can help bridge divides between people of different faiths. As the President said in Cairo, freedom of religion is central to the ability of people to live together. And as we look for ways to expand dialogue, the internet holds out such tremendous promise. We've already begun connecting students in the United States with young people in Muslim communities around the world to discuss global challenges. And we will continue using this tool to foster discussion between individuals from different religious communities.

Some nations, however, have co-opted the internet as a tool to target and silence people of faith. Last year, for example, in Saudi Arabia, a man spent months in prison for blogging about Christianity. And a Harvard study found that the Saudi Government blocked many web pages about Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, and even Islam. Countries including Vietnam and China employed similar tactics to restrict access to religious information.

Now, just as these technologies must not be used to punish peaceful political speech, they must also not be used to persecute or silence religious minorities. Now, prayers will always travel on higher networks. But connection technologies like the internet and social networking sites should enhance individuals' ability to worship as they see fit, come together with people of their own faith, and learn more about the beliefs of others. We must work to advance the freedom of worship online just as we do in other areas of life.

There are, of course, hundreds of millions of people living without the benefits of these technologies. In our world, as I've said many times, talent may be distributed universally, but opportunity is not. And we know from long experience that promoting social and economic development in countries where people lack access to knowledge, markets, capital, and opportunity can be frustrating and sometimes futile work. In this context, the internet can serve as a great equalizer. By providing people with access to knowledge and potential markets, networks can create opportunities where none exist.

Over the last year, I've seen this firsthand in Kenya, where farmers have seen their income grow by as much as 30 percent since they started using mobile banking technology; in Bangladesh, where more than 300,000 people have signed up to learn English on their mobile phones; and in Sub-Saharan Africa, where women entrepreneurs use the internet to get access to microcredit loans and connect themselves to global markets.

Now, these examples of progress can be replicated in the lives of the billion people at the bottom of the world's economic ladder. In many cases, the internet, mobile phones, and other connection technologies can do for economic growth what the Green Revolution did for agriculture. You can now generate significant yields from very modest inputs. And one World Bank study found that in a typical developing country, a 10 percent increase in the penetration rate for mobile phones led to an almost 1 percent increase in per capita GDP. To just put this into context, for India, that would translate into almost \$10 billion a year.

A connection to global information networks is like an on-ramp to modernity. In the early years of these technologies, many believed that they would divide the world between haves and have-nots. But that hasn't happened. There are 4 billion cell phones in use today. Many of them are in the hands of market vendors, rickshaw drivers, and others who've historically lacked access to education and opportunity. Information networks have become a great leveler, and we should use them together to help lift people out of poverty and give them a freedom from want.

Now, we have every reason to be hopeful about what people can accomplish when they leverage communication networks and connection technologies to achieve progress. But make no mistake – some are and will continue to use global information networks for darker purposes. Violent extremists, criminal cartels, sexual predators, and authoritarian governments all seek to exploit these global networks. Just as terrorists have taken advantage of the openness of our societies to carry out their plots, violent extremists use the internet to radicalize and intimidate. As we work to advance freedoms, we must also work against those who use communication networks as tools of disruption and fear.

Governments and citizens must have confidence that the networks at the core of their national security and economic prosperity are safe and resilient. Now this is about more than petty hackers who deface websites. Our ability to bank online, use electronic commerce, and safeguard billions of dollars in intellectual property are all at stake if we cannot rely on the security of our information networks.

Disruptions in these systems demand a coordinated response by all governments, the private sector, and the international community. We need more tools to help law enforcement agencies cooperate across jurisdictions when criminal hackers and organized crime syndicates attack networks for financial gain. The same is true when social ills such as child pornography and the exploitation of trafficked women and girls online is there for the world to see and for those who exploit these people to make a profit. We applaud efforts such as the Council on Europe's Convention on Cybercrime that facilitate international cooperation in prosecuting such offenses. And we wish to redouble our efforts.

We have taken steps as a government, and as a Department, to find diplomatic solutions to strengthen global cyber security. We have a lot of people in the State Department working on this. They've joined together, and we created two years ago an office to coordinate foreign policy in cyberspace. We've worked to address this challenge at the UN and in other multilateral forums and to put cyber security on the world's agenda. And President Obama has just appointed a new national cyberspace policy coordinator who will help us work even more closely to ensure that everyone's networks stay free, secure, and reliable.

States, terrorists, and those who would act as their proxies must know that the United States will protect our networks. Those who disrupt the free flow of information in our society or any other pose a threat to our economy, our government, and our civil society. Countries or individuals that engage in cyber attacks should face consequences and international condemnation. In an internet-connected world, an attack on one nation's networks can be an attack on all. And by reinforcing that message, we can create norms of behavior among states and encourage respect for the global networked commons.

The final freedom, one that was probably inherent in what both President and Mrs. Roosevelt thought about and wrote about all those years ago, is one that flows from the four I've already mentioned: the freedom to connect – the idea that governments should not prevent people from connecting to the internet, to websites, or to each other. The freedom to connect is like the freedom of assembly, only in cyberspace. It allows individuals to get online, come together, and hopefully cooperate. Once you're on the internet, you don't need to be a tycoon or a rock star to have a huge impact on society.

The largest public response to the terrorist attacks in Mumbai was launched by a 13-year-old boy. He used social networks to organize blood drives and a massive interfaith book of condolence. In Colombia, an unemployed engineer brought together more than 12 million people in 190 cities around the world to demonstrate against the FARC terrorist movement. The protests were the largest antiterrorist demonstrations in history. And in the weeks that followed, the FARC saw more demobilizations and desertions than it had during a decade of military action. And in Mexico, a single email from a private citizen who was fed up with drug-related violence snowballed into huge demonstrations in all of the country's 32 states. In Mexico City alone, 150,000 people took to the streets in protest. So the internet can help humanity push back against those who promote violence and crime and extremism.

In Iran and Moldova and other countries, online organizing has been a critical tool for advancing democracy and enabling citizens to protest suspicious election results. And even in established democracies like the United States, we've seen the power of these tools to change history. Some of you may still remember the 2008 presidential election here. (Laughter.)

The freedom to connect to these technologies can help transform societies, but it is also critically important to individuals. I was recently moved by the story of a doctor – and I won't tell you what country he was from – who was desperately trying to diagnose his daughter's rare medical condition. He consulted with two dozen specialists, but he still didn't have an answer. But he finally identified the condition, and found a cure, by using an internet search engine. That's one of the reasons why unfettered access to search engine technology is so important in individuals' lives.

Now, the principles I've outlined today will guide our approach in addressing the issue of internet freedom and the use of these technologies. And I want to speak about how we apply them in practice. The United States is committed to devoting the diplomatic, economic, and technological resources necessary to advance these freedoms. We are a nation made up of immigrants from every country and every interest that spans the globe. Our foreign policy is premised on the idea that no country more than America stands to benefit when there is cooperation among peoples and states. And no country shoulders a heavier burden when conflict and misunderstanding drive nations apart. So we are well placed to seize the opportunities that come with interconnectivity. And as the birthplace for so many of these technologies, including the internet itself, we have a responsibility to see them used for good. To do that, we need to develop our capacity for what we call, at the State Department, 21st century statecraft.

Realigning our policies and our priorities will not be easy. But adjusting to new technology rarely is. When the telegraph was introduced, it was a source of great anxiety for many in the diplomatic community, where the prospect of receiving daily instructions from capitals was not entirely welcome. But just as our diplomats eventually mastered the telegraph, they are doing the same to harness the potential of these new tools as well.

And I'm proud that the State Department is already working in more than 40 countries to help individuals silenced by oppressive governments. We are making this issue a priority at the United Nations as well, and we're including internet freedom as a component in the first resolution we introduced after returning to the United Nations Human Rights Council.

We are also supporting the development of new tools that enable citizens to exercise their rights of free expression by circumventing politically motivated censorship. We are providing funds to groups around the world to make sure that those tools get to the people who need them in local languages, and with the training they need to access the internet safely. The United States has been assisting in these efforts for some time, with a focus on implementing these programs as efficiently and effectively as possible. Both the American people and nations that censor the internet should understand that our government is committed to helping promote internet freedom.

We want to put these tools in the hands of people who will use them to advance democracy and human rights, to fight climate change and epidemics, to build global support for President Obama's goal of a world without nuclear weapons, to encourage sustainable economic development that lifts the people at the bottom up.

That's why today I'm announcing that over the next year, we will work with partners in industry, academia, and nongovernmental organizations to establish a standing effort that will harness the power of connection technologies and apply them to our diplomatic goals. By relying on mobile phones, mapping applications, and other new tools, we can empower citizens and leverage our traditional diplomacy. We can address deficiencies in the current market for innovation.

Let me give you one example. Let's say I want to create a mobile phone application that would allow people to rate government ministries, including ours, on their responsiveness and efficiency and also to ferret out and report corruption. The hardware required to make this idea work is already in the hands of billions of potential users. And the software involved would be relatively inexpensive to develop and deploy.

If people took advantage of this tool, it would help us target our foreign assistance spending, improve lives, and encourage foreign investment in countries with responsible governments. However, right now, mobile application developers have no financial assistance to pursue that project on their own, and the State Department currently lacks a mechanism to make it happen. But this initiative should help resolve that problem and provide long-term dividends from modest investments in innovation. We're going to work with experts to find the best structure for this venture, and we'll need the talent and resources of technology companies and nonprofits in order to get the best results most quickly. So for those of you in the room who have this kind of talent, expertise, please consider yourselves invited to help us.

In the meantime, there are companies, individuals, and institutions working on ideas and applications that could already advance our diplomatic and development objectives. And the State Department will be launching an innovation competition to give this work an immediate boost. We'll be asking Americans to send us their best ideas for applications and technologies that help break down language barriers, overcome illiteracy, connect people to the services and information they need. Microsoft, for example, has already developed a prototype for a digital doctor that could help provide medical care in isolated rural communities. We want to see more ideas like that. And we'll work with the winners of the competition and provide grants to help build their ideas to scale.

Now, these new initiatives will supplement a great deal of important work we've already done over this past year. In the service of our diplomatic and diplomacy objectives, I assembled a talented and experienced team to lead our 21st century statecraft efforts. This team has traveled the world helping governments and groups leverage the benefits of connection technologies. They have stood up a Civil Society 2.0 Initiative to help grassroots organizations enter the digital age. They are putting in place a program in Mexico to help combat drug-related violence by allowing people to make untracked reports to reliable sources to avoid having retribution visited against them. They brought mobile banking to Afghanistan and are now pursuing the same effort in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Pakistan, they created the first-ever social mobile network, called Our Voice, that has already produced tens of millions of messages and connected young Pakistanis who want to stand up to violent extremism.

In a short span, we have taken significant strides to translate the promise of these technologies into results that make a difference. But there is still so much more to be done. And as we work together with the private sector and foreign governments to deploy the tools of 21st century statecraft, we have to remember our shared responsibility to safeguard the freedoms that I've talked about today. We feel strongly that principles like information freedom aren't just good policy, not just somehow connected to our national values, but they are universal and they're also good for business.

To use market terminology, a publicly listed company in Tunisia or Vietnam that operates in an environment of censorship will always trade at a discount relative to an identical firm in a free society. If corporate decision makers don't have access to global sources of news and information, investors will have less confidence in their decisions over the long term. Countries that censor news and information must recognize that from an economic standpoint, there is no distinction between censoring political speech and commercial speech. If businesses in your nations are denied access to either type of information, it will inevitably impact on growth.

Increasingly, U.S. companies are making the issue of internet and information freedom a greater consideration in



their business decisions. I hope that their competitors and foreign governments will pay close attention to this trend. The most recent situation involving Google has attracted a great deal of interest. And we look to the Chinese authorities to conduct a thorough review of the cyber intrusions that led Google to make its announcement. And we also look for that investigation and its results to be transparent.

The internet has already been a source of tremendous progress in China, and it is fabulous. There are so many people in China now online. But countries that restrict free access to information or violate the basic rights of internet users risk walling themselves off from the progress of the next century. Now, the United States and China have different views on this issue, and we intend to address those differences candidly and consistently in the context of our positive, cooperative, and comprehensive relationship.

Now, ultimately, this issue isn't just about information freedom; it is about what kind of world we want and what kind of world we will inhabit. It's about whether we live on a planet with one internet, one global community, and a common body of knowledge that benefits and unites us all, or a fragmented planet in which access to information and opportunity is dependent on where you live and the whims of censors.

Information freedom supports the peace and security that provides a foundation for global progress. Historically, asymmetrical access to information is one of the leading causes of interstate conflict. When we face serious disputes or dangerous incidents, it's critical that people on both sides of the problem have access to the same set of facts and opinions.

As it stands, Americans can consider information presented by foreign governments. We do not block your attempts to communicate with the people in the United States. But citizens in societies that practice censorship lack exposure to outside views. In North Korea, for example, the government has tried to completely isolate its citizens from outside opinions. This lopsided access to information increases both the likelihood of conflict and the probability that small disagreements could escalate. So I hope that responsible governments with an interest in global stability will work with us to address such imbalances.

For companies, this issue is about more than claiming the moral high ground. It really comes down to the trust between firms and their customers. Consumers everywhere want to have confidence that the internet companies they rely on will provide comprehensive search results and act as responsible stewards of their own personal information. Firms that earn that confidence of those countries and basically provide that kind of service will prosper in the global marketplace. I really believe that those who lose that confidence of their customers will eventually lose customers. No matter where you live, people want to believe that what they put into the internet is not going to be used against them.

And censorship should not be in any way accepted by any company from anywhere. And in America, American companies need to make a principled stand. This needs to be part of our national brand. I'm confident that consumers worldwide will reward companies that follow those principles.

Now, we are reinvigorating the Global Internet Freedom Task Force as a forum for addressing threats to internet freedom around the world, and we are urging U.S. media companies to take a proactive role in challenging foreign governments' demands for censorship and surveillance. The private sector has a shared responsibility to help safeguard free expression. And when their business dealings threaten to undermine this freedom, they need to consider what's right, not simply what's a quick profit.

We're also encouraged by the work that's being done through the Global Network Initiative, a voluntary effort by technology companies who are working with nongovernmental organizations, academic experts, and social investment funds to respond to government requests for censorship. The initiative goes beyond mere statements of principles and establishes mechanisms to promote real accountability and transparency. As part of our commitment to support responsible private sector engagement on information freedom, the State Department will be convening a high-level meeting next month co-chaired by Under Secretaries Robert Hormats and Maria Otero to bring together firms that provide network services for talks about internet freedom, because we want to have a partnership in addressing this 21st century challenge.

Now, pursuing the freedoms I've talked about today is, I believe, the right thing to do. But I also believe it's the smart thing to do. By advancing this agenda, we align our principles, our economic goals, and our strategic priorities. We need to work toward a world in which access to networks and information brings people closer together and expands the definition of the global community. Given the magnitude of the challenges we're facing, we need people around the world to pool their knowledge and creativity to help rebuild the global economy, to protect our environment, to defeat violent extremism, and build a future in which every human being can live up to and realize his or her God-given potential.

So let me close by asking you to remember the little girl who was pulled from the rubble on Monday in Port-au-Prince. She's alive, she was reunited with her family, she will have the chance to grow up because these networks took a voice that was buried and spread it to the world. No nation, no group, no individual should stay buried in the rubble of oppression. We cannot stand by while people are separated from the human family by walls of censorship. And we cannot be silent about these issues simply because we cannot hear the cries.

So let us recommit ourselves to this cause. Let us make these technologies a force for real progress the world over. And let us go forward together to champion these freedoms for our time, for our young people who deserve every opportunity we can give them.

Thank you all very much. (Applause.)

\*Senator Lugar was not a co-sponsor of the VOICE Act. Senator Kaufman was one of the co-authors and leading co-sponsors.

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2011. Print a single copy of this article for personal use. [Contact us](#) if you wish to print more to distribute to others.

"FT" and "Financial Times" are trademarks of the Financial Times. [Privacy policy](#) | [Terms](#)  
© Copyright [The Financial Times Ltd](#) 2011.