



# Democracy & Society

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## Demonstrators and Dictators: Sharing Strategies on Repression and Reform

BY BARAK HOFFMAN

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Those seeking to promote and block political reform exist in a dynamic environment. They must consider new techniques, technologies, and strategies as they become available and respond to the actions of their adversaries. Reformers and those seeking to maintain the *status quo* also can learn from allies in other countries as well as form organizations that allow them to share information across borders. To explore these processes of political learning, the Center for Democracy and Civil Society and Freedom House hosted a conference, “Demonstrators and Dictators: Sharing Strategies” on December 10, 2009. We have dedicated this issue of *Democracy and Society* to the conference papers.

Those seeking to promote and block political reform exist in a dynamic environment. They must consider new techniques, technologies, and strategies as they become available and respond to the actions of their adversaries. Reformers and those seeking to maintain the *status quo* also can learn from allies in other countries as well as form organizations that allow them to share information across borders. To explore these processes of political learning, the Center for Democracy and Civil Society and Freedom House hosted a conference, “Demonstrators and Dictators: Sharing Strategies” on December 10, 2009. We have dedicated this issue of *Democracy and Society* to the conference papers.

The papers touched on two main themes. The first is how new technologies, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Ushahidi, affect the power dynamic between demonstrators and dictators. While many believe that these technologies inherently favor the former over the latter, the papers, especially those by Laura Mottaz and J. Hunter Price, question that assumption. Mottaz and Price show that while new technologies increase the capacity of demonstrators to organize and publicize, since governments control the communications infrastructure, demonstrators’ ability to exploit these platforms exists only to the extent that governments allow them to use the communication networks.

The second theme the papers raised was governmental learning across borders to counter the threats protestors pose. The papers highlighted three main strategies. The most common, as the papers by Jeanne Elone and [Continued, Page 22]

### IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 **Iranian Political Unrest in Cyberspace**  
By Hervé St-Louis
- 5 **Regime Security and Counter-Diffusion: Sources of Authoritarian Learning and Adaptation**  
By Sheena Chestnut
- 9 **Election Violence Monitoring and the Use of New Communication Technologies**  
By Gabrielle Bardall
- 13 **Backlash Against Democracy: The Regulation of Civil Society in Africa**  
By Jeanne Elone
- 23 **New Media in Closed Societies: The Role of Digital Technologies in Burma’s Saffron Revolution**  
By Laura Mottaz
- 26 **Reactionary Regimes**  
By Lauren Albright
- 29 **Importing Intimidation: The Spread of Strategies to Restrict and Repress Civil Society in Latin America**  
By Brandon P. Yoder

## The New Media Revolution in Egypt: Understanding the Failures of the Past and Looking Towards the Possibilities of the Future

BY J. HUNTER PRICE

Over the last decade, activists and scholars have grown increasingly excited at the prospect that new forms of communication might revolutionize the way in which people interact with their governments. Many of these observers, the vast majority of which come from the relatively democratic West, have predicted that these forms of new media will be used to force authoritarian governments to be more responsive to the wishes of their populations. As first cell phones, then blogs, and now social networking sites have become common tools in the limited arsenal of opposition activists in dictatorial countries, Western commen-

tators have grown even more confident in their conviction that new media will lead to a wave of democratization. These observers have viewed the potential of new media without considering how these tools could be hindered or stopped by uncooperative forces, and they have failed to understand the limitations of new media in the context of specific struggles between dissidents and their dictators.

This failure is particularly stark in the Middle East, where over the last decade many observers have seen their lofty dreams of democracy crushed, as the hold of dictators has grown stronger in many countries. [Continued, Page 18]

# Iranian Political Unrest in Cyberspace

BY HERVÉ ST-LOUIS

*Thanks to Dr. Thomas P. Keenan, Professor and Fellow of the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, University of Calgary for his guidance and support in this project.*

## Introduction

A popular way of describing Iranian blogging is as a refuge for opponents and critics of the Islamic regime in Iran. In 2001, a young intrepid Iranian reporter left his home country to settle in Toronto, Canada where he began communicating to Iranians around the world by diffusing political messages denouncing the Iranian regime.<sup>1</sup> By posting instructions in Farsi a week after the events of September 11, 2001 on how to set up a blog,<sup>2</sup> this blogger, Hossein Derakhshan became a mythical figure who taught Iranians how to use blogs and Cyberspace<sup>3</sup> to foment a viable opposition to the Islamist and conservative regime in Tehran. Dubbed “the Father of Iranian Bloggers,”<sup>4</sup> Derakhshan, according to various sources, helped make Farsi the tenth most widely used language in blogs, as of 2006.<sup>5</sup> Thousands of Iranians answered his call and began expressing themselves in blogs. Government control over the Internet in Iran is sporadic, so Cyberspace became a viable expression forum featuring the real feelings of Iranians inside Iran.

This study will cover the history of Iranian blogging, generated both from within Iran and from the Iranian diaspora. Some blogs have sought to influence the situation in the country by diffusing information on the Iranian regime, while others have been aimed at empowering groups within Iranian society. This essay will ask if there was a critical junction at which both types of blogs and Cyberspace activities merged, allowing them to become substantive actors in the wider blogging culture. It will also examine the security imperatives of Iranian blogging before its interface with the dominant blogging culture in the summer of 2009. Moreover, this paper will consider whether the interfacing<sup>6</sup> of Iranian blogging with the dominant blogging culture changed the preferred format of blogging to micro-blogging.<sup>7</sup>

## The Islamist Government and the Internet

The Internet in Iran was sponsored by the Iranian regime. According to then-doctoral student in political science Babak Rahimi, “Internet use in Iran was first promoted by the government to provide an alternative means of scientific and technological advancement during the troubled economic period that followed the Iran-Iraq War.”<sup>8</sup> According to the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, “The Islamic Republic was unwilling to forgo the benefits of the Internet

in order to maintain tight control. For example, ISPs were allowed to operate without serious interference from the late 1990s until 2003.”<sup>9</sup> But, state control of Iranian media eventually extended to the Internet. “In 2003, Iran became the first country to imprison a blogger for views expressed online, and at least 28 bloggers and online journalists have been imprisoned since.”<sup>10</sup>

The Press Law of 1986 is the main tool for regulating media in Iran. This law prohibits specific topics and censors speech. It also prescribes codes of conduct for the media and sets objectives about how it must promote the views of the Iranian authorities. Following the 1997 election of President Mohammad Khatami, censorship laws were relaxed to shift “from a system that relies on restrictions as its main strategy”<sup>11</sup> to one that “occasionally [...] deal[s] tactically with sensitive and vital matters.”<sup>12</sup> The “détente” led to a backlash from Iran’s parallel religious government with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei warning that “everyone must pay attention to the Red Line.”<sup>13</sup> In April 2000, the Press Law was amended to include electronic publications broadly defined as “publications regularly published under a permanent name, specific date and serial number ... on different subjects such as news, commentary, as well as social, political, economic, agricultural, cultural, religious, scientific, technical, military, sports, artistic matters, etc., via electronic vehicles.”<sup>14</sup> Publications, such as blogs that are not registered under the Press law are subject to general laws.<sup>15</sup>

Understanding the telecommunication infrastructure of Iran helps to understand the framework under which blogging and Internet operate in Iran. The Iranian government requires that Internet service providers (ISP) “use filtration technology, [...] monitor and record Internet use of their customers.”<sup>16</sup> ISPs are also required to “remove all anti-government and all anti-Islamic websites [sic] from their servers.”<sup>17</sup> Because all Internet traffic in Iran is routed “through the state-controlled telecommunications infrastructure of the Telecommunication Company of Iran (TCI),”<sup>18</sup> the author of the OpenNet Initiative researching Internet filtering in Iran argued that “[t]he architecture of the Iranian Internet is particularly conducive to widespread surveillance.”<sup>19</sup> Reports indicate that Germany’s Siemens and Finland’s Nokia have sold Iran equipment for monitoring and tracking Internet traffic.<sup>20</sup>

Internet filtering in Iran targets both “immoral contents” such as sexually explicit material and political material such as information from human rights organizations, critics from opponents of the regime and opposition parties.<sup>21</sup> “In a study conducted in the fall of 2008, OpenNet found that “[a] majority of the blogs that were blocked were associated with secular politics and reformist viewpoints.”<sup>22</sup> The

research firm also reported that before the 2009 election, more Farsi-language material was blocked than English-language material. For example, the New York Times was blocked on and off, while the English version of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was not blocked until June 2009. The Persian service of the BBC, on the other hand, has been blocked since its January 2009 launch. Similarly, the Farsi-language news and social network Web site Balatarin.com has been blocked since 2007 despite protests from users in Iran.<sup>23</sup> Websites of religious minorities in Iran, such as the Kurds, are also blocked.<sup>24</sup>

### *Iranian Blogging*

Despite the fact that many Iran-based media outlets are edited and controlled by the Iranian regime<sup>25</sup> cyberspace and blogs have served as mediums through which dissidents diffuse information on the regime.<sup>26</sup> It can be argued that, although Iran's blogging culture existed and was well constituted before events of the 2009 Iranian presidential elections, its influence rose when it interfaced with the dominant Cyberspace culture connected to the Western world, in particular, the English-speaking world. As a result of the 2009 events, blogging in Iran has been perceived as an activity centered on micro-blogging platforms like Twitter and social networks like Facebook and YouTube. Based on accounts from non-Iranian media, blogging sprung up in Iran and suddenly was compatible with the interface used outside Iran to inform non-Iranians about the political situation in that polity. This transformation from blogging, which focused purely on disseminating information to Iranians inside and outside Iran to addressing non-Iranians in languages other than Farsi, did not happen overnight.

Iranian blogs are not uniform. Blogs originating from inside Iran are different than those generated from the Iranian diaspora, specifically communities based in North America and the United Kingdom. Within the latter category, two subgroups of bloggers have been identified: The first consists of older established immigrants in Iran who left during or just after the 1979 revolution, while the second is comprised of Iranian students pursuing advanced degrees in American schools. Anthropology doctoral candidate Janet Alexanian interviewed Iranian bloggers in Southern California and observed that bloggers from the first subgroup "desired the restoration of some form of constitutional monarchy in Iran, and many were opposed to the current government in Iran."<sup>27</sup> The second subgroup of Iranians bloggers tended to consider the first subgroup as being out of touch with modern Iran as they did not live through the hardships of the country following the 1979 Islamic revolution.<sup>28</sup>

A common concern of both subgroups of Iranian bloggers outside of Iran has been to communicate and "sell" Iran to the Western world. Some blogs serve as virtual relay points for translating information about Iran from Farsi to English.

Their goal is to make an attack on Iran by the West less probable.<sup>29</sup> To that effect, these blogs run by expatriates include images and videos of Iranians in daily activities. Often the Iranians portrayed in these images are young, wear modern clothes, and look like their counterparts in the West.<sup>30</sup> To that extent, author Nasrin Alavi's book *Persian Chat* and the award-winning comic book series *Persepolis* turned into an animated film, created by Marjane Satrapi, served similar functions. The portrayal of Iranians as sharing similar values and cultures as the West serves to humanize Iranians to Westerners and possibly affect how policymakers in countries such as the United States, France, and the United Kingdom design their foreign policy towards Iran. Montreal-based Iranian blogger Nima Mohammad-Shahi wrote in an email interview, "I am hoping to show my audience that much of what they hear about Iran tells nothing about the true Iran. Iran is not a place full of radical Muslim terrorists, but normal people who care much, much more about how to have a decent job, make money and live in peace than about Great Satan or the Zionist Regime."<sup>31</sup>

British reporter Angus McDowall who lives in Tehran warned that, "while Iranian bloggers vividly portray a genuine part of Iranian society, they are a self-selecting sample that consist mostly of young, affluent, liberal-minded people who do not represent 'the real' Iran."<sup>32</sup> He added, "What we rarely see in the English-language blogs are the views of a car-parts worker in the Khodro factory in Karaj, the unemployed young man who smokes heroin in a new, cheap housing estate on the edge of Semnan, or a housewife in Mashhad worrying whether her kids will get a place at the university. These people are as much 'the real Iran' as the bloggers, but their voices are less often heard."<sup>33</sup>

The range of topics featured in Iranian blogs has been the subject of several discussions. Blogs aimed at Western audiences are often political in nature, denouncing the Islamist regime and some of its actions while at the same time highlighting Iranian society to non-Iranians. Other blogs cater to an Iranian audience and provide an alternative source of information replacing traditional media.<sup>34</sup> Researchers John Kelly and Bruce Etling, of Harvard University's Berkman Center for Internet and Society have produced a differentiated Iranian bloggers map among four broad subgroups. First, they identified a secular/reformist subgroup whose membership includes journalists and dissidents. According to the researchers, the secular faction within this subgroup contains many women and expatriates who focus on human rights and political prisoners. The reformist faction consists largely of Iranians living in Iran and dealing with contemporary political issues.<sup>35</sup>

The second subgroup observed by Kelly and Etling is the conservative/religious cluster, which is religious in nature and promotes Shi'a Islam. One faction within this subgroup is aligned with conservative politics and focuses on current

public affairs and politics. This faction supports the Islamist government but frequently criticizes its leaders. The second faction is rooted in the Twelver discourse and focuses on preaching Shi'a Islam and preparing the world for the return of al-Mahdi. The third subgroup identified by the study is comprised of religious youth, many of whom are students. The level of similarity among these bloggers, according to the researchers, suggests some degree of institutional coordination.<sup>36</sup> The researchers refer to this subgroup as the Persian poetry and literature subgroup because blogs in this category feature poetry and literature from Iran. The fourth and final subgroup identified by Kelly and Etling is the mixed network. The particularity of this group is the lack of a hierarchical structure of links to other blogs and Websites and the coverage of a variety of topics, such as sports and personal diaries. This subgroup also incorporates social networks used by Iranians.<sup>37</sup>

### Conclusion

The typical portrayal of Iranian blogging in Western media offers an idealized view of Iranian bloggers as political dissidents. This portrayal supported by factions of Iranian bloggers outside of Iran presents a perspective of Iranian society that is close to Western standards while being critical of the Islamist government of Iran. While the use of the Internet in Iran continues to grow, access and contents are controlled indirectly by the Iranian regime. Access to unfiltered content is a continuous issue for Iranians in Iran. Interfacing with Western standards helps Iranians communicate better with Western media, governments and the public. For example, moving away from Iran-specific blogs to a micro-blogging platform like Twitter, combining elements of blogs and social networks, reduces the technical complexity of the interfacing process.

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#### ENDNOTES

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- 2 Blogs are the descendants of the traditional home page from the late 1990s and early 2000s. Blogs combine some of the personal journal aspect of some of those old Web sites, while facilitating the maintenance and allowing easy exchange of links and information.
- 3 This paper defines Cyberspace as the Internet inhabited and used by people. Cyberspace includes the Internet, but also overlapping networks such as that of the Blackberry, text messaging done through cellular telephones and other wireless forms of communications, such as the WiMAX network.
- 4 Nicholas Keung, "Blogging is the new revolution." *Toronto Star*, May 18, 2006.

- 5 Liora Hendelman-Baavur, "Promises and Perils of Weblogistan: Online Personal Journals and the Islamic Republic of Iran." *The Middle East Review of International Affairs* 2, (June 2007): 6.
- 6 Interfacing describes the process whereby the Iranian-centered blogosphere became part of the wider Cyberspace when human actors from Iran (bloggers) interacted with non-Iranian human actors (bloggers and observers).
- 7 Micro-blogs are platforms and blogs that purposely limit the amount of information that can be posted. For example, the micro-blogging platform Twitter limits the length of messages, prohibits the use of image or sound files in messages posted, and does not retain data past a certain timeframe.
- 8 Rahimi, "Cyberdissent," 2.
- 9 Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. *Ctrl + Alt + Delete*, 8.
- 10 Nathan C. Martin, "Political Dispatches with Personal Twists: How Iranian Blogs Discuss Social Movements." (master's thesis, University of Kansas, 2007), 25.
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- 29 Martin, "Political Dispatches with Personal Twists, 35.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 75.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 78.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 78.
- 34 Rahimi, "Cyberdissent: The Internet in Revolutionary Iran," 7.
- 35 John Kelly and Bruce Etling. *Mapping Iran's Online Public: Politics and Culture in the Persian Blogosphere*. Cambridge, MA: Berkman Center Research Publication, (2008) 12.
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- 37 *Ibid.*, 12.

# Regime Security and Counter-Diffusion: Sources of Authoritarian Learning and Adaptation

BY SHEENA CHESTNUT

The current debate on China's stability is illustrative of gaps in the democratization literature. Among the domestic structural factors cited as reasons for China's failure to democratize are a lower level of development and industrialization; sociological characteristics such as the People's Republic of China (PRC) comparatively high ethnic homogeneity, lower urbanization and lower literacy rates; the different sequencing of political and economic reforms; and generational differences among the ruling elites in the late 1980's when the crisis of regime stability was thought to have reached its peak.<sup>1</sup> The skill of the Chinese political leadership or the potential for international factors to contribute to authoritarian stability do not feature explicitly on this list.

Voluntarist explanations, though not uncommon in the literature on democratization, are nearly absent from the debate on authoritarian stability. As Lucan Way notes, "Relative inattention to authoritarianism in regime studies has resulted in a disproportionate focus on the ability of regime actors to create and sustain democracy rather than on their capacity to maintain autocratic rule."<sup>2</sup> Analysts of competitive regimes often consider the importance of political skill and institution-building, he suggests, but the study of incumbent capacity in affecting authoritarian stability has been left relatively unexplored. An agent-driven explanation is needed to explain for the relative longevity of Chinese Communist Party rule, and by extension, for the longevity of other authoritarian regimes.

The use of diffusion to explain democratization processes is a particularly clear example of the lop-sidedness of the current literature. The "diffusion" hypothesis of democratization suggests that the success of certain democratic transitions is based in part on the "emulation of the prior successful example of others."<sup>3</sup> Within the literature, each pro-democracy movement has a higher probability of success because it has observed and learned from the ones before it. Logically speaking, for diffusion to result in increasing democratization over time, the learning capacity of these anti-regime actors must outpace the adaptive ability of the regime itself. Thus the diffusion hypothesis of democratization depends on the assumption that authoritarian regimes

are less capable of 'learning'—in the sense of rationally updating information—and adapting policies based on new information as compared to the civil society or pro-democracy movements that they harbor. Scholars have posited a number of factors that should be expected to create ossification and impede effective feedback and adaptation among authoritarian regimes: short time horizons that limit the acquisition of negative feedback; restrictions placed on horizontal and vertical information flows to facilitate central control; and structural incentives in these systems.<sup>4</sup> The literature also assumes that there will be no variation in the capacity to learn and adapt across different authoritarian regimes or leaders. Neither assumption has yet been subjected to rigorous empirical testing.

How can one reconcile theoretical arguments about democratic diffusion with the evidence of China's unexpected adaptability? To answer this question, I argue that we should reconceptualize diffusion to include counter-diffusion—the acquisition and employment of anti-democratic repressive strategies on the part of the state. If pro-democracy activists succeed in part because they learn from the successful efforts of their neighbors, authoritarian regimes holding power in those states should be able to observe these democratization

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movements as well. The ones that learn well or quickly may be able to avoid their fellow autocrats' fatal mistakes. Arguments of democratic-diffusion must be interacted with an anti-democratic diffusion variable, or one that measures the learning capacity and adaptability of the remaining authoritarian regimes.

I suggest that the dynamics of counter-diffusion are an integral part of the story of China's authoritarian resilience since 1989. Chinese leaders drew stark parallels between their own domestic troubles in 1989 and those abroad. As a series of separatist protests escalated in the western "autonomous regions" and protestors gathered in the central square, nationalists a continent away agitated against and then broke free of Soviet control. Fearing a repeat of the European 1989 inside their own borders, the Chinese leadership embarked in the early 1990's upon a series of efforts to learn from the mistakes that had weakened their fellow socialist regimes and ultimately disintegrated the fabric of their rule. These efforts produced a process of observation, analysis, and policy adaptation that should be incorporated into any understanding of why the events of 1989 and after produced such different outcomes in Beijing compared to Warsaw or Moscow.<sup>5</sup>

*The baseline response of the Chinese party and state to the internal and external crises related to ethnic nationalism in 1989 included the strengthening of both positive incentives and negative coercive elements.*

*Counter-Diffusion and Chinese Ethnic Minority Policy*

One key area demonstrating the capacity of the Chinese regime to analyze external events and adapt to them in ways that facilitated its continued rule was in ethnic minority policy. A range of analysis identifies ethnic separatism as a key problem that must be managed to ensure continued stability in the People's Republic of China. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) International Department recommended the government "Emphasize the unity of different ethnic groups and fight separatism,"<sup>6</sup> while Li Zhengju directs the CCP to "Place priority on solving ethnic, religious, and other social problems."<sup>7</sup> The collective group of scholars goes a step further toward a specific solution, suggesting that regimes, "Manage ethnic issues well. Economic development is the basic solution to ethnic tensions."<sup>8</sup> The most expansive suggestion comes from Li Jingjie, who argues that the leadership must "Fully comprehend the complexity and fundamental causes of ethnic issues and tensions, ensure equality and the right of self-determination to all ethnic groups, and expedite economic growth as the fundamental way to solve ethnic tensions; but recognize the danger in implementing political pluralism in a multi-ethnic region."<sup>9</sup> The basic premise that raised standards of living and economic growth will offset separatism has been reiterated in another volume, which though it expresses concern about the minority "problem," expressed confidence in economic and financial measures to offset secessionist tendencies.<sup>10</sup>

These recommendations reflected both the Chinese analysis of events in the Soviet Union, and a historical concern of long standing about the ability of the Chinese regime to keep these regions incorporated under Beijing's political control. Though ethnic minorities (少数民族, *shaoshu minzu*) make up only 8.4% of the population (104.49 million people), they exist in regionally autonomous zones of various sizes that cluster along strategically important land borders and occupy sixty-four percent of PRC territory, including resource-rich and spacious areas capable of easing eastern overpopulation.<sup>11</sup> As a result, one of the first systematic studies of China's minority policy notes that the *minzu* receive attention from the center in amounts disproportionate to their numbers, based on the assumption that if hostile, "such minorities could weaken border defense, increase the danger of attack by a foreign power, and result in loss of territory for the Chinese People's Republic."<sup>12</sup>

Chinese scholars and policy analysts recognized that a major factor behind the disintegration of European and Soviet

Communism was the mismanagement of ethnic nationalist tensions, which one Chinese scholar has referred to as the "powder keg of the Union's collapse."<sup>13</sup> Another study argued forcefully, "The collapse of the Soviet Union was precipitated by political autocracy, economic dogmatism, ethnic chauvinism, and international hegemonism."<sup>14</sup> More specifically, researcher Xu Zhixin suggests that from Stalin onward, the Soviet system made the mistake of propagating a glorified vision of ethnic Russian chauvinism that regarded ethnic tension solely through the lens of class struggle and led to the harsh repression of non-Russian nationalities.<sup>15</sup> Once reform began, Chinese scholars believed, Gorbachev underestimated the development of autonomous national identity and lost the ability to control non-Russian ethnic nationalism.

One contentious debate centered on the extent and effects of Soviet federalism. Some scholars argued that the mistaken encouragement of ethnic self-determination and the Soviet Union's system of granting republics limited autonomy was a key cause enabling the rise of separatism, and that the federal system should have been abandoned in favor of a unitary state.<sup>16</sup> Others suggested that the problem lay in the fact that the Soviet Union was not federal enough. They argued that the aggrandizement in practice by Stalin and successive Soviet leaders of the formal constitutional autonomy granted to the republics only served to foster nationalist resentment.<sup>17</sup> The apparent lack of resolution in this debate is particularly notable given that the Soviet federal system served as a loose model for China's own system of "ethnic autonomous regions," which though they were granted neither full autonomy nor the right to secede, still shared historical parallels with their Soviet counterparts.

The baseline response of the Chinese Communist party and state to the internal and external crises related to ethnic nationalism in 1989 included the strengthening of both positive incentives and negative coercive elements. On the one hand, central authorities have affirmed the preferential policies granted toward minorities, and even increased economic redistribution to poorer areas. At the same time, they have stressed a key difference from the Soviet model: unchanging intolerance for any hint of secessionism and willingness to suppress it by force where necessary.

As noted above, some of the major analyses of the collapse of the USSR specifically argued that the fundamental way to resolve ethnic instability or separatist tendencies in the PRC was to grow these areas' economies and provide economic benefits to the population. Despite being entitled from the

*In contrast to some existing arguments, therefore, political agency, diffusion and international influence, all currently thought to favor the pro-democracy movements, can also play a role in the maintenance of authoritarian stability.*

beginning to certain social and cultural benefits, minorities had been granted no special financial provisions under the 1952 General Program for Implementation of Nationality Regional Autonomy.<sup>18</sup> In the aftermath of 1989-91, however, the push to raise living standards — part of a general bargain wherein the population accepts limited political participation in exchange for economic growth — applied especially to ethnic minorities.<sup>19</sup> In July 1994, therefore, the Third (National) Tibet Work Conference expressed an urgent need for economic development in Tibet, approved sixty-two infrastructure projects costing 2.38 billion yuan, and set a goal of 10% annual growth to double Tibet's gross domestic product by 2000.<sup>20</sup> Overall assistance to minority areas also increased sharply after the Central Ethnic Work Conference in 1999, when Jiang Zemin referenced events in Kosovo and East Timor and called for improved management of ethnic issues. As a result, the government launched a campaign to shift the focus of economic development from the coastal east to the poorer, inland west;<sup>21</sup> minority autonomous regions became special targets of the western development and investment campaigns (*xibu de kaifa*).<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, however, the party strengthened its commitment to retaining political control of ethnic minority areas, by coercive force if necessary. In January 1992, at the State Council and Central Committee's First National Conference on Ethnic Affairs, General Secretary Jiang Zemin reiterated government commitment to ethnic autonomy and development, but also emphasized, in implicit contrast with the Soviet model, that Beijing would not grant minority autonomous areas the right to independence.<sup>23</sup> Educational and cultural policies (in Tibet for example) were revised to limit exposure to nationalist ideologies, while a 1996 campaign instigated "political re-education" in monasteries and led to the arrest of political dissidents.<sup>24</sup> In Xinjiang, the CCP warned local authorities to take firmer police action against separatists or risk subjecting the entire country to turmoil and instability.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, as Murray Scot Tanner notes, incidents of public/social unrest in minority areas have a higher chance of being classified as "antagonistic" (anti-regime), a determination which enables local Party officials to authorize the use of higher levels of force than would otherwise be the case.<sup>26</sup> Although police have been criticized domestically for being slow to respond with force in the cases of unrest in Tibet in 2008 and Xinjiang in 2009, the crackdowns and increased presence of the People's Armed Police (PAP) that did follow the protests show the CCP's willingness to levy coercive power when necessary to manage a fractious ethnic population.

Thus, although Chinese leaders have gone to some lengths to increase economic redistribution and mitigate minority grievances through an affirmation of the autonomy system, they have also publicly affirmed that unlike Eastern Europe in 1989, the CCP is willing to use force to maintain its control over the areas contested by ethnic nationalist movements. Each of these policy developments was, at least in part, the result of the Chinese regime's post-1989 analysis.

### Conclusion

In the aftermath of the twin crises of 1989, the leaders of the People's Republic of China initiated a series of studies to gather data and analyze the causes of instability among their former authoritarian counterparts, as well as to craft recommendations for avoiding similar problems within the PRC. The extensive data-gathering effort, and the subsequent push to incorporate its findings into policy, defy baseline expectations both about the general capacity of authoritarian regimes to adapt, and more specifically, about the responses of authoritarian governance structures to the transnational diffusion of democratization strategies.

This suggests that theories of authoritarian stability that rest on inflexible structural variables need to be rethought to incorporate ideas about diffusion, agency, and the importance of political skill or leadership in responding both to structural conditions and to the agency of pro-democratic actors in civil society. By focusing only on the learning capacity and temporal progression of democratic movements, the diffusion literature neglects the strong incentives that authoritarian regimes also have to draw lessons from the success and failure of democratic movements abroad in order to maintain control at home. Perhaps democratization and authoritarian stability should be thought of, instead, as alternate outcomes in a process which scholars studying law enforcement have termed "competitive adaptation," in which criminal organizations and police bureaucracies adjust their patterns of behavior in response to the other's evolving strategies and tactics.<sup>27</sup> The post-1989 history of the PRC clearly demonstrates that CCP leaders saw this kind of analysis and adaptation to be in their interest, and pursued it aggressively. In contrast to some existing arguments, therefore, political agency, diffusion and international influence, all currently thought to favor the pro-democracy movements, can also play a role in the maintenance of authoritarian stability.

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## ENDNOTES

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# Election Violence Monitoring and the Use of New Communication Technologies

BY GABRIELLE BARDALL

Election violence monitoring has long been a key tool of civil society for violence prevention and mitigation. As recent experiences in Iran, Kenya, and Moldova have shown, new media technology such as Twitter, short message system (SMS) messaging and YouTube, and adapted tools such as Ushahidi, have created a new horizon of possibilities for monitoring, harnessing election violence by documenting it in real time, and creating new access channels for citizens to hold their governments accountable.

The effectiveness of election violence monitoring relies on three main factors: cost, accuracy and richness of data, and time of data capture. The opportunities presented by new social media technologies have revolutionized the cost and speed of violence monitoring, yet to date no analysis has been conducted of the accuracy of data generated through crowd sourcing nor of the lessons the traditional and new approaches can gain from each other. This paper will evaluate new media solutions to assess their respective benefits and limitations notably in the area of data accuracy. Building on the assessment, the paper will suggest common points for mutual reinforcement.

## *Emerging Technology and Election-Related Violence*

The introduction of new information communication technology (ICT) is radically transforming political landscapes around the world by creating unprecedented opportunities for civic engagement and connecting citizens, politicians, security responders, international and domestic observers, warlords, militia and political financiers with lightening speed. The populations of the world's poorest and most politically turbulent countries now largely have widespread access to nationwide cellular network coverage and SMS messaging at a minimum, as well as remote computing, Twitter, Facebook, podcasting, blogging, RSS feeds (Really Simple Syndication) and peer-to-peer networks in more sophisticated environments. The introduction of these ICTs to the issues of election-related violence has had far-reaching impacts for organized election and violence monitoring programs. In addition, ICTs have introduced a new generation of violence data collection and crisis mapping by generating a meaningful, spontaneous participation of everyday citizens armed with cell phones and laptops.

Firstly, the use of ICTs in election monitoring has been pioneered by several organizations in the past few years to enhance observation in a variety of ways. A diverse series of

examples of the use of SMS technology in domestic election monitoring comes from the National Democratic Institute (NDI), which introduced SMS technology as a reporting tool for election observation in two pilot projects in Indonesia (2005) and Palestine (2006) and has continued to integrate SMS into subsequent observation missions including Bahrain (2006), Albania (2007), Sierra Leone (2007), and Lebanon (2009).<sup>1</sup> NDI's experience has illustrated some of the numerous ways in which SMS messaging can facilitate the transmission of observation data. In Indonesia, NDI used SMS to overcome long wait times and coordination issues at observation data collection call centers, by creating a call-queue. The Palestine case was also notable in that SMS was combined with GIS digital mapping software to automate the process of tracking observer teams.<sup>2</sup>

The implications of these test cases for election violence monitoring are substantial. The speed and reduced costs are clear advantages, as is the ability to reduce human error or fraud in data management by moving data directly from the observer to a database. The Sierra Leonean example is particularly encouraging for the use of SMS messaging to

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*The most radical changes in the field may be taking place 'outside the box' of institutional programs.*

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provide textured data on the quality of an election and on incidents of violence and intimidation. The case is all the more significant given its application in a country with one of the world's poorest infrastructures. The adaption of SMS election observation methods to election-related violence monitoring is clearly a next step to enhancing the efficiency and sustainability of violence monitoring programs.

The most radical changes in the field may be taking place 'outside the box' of institutional programs. New media technologies such as Twitter, SMS and YouTube, and adapted tools such as Ushahidi have created a new horizon of possibilities for harnessing election violence by documenting it in real time via crowd-sourcing<sup>3</sup> and creating new access channels for citizens to hold their governments accountable—or to flame the fans of building violence. Ushahidi, or "testimony" in Swahili, is an Internet platform that was initially developed to map reports of violence in Kenya after the post-election fallout at the beginning of 2008. Adapted for use worldwide since its introduction less than

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*Election violence monitoring is at an important crossroads and practitioners must reflect carefully on how to capitalize on the opportunities offered by ICT solutions without compromising existing standards, which may endanger lives.*

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two years ago, the application collects basic information about incidents of violence and peaceful political events via SMS, email, and Twitter (crowd-sourcing) and maps the data using publically available mapping programs, such as Google Earth.

Ushahidi is already being extensively refined and supported by complementary software programs. The upcoming development of the Swift River project is an advanced application of the crowd-sourcing principle. The project aggregates data from tools such as Twitter, Ushahidi, Flickr, YouTube, local mobile and web social networks, and allows users to rate the information as it arrives. By “crowd-sourcing the filter” the probability of finding accurate information is increased, as information with greater veracity rating moves to the top of the information flow and is sorted by proximity, severity and category of an incident.

#### *New Media and Election Violence Monitoring – Analysis*

Election violence monitoring is at an important crossroads and practitioners must reflect carefully on how to capitalize on the opportunities offered by ICT solutions without compromising existing standards, which may endanger lives. Three key elements necessary to an effective election violence monitoring initiative including the speed of data collection, transmission, processing and publication; the accuracy and richness of data to ensure accountability; and the ability to achieve these criteria at a reasonable and sustainable cost. The following analysis will hold social media applications up to these requirements to assess the opportunities and risks of integrating ICTs into traditional violence monitoring work.

#### *Cost*

The cost benefit of applying SMS technology to facilitate the transmission of data has already been proven. Similarly, the cost of data collection and transmission via citizen reporting and crowd-sourcing shifts the cost burden away from training, deploying and securing monitors and moves it towards public awareness and (to a limited extent) towards the purchase of SMS credit and bandwidth.

There are two essential lessons to draw from the technical and methodological impact of these considerations. Firstly, crowd-sourcing data should not be regarded as a controlled research methodology but as supplementary source for information for monitoring research. Therefore, an effective

election-violence monitoring program that incorporates social media techniques must use a combined approach to ensure representativeness and bear the subsequent cost burdens of those additional resources. The second lesson concerns the appropriateness of technology solutions in impoverished countries.

While the cost inputs may be significantly lower through social media, costs related to analysis and dissemination must be considered. The cost of educating the public to use a cell phone short code system or other targeted program requires public outreach and possibly security costs for the organizing institution in places where this may put them at risk. Also, since the purpose of social media reporting is to generate more data than would otherwise be available, more data analysts, interpreters and investigators may be needed to follow up and research incoming reports. Solutions such as Swift River are providing better management of large quantities of data, however the need for human interface remains. Equally, the dissemination of results under an effective elections-violence monitoring program must be reported and diffused well beyond the confines of the Internet. Press conferences and other public pressure techniques to encourage political leaders to respect their codes of conduct require separate budget lines. These considerations are not meant to suggest that social media techniques are not cost effective—they are—but there are additional costs to consider in pairing ICT use with traditional monitoring standards.

Finally, sustainability of a medium must be included as a long-term financial consideration for any violence monitoring program. Certainly the online engines of Ushahidi and Swift River offer an ongoing, low-cost solution after their initial set-up costs that may reasonably be maintained after elections-focused donor funds are withdrawn. I would also suggest that the sustainability of social media approaches lies in the empowerment they provide their constituents. These strengths, coupled with the institutional capacity support could provide a powerful tool for sustainable democratic development.

#### *Richness and Accuracy of Data*

As the NDI and Swift River examples illustrate, SMS and Internet technologies are being used to gather and filter increasingly rich data via ICTs. But because effective election-violence monitoring requires both incident reporting and situational reporting, further adaptation is needed. Furthermore, violence monitoring also demands the identification

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## *Authoritarian governments are developing sophisticated tools to control Internet freedom and use social media to promote their own propaganda.*

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of a perpetrator, which is essential for filling the accountability gap and effectively using data to warn and prevent against further violence.<sup>4</sup> Crowd-sourcing programs such as Ushahidi do not take this into account thus far. While the software can be modified to include this information, it is highly sensitive and often difficult for an untrained, independent observer to identify, especially in the heat of a moment or in the frequent cases where a perpetrator is difficult to identify.

The interpretation of data is equally critical in this perspective. Election violence monitoring programs must offer a capacity to distinguish incidents of minor political importance from those that may foreshadow risks of escalating violence or political breakdown. Without this depth of analysis, election violence monitoring risks losing its application for broader risk assessment and early warning based on broad trends. The absence of this type of differentiation may also create additional risks by placing undue importance on small disputes or ignoring the broader impact of other incidents.

The question of data accuracy is critical to practitioners from all fields who are considering applying the technology. New advances in ICT applications offer some possible additional reassurances. Firstly, integrating social media data sources into monitoring data sets increases the amount of available information, which can help in verification and crosschecking information. Programs like Swift River are further refining the triangulation of crowd-sourced information by applying the same principle as data crowd-sourcing to the sourcing of the filters. The accuracy of these tools will need to be tested as they develop, however they already offer encouraging prospects for moving the accuracy of citizen journalism closer to professional verification standards.

Secondly, the technique of “bounded crowd-sourcing” enhances the quality of data by introducing password protection and limiting the set of users. Al-Jazeera took this approach in Gaza in 2009, which limited contributions Ushahidi to its journalists.<sup>5</sup> Different mutations of bounded sourcing may prove useful in various contexts where more sophisticated or highly sensitive data is being collected. Presumably a hybrid program could be developed that allows both bounded and unbounded sourcing to take place with a single project, thereby realizing the benefits of both approaches. While “human-to-human” verification of information may continue to be the ‘gold-standard’ (by default), the adaptability of available software offer helpful solutions,

especially if employed in a hybrid program utilizing both electronic and human data verification approaches.

### Timeliness

Undoubtedly the strongest argument put forward in favor of ICT use for monitoring is that of timeliness. However, as illustrated in the analyses above, the timeliness of social media sources may come at the expense of accuracy and data richness.

The straightforward calculation of time over accuracy is not as clear-cut outside the context of immediate crisis. In certain circumstances, the accuracy of information becomes equally, if not more important in relation to timeliness of reporting, especially when the incidents are characterized by shades of gray. Accuracy in these contexts is required to correctly identify incidents and perpetrators as well as adequately understand the cause and implicit impact of a given event, thereby providing security providers and electoral planners with more pertinent information and allowing civil activists to make strong and supported cases against violence.

### The Threats of ICTs and Election Violence— Abuse and Misuse

While the spectrum of opportunities and benefits of ICTs may inspire democracy and freedom activists around the world, they offer equal opportunities in repressing political freedoms. Authoritarian governments are developing sophisticated tools to control Internet freedom and use social media to promote their own propaganda. The use of images and Tweets, blog reports, and emails to identify and prosecute monitors or protesters, as seen in Iran, seriously threatens the security of citizen journalists. The use of these “open” and nominally unverified sources of data may also create challenges for international organizations working under state-issued permits and registration documents. Likewise, just as “old” media has been used to foment violence, such as the case of the *Radio Mille Collines* in Rwanda, which transmitted racist propaganda to encourage the genocide, “new” media is equally potent. For example, in Kenya, where many used social media to comment and monitor the conflict, over 1,000 mass text messages were traced that advocated ethnic violence against one or the other side in the post-election disputes.<sup>6</sup>

## Conclusion

The power of information continues to drive the electoral observation movement today, as it did over 100 years ago. New technology allows information to be collected and shared at an increasingly fast pace. The essential principle to take away from this discussion is that no single tool is a substitute for a complete system. ICTs are instruments to facilitate a growing body of data related to election violence and which can complement violence monitoring programs, not supplant them. As Patrick Meier argues, “we need to think less in linear terms and more in terms of information ecosystems with various ecologies of information sources.”<sup>7</sup> Effective application of social media and ICT technology to election violence monitoring will require a hybrid approach, tailored to the political environment and technological infrastructure and culture of the country.

Social media tools such as Ushahidi will undoubtedly continue to adjust and diversify to adapt to the needs of violence monitoring initiatives as well as other specific situations, from health to corruption to politics. While urgent crises may demand immediate information over of verified data, most election-related violence monitoring takes place in low- or medium- intensity conflict contexts and will require systems that balance speed, accuracy, data richness and analysis and program costs. Combining the high standards of election violence monitoring with the resources of new media and ICTs provides an exciting horizon for improving the prevention and resolution of election-related violence and empowering generations of citizens to engage constructively with their governments.

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# Backlash Against Democracy: The Regulation of Civil Society in Africa

BY JEANNE ELONE

Among the many forces<sup>1</sup> which contributed to the political liberalization of African nations, civil society formations played a pivotal role in dismantling authoritarian one-party rule and opening public space for wider political participation.<sup>2</sup> However, democratic gains achieved during the 1990s have slowly begun to erode as conflict has resurfaced across the continent and many hybrid<sup>3</sup> democratic regimes have adopted repressive tactics to maintain political power. The increasing regulation of the civil society sector indicates a return to autocratic practices and a backlash against democratization. Yet, despite this trend several countries have also adopted enabling frameworks for civil society, recognizing the contribution of this sector to national development. The existence of these simultaneous trends invites a re-examination of the current state of African civil society and its relationship to democratic consolidation.

The first section of this paper provides a brief overview of the recent history of state-civil society relations in Africa. The second section examines the current trend in repressive NGO legislation in Zambia, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe, which include: (1) barriers to entry; (2) barriers to operational activity and free speech; and (3) barriers to resources.<sup>4</sup> The third and final section frames this trend within the history of democratization in Africa and identifies new directions for research and analysis.<sup>5</sup>

The 1990s ushered in an era of hope and optimism in Africa, as previously autocratic regimes took salutary steps towards accommodating political participation, establishing democratic institutions, and relinquishing absolute power over state apparatus. The failure of state-socialism and the victory of liberal democracy created new incentive structures for developing nations to adopt political and economic reforms to ensure favorable aid flows. African civil society played a pivotal role in this transition as well, convening sovereign national conferences and constituent assemblies, which laid the foundations for multi-party democracy and political transition.

This third wave of democratization resulted from a combination of internal and external pressures to open up closed political spaces and create the conditions for democratic governance and popular participation. The question of why

nations transition from autocratic to democratic systems is posed by Robert Dahl in terms of the “the costs of suppression” versus the “costs of toleration.”<sup>6</sup> When the former outweigh the latter, even dictatorial regimes will cede to nominal levels of political inclusion and compromise to maintain access to political power. During the third wave of democratization, the costs of suppression greatly increased. Post Cold War, international allies withdrew their support from autocratic leaders who had previously enjoyed unlimited amnesties and financial backing from opposing sides in the East-West divide.

The victory of economic and political liberalism gave rise to a global consensus regarding the virtues of democracy. Democratic government promised to advance economic development, human rights, and peace. The practical implications of this new consensus were manifest in the proliferation of democracy-assistance programs funded by governments, multilateral bodies, international financial institutions, and independent foundations.<sup>7</sup> The end of the Cold War and the failure of state-centered development strategies led international donors to seek new avenues to influence political and economic development, namely civil society and non-governmental organizations. Civil society’s role thus expanded from the sphere of political and civil liberties to play an integral role in development strategies, poverty reduction, humanitarian aid, and basic services provision.

Incomplete democratic transitions have created a new kind of authoritarianism in which outright repression and violence are no longer tolerable given the increased effectiveness of civil society from within the state and the international climate for human rights and donor conditionality based on good governance and the rule of law. In these cases, autocrats have either appointed and quickly replaced reformists after brief intervals of unsuccessful democratization, or have held on to power while touting superficial liberalization and a moderately more open political space for democratic opposition. The underlying political realities remain unchanged: manipulated elections, weak government institutions, excessively powerful executives, state-censored media, rampant corruption, and the lack of an independent judiciary.<sup>8</sup> Since democratic movements have the potential to topple weak states in favor of democracy and away from the control of ruling elites, civil society represents a viable threat to the stability of these repressive regimes.<sup>9</sup> Such politically insecure governments have adopted subtle strategies for quelling dissent, including: barriers to entry, legal restrictions on NGO activities, and barriers to resources.

## 1. Barriers to Entry (Registration Limitations)

In most cases, the right to association is guaranteed by national constitutions. In Ethiopia, the right to free association is enshrined in Article 31 of the Constitution stating

*The absence of clearly defined rules and regulations regarding the registration procedures exacerbates the climate of insecurity for NGOs whose registration status remains at the discretion of political authorities.*

that ‘Everyone shall have the right to form associations for whatever purpose.’ The Zambian constitution safeguards fundamental rights and freedoms including the right to freedom of association under Article 11 (b). The same is true for Zimbabwe. However, these rights are obstructed by prohibitions against unregistered groups, complex registration procedures, vague grounds for denial, re-registration requirements, and barriers for international organizations. For example, the 2008 Ethiopian Proclamation on Societies and Charities imposes severe penalties on individuals managing unregistered groups including a fine of 10,000 Birr (approximately \$800 US) which can be combined with a prison sentence of up to 5 years.<sup>10</sup> Such penalties undermine the civil society sector by criminalizing unregistered groups and creating a climate of fear and insecurity for groups which have not yet received legal status.

To ensure the independence and freedom of civil society organizations, registration procedures should be voluntary, efficient, time-bound, and include well defined grounds for refusal of registration.<sup>11</sup> Contrary to these international best practices, repressive legislations create mandatory and burdensome registration requirements which are purposefully vague. The 2009 Zambian NGO Bill mandates compulsory registration for all NGOs, a requirement that can be debilitating for community based organizations, which may or may not be able to produce official documents such as annual reports and audited accounts. Although the bill allows for organizations to begin activities once a registration application has been entered, it does not prescribe time limits on application processing. This uncertainty effectively prevents organizations from making intermediate and long term plans since future registration status remains in doubt.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, in Ethiopia, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, regulations governing the registration process are vague and leave considerable discretion to the registration officials. As a result, NGOs have trouble registering, bear long delays, recurring requests for information, and in some cases denial.

In all four countries, the grounds for refusing registration are poorly defined thereby creating the conditions for prejudicial decisions against which civil society organizations have no legal recourse. Registration can be denied for a number of reasons, all of which repose on the discretionary power of political authorities. In Zambia, an application for registration can be rejected on the basis of failing to contribute to “public interest,” which is not defined in the text of the bill, or upon recommendation of the NGO Council, a body created under the auspices of the bill to oversee registration

processes.<sup>13</sup> The absence of clearly defined rules and regulations regarding the registration procedures exacerbates the climate of insecurity for NGOs whose registration status remains at the discretion of political authorities. Additionally, the Zambian NGO Bill requires registration applicants to specify the administrative districts, divisions, and location where NGOs plan to carryout proposed activities as well as indicate proposed sources of funding. These stipulations represent self-imposed constraints which could seriously hamper the future expansion and effectiveness of civil society organizations.

*2. Barriers to Operational Activity  
(Legal Restrictions on NGO Activities)*

Once organizations have successfully negotiated complex and burdensome registration requirements, legal constraints can restrict the types of activities they participate in. These barriers to operational activity include direct prohibition of certain spheres of activity, intrusive government oversight, criminal sanctions against individuals, and the threat of termination or dissolution. Recent legislation in all three countries includes provisions which correspond to one or more of these barriers to operational activity.

Both the 2004 Zimbabwean NGO Bill and the 2008 Ethiopian Proclamation on Societies and Charities impose restrictive definitions of foreign versus national NGOs, which are subsequently used to prohibit certain spheres of activity. In Zimbabwe, the 2004 Bill defined local NGOs as those organizations that are founded, managed, and staffed by Zimbabwean nationals residing in the country. Foreign NGOs whose primary purpose involves governance issues would be denied registration, and local NGOs participating in governance activities would be prohibited from receiving foreign funding. Similarly, charities and societies established by Ethiopians under Ethiopian law would be deemed foreign institutions if they received more than 10% of their funding from foreign sources. Foreign NGOs are prohibited from participating in activities that advance citizenship, community development, human and democratic rights, conflict resolution, equality, diversity, and the efficiency of the justice and law enforcement system. These laws effectively relegate civil society organizations to service delivery and preclude their engagement with substantive issues such as human rights and governance.

The establishment of government oversight agencies to regulate the NGO sector creates intrusive supervisory mech-

*These authoritarian efforts are in contrast to the enabling environments nurtured by several African governments, which recognize civil society and the NGO sector as partners in economic and political development.*

anisms which are in many cases beyond judicial review. Invasive oversight measures may take the form of burdensome reporting requirements, interference in internal management, and mandatory coordination with government policy. Much like the Zambian bill, the Ethiopian proclamation establishes a regulatory agency with virtually limitless powers including the authority to revoke registration status and dissolve organizations which it suspects of “misconduct or mismanagement” or participating in “unlawful purposes” which are “contrary to national or public interest.” In addition, the Ethiopian agency can appoint, remove, or suspend staff of civil society offices, freeze assets, perform intrusive audits, intervene in internal decision making processes, scrutinize operations, and force testimonial disclosure with respect to any matter related to the organizations operations. Membership lists and donor records are also required in order to provide government access to information regarding all individuals potentially associated with an organization.<sup>14</sup> Under these circumstances, participating in local civil society organizations entails serious personal risk since NGO members can be fined and imprisoned as a result of their connection to any “unlawful” organization.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Barriers to Resources

NGO legislation can be used to constrain the ability of NGOs to secure the funding necessary to carry out their activities. Increasingly, barriers to funding have become common place and target foreign funding in particular. Zimbabwe was the first African country to institute legislation restricting foreign funding to local organizations and proscribing the types of work local organizations could participate in once they had received foreign backing. Similarly, the 2009 Ethiopian law restricts NGOs receiving more than 10% of their financing from foreign sources to engage in activities related to “the advancement of human and democratic rights.”<sup>16</sup> This severely limits the productivity of these organizations because it is virtually impossible for these groups to raise sufficient funds from local sources. Such provisions silence civil society by starving NGOs of resources, essentially extinguishing their right to expression.<sup>17</sup>

### Implications for Democratic Consolidation in Africa

Although the progress of democracy in Africa since the 1990s is undeniable, many of Africa’s democratic transitions remain incomplete and pluralistic policies exist alongside persistent authoritarian practices. In this regard, Larry Diamond distinguishes between electoral democracy and

liberal democracy.<sup>18</sup> Electoral democracy refers to a minimalist conception of democratic practice based on electoral competition and participation, while liberal democracy refers to the qualitative elements of political freedom necessary to render electoral participation meaningful. These political freedoms, which include the right to free speech, the right to media independence, and the right to free association, are currently being undermined by the drafting of restrictive NGO legislation across the continent. Until these fundamental rights have been operationalized, African democracies will remain hostage to political elites in control of state apparatus.

Democratic consolidation in Africa thus requires a vibrant and free civil society which can contribute to the transformation of electoral democracies into liberal democracies through the expansion political freedoms and mobilization of popular participation in economic and political development. The state remains an essential player in this important work, thus the two sectors must develop effective rules of engagement so that they can work as allies rather than as adversaries. The repressive legislations discussed in this paper fail to provide a positive regulatory framework which could advance local civil society’s capacity to contribute to economic and political development by providing predictable and reliable systems of corporate governance, oversight, and management. Instead, these legislations represent an underhanded attempt by the state to re-conquer the political arena and criminalize dissent. These authoritarian efforts are in contrast to the enabling environments nurtured by several African governments, which recognize civil society and the NGO sector as partners in economic and political development. In these cases, the regulation of civil society becomes a welcome sign of state strength and contributes to advance political legitimacy and popular support for good governance.

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- 5 It should be noted that the countries covered by this paper represent examples of repressive regimes. There are also examples of African states which have created enabling environments for civil society such as Ghana, Senegal, and Tanzania, to name a few. A comparative study of the legislative and political environment for civil society in a mix of repressive and open regimes will be the subject my dissertation research.
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ENDNOTES

1 Other forces include the collapse of the Cold War bipolar system, international pressures for democratization, the contagion effect of popular democratic movements in Eastern Europe and various forms of aid conditionality.

# Dictators and Demonstrators: Sharing Strategies on Repression and Reform



**Barak Hoffman** makes opening remarks. The symposium was presented by CDACS, Georgetown's Forum for the Study of Democracy, and Freedom House at the Council on Foreign Relations on December 10, 2009.



**Daniel Brumberg**, associate professor of political science at Georgetown University, co-director of Georgetown's Master of Arts Program in Democracy and Governance, and acting director of the Muslim World Initiative at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), opens the panel on dictators.



**Thomas O. Melia**, deputy executive director of Freedom House, opens the panel on demonstrators.



Thomas O. Melia (*center*), leads a panel discussing demonstrators and their adoption of new strategies and technologies against oppressive regimes. Participants include (*from left to right*): J. Hunter Price, from the Department of Political Science at Trinity University; Laura Motazz, from the National Endowment for Democracy's Center for International Media Assistance; Gabrielle Bardall, from the International Foundation for Electoral Systems; and Hervé St. Louis, from the University of Calgary's Center for Military and Strategic Studies.



Daniel Brumberg (*center*), leads a panel discussing dictators' efforts to preempt demonstrators' use of new technologies. Participants include (*from left to right*): Brandon Yoder, from the National Endowment for Democracy; Jeanne Elone, from Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies; Lauren Albright, from the Department of Political Science at Temple University; and Sheena Chestnut, from the Department of Political Science at Harvard University.

*In Egypt, the successes, failures, and potential of the new media revolution are more apparent than anywhere else in the region.*

PRICE, *Continued from Page 1*

The wave of democracy that was supposed to flood the region after the fall of Saddam Hussein never manifested itself. Hopes that many of the populist movements that sprouted following invasion Iraq, the most promising being the *Kefaya* and *Khalas* movements in Egypt and Lebanon respectively, would yield at least some small changes for the better seem to have been merely wishful thinking. While new media isn't going to be the end of dictatorships in the Middle East, it could prove to be helpful in forcing some democratic changes.

In Egypt, the successes, failures, and potential of the new media revolution are more apparent than anywhere else in the region. Perhaps the most fundamental success story is simply the incredible access to these new forms of technology Egyptians have gained over the last decade. The substantial forays into electronic dissent occurred in early 2004, and in the half decade following such efforts gained in both number and intensity, largely unhindered by Egypt's dictatorial regime. However, the past year has seen new efforts on behalf of the regime to repress these new modes of activism, which have in many ways been successful. If Egyptian activists are to learn to use the mediums effectively (and if observers wish to more accurately predict the consequences of electronic dissent), then it is important to take stock of the spread of new media in Egypt, how far electronic activism has come, and what paths might be available for it in the future.

The pace with which technologies of the 21st century have gone from non-existent to pervasive is nothing short of astounding. At the turn of the century, there were fewer than 1 million mobile phone subscribers in Egypt; less than a decade later there are almost 55 million,<sup>1</sup> a penetration rate of almost 66%.<sup>2</sup> Considering that over 25 million Egyptians are under the age of 14, over 95% of Egyptian adults have access to a mobile phone.<sup>3</sup> With SMS rates at less than .1 Egyptian pound a message, communication via text message is available to almost all adult Egyptians. Mobile phones have become ubiquitous in Egypt.

Data indicate that Internet access is not far behind. The cost of Internet access in Egypt means that it is more restricted than mobile phones, but still available to the majority of Egyptians. Most Internet use in Egypt occurs at public terminals, schools, and Internet cafes, and not inside the home. The flourishing of Internet cafes in Egypt has helped expand Internet access. By interviewing hundreds of Internet café

owners in 2004 Deborah Wheeler found that Internet cafés are patronized by all classes of societies, including college students, tea boys, and secretaries.<sup>4</sup> Because many blogs and other online communication tools are written in *`ammiyya* (colloquial Arabic), the educational barrier to use the Internet is not as high as it is with more formal Arabic media.<sup>5</sup> The penetration rate among Egypt's youth is mostly likely significantly higher than other age groups since they have grown up socialized into Internet usage in ways their elders have not. Given the low cost and literacy barriers, a sizable portion of the 40 million Egyptians between the ages of 10 and 25 have at least basic familiarity with the Internet.

Egyptians use the Internet primarily for email and chatting, and more recently for social networking. Facebook estimated over one million users in Egypt by the beginning of May of this year.<sup>6</sup> Yet the most prominent method of peer-to-peer communication in Egypt is still blogging. Determining the number of bloggers (and their readership) has been so difficult that most scholars have had to resort to generalizations. Marc Lynch and Andrew Exum estimated in 2007 that the number of political blogs in Egypt is anywhere from "perhaps a few thousand" to just around 1,000.<sup>8</sup> Top blog hosts Blogger.com and Maktoobblog.com list 24,409 blogs and 10,000 blogs respectively for registered to users who report their country of residence to be Egypt.<sup>9</sup> While many of these blogs are possibly inactive,<sup>10</sup> the fact that just two hosts collectively report almost 35,000 blogs suggests that the number of active blogs in Egypt could be over one thousand. Even more difficult is determining who reads blogs. Readership varies immensely between different blogs and at different times. For instance, Wa`el Abbas claims about 30,000 regular visits to his blog each month, but in May of 2005, a protest that was violently suppressed by government forces, his site received over 500,000 hits in just two days.<sup>11</sup>

Blogging began in earnest in Egypt in 2003-2004, at the time of the advent of the *Kefaya* movement.<sup>12</sup> It would not be possible to understand the origins of the political blog in Egypt without mentioning *Kefaya*, nor would it be possible to understand the successes of *Kefaya* without discussing blogs. Indeed, this relationship has been described as "a close, organic relations between blogging and a contentious political movement."<sup>13</sup> When *Kefaya* held its first major demonstration in December of 2004, it was organized entirely online, coordinated by the group's highly trafficked site *harakamasria.com*.<sup>14</sup> From the very beginning, *Kefaya* was an online movement as well as an offline one.

*Instead of shutting down websites, the regime has utilized other methods of repression, such as arresting journalists, harassing their family members and friends, and enlisting the government press to defame the character of dissidents.*

As the movement gained momentum and political activists joined the group, they brought their personal blogs with them, or, were encouraged to start them. What emerged was an online forum that reflected the diverse nature of *Kefaya* itself. The almost total lack of barriers to the entry of the blogosphere, as well as the drastic decrease in the costs and dangers associated with free speech, led to a profusion of diverse blogs which were united by their criticism of the government. As the movement held more demonstrations, blogs helped generate increased attention and participation when traditional media outlets refused to provide coverage. Activists used SMS messaging to coordinate demonstrations. Mass texting allowed for demonstrators to warn each other about the location of State Security Forces, make last minute changes regarding the location of the protest, and in many cases help track to movement and status of demonstrators who had been apprehended by authorities. These messages were then relayed to a broader audience via the blogosphere, all of which led to an extremely well informed activist community. However, *Kefaya* failed to reach a broader audience because the general public was not aware of its existence.

Gradually, as Internet penetration in Egypt increased, the public became more familiar with the blogosphere. While the number and types of Egyptian blogs has increased greatly, they have not had more impact. The result has been a large influx of digital participants in existing opposition movements, but not offline activists. This in turn led to competition and various disagreements amongst the original *Kefaya* activists as well as the newcomers, and ultimately contributed to the disintegration of the movement. The arrival of a second and third generation of bloggers since the decline of the *Kefaya* movement has contributed to the cacophony that, while helping increase the legitimacy and popularity of blogs, has also served to drown out some of the more experienced and motivated leaders. Blogger Amr Ezzat, who authors *What it seems to me*,<sup>15</sup> worries that this sort of predicament may be endemic to political culture online: “It’s ironic that we keep promoting democracy and condemning centralization of power, but we can’t even run a yahoo[sic] group.”<sup>16</sup>

Until the spring of 2008, the Egyptian government had largely ignored the electronic activities of dissidents, preferring to respond only to the physical manifestations of any opposition. Unlike other countries in the region, Egypt blocks very few pages and it is relatively simple to use proxy-

servers to skirt the restrictions. With a few exceptions, there had been almost no blockage of websites in Egypt prior to the spring of last year.<sup>17</sup> Instead of shutting down websites, the regime has utilized other methods of repression, such as arresting journalists, harassing their family members and friends, and enlisting the government press to defame the character of dissidents.

The turning point in the nexus of electronic repression and dissent came with the April 6th General Strike in 2008. The April 6th Youth Movement is a loose, diverse coalition comprised of remnants of the *Kefaya* movements, the al-Wast party, the al-Karama, the 9th March Movement for University Autonomy, and other groups.<sup>18</sup> Facebook and the blogosphere enabled the group to coordinate efforts quickly (the strike was organized in less than two months), which led to Western observers touting the success of the movement and the future of “Facebook activism.”

Yet when April 6th finally arrived, the general strike called for in the blogosphere failed to materialize, and the only tangible manifestation of the planned protests occurred at textile factories, where workers largely mobilized by themselves through more traditional means. But the regime took notice, and would no longer turn a blind eye towards electronic activism. It rolled out a strategy for countering this movement on May 4, 2008 when the April 6th Movement attempted to stage another general strike on Mubarak’s birthday. Between May 4, 2008, and April 6, 2009, the Mubarak regime employed a distinct strategy to derail the April 6th Movement. The regime hounded the leadership of the movement practically into submission, and many bloggers and activists affiliated with the group were arrested. At the same time, the regime conducted an even more brutal and wide-ranging campaign against the labor movement in Mahalla, putting 49 workers on trial in the High State Security Court. Many more young people have been dissuaded from joining such movements in the first place, preferring instead to pursue the creature comforts of post-*Infatih* Egypt.<sup>19</sup> Why risk getting yourself beaten or arrested in demonstration when you could be enjoying the comforts of modern Egyptian life, especially when protesting has shown that would only be in vain?

It would be unfortunate if the failure of the April 6th Youth Movement in this one instance led to the end of electronic activism in Egypt generally, or even the departure of the

newly-mobilized urban youth elite from the field of activism. Yet the state these activists are entangled with is a hardened authoritarian regime with decades of experience dividing and conquering its opposition. It will take a much savvier opposition, with clearer goals and a stronger presence on the ground, to seriously threaten the state. If a viable opposition is to take shape with the assistance of electronic media, the opposition will have to pay much more careful attention to the kinds of small-scale struggles over freedom taking place every day in the courts, the press, the labor sector, and the professional associations. It will also have to draw the right conclusions from the April 6, 2008 experience. The 2008 strike was probably more of a test run for information dissemination more than a large-scale mobilization. As Ferris notes, “It was a day where information technology played a crucial role, the updates coming out of Mahalla, people were exchanging info on Facebook about the strike, they were mobilizing, how can we help, this and that.”<sup>20</sup>

Future actions via new media should probably be tied to on-the-ground efforts, especially concerning those areas in which activists and professionals have had the most success contesting the regime’s hegemony: human rights and issues of constitutional and economic justice. These issues are the subject of widespread political agreement among Egypt’s divergent opposition forces and population as a whole, and if they can successfully pool their resources, social media are likely to play a critical role in building political consensus, coordinating and executing concrete actions, and in putting together international human rights coalitions that can put pressure on the regime. The most promising route might be for the April 6th movement, with its ties to international media organizations and NGOs, to somehow link up with the labor movement in advance of the 2011 presidential elections—even if not all sectors of the opposition agree with the labor movement’s economic principles. As other revolutions have demonstrated, unity around issues of democracy must precede struggles over the post-revolutionary landscape. However, it is up to individual activists to turn the possibilities of social media into reality, and even the most tech-and-politically savvy individuals will continue to face determined resistance from a regime that has proved to be adept at repressing all threats to its existence.

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ENDNOTES

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- 7 Lynch, Marc, *Voices of the New Arab Republic*. Columbia University Press; New York. 2007. Pages 7-9, 11-23
- 8 Ibid 43
- 9 Maktoob.com
- 10 A study to approximate the ratio of regularly maintained to inactive blogs would be immensely helpful in determining the number of blogs in any given community. Unfortunately, I am unaware of the existence of any such study.
- 11 Author interview with Abbas 27 June 2007
- 12 *Kefaya* is the Arabic word for “enough,” and is the name given to a loose coalition of political organizations that are united by their opposition to the presidency/autocracy of Hosni Mubarak and the presumed succession of his son Gamal. *Kefaya* was very active from the summer of 2004 to early 2006, but aggressive repression on the part of the regime and its failure to see the successful completion of many of its stated goals contributed to a general decline in the group’s activity.
- 13 Lynch 2007, p 57
- 14 Loosely translated, the website address is “The Advancement of Egypt.”
- 15 <http://mabadali.blogspot.com>
- 16 While Ezzat’s concern might appear hyperbolic, it is in fact quite literal; disputes over who would run the “Youth for Change” Yahoo group affiliated with *Kefaya* actually forced the group to shut down. Author interview with Ahmed al-Saleh, April 14th, 2008.
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2 See “Defending Civil Society,” World Movement for Democracy, February 2008, full report available at <http://www.wmd.org/defcivilsociety/about.html>; Vernon, Rebecca B., “Closing the Door on Aid,” *The International Journal for Not-for-Profit Law*, Volume 11, Issue 4 (August 2009); Kamhi, Alison, “The Russian NGO Law: Potential Conflicts with International, National, and Foreign Legislation,” *The International Journal for Not-for-Profit Law*, Volume 9, Issue 1 (December 2006).

3 Kamhi, Alison, *supra* note 3.

4 Bourjaily, Natalia, *supra* note 5.

5 CIVICUS, *supra* note 13.

6 “Barred from the Debate: Restrictions on NGO Public Policy,” *supra* note 2.

7 CIVICUS, *supra* note 13.

8 CIVICUS, *supra* note 13.

9 International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, *supra* note 20

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12 *Ibid.*

13 Burrows, Beth, “Letter to the Honorable Rafael Correa, President of Ecuador,” Edmunds Institute, March 10, 2009, available at [http://www.ac-cionecologica.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1034&Itemid=7551](http://www.ac-cionecologica.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1034&Itemid=7551)

14 “NGO Law Monitor: Nicaragua,” International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, October 13, 2009, available at <http://www.icnl.org/knowledge/ngolaw-monitor/nicaragua.htm>

15 *Ibid.*

16 *Ibid.*

17 “Barred from the Debate: Restrictions on NGO Public Policy,” *supra* note 2.

18 “*Defendiendo la Sociedad Civil*,” *supra* note 28.

19 “*Defendiendo la Sociedad Civil*,” *supra* note 28.

20 *Ibid.*

21 As of April 2010, no new details have emerged regarding the Nicaraguan government’s consideration of the law.

Brandon Yoder, make clear is adopting laws to repress civil society. In the 1980s and 1990s, many countries transitioned to democracy, and enhancing freedom of political association was central in these political reforms. As civil society organizations have become more effective and begun linking with organizations in other countries to enhance their capacity, governments increasingly see these organizations as a threat. In response, Elone and Yoder notice a broad trend of governments imposing restrictions on these organizations, especially their capacity to seek external funding. The second strategy, most prominent in Sheena Chestnut’s paper on China, is governments learning the most effective way to silence protestors. Camera cell phones and internet web sites, such as You Tube, now permit near-instantaneous global transmission of pictures and video. As a result, governments are becoming more wary of repressing violently in public. Instead, they are resorting to less visible forms of coercion. Chestnut explores the efforts of the Government of China in these tactics. The final strategy is cooperation on blocking political reform through international organizations, a theme most highly developed in Lauren Albright’s paper on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Often called the Dictator’s Club because non-democratic regimes comprise its entire membership, Albright examines how the SCO allows member states to share strategies on “best practices” for defusing internal demands for political reform.

Politics is dynamic contest. The main conclusion to emerge from the conference is that in the struggle between dictators and demonstrators, those who are best able to adapt to changing circumstances and opportunities tend to prevail.

# New Media in Closed Societies: The Role of Digital Technologies in Burma's Saffron Revolution

BY LAURA MOTTAZ

In recent years, digital technologies have made headlines for their role in democratic movements. Activists around the world have harnessed these technologies to support protest movements, but the political implications of these technologies remain poorly understood. Proponents argue that the decentralization of news production can enhance channels for political engagement in authoritarian countries and create opportunities for democratic gains. While critics contend that the susceptibility of digital technologies to the manipulations of authoritarian governments prevents them from challenging the power base of repressive regimes.

The last decade witnessed a shift in the variety and uses of media. Traditional media's high barriers to entry, including gatekeepers and high production costs, restricted news production to a select few. Centralization allowed autocrats to more easily control and censor media content. New media platforms like the Internet and mobile phones greatly reduce barriers to entry by decreasing the cost of producing and publishing media content. Citizens are transformed from news consumers into news producers, allowing for a more democratic and robust discussion of news and current events than traditional one-way media. Decentralization of news production creates new challenges for authoritarians to control information.

Digital technologies also brought a new dimension to political activism by creating a platform for individuals living under authoritarian rule to share information with the world. Digital technologies allow activists to transcend geographic boundaries and build networks for disseminating information. These technologies have become efficient tools for activists across the globe to communicate and mobilize.

The skeptics argue that in authoritarian regimes, the impact of digital technologies on democracy is more nebulous. Potential benefits are overshadowed by the ability of autocratic governments to retain control over use and access to these technologies. This would suggest that the proliferation of digital technologies would not necessarily create a significant challenge to the power base of authoritarian regimes. Though the technologies provide the world access to events in real-time, critics argue that information does not enhance the ability of international actors to influence outcomes.

Burma's Saffron Revolution provides a compelling case to test these ideas. The 2007 uprising is a unique example of a technology driven protest in a highly authoritarian state. Images from the protests garnered a great deal of international attention, but ultimately did not lead to political change. The case can thus be used to highlight both the strengths and vulnerabilities of these new technologies.

## *Digital Technologies in Burma: Censorship vs. Circumvention*

The Burmese military regime is highly centralized and grants little power to the individual or private sector. Not surprisingly, regime control extends to the use of digital technologies. Less than .5 percent of the Burmese population has access to new media platforms. Out of Burma's 48 million citizens, only 214,000 have access to a mobile phone and only 31,500 have access to the Internet.

Those that do have access face a variety of regulations meant to maintain government control over information flows. In 1996, the government made the possession of an unregistered telephone, fax machine, or modem illegal and punishable by imprisonment of up to 15 years. The junta has repeatedly made good on this threat, going as far as imprisoning the honorary consul for Norway for "unauthorized use of a fax machine". In 1999, the authorities shut down two independent Internet Service Providers (ISPs), leaving only government controlled ISPs. Continuing this trend, the regime introduced new rules of online conduct under the 2000 Web Regulations, which prohibit any web content that is, "...detrimental to the current policies and secret security affairs of the government..." and prohibits writings that are political in nature. Under these regulations, email communications are subject to strict surveillance and access to content is controlled.

New restrictions also make it difficult to obtain residential Internet connections. An applicant must acquire a signed letter from the relevant 'porter warden' verifying that the applicant is not 'politically dangerous' before the application process can even begin. Consequently, most Burmese citizens access the Internet from a limited number of Internet cafes, which are subject to severe surveillance and often engage in self-censorship. Cafe owners are required to take screenshots of user activity every five minutes and deliver these images to the government on a regular basis.

*By utilizing both the speed of digital technologies and large traditional media audiences, Burmese activists were able to propel their cause into the international spotlight.*

Despite government restrictions, citizen journalists and digital activists have found innovative ways to circumvent restrictions. Many install foreign-hosted proxy servers, allowing users to access Gmail and other blocked sites. Hyper-encrypted e-mail services are also used to evade government censorship of e-mail content. According to experts, these circumvention techniques have been very successful and the junta has been unable to control their use. The outbreak of the Saffron Revolution demonstrates this.

*The Saffron Revolution: The Role of Digital Dissidents*

On August 15, 2007 a series of anti-government protests erupted in response to a decision by the junta to remove fuel subsidies, raising the price by as much as 100 percent. These initial demonstrations were bolstered on September 18, as thousands of Buddhist monks led over 80,000 citizens in a peaceful protest opposing military rule. The subsequent crackdown resulted in the deaths of at least three Buddhist monks and the detention of as many as 300 people. On September 27, the junta security forces raided Buddhist monasteries across the country, arresting an additional 700 monks. The junta also moved against a 50,000-person protest in the streets of Yangon, shooting an estimated 100 people. By the following day the protests were over. Across Burma, eyewitnesses reported that the streets were eerily empty as protestors and citizens kept to their homes for safety.

Despite their eventual defeat, activists utilized new media to aid their cause in two ways. First, access to digital technologies in 2007 enabled activists to stay organized and informed. Mobile phones played a crucial role in keeping protestors connected by reducing communication times from weeks to mere seconds. Mobile phones played an indispensable role in the pro-democracy campaign. They permitted monks and activists to coordinate their protests to generate the most pressure on the regime. Mobile phones also allowed activists to stay in contact during the protests and warn each other about military movements. According to Tun Myint Aung, an activist for the National League for Democracy, “The phones are very important now. I always take mine wherever I go. It is next to me when I sleep. Through it I stay in touch with my people, and follow news about events in the country.”

Burmese bloggers also played a critical role in the uprising by providing citizens with information about the protests. “It is really important; people want to know what is going on,” states one blogger. “If something happens we can warn people. We can do something, we can keep the people aware.”

Even with limited Internet access, bloggers found innovative ways to circumvent government restrictions and to send out updates about the protests. Many relied on foreign proxy servers and encrypted e-mails to keep their blogs updated during the protest.

Due to the lack of broad Internet access in Burma, Internet initiatives found the most success when coupled with traditional forms of mass communication, particularly radio and satellite television. During the uprising, news updates from Internet blog sites were quickly transferred into television and radio broadcasts — most notably those operated by the Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB). DVB reports were broadcast back into Burma via satellite to counter the regime’s propaganda and misinformation about the protests. With international journalists banned from the country, these updates were the only source of information for protestors during the demonstrations.

Second, these technologies also allowed activists to connect with the international community. Pictures, video footage, and commentary reached international news agencies via the Internet within hours. The speed at which information about Burma’s democracy protests reached the outside world had a significant impact on the movement because the international community was able to quickly react to this information and support protestors by putting pressure on the Burmese regime.

Protestors were able to utilize a variety of digital sources to transfer information. At the start of the protests many dissidents used e-mail to contact Burmese exiles, transnational advocacy networks, and news agencies to relay information about the uprising. However, as the junta tightened its grip over outgoing e-mail, protestors used chat services, Wikipedia, and even Facebook to continue supplying information. Many protestors turned to Internet chat rooms, such as Yahoo Messenger, to recount the events unfolding in Burma.

Traditional media outlets quickly picked up these eyewitness reports and integrated them into their content. These outlets, like the *New York Times* and the BBC, lent international credibility to the reports and amplified their impact. Though new media platforms have significant user bases, their audience is dwarfed by the traffic received by traditional media organizations. By utilizing both the speed of digital technologies and large traditional media audiences, Burmese activists were able to propel their cause into the international spotlight.

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*The Burmese government stifled the Saffron Revolution not with policy changes but with the use of force and the protests do not appear to have impaired the military junta's control of the nation. Nevertheless, digital technologies helped create a more powerful and cohesive uprising.*

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The increased global awareness prompted many political leaders to take a more proactive and explicit stance against the Burmese regime. As information about the uprising in Burma spread, governments around the world quickly responded in support of the protestors. The United States increased financial and travel sanctions on Burmese government officials only a day after the Burmese government began cracking down on protestors. The next day the United Nations followed suit calling for restraint on behalf of the Burmese regime. The European Union announced tighter sanctions on Burma as well, including an embargo on imports of gemstones, timber and metal, and a wider visa ban against members of the Burmese military government in an attempt to compel the Burmese regime to make concrete steps toward democratization. The vivid images provided by activists inside Burma shook the consciousness of the international community and forced a response.

#### Digital Crackdown

When the crackdown came it incorporated not only physical violence, but also the repression of digital technologies. On September 29, in a desperate attempt to keep the world from knowing about events in Burma, the regime shut down Internet access nationwide and disabled international mobile phone connections in an unprecedented attempt at a total information blockade. As the sole provider of Internet in the country, the government had little trouble cutting off all Internet access to the country. According to opposition spokesman Myint Thein, almost every prominent member of the opposition had all incoming and outgoing calls cut off. Soldiers confiscated digital cameras and mobile phones, and threatened or arrested anyone caught transmitting information.

The junta's crackdown on digital technologies was fast and effective. The effects of this technology blackout were felt around the world. According to Mydans, "Until [the crackdown] television screens and newspapers were flooded with scenes of tens of thousands of red-robed monks in the streets and of chaos and violence as the junta stamped out the biggest popular uprising in two decades. But then, the images, text messages, and [Internet] postings just stopped, shut down by the generals". With no material flowing out of Burma via digital connections, international news agencies moved on to other stories and Burma quickly slipped from the limelight. While some news agencies continued

to follow the story in Burma, in the months following the crackdown, the number of articles run about the uprising was reduced by more than half, and Burma slipped from the consciousness of the international community.

The Internet, camera phones, and other digital technologies played a critical role in the protests, particularly through the transmission of news about the protests to the outside world. Ultimately, however, the revolution was a failure and did not lead to political change. While the junta made minimal concessions, including the drafting of a new constitution and agreeing talks with Aung San Suu Kyi, these appear to be primarily symbolic. According to the junta, the constitution is one step on a "road map to democracy." The next are elections in 2010. The outcome of these elections though is already clear. The military will remain in control of the government.

The case of the Saffron Revolution indicates that digital technologies alone do not have the ability to pose a major threat to the power base of authoritarian regimes. The Burmese government stifled the Saffron Revolution not with policy changes but with the use of force and the protests do not appear to have impaired the military junta's control of the nation. Nevertheless, digital technologies helped create a more powerful and cohesive uprising. In the absence of these technologies the protests quickly deteriorated.

Burma's military regime seems prepared to continue to cut its country off from the digital world just as it has from the world at large. However, it is not clear how much longer the junta can hold back the future. As demonstrated by this case, digital technologies are making it much harder for authoritarian regimes to draw a curtain of secrecy and act with impunity. Digital technologies create opportunities for enhanced communication and transparency, but these are just a few of the many factors needed for a democratic transition. As practitioners, we must temper our expectations for these technologies and work to establish realistic goals for their use. In order to more effectively support these technologies in the future, practitioners and activists must develop a greater technical understanding of these tools in order to better adapt them to political contexts.

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# Reactionary Regimes

BY LAUREN ALBRIGHT

## *Introduction*

When do authoritarian states create international organizations? By examining an international organization (IO) frequently dubbed a “dictators’ club”—the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)—I assert that authoritarian states create international organizations to reap the benefits of sustained international cooperation while avoiding the need to conform to the liberal democratic norms of governance espoused by many IOs. Rather than try to influence the norms of an IO from within, authoritarian states form new organizations, building into the organizations a tolerance for repressive and reactionary domestic policies.

## *Why Do International Organization Exist?*

In an anarchical system, IOs provide opportunities for sustained cooperation between states, decreasing transaction costs, increasing information flows providing chances to link issues which would otherwise have to be negotiated separately, etc. International organizations serve as focal points for expertise, time, political ability and the resources to smooth the road toward cooperation.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to these benefits, potential members must also weigh costs. Membership obligations may include structural adjustments. A state may be asked or expected to liberalize its governing process, move towards a market economy, strengthen its currency or greatly reduce corruption within government in order to join an international organization. If an authoritarian state tries to join an organization with these membership requirements, the costs can be dangerous, even potentially fatal to the existence of the regime. Even if a specific international organization does not demand that a potential member alter its form of government, IOs may still serve as the vehicles for socialization by diffusing certain norms of behavior.<sup>2</sup>

For states trying to move towards democracy, membership in an IO that encourages democratic government can be quite valuable. International pressures can dovetail with internal pressures to compel leaders to liberalize governing processes. Alternately, membership in an international organization could work on a purely domestic level and encourage ruling elites to loosen their commitment to autocratic rule in one of two ways. First, IO membership could encourage democratization acquiescence by lowering the risks they would face from the general public during the democratization process. Alternately, the international organization

could socialize the ruling elites to believe in democratic values and government.

For states with an authoritarian form of government, IO membership can be quite dangerous, but few alternatives exist to consistently solve collective action problems. Most autocrats are open to the benefits of membership in some organization, but an autocratic regime may not find it worth the considerable time and trouble to alter or influence an IO towards equal acceptance of all regime types. It is better for authoritarian states to create institutions to solve collective action problems between like-minded actors.

It is perfectly rational then, for autocratic states to create IOs among themselves to serve their personal purposes. Creating a new institution out of whole cloth allows autocratic regimes to build in norms, which support an authoritarian government, a weak secretariat that will not interfere with member states’ wishes, and a network of allies that will aid other members in perpetuating authoritarian regimes. The new organization may or may not confer legitimacy to the member states, but it provides autocratic states an alternative to using an institution dominated by democratic norms. The SCO provides an example of this process.

## *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Fighting the Three Evils*

The SCO grew out of a less formal organization known as the Shanghai Five, which was a regional organization created in 1996 between Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to monitor and facilitate the demilitarization process along the joint Russo-Chinese border. In 2001, the group admitted a new member, Uzbekistan, and became formally known as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. By 2006, the SCO had an expanded its mission to include fighting what it termed the “three evils” of terrorism, religious extremism and (most importantly for the purposes of this paper) regional secessionism. The new mission included a larger role for the SCO in preserving regional energy security, conducting more joint anti-terrorism drills and exercises, and deepening military cooperation and intelligence sharing between member states. The SCO has also welcomed several nations as observers;<sup>3</sup> the list of observer states includes Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Mongolia—not helping the SCO’s image as an autocrats’ club. Having largely resolved the issues along the Russo-Chinese border, the SCO now functions as a security forum whose aim is to keep democracy from spreading into member states. It provides international solidarity for the member governments as they reinforce

the domestic political status quo (whether the status quo is managed democracy, one party rule or dictatorship).

The SCO has a small permanent secretariat based in Beijing. The position of secretary-general is limited to proposing the annual budget and providing organizational and technical support to any decision undertaken within the SCO framework.<sup>4</sup> The member states' representatives undertake all actual decisions, and the secretary-general is appointed by the Council of Ministers. The Council of Ministers is the actual decision-making body of the organization; all decisions are taken by consensus and if a state does not support the proposal at hand, it is no impediment to the proposed decision being implemented.<sup>5</sup> The SCO emphasizes consensus, indicating a preference for conflict avoidance. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization firmly supports its members' rights to sovereignty. The Dushanbe Declaration, issued in July 2000, confirms the right of each state to choose its own path of political, economic, and public policy development, rejecting the notion of universal political values like democracy. The Dushanbe Declaration also specifically condemns intervention into the domestic affairs of other states under the pretext of "humanitarian intervention" and "human rights protection." This document, C. P. Chung writes, more than any other, "defines the norms of the Shanghai Five forum, and its content has been repeated in various form at subsequent SCO summit meetings."<sup>6</sup>

Freedom House, a nongovernmental organization that rates governments as Free, Partly Free, and Not Free; routinely gives SCO member countries poor rankings. In 2008, only one member, Kyrgyzstan, was ranked as Partly Free. All of the other members received the label Not Free. Thomas Ambrosio correctly points out that SCO member states have consistently negative Freedom House records on human rights and civil liberties.<sup>7</sup> For the past several years, the international media has run numerous stories reporting on human rights abuses, missing or murdered reporters, and rigged elections about SCO members. But Ambrosio's work proves correlation, not causation. If an IO is the reflection of its member states, created to serve their purposes, why would its mere existence cause state governments to strip citizens of civil rights and violate human rights? I find it difficult to believe that the SCO, a young organization with a weak secretariat, make dictatorships out of its member states. Instead, the organization acts as a shield for the member states, allowing them to continue on their chosen path without fearing outside intervention. For members, the forum is not merely a point of solidarity but an opportunity to prepare themselves against the expected onslaught of demands for democratization. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization specifically allows, and in fact encourages, policy coordination for the threat of secession and terrorism. These two "evils" can be read as any organized or disorganized movement that threatens the existing regime.

Fighting the three evils has become the SCO's new mission, with the threat of secession heading the list. The color revolutions especially touched a nerve for the SCO member states. For instance, following the Ukrainian Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Georgian Rose Revolution in 2005, Russian newspaper *Pravda* ran a story outlining the responses from the heads of SCO states. "The members of the SCO share the opinion about the so-called 'color revolutions.'" They believe that all of them are made "by request" as part of a dirty geopolitical scheme.<sup>8</sup> Uzbekistan President Karimov accused "scriptwriters and directors" of orchestrating the color revolutions in Eastern Europe. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev stated that the color revolutions were merely a façade for the new leaders to secretly divide state assets among themselves. The Russian military also developed a program to deal with situations like a color revolution and countermeasures for putting down grassroots demonstrations with minimum fuss. This program, which was shared with other SCO states, called for coordinated responses among military, police, government officials and foreign allies.

The SCO heads of government raced to pledge their support for Uzbekistan President Karimov during the 2005 Andijon uprising. Protestors had gathered in the town to decry poor living conditions and corrupt government; the national security forces fired on the crowd without warning. The Uzbek government originally issued a statement blaming

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*For members, the forum is not merely a point of solidarity but an opportunity to prepare themselves against the expected onslaught of demands for democratization.*

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the deaths on a terrorist plot hatched by "Islamic extremist groups."<sup>9</sup> Later, the Uzbek government admitted its part in the massacre, but still insisted that the security forces had only shot at bandits and terrorists. Both China and Russia issued separate statements of support for Karimov; the SCO passed a resolution calling for nations to deny Uzbek refugees asylum. Kyrgyzstan, despite its own recent and successful color revolution, closed its border with Uzbekistan. SCO Secretary-General Zhang Deguang gave several interviews to a variety of media sources after the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan and the Andijan uprising in Uzbekistan. In all the interviews, Zhang mentioned the "disturbing events" and "dangerous excesses" in Kyrgyzstan as proof of the need for the Shanghai Organization Cooperation to quell extremist forces in the region. Zhang also warned that future color revolutions would "result in extremely dangerous political consequences, seriously affecting the whole region."<sup>10</sup> The

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SCO has repeatedly linked the color revolutions with terrorism and extremism in its press statements and summit rhetoric.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states hold regular training exercises, usually in advance of the SCO summit meetings every year. Military exercises take place in one of the member states, usually in harsh terrain, and troops prepare to "...help [the] frontier guards to bloc or, possibly, to destroy large armed gangs attempting to cross the border of a SCO country."<sup>11</sup> It is interesting to note that Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov did not mention defending member states from foreign armies, but from "large armed gangs." I should also point out that these joint training exercises are indicative of how united or divided the SCO member states are in any given year. Kyrgyz and Uzbek forces have been noticeably absent in some years (such as 2007), but the two most powerful states in the SCO, Russia and China, always participate in joint training exercises. Hansen draws the following conclusion regarding Russian and Chinese commitment to the SCO: the two states cannot support changes, which will make the Central Asian states more democratic than they [China and Russia] are. The spread of democracy in the region would undermine their bases of legitimacy at home, making it hard to preserve one party rule and "managed democracy" respectively.<sup>12</sup>

### Conclusions

Why do authoritarian states join IOs? Political scientists usually list objectives like decreasing transactions costs, creating a framework for future interactions between states and opening channels of communication. The SCO provides this service, but it also provides something much more valuable to authoritarian governments: a viable alternative to IOs dominated by Western values. The United Nations, the World Trade Organization, NATO and the European Union facilitate the spread of political values such as civil rights under the law, representative government and human rights. The SCO facilitates authoritarian norms like rule of leaders over rule of law, consolidated state media, and police-enforced political stability. Alagappa writes that for many Central and East Asian governments, "political ideas such as democracy and human rights are presently viewed... as threats to survival because of the perceived adverse consequences for political stability and economic development and because of the challenges they pose to the political legitimacy of the incumbent elites."<sup>13</sup> Authoritarian states seek to create deeper ties with other authoritarian states, not

only to resolve border disputes or integrate economically, but also to reinforce and spread their common values.

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# Importing Intimidation: The Spread of Strategies to Restrict and Repress Civil Society in Latin America

BY BRANDON P. YODER<sup>1</sup>

On January 10, 2006, the Russian Federation passed new legislation undermining the independence and restricting the activities of civil society organizations operating in the country. The new law created burdensome registration processes, established invasive oversight procedures, and called for detailed reporting about the relationships between domestic and international organizations active in Russia. Russia's "NGO law," as it is commonly known, is part of a global trend that accelerated in recent years as a growing number of governments have sought to silence civil society organizations.

This backlash against civil society organizations reached Latin America in June 2006 when the Venezuelan National Assembly passed the first of two votes on the *Ley de Cooperación Internacional* (International Cooperation Law). Although this legislation has never received the second round of approval needed for it to become law, the bill sent a clear message to civil society organizations in Venezuela, proposing harsh limitations on fundraising and new bureaucracy-laden registration processes. While the International Cooperation Law has yet to be approved as of November 2009, legislators threaten its passage at random intervals in order to keep civil society on the defensive. Moreover, Venezuela's pending legislation opened the door for other countries in Latin America to launch similar efforts to restrict the activities of civil society organizations operating within their own borders. These restrictions have been increasingly common among Venezuela's allies, particularly Nicaragua, Bolivia, and Ecuador.

As governments in both Latin America and other regions have introduced new restrictions on civil society, they have often attempted to do so under the cloak of legitimate legal reform. However, as many scholars and international organizations—including the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law and the World Movement for Democracy—have pointed out, countries' NGO laws are frequently in conflict with articles of their own constitutions and provisions of international agreements to which they are signatories.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, at the international level, a wide range of organizations committed to issues of human rights and the rule of law have pointed out that NGO laws violate various aspects of international law and recognized international norms.

To highlight how NGO laws are becoming a commonly used strategy to restrict civil society, this paper will provide an overview of laws in several different countries. To first offer international context, there will be a brief examination of Russia's NGO law. This will be followed by analysis of the restrictions against civil society organizations in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua. The paper will conclude with recommendations for further reading on the international standards that can be used in defense of civil society.

## The Russian NGO Law

Starting with procedures to register a civil society organization, the Russian NGO law created a series of complex bureaucratic requests for documentation and reporting. Delays associated with the registration of international organizations forced several prominent institutions including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Doctors Without Borders to temporarily suspend their operations in Russia in October 2006.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, under this law, the Russian government can require organizations to present reporting about management structures, policy decisions, financial affairs, and accountability procedures.<sup>4</sup> The government can also send representatives to observe organizations' internal meetings, including board meetings and routine daily discussions. The mere potential for such invasive levels of scrutiny places severe limitations on organizations' ability to operate independently and efficiently.

Although the Russian Federation was not the first country to create repressive regulations for NGOs, its prominent role on the world stage and ability to restrict civil society without yielding greatly to international criticism allows it to serve as an example for other countries seeking to silence voices of opposition within their own borders.

## Venezuela's International Cooperation Law

In 2005, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez began to take his anti-U.S. rhetoric to the international arena, establishing alliances with countries that oppose, or at least choose not to openly embrace, the United States. Against this backdrop, President Chávez began to broker a series of arms purchases with Russia that have eventually exceeded \$5 billion dollars. While bilateral military cooperation may not have led to direct discussions of strategies to curtail civil society freedoms, President Chávez has repeatedly demonstrated an interest in aligning himself with Russia's leadership.

*With a stated goal of providing a platform for regional integration that was not solely based on free trade and commercial relations, the initiative quickly became identified with President Chávez's efforts to curb U.S. influence in Latin America.*

Similar to Russia's NGO law, Venezuela's International Cooperation Law stemmed from a desire to curb foreign influence in the country. The law would annul the current operating status of all domestic and international NGOs active in Venezuela and require them to complete a new registration process. In the interim, organizations would potentially have to suspend their activities as they await approval of their request for registration. Additionally, the law provides the national government with the sole authority to establish, via executive decree, which organizations can operate in the country and what forms of international cooperation would be permitted.<sup>5</sup>

In its attempts to regulate foreign influence, Venezuela's NGO law proposes broad limitations on international funding for domestic organizations. The law mandates the creation of a government-run "Fund for International Cooperation and Assistance" that would receive, assign, and distribute all foreign development funds entering the country, regardless of the donor or the intended recipient.<sup>6</sup> By constructing a singular channel for all foreign funding, the International Cooperation Law would effectively outlaw the direct receipt of monetary assistance from abroad and cut off Venezuelan civil society organizations from a principal source of financial support. Consequently, these organizations would become increasingly dependent on the central government's Fund for International Cooperation and Assistance, decreasing their autonomy and leaving them subject to the discretionary decisions of a given administration.<sup>7</sup> The stringent regulatory framework that this law would implement would further control NGOs' exchange of knowledge and expertise by requiring extensive reporting about their communication with international organizations and imposing an unlimited number of government inspections and audits.

Although Venezuela's International Cooperation Law remains in its draft form in the National Assembly, it poses significant risks to the existence of an independent civil society in the country.<sup>8</sup>

*The Spread of NGO Restrictions among ALBA Member States*

Launched in December 2004, the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA) started as a bilateral agreement between Venezuela and Cuba. With a stated goal of providing a platform for regional integration that was not solely based

on free trade and commercial relations, the initiative quickly became identified with President Chávez's efforts to curb U.S. influence in Latin America. As President Chávez sought to build credibility and membership for ALBA, he turned to his closest allies in the region: Bolivia under President Evo Morales, Nicaragua under President Daniel Ortega, and Ecuador under President Rafael Correa.

In working to develop policies that eradicate poverty and improve social welfare for the region's citizens, ALBA's member states have called for strategies crafted solely by Latin American countries and have rejected outright cooperation with international development institutions and organizations. This has motivated ALBA countries to create a wide range of restrictions on the activities of domestic civil society organizations and their interaction with foreign counterparts.

President Morales issued a presidential decree in October 2007 that established new regulations for international cooperation in Bolivia. While it lacked many of the more invasive limitations proposed under Venezuela's International Cooperation Law, it instituted a series of restrictions aimed at undermining international financial support for Bolivian civil society organizations, specifically for activities that the government deems undesirable. The decree explicitly bans agencies of the Bolivian Government from channeling any bilateral foreign aid to local civil society organizations.<sup>9</sup> It also provides the government with authority to review and overturn hiring decisions in all international agencies operating in Bolivia. Furthermore, the decree bans international organizations from providing any technical or financial assistance to Bolivian NGOs for activities that the government considers political or ideological in nature.<sup>10</sup> However, it lacks formal guidance on what activities would fall into these broad categories.

At the start of 2009, the Ecuadorian Government introduced draft legislation for a Law Governing NGOs. The law proposes new registration procedures that provide no insight on the criteria that the government will use to evaluate applications and do not define a registration timeline.<sup>11</sup> The absence of such provisions could potentially permit the government to delay registration decision indefinitely, leading to a *de facto* denial of applications. The law also authorizes the government to withdraw the operating license and dissolve civil society organizations for a number

of technical considerations including failing to complete or working outside the established objectives of the organization, as well as the inability to maintain a minimum number of members and staff.<sup>12</sup> In March 2009, decided to employ these regulations selectively and suspended the activities of *Acción Ecológica* (Ecological Action), a respected Ecuadorian environmental group.<sup>13</sup> The decision prompted a response from the international community and the Government of Ecuador reinstated *Acción Ecológica* with a provisional license later that month.

Despite the fact that Bolivia and Ecuador have not pursued the extremes laid out under Russian law and proposed in Venezuela's International Cooperation Law, they nevertheless sent a clear signal to local organizations and the international community about the future direction of policy towards civil society.

### Nicaragua's Manual on International Associations

In June 2009, tensions between the Nicaraguan Government and civil society organizations escalated as the government released draft copies of a manual entitled "Procedures for a Single Policy of Attention towards International Not-for-Profit Associations and Foreign Foundations." Prepared by the Ministry of Government and the Ministry of Foreign Relations, the manual outlines the need for greater restrictions on cooperation between domestic and international organizations.<sup>14</sup>

As in the cases discussed above, Nicaragua's manual on international associations states that only legally registered organizations can receive international cooperation and officially prohibits funding for social movements or informal organizations. While it doesn't explicitly call for new registration procedures similar to the Russian and Venezuela NGO laws, Nicaraguan civil society organizations have expressed concern that these regulations could be used to block the registration of new NGOs in the future.<sup>15</sup> In terms of institutional composition, the manual places limits on the number of foreign citizens that can participate in the implementation of international development programs.<sup>16</sup>

Similar to the Russian and Venezuelan NGO laws, Nicaragua's manual on international associations focuses on limiting foreign influence inside its own borders. The manual proposes restrictions on all foreign funding for "political" activities that "run counter to or might influence national legislation."<sup>17</sup> Given the use of broad, undefined terminology, Nicaraguan analysts have contended that this provision could be used to outlaw international support for organizations working on any public policy issue such as health, nutrition, and education.<sup>18</sup>

To enforce its proposed regulations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would be given the authority to oversee, in coordina-

tion with the international donor organization, the design and implementation of all development projects carried out in Nicaragua.<sup>19</sup> The manual states that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would establish new protocols to carry out this oversight, including mandatory reporting requirement and conducting field and office visits to review work.<sup>20</sup> Such invasive monitoring would essentially make the Nicaraguan Government a co-administrator in all international development projects and would consequently limit the autonomy of both foreign and domestic organizations working in the country. While a coordinated campaign by Nicaraguan civil society organizations has successfully delayed official implementation of the procedures outlined in the manual on international associations, the government has said it will reconsider its approval in late 2009.<sup>21</sup>

### Conclusions

Civil society encompasses the space where a state's citizens obtain information and exchange opinion and ideas, thus it comes as no surprise that repressive governments would seek ways to curtail the development of relevant organizations. As laws and restrictions on NGOs proliferate in Latin America and globally, civil society organizations will increasingly need to develop a coordinated response, one which employs both legal and advocacy strategies. With regard to a legal approach, a broad number of constitutions establish rights including freedom of association, freedom of expression, rights to privacy, and certain rights to employment arrangements that could provide a basis to challenge NGO laws in domestic courts. National legal strategies should also be reinforced by the myriad international declarations pertaining to the work of civil society organizations, including, but not limited to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as several regional declarations including the American Convention on Human Rights.

As NGOs push back against the creeping global trend of restrictions and repressive regulations, the emergence of this type of innovative advocacy tools, combined with new domestic and international legal precedent, will be crucial to the continued effort to defend the rights and freedoms of civil society globally.

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### ENDNOTES

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