Digital technologies and the new public square: Revitalising democracy?

Background Paper

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The Pathways for Prosperity Commission on Technology and Inclusive Development is proud to work with a talented and diverse group of commissioners who are global leaders from government, the private sector and academia. Hosted and managed by Oxford University's Blavatnik School of Government, the Commission collaborates with international development partners, developing country governments, private sector leaders, emerging entrepreneurs and civil society. It aims to catalyse new conversations and to encourage the co-design of country-level solutions aimed at making frontier technologies work for the benefit of the world's poorest and most marginalised men and women.

This paper is part of a series of background papers on technological change and inclusive development, bringing together evidence, ideas and research to feed into the commission's thinking. The views and positions expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not represent the commission.

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1. Introduction

For more than 15 years, there has been astonishing progress in information and communications technologies (ICTs). This has generated tremendous enthusiasm about the potential of ICTs to transform the way people organise, mobilise and engage to articulate their needs, demands and priorities more effectively, and to hold government authorities to account, especially in the earlier days of technological innovation. Over time, though, unbridled techno-optimism has given way to more pessimistic appraisals about the impact of ICTs on governance. There are increasing concerns about how ICTs may in fact undermine the quality of democratic practices and processes and help to strengthen authoritarian tendencies and regimes.

This paper explores the effects of digital platforms (websites, web-portals, social media, etc) in shaping and refining mechanisms for political voice and political empowerment to demand greater accountability and responsiveness from the state. Through extensive analysis and synthesis of existing academic and policy literature on digital technologies and their effect on citizen engagement and participation, the paper seeks to address the following core questions:

• How is technology changing the way in which citizens organise, mobilise and engage politically?

• How have ICTs altered links between state and society and the quality and nature of participation, representation and democratic debate?

• Is technology empowering marginalised groups or disrupting civic liberties and human rights?

The use of ICTs to improve the quality of (democratic) governance, hold governments to account, and enhance broad-based participation and public deliberation is still nascent and novel (Fung et al. 2015), and available literature remains limited. In particular, while the Pathways for Prosperity Commission expressed a desire to focus the paper on how ICTs may be shaping the emergence of a new public square – the spaces where people can debate and deliberate over matters that concern them (Miswardi 2015) – much of the evidence is based on experiences in the developed world, especially in the US and Europe (Boulianne 2015). Thus, the analysis presented here draws on experiences from the developing world where possible, but it engages with the broader body of literature that is being produced on the links between technology and mobilisation, participation and democracy. The paper also seeks to identify knowledge gaps and to tease out some implications for how to harness the power of ICTs more effectively to hold governments to account and improve the quality of democratic debate, engagement and participation.

Drawing on different examples and initiatives, the paper explores the possibilities and limitations of digital technologies in creating a new public square of engaged citizens who are committed to progressive change. It finds that, while ICTs can be useful tools that help to amplify existing strategies for participation and political mobilisation, they constitute only one element of a variety of factors that shape the dynamic relationship between citizen voice, participation, accountability

and responsiveness. ICTs alone are not, and cannot be expected to be, the answer to the need to revitalise the public square within a context of growing polarisation within and across countries and profound dissatisfaction with 'politics as usual'. It may be more useful to frame the kinds of changes that they can help to foster as more gradual and incremental in nature. Moreover, while ICTs have the potential to be used in ways that empower citizens and improve the quality, legitimacy and transparency of decision-making processes, there is a long way to go to make these kinds of activities more widespread and commonplace across countries and regions – and it is still too early to assess their full effects.

The paper is structured as follows. After this introduction, Section 2 provides an overview of the promise of digital technologies as a global force for plurality and democracy. Section 3 looks at who is actually using digital technologies to exercise voice and engage in collective action, and examines the nature of the change that ICTs are helping to bring about. Section 4 explores some of the most serious challenges that ICTs pose to the quality of democratic debate and engagement. Section 5 concludes by offering a few reflections and implications for understanding the opportunities and limitations of ICTs in shaping a new public square.

2. The promise of digital technologies as a global force for plurality and democracy

Setting the context: disillusionment with 'politics as usual'

Since the advent of the 'third wave' of democratisation that swept through the developing world starting in the 1980s, there has been a fundamental shift in the nature of political regimes worldwide. Today, most countries are considered formal democracies (EIU 2017). However, only a small number of the democracies that have emerged over the past three decades have become deeply rooted. Most of these emergent democracies are defined by often hollow, weak and ineffective institutions. The ability of these regimes to perform – in both economic and social terms – remains mixed at best.

Even in some of the world's oldest and most established democracies, the stability and resilience of democracy has come into question (*The Economist* 2014; International IDEA 2017; EIU 2017; Mounk 2018). Concerns about stability and resilience of democracy and its ability to deliver have become evident across developed countries as well, especially in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis and the deepening inequality and dislocation it has wrought (International IDEA 2017; EIU 2017; The Economist 2014).

In effect, over the past decade, the promise of democracy seems to have lost much of its appeal in both wealthier and poorer countries and in more long-standing and less-established democracies. A variety of analysts have pointed to a worldwide crisis of democracy and a fundamental disillusionment with the workings of democracy and its values (*The Economist* 2014; EIU 2017; Mounk 2018). There is growing polarisation and the increasing appeal of populism – ranging from the electoral triumph in the US to the anti-European populists in the UK, France, The Netherlands and beyond, and the rise of anti-establishment 'strongmen' in places like Venezuela, the Philippines and Turkey. This shows a profound dissatisfaction with the quality of representation, anchored in perceptions of a widening chasm between political elites and the people. There are concerns that the political establishment is stacked in favour of elites who have lost touch with the people (*The Economist* 2014; Caryl 2016; Mounk 2018).

In contemporary democracies across both the developing and the developed world, many formal institutions that are intended to channel competition, representation, accountability and decision-making processes suffer from a lack of credibility and/or trust. In particular, people all over the world have a very low opinion of parliaments and political parties, which tend to be the organisations that citizens trust the least (see Figure 1) (Bergh et al. 2014). As a result, people – young people in particular – have become more and more disengaged from the political arena, or at least from traditional ways of participating (including elections, formal party membership, traditional news media, etc).

Figure 1: What institutions do people trust?
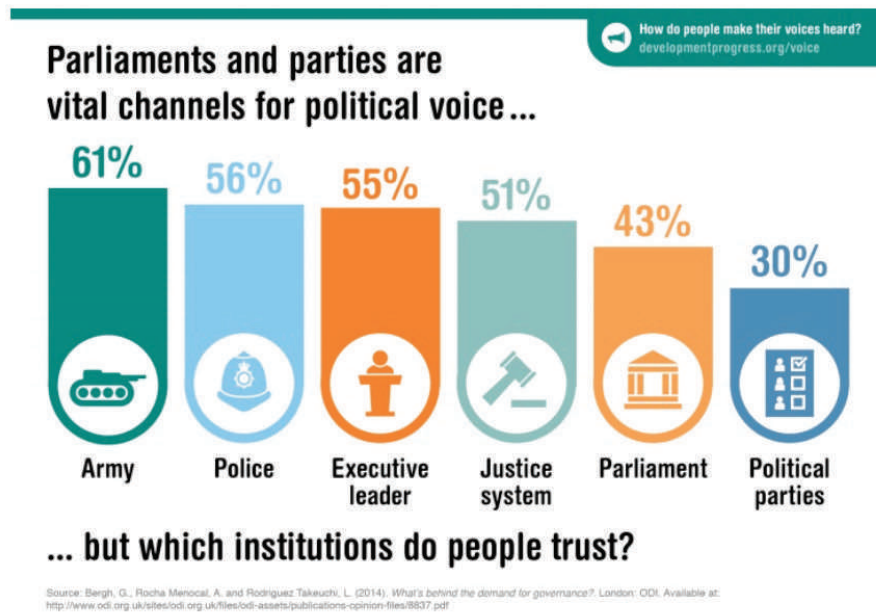
Source: Bergh et al. 2014

As democracy and its institutions come under increasing scrutiny and challenge from citizens who feel disaffected and disconnected, the question of whether and how ICTs can help revitalise the quality of democracy and state-society linkages has gained particular relevance and traction. Can digital technologies achieve deeper and broader participation and contribute to a richer public sphere for argumentation and debate than has been possible through more traditional mechanisms. If so, how? This is the focus of the remainder of this section.

Changes in the ICT landscape

Over the past 15 or more years, the world has witnessed an astonishing transformation in the ICT landscape. There has been an increase in the use of communications technology, including digitalisation, mass-accessible internet, video platforms, smartphones (with access to internet and apps) and social media, across developed and developing countries (McGee and Carlitz 2013; Carothers 2015) (see Figure 2 below). This growth in ICTs has meant that exposure to news and civic information has become increasingly mediated by online social networks and digital personalisation. For instance, while in 2013 Facebook had 1.4 billion active users worldwide, by the end of 2016, it had reached 1.86 billion. In the US alone, 68% of the adult population are on Facebook, accounting for 80% of all people in the US who are online (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016) – and the social media platform still has considerable room to expand across the developing world (Mullaney 2018).

Figure 2: Growth of digital technologies 2000–2012
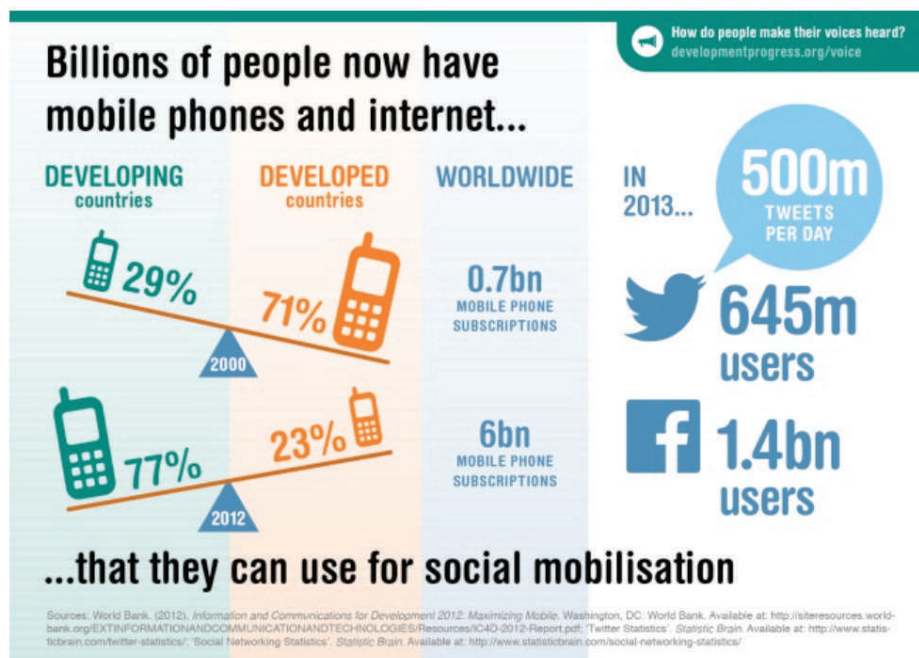
Source: Rocha Menocal 2014

Liberation technology?

The past two decades have seen an explosion of political voices across the developing world. From the shift towards democracy in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the mushrooming of citizen-led initiatives to hold those in power to account, from the uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa to the eruption of protest movements in countries as diverse as Brazil, Egypt, India, and Turkey, we now have a wealth of experience we can use to reimagine the role of engaged populations in political processes and to redefine the very substance of democracy (Rocha Menocal 2014). This is an extraordinarily diverse and complex landscape, with people everywhere grabbing opportunities to express their views in a multitude of ways to influence policy and decision-making processes (Simon et al. 2017). It is impossible to provide a comprehensive picture of the many forms of political voice, but ICT has played an extraordinarily important enabling role in most of them.

As a result, it is not surprising that the advent of ICT – or 'liberation technology' as Larry Diamond (2010) has coined it – has generated tremendous enthusiasm about the transformational power of technology to revitalise democracy and to renew the public square, especially in terms of promoting greater equality and active participation (Miswardi 2015). *Time* magazine called 2011 'the year of the protester'; and that same year Alec Ross, Hillary Clinton's senior advisor, called the internet the 'Che Guevara of the 21st century' (Gerbaudo 2012). As Thomas Carothers put it, these trends constitute revolutionary changes that imply, in principle, 'a profound empowerment of individuals through exponentially greater access to information, tremendous ease of communication and data-sharing, and formidable tools for networking' (Carothers 2015). The promise of the ICT revolution is that more information will seamlessly lead to more possibilities for collective action and progressive change (Gerbaudo 2012; Rocha Menocal 2015). From this perspective, the proliferation and abundance

of information provides individuals who have access to ICTs with an unprecedented number of options to exercise their voice and influence in political processes. ICTs are intended to lower the costs of many different forms of engagement and provide new ways to discover and get involved with issues, forge virtual communities, and thus, the argument goes, they have great potential to enable collective mobilisation, but also to broaden political participation (Xenos et al. 2014).

ICTs also offer the potential to profoundly democratise the public sphere because, again in principle, they make it possible for all kinds of people, not just those perceived to be elites, to express their voices and opinions, and contribute to and shape ongoing debates (Miswardi 2015). In this way, digital technologies act as a level playing field. With platforms like Facebook and Twitter, the relationship between political authority and popular will has been upended. The function of curating content has shifted away from traditional mediating mechanisms or 'gatekeepers' – such as newsroom editorial boards, journalists, or political parties – to individuals and their social networks (as well as manual or algorithmic information sorting). In theory, this democratisation of information and the public sphere has the potential to make the political arena more open, accessible, flatter and more egalitarian. This exposes people to more diverse viewpoints and enables them to connect, collaborate and co-ordinate across time and space at a speed and scale that was unimaginable before (Gladwell 2010). Among other things, it has enabled citizens to engage with, influence and hold to account those with authority and power directly, without the need for intermediaries. As Biju PR has put it, amateurs acquire an influence that, not so long ago, was the exclusive privilege of professionals and experts (Biju PR 2017). In addition, this type of news may be more influential on users because it has been filtered through 'trusted others', for example, family and friends (Boulianne 2015). In an age where such mediators – ranging from traditional institutions of political representation and news media to intellectual elites, expert commentators and opinion shapers – have become so profoundly discredited in the eyes of populations across developed and developing countries, ICTs thus provide novel and innovative mechanisms to engage in the political arena in ways that transcend 'politics as usual'.

Where traditional politics have alienated many, especially young people (see more on this below), ICTs can help create an emotive sense of community and belonging (Gerbaudo 2012). As the spread of 'Occupy' movements – starting in the US and reaching all the way to Hong Kong – showed, digital technology can contribute to processes of political engagement and mobilisation as a reflection of individuals' 'personal' orientations, and of the importance of sustaining a sense of togetherness, friendship and sharing among dispersed participants. Thus, ICTs can be vehicles for the creation of new forms of proximity and interaction in both virtual and physical public squares. Or as Gerbaudo (2012) has put it: 'In front of this situation of crisis of public space, social media have become emotional conduits for reconstructing a sense of togetherness among a spatially dispersed constituency, so as to facilitate its physical coming together in public space.'

The remainder of this section looks at different examples of how ICTs, as avenues to exercise and aggregate political voice and demand greater accountability and responsiveness from the state, are helping to shape the emergence of a new public square.

Large-scale political mobilisation and protest

One of the most direct and powerful effects of the digital revolution has been its facilitation of fast, large-scale popular mobilisations (Diamond in Carothers 2015). Digital technologies have become extraordinarily effective means of organising collective action and 'getting people on the streets' (Gerbaudo). On 1 January 1994, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) – or the Zapatistas – exploded onto the world stage as they launched an armed struggle against the Mexican government from the southern state of Chiapas, the country's poorest. This was the first example of a movement that made extensive use of digital media in the early days of the internet to draw attention to their cause and share the plight of the indigenous population with the world (Miswardi 2015). Since then, ICTs have featured prominently in virtually all mass protests and movements that have led to the demise of various governments and regimes. In January 2001, for example, President José Estrada of the Philippines had to resign after four days of protests that brought together more than a million people in Manila through ICTs (Diamond 2010). Digital technologies have played a vital mobilising role or have otherwise provided vital information about mass mobilisation efforts and revolutions (as well as their violent crackdown), in settings ranging from the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 to the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon in 2005 to demand the withdrawal of Syrian troops, from the Saffron Revolution in Myanmar in 2007, to the so-called 'Twitter Revolution' (Gladwell 2010) in Moldova in 2009, and the Green Revolution in Iran that same year.

Perhaps the most momentous manifestation of the power of ICTs to mobilise and energise mass movements against oppressive and unaccountable regimes and demand change came with the Arab uprisings that erupted in 2011. What started with the self-immolation of a Tunisian fruit-seller, Mohamed Bouazizi – desperately frustrated by long-term harassment at the hands of indifferent Tunisian officials – captured the imagination of millions of people across the country, the Middle East and Northern Africa, and the world more generally. It profoundly altered the political landscape of the region (though, as discussed further below, for the most part not achieving the kinds of democratic transformations that were originally sought). On the whole, these uprisings, brought together and harnessed through ICTs, happened extremely quickly and were also unpredictable – their scale came as a surprise to activists, authorities and observers alike. They were mobilised mostly by young, urban, technologically savvy and networked students and intellectuals outside established political parties or mechanisms. As such, they did not have centralised leadership or a clear political programme, but they gained increasing support from other groups in society as events and demonstrations continued to evolve. They created chain reactions that mobilised huge crowds of people across a whole geographical region and brought down rulers who had been in power for years (if not decades) in a matter of days, weeks or months in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. They also prompted important reform processes in Morocco and Jordan as monarchs sought to avoid fates similar to Ben Ali, Mubarak or Gaddafi, and unleashed a full-on civil war in Syria that is ongoing (Butenschøn 2015). Some of the challenges and limitations embedded in this type of mobilisation are discussed further below.

Advocacy, social monitoring and deliberative democracy

Beyond harnessing large-scale mobilisation and mass protests to demand democratic change, ICTs are also emerging as useful tools of advocacy, monitoring and deliberation to promote greater accountability and transparency from government authorities, and to foster more substantive engagement between state and society actors on decision-making processes (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Digital democracy

Source: Simon et al. 2017

Among other things, ICTs have enabled users, wherever they may be, to aggregate and crowdsource information of interest – including, for example, instances of abuse of authority – and to share that in a fast and efficient manner. ICTs also make it easier and less costly to communicate across space and time, thereby enabling people to co-ordinate with one another in collective efforts to call government officials, political representatives and other power holders to account (Fung et al. 2015; Margetts et al. 2015).

ICTs have played an instrumental role in putting a variety of issues of concern on the table at the domestic and international level, and in calling for action to address them. In the US, for instance, social media has proven essential in helping marginalised communities and less powerful groups to come together, take on much more powerful vested interests, and make their voices heard. Black Lives Matter (a movement with an international network that campaigns against violence and systemic racism toward black people), Me Too (a movement to help survivors of sexual violence, particularly young women of colour in poor communities, find pathways to healing), and Never Again (the student movement for gun control spearheaded by the school shootings in Parkland, Florida,

in February 2018), have all pushed their way onto the centre of national debates for progressive change (Taub 2018). The same can be said of the anti-austerity Indignados movement in Spain and the #Yo Soy 132 student movement in Mexico to demand greater accountability and fairness in media coverage, especially around the 2012 presidential elections. At a more global level, there has been mobilisation and outrage at the massive increases in inequality, epitomised by movements like Occupy that is intended to advance social and economic justice and new forms of democracy, and international campaigns on the need to make tax avoidance more difficult and put greater pressure on tax havens (eg the Tax Justice Network). These movements have also helped to place inequality at the centre of domestic and international policymaking agendas (Rocha Menocal 2017). Young people, and students in particular, have been at the forefront of many of these emerging political movements (more on young people and ICTs below), and all of them have been harnessed and partly enabled by ICTs.

Initiatives based on ICTs have also emerged in a variety of countries and regions. The aim is to promote social monitoring and greater citizen engagement and participation in decision-making processes (especially among poor and/or otherwise marginalised groups) and foster more substantive links between citizens and sources of authority and representation, ranging from local governments and parliaments to political parties (see for example Fung et al. 2015; Simon et al. 2017 – see also Box 1). These experiences, which can be found across developing and developed countries, cover a diverse set of issues, including municipal problem-solving (eg Cidade Democrática in Brazil), satisfaction with delivery of public services and complaint-resolution mechanisms (Reclamos! in Chile), participatory budgeting (which originated in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 1980 and has mushroomed to encompass more than 1,500 cities worldwide), election integrity (eg Ushahidi, see below), and tracking and disclosure of political candidates and representatives (eg Mumbai Votes). These initiatives often function as subsidies to investigative reporting, doing the time-consuming work of gathering information (Fung et al. 2015). And, according to different studies (eg Fung et al. 2015; Simon et al. 2017; Langlamet 2018), the sites also seem to be regarded as credible. Their informational legitimacy stems from the fact that all the data are available and, in principle, accessible to anyone with an internet connection (Fung et el. 2015).

Twaweza, for example, which means 'we can make it happen' in Swahili, is an ambitious initiative in East Africa that seeks to empower citizens to seek social change and demand accountability and responsiveness from government through the democratising potential of ICTs. It works to make practical information easily accessible to everyone, to foster quality independent media and citizen-monitoring services on issues related to education, health and clean water. Another important initiative, Ushahidi (or 'testimony' in Swahili), was developed to map reports of violence in Kenya in the aftermath of electoral violence in 2008. It now works across East Africa and beyond on issues ranging from electoral monitoring to crisis response to advocacy and human rights with the aim to enable marginalised people to exercise and aggregate their voices and engage with governments more effectively to address their communities' needs and priorities. The original Ushahidi platform, which is perhaps one of the most celebrated tech-enabled initiatives in the domain of governance and accountability, attracted thousands of users in Kenya and beyond. It exposed events that the mainstream Kenyan media were reluctant to cover and that international media were not fully aware of. Its impressive uptake and success catalysed dozens of similar experiments around the world,

including Brazil, India, Liberia, Mexico and the Philippines, especially around election monitoring. Building on and learning from its experience, Ushahidi also spearheaded the development and deployment of the Uchaguzi platform. This was intended to monitor the constitutional referendum of August 2010, through sustained engagement between election authorities and civil society organisations (Fung et al. 2015).

Launched in 2011, the Open Government Partnership seeks to provide an international platform for domestic reformers who are committed to making their governments more open, accountable and responsive to citizens. Through the use of new technologies to strengthen governance, this multilateral initiative seeks to secure concrete commitments from national and subnational governments to promote open government for effective public oversight. Among other things, the Partnership has helped to spearhead e-government information systems across a variety of member countries to support a more transparent, accountable and participatory government (see Box 1 for an example of e-democracy in Brazil). Local governments have also set up platforms to enable citizens to submit ideas and information, rank priorities, allocate public resources and receive notifications of upcoming debates (Simon et al. 2017).

Box 1: e-Democracia Portal in Brazil

A recent study (Simon et al. 2017) analysing different experiments of digital democracy at work in a variety of countries across Europe, as well as Brazil and Taiwan, found that the e-Democracia Portal in Brazil – www.edemocracia.leg.br – has enabled a greater variety of people to become involved in decision-making processes. Through new tools to enable citizens to propose and draft legislation, such as the Youth Statute Bill and the Internet Bill of Rights, the portal has enabled elected representatives in Congress to hear a wider range of views from citizens, in ways that were previously much more difficult. In principle, such information has the potential to improve the quality of debate within the lower house in Congress and the quality of laws passed using this process. This would need to be tested further, but anecdotal evidence describes how 'someone from the Amazon gave direct contributions [to policymaking processes] with important information, with no intermediary' and how this 'really helped in bringing a new idea and a new perspective from someone living the problem at the grassroots'. Similarly, technical discussions on healthcare regulation and space policy yielded a number of contributions that would not otherwise have been heard within the Chamber. The portal also has mechanisms that provide feedback on how members of parliament make use of the contributions made.

The lack of data on users and how representative they are remains a key challenge for understanding the platform's impact. Nonetheless, as the study suggests, the e-Democracia platform seems to have injected more accountability into parliamentary proceedings, by making many of the day-to-day functions of the legislative process more open and publicly accessible.

Source: Simon et al. 2017

Box 1 also illustrates the experience of tech-enabled 'crowdlaw' or 'collaborative democracy' platforms – intended to create spaces of collaboration to crowdsource policy ideas from lay citizens, and make policymaking processes more open and inclusive – have also begun to emerge (Langlamet 2018). These online networks draw on self-selecting individuals or groups who can channel their knowledge and desire to engage in policy-relevant expertise and thereby enable a variety of views and perspectives that would otherwise be very difficult to tap into to come to the fore (Noveck 2009). Crowdlaw or collaborative democracy efforts can include constitution-making processes to involve citizens in the drafting and revision of constitutions and generate broader buy-in across the population (including, for example, experiences in Chile, Kenya, Kurdistan, Libya and Tunisia), online platforms for policy debate between political parties and their members/supporters (e.g. Podemos in Spain), as well as crowdsourcing spaces facilitated by research institutions and think tanks to generate evidence and solicit citizen suggestions on specific policy issues to inform legislative processes (Langlamet 2018).

3. Who is talking, and what kind of change do they want?

For all the excitement and enthusiasm about the potential of digital technologies to transform the way citizens exercise voice, demand accountability, and act collectively to bring about change, there are some fundamental questions that need to be addressed around how ICTs are redefining the public square. The analysis below focuses on two essential issues: who is actually participating, (or whose voices are being heard?); and what kind of change are ICTs helping to bring about?

Empowered citizens? An exploration of who is doing the talking

There are a lot of assumptions about how ICTs are helping to foster a more inclusive, participatory and representative public square, giving voice and empowering in particular groups that have traditionally remained more marginal. But to what extent is this the case? This is an area that remains underexplored in existing literature – who participates in ICT platforms and why? There are also important gaps in knowledge, especially within the developing world. Nonetheless, available evidence suggests that, while digital technologies have empowered some groups and encouraged their participation in political processes – especially among young people – their democratising effects have remained limited to date.

ICTs and young people

Above all, ICTs have empowered and given political voice and influence to young people. Evidence from across developed and developing countries consistently finds that the effects of social media, in particular on youth engagement, have been 'transformational' (Gerbaudo 2012; Xenos et al. 2014; Pew Research Center 2017). On the whole, young people have relatively weak political habits and undeveloped political identities, and they tend to engage much less politically through traditional mechanisms and engagement techniques, for example, elections. However, they are intense social media users, and this has provided them with more intuitive and less burdensome platforms to get involved in the political arena (Simon et al. 2017). Perhaps the most powerful example of the transformative impact of ICTs on youth political mobilisation is the Arab Spring. As has been extensively documented, it was a cosmopolitan 'Facebook youth' – young people between the ages of 15 and 29 make up 75% of Facebook users in the Arab region (Mahlouly 2013) – that co-ordinated and led the mass protest movements that swept through the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in 2011 (Gerbaudo 2012).

But while there has been a veritable explosion of ICTs and their usage across developed and developing countries, (especially among young people), those technologies are not reaching everyone equally. There are still significant disparities in access and opportunity both between countries and within countries. We discuss these issues below.

Disparities between countries

Mobile technologies have become ubiquitous everywhere. For example, Sub-Saharan Africa has bypassed the landline stage and jumped directly into the digital age, with the proliferation of mobile phone networks transforming the communications landscape (Pew Research Center 2015). Southeast Asia is poised to be the fastest-growing digital market in the world by 2020 (Paladino 2018).
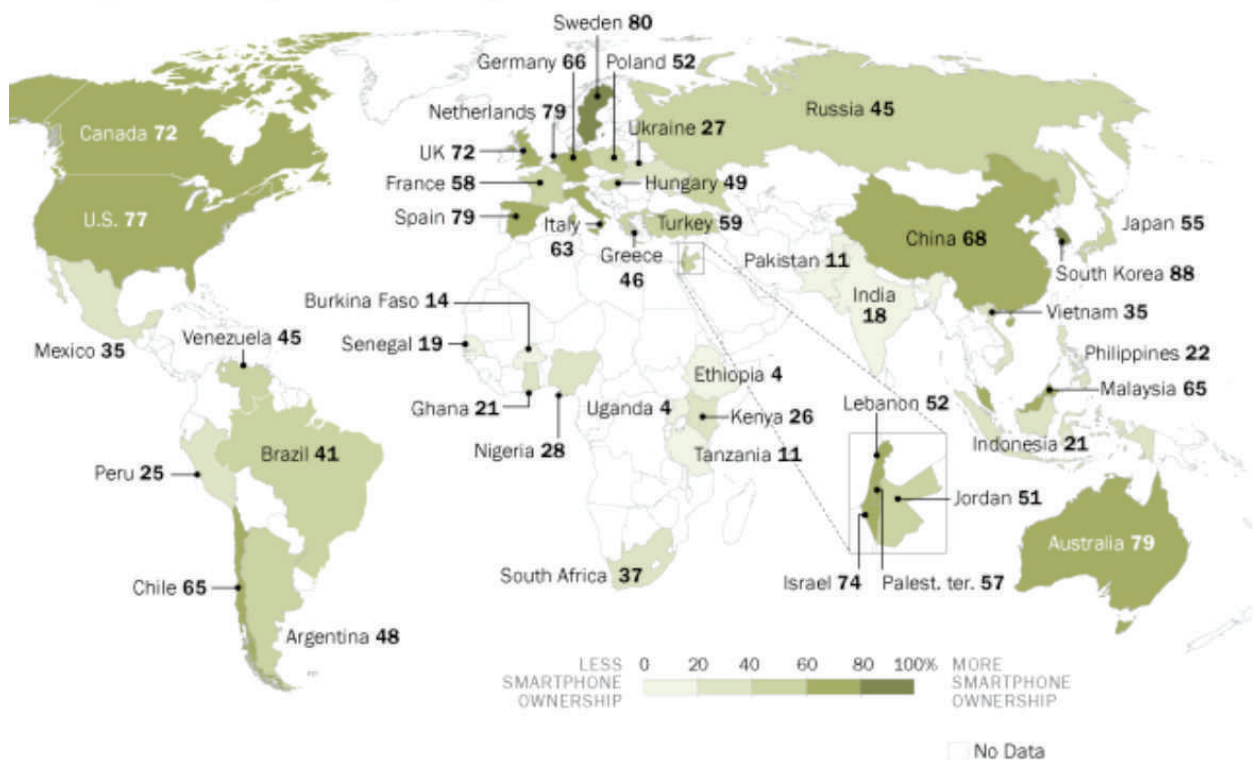
Figure 4: Internet use across the world, 1996–2013
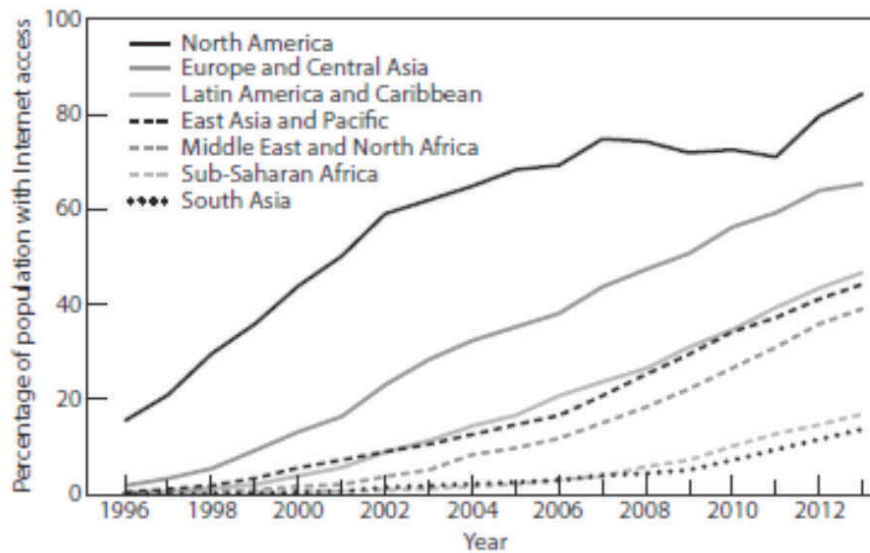
Source: Margetts et al. 2015

However, as Figure 4 suggests, while there is an upward trend across all continents and regions, there are also important disparities. Internet access remains much greater in the wealthy, established democracies of North America and Europe than other regions, especially in the developing world. For example, while 85% of the adult population is using the internet regularly in the US, in Turkey – a relative economic success story among emerging democracies – only around half of households have internet access (Carothers 2015). In Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, that figure is still below 20%. Moreover, even as mobile technology has spread considerably across the world, access to and use of smartphones remains considerably less common in developing countries. For example, surveys show that roughly one in three respondents in South Africans and one in four in Nigeria have a smartphone, while elsewhere in the region, ownership is less than 10% (Pew Research Center 2015). By comparison, on average around 75% of the population across the US, Canada and Europe own a smartphone (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Adult populations owning a smartphone in different countries

Smartphones are more common in Europe, U.S., less so in developing countries

Percent of adults who report owning a smartphone

Sweden **80**
Germany **66** | Poland **52**
Netherlands **79** | Ukraine **27**
UK **72** | Russia **45**
France **58** | Hungary **49**
Spain **79** | Turkey **59** | China **68** | Japan **55**
Italy **63** | Greece **46** | Pakistan **11** | South Korea **88**
Canada **72**
U.S. **77**
Burkina Faso **14** | India **18** | Vietnam **35**
Venezuela **45** | Senegal **19** | Philippines **22**
Mexico **35** | Malaysia **65**
Ghana **21** | Ethiopia **4** | Lebanon **52**
Uganda **4** | Kenya **26** | Indonesia **21**
Brazil **41** | Nigeria **28** | Tanzania **11** | Jordan **51**
Peru **25**
Australia **79**
South Africa **37** | Israel **74** | Palest. ter. **57**
Chile **65**
Argentina **48**

LESS SMARTPHONE OWNERSHIP 0 20 40 60 80 100% MORE SMARTPHONE OWNERSHIP

No Data

Note: Percentages based on total sample.
Source: Spring 2015 and 2016 Global Attitudes surveys.

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Source: Pew Research Center

Disparities within countries

The digital divide is also quite stark within countries. While ICTs have enabled the empowerment and increased participation in the political arena among some population groups (notably young people), others continue to be bypassed. Power is not equal among all citizens and online communities are not exempt from those power relationships and dynamics; some have greater access or are more effective in the use of ICTs to exercise voice and influence than others.

Overall, emerging evidence from the developing world in particular suggests that many of the ICT-innovations intended to enhance citizen voice and influence have fallen considerably short of expectations in terms of empowering ordinary people in new ways. ICT-based portals and platforms to engage with or demand accountability from government authorities are only useful to those who have access to the required ICT-enabled phones, laptops, and devices; this means that those who are poor, live in rural areas, and/or are illiterate do not participate (Pew Research Center 2015). Active participants thus tend to be the 'usual suspects': urban, well-educated young men, who also are already politically active (McGee and Carlitz 2013; Pew Research Center 2015; Simon et al. 2017; Langlamet 2018; Paladino 2018).

According to one study on nine countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America, while poor, urban men and women may own a mobile phone, women are still nearly 50% less likely than men to access the internet in the same communities, and between 30–50% less likely than men to use the internet to participate in public life (Worldwide Web Foundation 2015). Another recent study looking at examples of collaborative democracy experiments ranging from Brazil to Estonia found very few instances of ICT-based participation that reflected the demographic structure of society. 'The case studies we examined', the authors write, 'do not suggest that digital tools are currently making democracy more representative' (Simon et al. 2017). Instead, ICTs tend to reinforce the socio-cultural, economic, and gendered environments in which they are embedded. Such bias risks empowering certain pockets of the population while further marginalising others. This serves to entrench discrimination and social exclusion rather than increase accountability to the broader public (McGee and Carlitz 2013; Pew Research Center 2017).

The Arab Uprisings of 2011 reinforce many of these patterns. Research shows that, by December 2010, on the eve of the massive protests against regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, and beyond, access to the internet was considerably limited. For example, only 17.55% of the Tunisian population had access to Facebook, and in Egypt it was below 6%. Comparatively, Facebook penetration reached 46.22% in the US and 45.92% in the UK at that time. Thus, the portions of the populations across MENA countries that were engaged and technologically savvy were not representative of the broader make-up and diversity of the population more broadly. On the whole, these constituted an urban, well-educated, middle-class, and secular elite – and they were also overwhelmingly young and male (Mahlouly 2013). Data from the Sharek e-initiative (launched by the Egyptian government after the 2012 Referendum on the Constitution to provide citizens with the opportunity to discuss the new constitution) also shows that most participants were young men aged between 24 and 34, while only 14% were women. Thus, even if the digital divide has the potential to decrease quickly in the Middle East, it is the educated middle-class population that continues to lead online public debate and political engagement (Mahlouly 2013).

It is also essential to contend with a central assumption embedded in the empowering potential of participation through ICTs: that marginalised people actually want more direct means of engaging with their governments. But engagement and participation require significant commitment and can be resource-intensive (Simon et al. 2017). As McGee and Carlitz (2013) have noted, while people need solutions to their problems, they may not see tech-based systems or those linked to government as the best way to address them. They analysed different voices and accountability initiatives for a Hivos learning study and found that those who are intended to be 'sensitised' and thereby induced to participate are often poor and face other resource constraints (such as time) and may also have historic reasons for expecting little responsiveness from their governments (McGee and Carlitz 2013).

What kind of change have ICTs brought about?

Beyond the numbers and the demographics of who is participating, a second area that needs to be explored further is around the kinds of substantive changes that ICTs have helped to bring about as people engage in a new or redefined public square. Again, it is important to keep in mind that existing literature on this question remains limited, especially in developing country settings. As noted earlier, this is a nascent field. The deployment of tech-based initiatives to mobilise collective action and

enhance governmental accountability, political participation and public deliberation in a sustainable manner is still in the early stages. It is too soon to assess how well they have worked (see Fung et al. 2015, Carothers 2015, Margetts et al. 2015; Simon et al. 2017, Langlamet 2018). Nonetheless, available evidence to date suggests that ICTs on their own are not transformational forces of progressive change (see the next section for more on this). It is therefore more useful to frame the kinds of changes that digital technologies can help to foster as more gradual and incremental in nature.

While it is not possible to make definitive statements about the effectiveness of ICTs in promoting change in the inclusive governance and democratic politics space, some observations emerge from the variety of studies and publications we reviewed for this paper.

ICTs have energised younger audiences who have traditionally tended to participate less (Xenos et al. 2014). This is extremely important in terms of the potential of increased youth engagement to revitalise politics. On the other hand, we have seen that digital technologies have not empowered different voices equally. Users tend to be overwhelmingly well educated, urban, male and young, with the bias this implies in terms of making the public square more inclusive and representative.

Another question relates to scale. As we have seen over the past several years, there has been a mushrooming of tech-enabled initiatives intended to empower citizens to exercise and aggregate their voices and demands more effectively and improve the quality of democratic governance. However, many of these initiatives are still very new, their focus is relatively narrow and unidimensional, and they remain far from widespread and commonplace across countries and regions. So, while a variety of experiences may be working on a more micro-scale, how these can be scaled-up so that, in aggregate, they can have wider and broader impact is an issue that merits further attention. Also, the available literature suggests that, while ICTs can encourage greater participation (at least among some groups), how substantive and meaningful that participation is remains an open question. To begin with, simply building a tool or platform for citizen engagement is no guarantee that it will be used (Simon et al. 2017). And, even when used, participation can remain remarkably shallow – 'slacktivism', as it has been dubbed, is a kind of feel-good activism that creates the illusion of having social impact without demanding much more than a click online, but is devoid of substance (Gerbaudo 2012).

The studies analysed indicate that, even when people do participate in more involved ways, there is no convincing evidence that tech-based experiments alter the balance of power in favour of those who have traditionally been marginalised. Nor is there evidence that technology can alter entrenched patterns of stratification and exclusion in substantive ways (Xenos et al. 2014; Fung et al. 2015; Langlamet 2018; Simon et al. 2018). Certainly, as the Arab uprisings demonstrated so powerfully, micro-actions carried out through ICTs can profoundly disrupt the political landscape on a much broader scale (Margetts et al. 2015). But the fate of the uprisings also helps to illustrate how ephemeral those moments of empowerment can be, and how very challenging the task is to capitalise on those moments and make them more sustainable over time.

4. The public square vs tech? ICT as a double-edged sword

The previous section highlighted some important limitations related to the extent that ICTs can expand the public square in ways that make it more inclusive and representative. The discussion also highlighted that the kinds of changes that ICTs may be helping to harness may be more gradual and incremental. However, beyond this, over the past several years, a decidedly more pessimistic tone has set in. There are growing concerns that ICTs may not be as transformational as tech-optimists had originally hoped, Technology may aggravate the sense of political alienation and disillusionment that has become manifest in developed and developing country settings alike, and actively undermine the quality of (democratic) politics. It has become increasingly clear that, while ICTs have the potential to connect and harness collective action for progressive change, they can just as easily foster fragmentation and drive agendas that are much more exclusionary.

Let a hundred flowers bloom?

One challenge is that the proliferation of views – letting a hundred flowers bloom, if you will – can become overwhelming, and the articulation of so many diverse voices can lead to a cacophony of noise rather than the aggregation of coherent ideas. So, for instance, while citizens may be able to exert pressure on government authorities more directly and immediately, the absence of a filter means it is much more difficult for those authorities to understand the issues to prioritise and respond accordingly. Among other things, this can lead to the fragmentation of policy agendas and a focus on immediate, narrower, more personalised concerns at the expense of a more strategic and longer-term focus on the public good. There are also concerns that, by enabling direct linkages between voters and government officials (both elected and appointed), the mushrooming of ICTs may be unwittingly contributing to an ongoing de-institutionalisation of the political process. This can contribute to the further weakening of parliaments and the checks and balances mechanism. As we have seen in different countries, ranging from the US to the Philippines to Venezuela, it can also facilitate the rise of populist political leaders who base their appeal on an anti-establishment rhetoric (Carothers 2015).

Fragmented publics, polarisation and 'fake news'

More fundamentally perhaps, two increasingly disruptive forces – anger over social changes that many perceive as a threat, and the perception that social media is upending the ways ideas spread and communities form – are colliding (see Caryl 2016; Margetts et al. 2015). This has given rise to increasingly polarised and rancorous political climates: what were once fringe movements or ideologies are becoming more accessible, more influential, and more extreme and intolerant (Margetts et al. 2015 Paladino 2018; Taub 2018). Thus, the proliferation and diversity of voices has not always improved the quality of public deliberation and democratic debate. On the contrary, it has given rise to the creation of 'echo chambers' of ideologically like-minded people and/or 'filter bubbles', where content is selected by algorithms based on a viewer's previous behaviours. In both instances, exposure to different ideas and attitude-changing information becomes extremely limited (see Carothers 2015, Annan 2018). By way of illustration, a recent study has documented that 85%

of 15 million political tweets from users in the US and five European countries took place among politically like-minded users (Barberá 2015). These problems have also been exacerbated by 'fake news' (see Box 1), which is extraordinarily divisive and tends to reinforce the echo chambers and internet bubbles.

By democratising access and bypassing mediators, platforms such as Facebook now give everyone with a smartphone equal space and opportunity to sow discord, polarisation and hate. The social stigma associated with ideas perceived as outside the mainstream has been dramatically reduced (Paladino 2018; Taub 2018). This has become a considerable problem in well-established Western democracies like the US and the UK, but is even a more daunting challenge in emerging democracies and/or conflict-afflicted countries where institutions are considerably weaker. As Larry Diamond (quoted in Carothers 2015) has noted, when polarisation happens without robust consensus on the rules of the democratic game, the resilience of the political system becomes endangered. Such disinformation tends to stoke long-standing tensions and conflicts, and can have profoundly detrimental effect on fragile democracies.

For example, research shows that, in countries across the developing world, if people feel they cannot trust or rely on established authorities like the police or the courts to keep them safe, some may opt to take matters into their own hands (Paladino 2018; Taub and Fisher 2018). As several reports and studies have documented, there has been a disturbing rise in the incidence of riots, lynchings, and other manifestations of violence that often turn deadly in countries ranging from Kenya, India and the Philippines to Myanmar, Mexico and Thailand. These incidents are instigated through hate speech, rumour, and 'fake news' or misinformation spread online, including on platforms like Facebook and YouTube (see Mutahi and Kimari 2017 on Kenya; Marchand 2018 on India; Zuckerberg interview with Klein 2018 on Myanmar; Paladino 2018 on South East Asia; and Ahmed & Villegas 2016 on Mexico). As Taub and Fisher (2018) have chronicled in Sri Lanka, for example:

> '[i]n March 2018, ... misinformation constructing an alternate reality of Muslim plots and conspiracies was spread through Facebook and contributed to anti-Muslim riots in Sri Lanka which led to the death of several people. According to the reporters uncovering the turn of events, "Facebook's newsfeed played a central role in nearly every step from rumor to killing"'.

Other emerging research has focused on how ICTs may affect electoral processes in ways that spread 'fake news' (see Box 2), feed polarisation and further undermine trust in institutions of democratic governance. This is a phenomenon that has become deeply problematic in democracies that are both more and less well-established.

Box 2: Fake news

The phenomenon of 'fake news' is not new, nor is it limited to social media. Fake news, or the spreading of news, stories or hoaxes created with the deliberate intent to misinform or deceive readers to influence people's views, push a political agenda or generate confusion, dates back decades if not centuries (UK Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee 2018). However, there are growing concerns that fake news has become much more extensively widespread over the past several years, and that, as a result, free and independent media around the world is in deep trouble (Deane 2018). Of course, social media has proven to be a major and extremely effective medium fostering access to and dissemination of fake news at unimaginably high speed (Fuchs 2017). As a variety of scholars have pointed out, social media platforms are particularly adept at directly reaching large numbers of people with personal messages (UK Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee 2018).

Fake news has also become big business. Stories on platforms like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are manipulated to resemble credible journalism and attract maximum attention and, with it, advertising revenue: links are given the same weighting irrespective of the source, and the more clicks a story gets, the greater the profit it generates.

One area in particular where 'fake news' poses serious problems across the developed and the developing worlds is around electoral processes and political campaigning (Annan 2018). As we have seen from elections and referenda in countries like Brazil, France, Italy, Kenya, the Philippines, South Sudan, the UK, and the US, 'fake news' clearly has the potential to skew and distort political debate (UK Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee 2018). For example, according to an Ipsos MORI poll from November 2017, three-quarters of Americans who see fake news believe it (Moore 2017). As Kofi Annan (2018) noted, in the gubernatorial elections in Jakarta in 2018, there was a surge in the use of inflammatory 'fake news' on social media intended to mobilise sectarian loyalties and increase communal tensions. In the latest elections in Kenya, social media was used to polarise political and ethnic groups. There were allegations that the electoral commission's servers were hacked to alter the outcome of the vote.

As growing evidence shows, 'fake news' has become an important, and considerably effective, mechanism to seek to influence elections beyond borders – as in the case of Russian meddling in electoral contests in France, the UK, the US and beyond (House of Commons 2018). Young people are especially vulnerable to fake news because they tend to rely almost exclusively on social media to remain informed – as recent analysis from the US has shown, a crucial challenge is that they are often not able to recognise misinformation (Hunt 2016). Similar data from across the developing world does not seem to be available, but presumably the effects on the ability of audiences to process news and tell what is true or fake are similar.

A recent study undertaken by the Computational Propaganda Research Project at the University of Oxford looks at the work and activities of so-called 'cyber troops', or government or political party actors tasked with manipulating public online. The study of 48 countries in Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe, the Middle East and Oceania found that ICTs and social media platforms are deliberately being exploited to spread misinformation to undermine the legitimacy of democratic processes, polarise voting constituencies, manipulate voters, and shape electoral outcomes at a time when trust in democratic politics is already very low (Bradshaw and Howard 2018; Annan 2018). According to Paladino (2018), in Southeast Asia, for example,

> such behavioral manipulation has occurred at the grassroots level as charismatic leaders and groups have taken to social media to spread hate speech and fake news with the intent of gaining adherents to their cause in long-running communal conflicts that threaten democratic consolidation. At the same time, a couple of prominent, democratically-elected strongman leaders in the region have also taken advantage of social media's persuasive power to undergird their rule as they simultaneously seek to silence the professional media organizations that pose a challenge to their carefully curated narratives.

A financial catch-22

While every story of misinformation and manipulation is unique, different stories – whether in Brazil, Burma, France, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, Sri Lanka, Ukraine or the US – share common characteristics. These are related to how social media/ICTs can unintentionally amplify certain messages and tendencies that turn out to be dangerous. Some of these are anchored on uncomfortable tensions embedded in the way that social media platforms work given their business and financial models. As Taub (2018) explains:

> Facebook's news feed, for instance, runs on an algorithm that promotes whatever content wins the most engagement. Studies find that negative, primal emotions – fear, anger – draw the most engagement. So, posts that provoke those emotions rise naturally. Tribalism – a universal human tendency – also draws heavy engagement. Posts that affirm your group identity by attacking another group tend to perform well. Algorithm-driven platforms amplify and systematically move hate speech into the mainstream. But to the algorithm, the content of an idea is irrelevant. Whether it's extremist or mainstream doesn't matter; only its ability to draw engagement counts.

This does not mean that platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Google or any other intend to spread misinformation or feed intolerance and extremism. What they are interested in is maximising advertising revenues. Thus, these platforms are caught in a catch-22: on the one hand, as Mark Zuckerberg and other digital technology leaders have expressed, there may be dismay at witnessing how social media can be exploited for unsavoury purposes – but, on the other hand, bottom lines are improved by increasing user engagement. However, people tend to be drawn to content that is more divisive. As John Naughton (2018) has noted, this puzzle of how social media giants can help to address social problems they have helped to exacerbate without hurting their revenues and growth, is one of the leading challenges confronting reformers in this space.

Feeding the Leviathan?

As some of our analysis suggests, ICTs don't only flourish in democracies or empower those with progressive agendas. ICTs – and social media in particular – may have ended the monopoly of information that authoritarian states previously enjoyed. They have also helped to expose people in countries like China and Iran to banned news and critical opinions. However, these same states – and leaders with authoritarian tendencies in more hybrid regimes (such as Turkey) – have become remarkably adept at using digital technologies to manipulate information, shore up political support, and censor opponents. As Bradshaw and Howard (forthcoming) have put it:

> '[w]here government control over Internet content has traditionally relied on blunt instruments to block, filter, and stifle the free flow of information, powerful political actors are now turning to dynamic narratives, information operations, trolling campaigns, and bot armies to shape public discourse and nudge popular opinion'.

Social media manipulation has enabled authoritarian systems to continue to control political processes, not simply through long established methods like vote rigging, the cracking down on civic space, or the harassment of journalists, but also through efforts to 'win hearts and minds' and nurture popular support for the system through the use of ICTs. More perversely, authoritarian leaders are also using new technologies to track the whereabouts and actions of reform activists both inside and outside their borders. As the case of Russia helps to illustrate, they do not confine themselves to intervening domestically but also seek to influence political processes elsewhere (Tisné and others cited in Carothers 2015). With China and Russia at the forefront, authoritarian systems and leaders are also becoming increasingly sophisticated and learning from and sharing with one another tools of internet and digital filtering, surveillance, suppression and censorship (Diamond in Carothers 2015).

An example of this is in the recent attempts by a variety of governments in East Africa (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania) to pass laws ostensibly intended to punish the spreading of 'fake news' and impose taxes on the use of social media to end 'gossip' online (Olewe 2018). As above, some of the concerns these legislative efforts seek to address are real, but there is a danger that such measures will also silence some of the few and independent voices (such as bloggers) that are emerging and may be critical of the political system. As Nic Cheeseman (cited in Olewe 2018) has also noted, laws to curb 'fake news' are likely driven by other agendas and the risk is that, as has happened with anti-terror legislation, governments hide behind genuine issues to put measures in place that strengthen their own power and fundamentally muzzle any legitimate criticism or dissent.

Together, all of these different concerns have led some leading techno-pessimists (who were previously tech-optimists) to argue that democratic politics may be fundamentally incompatible with ICTs. For instance, according to Jamie Bartlett (2018), democracy and technology 'are products of completely different eras and run according to different rules and principles'. Democracy is 'slow, deliberative and grounded in physical space' (Bartlett 2018), whereas social media generates a culture of acceleration, soundbites and short attention spans that thrives on emotions rather than on facts and evidence (Fuchs 2017).

5. Conclusions

Where does this leave us? This section includes some reflections and implications for understanding the opportunities and limitations of ICTs in shaping a new public square.

In his (1983) classic, Benedict Anderson argues that the arrival of the printing press in the Americas in the 18th century played a pivotal role in the birth of nationalism. While people across vast stretches of geographical space were not able to engage in face-to-face contact, the printing press enabled them to create a sense of nation across territories as 'Imagined communities' and to project an image of themselves as a collective. The advent of the digital revolution almost three centuries later seemed to offer similar promise to shape a new public square. In practice, however, realising this potential has proven much more complex and challenging. ICTs have generated different dilemmas, trade-offs, and unforeseen or unintended consequences that threaten to fragment, divide and polarise societies rather than foster social cohesion and a shared sense of nationhood. Instead of imagined communities, ICTs seem to be feeding atomised expressions of being and echo chambers.

Yet, reality is more complicated, and it is essential to avoid either overly optimistic or overly pessimistic techno-deterministic perspectives of how change happens and develop more nuanced and realistic understandings of how ICTs affect governance dynamics and how they can bring about change – both positive and negative. Several important lessons emerge from our analysis about the potential of ICTs to improve the quality of democratic governance and redefine the public square. The most important perhaps is that, while ICTs can be instrumental tools in opening up new and innovative paths to participate and mobilise – altering political opportunity structures for public engagement, contestation, and/or dissent – they are not a substitute for other essential factors.

Digital technologies are not responsible for creating the kinds of social divides and fault-lines of conflict that characterise countries across the developed and the developing world, and they cannot on their own solve the challenges of apathy, disillusionment, low levels of trust and the widening chasm between the people and those who rule them. Technologies may amplify or exacerbate certain kinds of social and human behaviour, but they do not create such behaviour – rather, they are embedded in the contradictions and complexities of different states and societies (Fuchs 2017). Thus, ICTs are but one aspect of the many factors that shape the dynamic relationship between citizen voice, accountability and responsiveness (Brock and McGee 2017). The crisis of the public square evident across the world is deeply rooted in existing and underlying structures, institutions and power relations. Getting to the core of when and how ICTs can help to make citizen engagement more effective – and for whom – means grappling with the underlying politics at play. The struggle for greater inclusion, accountability and representation is an ongoing process of negotiation and contestation; above all, it is about altering existing power relations.

Relying on technological fixes is not enough to bring about change. The choice to engage people online or in person should not be binary or exclusionary – both mechanisms are essential and can be mutually reinforcing. As research from Kenya suggests, ICT-based solutions can widen the gap between government and citizens, if offline methods to engage (around service provision,

accountability, and so on) are scaled back (Gurumurthy, Bharthur and Chami 2017). On the other hand, when offline approaches are combined with online efforts to reach out to those who lack digital skills or access, they tend to be more successful in terms of widening participation and becoming more representative.

Perhaps more fundamentally, collective organisation and leadership are essential in fostering sustainable change. When it comes to policy influence, the interaction of most people with the state is mediated through organisations. Political parties, parliaments, and coalitions among organised groups across state and society are all crucial. As Stephen Heydemann (2018) has argued in the case of the Arab Spring, one of the most striking features of the uprisings is 'the failure of the mobilised publics that played such an important role in launching protest movements to sustain their influence once the focus of transformations shifted from streets and public squares into formal political arenas'.

The fate of the failed revolution in Egypt is particularly illustrative. What made the movement that ousted Mubarak from power strong and compelling to begin with – its diffuse and transient nature and flat structure – eventually became its weakness. Protestors, brought together mostly through online networks, lacked clear leadership and representation, which made meaningful negotiation with the powers that be particularly challenging. This is ultimately why, in Malcolm Gladwell's (2010) memorable phrase (itself echoing Gil Scott-Heron's observation in relation to television), 'the revolution will not be tweeted'. The spontaneous, unorganised and virtual character of the mass mobilisation made it more difficult to build consensus across broad swaths of the population, crossing ethnic, religious, and class groups. This also made it impossible to keep up the pressures to fulfil the promises of the revolution. Those who started the revolution on the streets by harnessing the power of ICTs, were side-lined by groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and, eventually, the military which had much clearer and more effective organisational capacity. As audiences outside MENA, who were instrumental in strengthening the cause of protesters at the international level, gradually became distracted and moved on, and the internet's novelty as an instrument of social change began to settle. The struggle for democracy in the region as a whole remains as traditional as ever, with entrenched powers and conflicting sectarian interests still very much in existence.

Lastly, we are in the midst of a revolution in communications, and the situation feels extremely fluid and uncertain. There is a tremendous amount of processing and learning in real time as we try to adjust to shifting digital contexts. Yet, as the late Kofi Annan (2018) helpfully reminded us, ICTs are not the first revolution of its kind to have challenged political systems. The printing press, and later radio and television, were all revolutionary in their day. Eventually, all of those, disruptive as they may have seemed, were gradually regulated. How to do that now with ICTs has emerged as the new frontier. As before, finding the right balance between different needs and priorities will be a matter of trial, error and learning.

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