

New Media to Further Global Engagement

CONVENER:
al-Husein N. Madhany



at BROOKINGS

The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World
2010 U.S. Islamic World Forum Papers

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For the past seven years in Doha, Qatar, the annual U.S.-Islamic World Forum has served as the premier convening forum for key leaders from government, civil society, academia, business, religious communities and the media from across the global Muslim community and the United States. Over the course of three days, these dynamic leaders gather for thoughtful discussion and transformative dialogue on issues of mutual importance.

This past year we witnessed a significant shift in the conversation between the United States and global Muslim communities. A new American president has set forth a more positive tone for engagement, holding out the promise of a new relationship between the U.S. and Muslim communities, as set forth in his historic remarks in Cairo last June. Throughout the Forum, we explored whether this altered discourse has transformed the relationship and how it has translated into substantive policy recommendations and programs. We also explored and debated key issues of importance to global Muslim communities. The gathering was all the more notable for the presence and participation of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Anwar Ibrahim, Saeb Erakat and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, among many others.

This year also saw a change in the structure of the Forum, with the addition of five working groups who met for numerous hours throughout the course of the three-day Forum. Led by a convener, these working groups focused on specific thematic issues with the goal of provoking thoughtful discussion and, where applicable, developing concrete recommendations. Our five working groups this year included: “The Role of Religious Leaders and Religious Communities in Diplomacy,” “Democracy and Islamist Parties: Opportunities and Challenges,” Empowering Networks for Community Development and Social Change,” Scientific, Intellectual and Governance Cooperation on Emerging Environmental Challenges,” and “New Media to Further Global Engagement.”

We are pleased to be able to share with you the following paper which is a product of the rich workshop discussion which took place at the Forum. However, please note the opinions reflected in the paper and any recommendations contained herein are solely the views of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the participants of the working groups or The Brookings Institution.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the State of Qatar for their partnership and vision in convening the Forum in partnership with us. In particular, we thank the Emir of Qatar, HRH Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Qatar, HE Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr al-Thani, and the entire staff of the Permanent Committee for Organizing Conferences at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their support and dedication in organizing the Forum.

Sincerely,

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This working group will explore opportunities for expanding the instruments available to foreign policy-makers to engage weak states. Fragmented and internally-conflicted states can be difficult to influence by traditional foreign policy means and further can be difficult to understand through traditional media outlets. New models of civil society action enabled by new media—and more broadly grounded civic media—show potential for reducing internal conflict and promoting social trust among tribal, ethnic, and religious groups. Bringing new media communications together with model civil society programs creates more powerful opportunities to enhance understanding of these internal conflicts and thereby address them in ways that will help accelerate social and political change. We will accomplish this by identifying tools in any media that can foster or enhance civic engagement through case studies that span the globe. This working group will create policy recommendations on how best to employ civic media, as well as new media information technology communication tools, to harness the muted voices of civil societies to be active partners in promoting foreign policy objectives by working for economic, social, and political reform.

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WORKSHOP

NEW MEDIA TO FURTHER GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT

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“Change can happen because real time is the new primetime. It’s a source for news, a platform to collaborate, a mouthpiece to mobilize.”

—Queen Rania Al Abdullah of Jordan

“The key is to produce something that both pulls people together and gives them something to do.”

—Dr. Henry Jenkins

ABSTRACT

This 2010 Brookings workshop paper explores opportunities for expanding the instruments available to foreign policy-makers to engage weak states. Fragmented and internally divided states can be difficult to influence by traditional foreign policy means and further can be difficult to understand through traditional media outlets. New models of civil society action catalyzed by new media—and more broadly grounded civic media—show potential for reducing internal conflict and promoting social trust among tribal, ethnic, and religious groups.

Bringing new media communications together with civil society action and model programs creates more powerful opportunities to enhance understanding of these internal conflicts and thereby address them in ways that will help accelerate social and political change. This paper identifies new media tools and connection technologies that can foster or enhance civic engagement through case studies that span the globe. It was prepared for, and its recommendations reflect the proceedings of, the New Media working group at the 2010 U.S.-Islamic World Forum.¹

¹ Guiding definitions:

New media. In this report, new media entails the digital and networked data and communications facilitated by information-communication technologies (ICTs). Examples of ICTs relevant to this report are personal computers, laptops, mobile devices, smart phones, digital readers, and other hand-held devices. New media then, to use a popular theorist’s definition, has the characteristics of being 1) numerically represented, 2) is modular, 3) can be automated, and 4) is variable. (See Lev Manovich’s *The Language of New Media*.)

Social media. In our approach, social media is situated within the larger rubric of conversations on new media platforms. By social media I refer to the networked communication technologies that facilitate interactivity, collaboration, and especially the ability to produce user-generated content and collective organization. Popular examples of these technologies and spaces include: blogging software and blogging communities, wiki spaces, social bookmarking and sharing software, and multimedia production and sharing suites such as audio, video, and image manipulation technologies. (See Yochai Benkler’s *The Wealth of Networks*.)

Civic media. Civic media incorporates both new media and social media, but fundamentally is “any use of a medium that fosters civic engagement.” While hard news is an obvious example of civic media in most contexts, the changes taking place online and digitally introduce alternative conceptions of civic media. The digital opening provides a freely accessible space to create opportunities for interactions across loyalties. For our purposes, civic media comprises community-oriented interactions through the use of connection technologies. Civic media allows for the creation of new unexpected communities and fosters an understanding that peoples’ lives are connected to one another. Technological connectivity by digital natives occurs simultaneously at local and global levels without the traditional barriers to entry that normally limit their regular participation and activism, such as government visas, parent’s permission, and money. (See *Center for Future Civic Media* at MIT: <<http://civic.mit.edu>>.)

PREFACE

We live in a world of weak states. The United Nations Security Council was created in 1945 to arbitrate conflicts between states. Up to the end of the Cold War, the international order was focused on strong states. Today however, the majority of the Security Council's agenda involves securing peace in weak states in a world of non-state actors. It was during the 1990's that non-state forces started to play a larger role in the Arab and Muslim countries and became a priority in international politics after the end of the Cold War. During that time non-state actors, in the form of civil society organizations (CSOs) and also terrorists—the newer threats to national and global security—emerged as significant players both in their influence on their governments and also in international affairs. Communications media played an important role in the shift, empowering citizens to act independently. Communications media became an increasingly important force both in promoting conflict within tribal societies and also in international affairs.

In an environment where hostility toward the United States is widespread, communications media and information environments—an aggregate of systems and individuals that disseminate informa-

tion both from state-sponsored media as well as private media, both offline and online, and both formal and informal media—play an important role in conveying and facilitating that hostility. Media have been used by radical political movements and terrorist groups, such as Al Qaeda, as communications vehicles to lobby public support for perceived grievances; while weakening states' legitimacy and promoting conflict in these societies. On the other hand, media and communications infrastructures in the Muslim world have so far played a much weaker *positive* role in reducing conflict, due to the lack of investment in and incubation of alternative non-state sanctioned perspectives in both online and offline spaces.

This workshop paper, prepared for and with recommendations reflecting the proceedings of the New Media working group at the 2010 U.S.-Islamic World Forum, explores the new challenges facing foreign policy toward these weak states. Specifically, it examines how communications media can amplify the impact of these civil society initiatives and in particular how information-communication technologies (ICTs) are being leveraged in these societies to nurture alternative civic commons for dialogue and development.

CIVIL SOCIETY, NEW MEDIA AND THE CHALLENGE OF WEAK STATES

In less than two decades, non-state actors have come to play roles in developing countries that greatly influence these countries and affect their positions in the international order. This has happened as civil society organizations and communications technology have helped strengthen the influence of public opinion on political systems, especially in limiting governmental power. In the sense of government power and authority, many countries that are today “weak” were “strong” two decades ago, before non-state sectors and public opinion became significant factors. An anecdote from a track-two American diplomat and professor tells an important piece of the story. He recalls flying over Cairo’s City of the Dead with Egypt’s President Mubarak in 1995. The President called him to the window of the Presidential helicopter and remarked, “This is why I no longer have the control over the country that I once had”—pointing to the forest of television antennas below.

The strengthening of societies has come largely at the expense of states (governments). The weakening of autocratic states opens up possibilities for expanding citizen participation in governments, but as threats to state security have increased, governments have often resorted to increased repression to remain in power—curtailing the activities of civil society organizations (CSOs) and sometimes imprisoning their leaders. In Egypt, for example, the Mubarak government clamped down on CSOs

promoting democracy and inhibited freedom of the press while imprisoning the country’s most prominent secular democrat, Ayman Nour. Similarly, the government of Vladimir Putin in Russia has imposed numerous restraints on civil society organizations and their funding. When asked how the government of a Middle Eastern country had managed to reduce the threat from well-supported and popular Islamic movements—who are perhaps the major non-state actors organized to challenge governments in the region—one political scientist professor, at a Council on Foreign Relations roundtable in 2008, gave her explanation in the simplest possible terms: “They shot a lot of them.”

Governments that stay in power through force may have substantial power, but they lack authority, and in that sense they are weak. Authority facilitates rule by consent. Weak states lack important capacities to be effective, including capacities to promote economic and political development, precisely due to low levels of legitimacy in the eyes of their publics and low levels of trust in their governments’ abilities to provide services. Because they are often torn by internal conflict, they are often defined by negative agendas of opposition, with little latitude for positive action. Discussion of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict assumes that both sides *can* act toward peace if they only choose to do so. However, both Israel and Palestine are deeply divided internally along political, religious, and cultural lines,

and these deep divisions limit their governments' freedom of action far more than is commonly supposed. These are not problems that afflict the "strong states," including today's weak states before they became weak.

Weak states also lack the capacity to be effective partners in the international order because their preoccupying concern with staying in power limits their ability to do anything else. It can be argued that many countries in the Middle East, including Israel, are greatly constrained by domestic political forces from acting effectively in their international relations.

The developed countries, including the United States, have lacked the capacity until now to assist these governments to promote development, both economic and political.² Part of the problem is a failure to understand that states are often ineffective in promoting change; in fact, the non-state sector, the CSOs, are much better for this purpose. The reason is that CSOs can navigate in societal spaces closed to government action, both host governments' and foreign governments' action. With certain strategies, CSOs can promote change from "inside" other societies more efficiently due to their

autonomy, without significant opposition. CSOs can accomplish this through organic, collaborative strategies that promote change without threatening the regimes and therefore face no political opposition. Civil society initiatives that advocate democratic rights and demand political change in the government are those that often threaten regimes and provoke repressive responses from them. While most attention focuses on CSOs oriented towards democratization and human rights issues for political development, many others abound, including those working toward social and economic development.

Grass roots initiatives, which work organically and consensually, create visions of a new future based on real experiences. They create powerful stories that can be told to change people's sense of the possible. Increasingly CSOs are implementing their strategies and actions through strategic communication and coordination facilitated by ICTs and new media. The ability to communicate quickly to large populations (i.e., above and beyond those who directly experience their work) what is possible through narratives about what is in fact happening is a powerful instrument that can affect both internal and foreign policies.

² An excellent summary of the challenges, together with a broad sketch of how foreign policy can respond to them may be found in A. Lawrence Chickering and P. Edward Haley, "Strong Society, Weak State," *Policy Review*, June/July 2007. The article is partly based on a book coauthored in 2006 by A. Lawrence Chickering, Isobel Coleman, and Emily Vargas-Baron on how to make foreign aid strategic, *Strategic Foreign Assistance: Civil Society in International Security*, 2006.

NEW MEDIA, CIVIC PARTICIPATION AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

On June 4, 2009, President Obama, delivering his historic address to the Muslim world, said, “I want to particularly say this to young people of every faith, in every country—you, more than anyone, have the ability to re-imagine the world, to remake this world.” Of the 1.57 billion² Muslims in the world today, the vast majority resides in developing nations, and a significant portion of them are young citizens. With a quarter of the predominantly Muslim Middle Eastern and North African population currently between the ages of 10 and 24 years old,³ President Obama’s call to invest in young people as agents of change is critically important. Young Muslims around the world have the unique potential to engage in their communities and contribute to both social and economic development. To successfully tap this potential, it is vital to understand contemporary young citizens’ engagement preferences, and the communication strategies that mesh most harmoniously with them. The purpose of this working paper is to synthesize the latest findings from studies of new media and civic media models and contemporary citizen engagement trends. Doing so allows us to see the existing linkages between the two, as well as the plausible relationships that have not yet successfully been nurtured.

To do so, one needs to understand the positive role that young Muslims—often identified as the Muslim world’s “youth bulge”—can play in their societies and nations, as well as the best ways to facilitate their involvement. The findings and case studies from the 2010 Brookings New Media working group have highlighted developments and innovations taking place within young Muslim populations around the world. The findings also highlight the growing importance of digital media and connection technologies for Muslim youth as a vital component of their mediated interactions with civil society actors, institutions, and the U.S. government’s policies towards their countries.

INFORMATION SOCIETY AND SOCIO-POLITICAL-ECONOMIC RAMIFICATIONS

Globalization, often characterized as the global networking of international economies and the trading of goods, also fosters greater connectivity between societies and leads to a more fluid flow of cultures and values. These issues together are usually discussed in the larger rubric of “the information society,” where some contemporary thinkers have gone so far to argue that the creation, structuring, and flow of information is now “the key ordering principle in society.”⁴ Therefore, globalization is not

² Retrieved from the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life: <<http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=450>>.

³ Retrieved from: <<http://thenews-service.wordpress.com/2009/08/07/civicallyengagingmenayouth/>>.

⁴ Webster, Frank, and Raimo Blom. 2004. *The information society reader*. Routledge.

only reshaping economies, but also profoundly influencing the social structures of societies, which in turn has ramifications for the ways in which citizens engage in their societies, both locally and transnationally. Understanding these issues provides key insights on how to alleviate negative experiences, particularly among young Muslims, and possible pathways for improving relationships with them. It can also help reshape the limited roles they play in their communities toward more inclusive and participatory ones.

Though scholars and theorists disagree about the exact extent and contours of the information society, proponents⁵ of the idea list some important characteristics that determine both the economic and socio-political experiences of information-based societies. These characteristics comprise the following pathway to a different economy, and socio-political foundation:

1. The fundamental function and contributions of individuals center on mental labor;
2. This labor leads to the proliferation and mass production of cognitive, systematized information, technology and knowledge; and
3. Information networks and data banks become the production and distribution centers of information and technology goods.

Therefore a country's economic advantage in an information society depends on participating in the creation of a 'knowledge frontier.'

Future successful societies then are those that build themselves based around intellectual and information industries, working to create synergetic economies. Economies based on synergism, are those that are actively transforming themselves from commodity economies to synergetic production

and shared utilization economies whose core economic drivers are information utilities as opposed to factory production. This is as true of the economies and societies of weak states as it is developed nations. If weak states are to become more stable and participate in the globalized world, they inevitably must adapt their productive capacity toward information-based economies. This cannot happen if weak states systematically exclude the future productive members of their societies, and limit their agency in adapting and contributing to their communities' narratives.

Furthermore, the socio-political ramifications of the advent of information societies are that social activities increasingly revolve around voluntary communities, where individuals engage in civil society autonomously. Whereas post-industrial societies of the 20th century existed in civil societies where organizational membership and formal participation was the defining characteristic of citizen involvement, citizens' activities and engagements are more fluid and unrestricted in the 21st century. With the growth of networked participation, citizens who are engaged, do so with different participatory tendencies, as social change arises from the force of citizen-initiated collective action movements and network-organized flash mobs; unlike the classically organized social movements and institution-dependent era from the industrial age.

The above trends and characteristics of an information economy should not be viewed as an inevitable end to what societies are going to be as the proliferation of information technology increases. The on-the-ground situation is far more complex, especially in weak states and in many Muslim majority societies. For example, many parts of the world do not have basic access to employment, let alone clean drinking water, not to mention the levels of literacy required to take advantage of information society-based industries. Rather, information society trends

⁵ Masuda, Y. (2004). Image of the Future Information Society. In *The information society reader*. pp 15-20. Routledge.

are directions towards which developed nations and advanced societies are moving, at different speeds. Third-world nations feel the effects of these trends either directly or by proxy through their relationships with more advanced states in the globalized, networked world.

The impact of information society trends on developing societies can be seen most vividly in the transnational collective action movements taking place between nations. Civil society actors around the world increasingly utilize ICTs and digital media to organize in home countries and abroad to address social and political issues. Furthermore, online public spheres and civic commons on the web are being created often times organically—and other times with strategic investments from their governments—through these networks, ranging from the political blogosphere in North America, international protest organizations in Europe, to global citizen media campaigns that challenge corporate corruption to authoritarian states in Asia and the Middle East, respectively.

ICTs AND CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS

The relationships between and among states and citizens are increasingly mediated by new media communication technologies. State-to-state diplomacy is quickly becoming a relic of the past as the barriers to entry for citizen diplomacy have been significantly lowered. Citizen engagement no longer requires a government visa, parental permission, or even money. People are replacing their trust in traditional authorities and authority structures with trust in each other. Furthermore, with more than 4.5 billion mobile phones currently in circulation—an increasing percentage of which are smart phones—access to the digital network is quickly becoming ubiquitous. Citizens and civil society actors utilize ICTs to work

both locally and transnationally, partnering with governments or with one another, to address their needs via four spheres of engagement: *e-democracy*, *e-mobilization*, *e-campaigning*, and *e-government*.⁶

E-democracy. Here, ICTs are used to enhance community engagement, citizen deliberation, and civic participation. Virtual communities are used by citizens to explore hobbies and interests, become involved in local community groups and associations, join political or religious groups, obtain general news and information, find like-minded individuals, and connect with people of different backgrounds and perspectives. Given the opportunity, those individuals that successfully utilize the e-democracy potential of new media are likely to participate in vibrant online public spheres and build social capital, increase their own knowledge and efficacy to address and solve social problems in their own communities, as well as find like-minded individuals to collectively deliberate, coordinate, and mobilize to resolve these issues. While some nations, especially closed and autocratic regimes, are suspicious of such developments because of the challenges they pose to their power, it cannot be denied that whether they accord these developments or not, they are happening. For example, a recent study of the Iranian blogosphere by researchers from Harvard University and Columbia University shows that despite the Iranian government's censorship of the internet, Iran has one of the richest and most diverse known online public spheres.⁷

E-mobilization. ICTs are now also routinely leveraged by interest groups and social movements to organize online, offline, and hybrid campaigns to address their concerns, both locally as well as transnationally. Like the horizontal citizen communication possible in e-democracy approaches to engagement, e-mobilization works similarly but

⁶ Chadwick, Andrew. 2006. *Internet politics: states, citizens, and new communication technologies*. Oxford University Press.

⁷ Retrieved from the Berkman Center's Internet & Democracy Blog: <<http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/idblog/2009/02/12/mapping-change-in-the-iranian-blogosphere/>>.

often towards specific collective causes. From classic social movements, to modern flash mobs, interest groups have worked nationally and internationally to influence: environmental legislation, electoral outcomes (ex: MoveOn.org), and address human rights issues (ex: Mexico's Zapatistas) through the power of ICTs and new media. Social media practices such as blogging, and ICTs such as mobile telephony are vital components of e-mobilization work, without which citizen-initiated movements would be limited in relying on formal institutions that require strong commitments,⁸ not episodic involvement that allows greater numbers of individuals to participate. These forms of political engagement have been shown to have played important roles in monitoring elections by democratic activists in Ghana,⁹ or mobilizing voters through texting in other parts of the world.

E-campaigning: Unlike both e-democracy and e-mobilization engagement scenarios, e-campaigning refers to the vertical communication between citizens and formal political structures, such as governments and affiliated bodies (such as parties). ICTs are being leveraged heavily by governments and states, but often with caution, as these changes have the potential to shift the relationship of power between the two. The two issues receiving most attention in e-campaigning are related to innovations in fundraising as well as interactive tools adopted by political campaign web portals to engage citizens. President Barack Obama's election campaign of 2008 serves as the best example for both: fundraising was revolutionized by allowing small contributions from the long-tail of advocates, while the campaign's interactive tools allowed everyday citizens to feel as part of a movement by joining online communities, creating personalized content, and working towards collective causes for which they

were given greater agency to design and execute. Another very recent example of e-campaigning has been the use of text-message fundraising used by CSOs and NGOs to raise over \$3 million in 30 hours¹⁰ after the earthquake in Haiti.¹¹

E-government. Like e-campaigning strategies that make elite politics more accessible to everyday citizens, e-government engagement allow bureaucracies to be more accessible to civil society actors and everyday citizens. ICTs here facilitate transparency, improve efficiency, and provide better services to constituents. Though e-government engagements are heavily transactional in their relationships with citizens, unlike e-campaigning and e-mobilization trends, which have evolved to be more of a partnership with citizens working towards a collective goal, electronic governance programs are vital to improving governmental dealings with businesses and individuals, reduce costs, and improve the effectiveness of governmental services. For developing nations, such as is the case for many Muslim societies, advancements in e-government infrastructures can facilitate the services of political institutions to their publics, reducing costs, improving efficiency, and inevitably increasing the legitimacy of, and trust in, governments.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND DIGITAL DIVIDES

Information-communication technologies and digital media allow for key methods to improve inclusion and facilitate involvement of societal actors, of which e-democracy, e-mobilization, e-campaigning, and e-government are important paradigms for future engagement strategies. Both developed nations and stable societies have already been able to benefit most heavily from these approaches so far, while weak states and developing societies have been hindered by a *multi-tiered digital divide*.¹²

⁸ Bennett, W.L. (2003). Communicating Global Activism. *Information, Communication, & Society*. 6(2), 143-168.

⁹ Retrieved from the Center for Strategic & International Studies: <<http://csis.org/blog/texting-democracy-mobile-phones-and-elections-africa>>.

¹⁰ Retrieved from e-politics: <<http://www.epolitics.com/2010/01/17/texting-for-haiti-a-breakthrough-for-cell-phone-fundraising/>>.

¹¹ <<http://www.epolitics.com/2010/01/17/texting-for-haiti-a-breakthrough-for-cell-phone-fundraising/>>.

¹² Norris, Pippa. 2001. *Digital divide: civic engagement, information poverty, and the Internet worldwide*. Cambridge University Press.

While studies have shown that global digital divides exist in both the most advanced societies to the poorest nations, many investment scenarios and policy initiatives have emerged to address these inequalities. However, it is important to note that in the Arab world,¹³ some nations are better positioned to jump-start investments in the information society and lessen the digital divides than others. For example, those nations with the highest proportion of internet users (between 20-35%) include: the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain. Those in the meso-level of internet users (between 10-15%) include: Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. Those with the lowest levels of internet users (less than 10%) include: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. These distinctions, though based only on measures of internet penetration, are reflective of the vast chasms present from Muslim society-to-society, spelling the obvious reality that a one-size-fits-all strategy is neither efficient nor applicable. The review of online engagement models offer a multitude of online civic media models from which the specific needs of communities and states must be adjusted to.

Nevertheless, while internet penetration and the percent of users is one basic measure of the digital divide, these vast differences raise concerns of a multi-tiered digital divide existing in the Muslim world, at the global, social, and democratic level:

Global divide. The global divide reflects the disparities between internet and information access between industrialized and developing societies. In 2000, data analysis covering 7221 governmental agencies from 191 nations worldwide, Cyberspace Policy Research Group (Cyparg)¹⁴ found that the average number of government websites per

nation was between 100-190 for North America and Western Europe, while South America, Asia, and the Middle East averaged between 25 and 35. A more fine-grained analysis of the functions of these sites also reveals interesting and important patterns: most sites' features aim towards providing information, not improving communication between constituents, and are least likely to provide them with opportunities to participate. What this spells for investments in Muslim societies, is that governments who aim merely to create web presences for one-way information dissemination will not effectively engage their publics. However, utilizing interactive technologies that actually engage citizens, by providing them with ways to reach their governments, and have their needs and concerns listened to, will fare better.

Social divide. The social divide reflects the disparities between the information rich and the information poor. Levels of income, education, race, ethnicity, and age, are known predictors of unequal information access. Moving towards a more equal participation of publics in the information society requires that governments and organizations invest in bridging the access, literacy, and participation gaps prevalent in developing societies. Strategies¹⁵ to do so include: rolling out technical infrastructures to promote local industry while investing in digital skills literacy development for those that need it most; investing in leap-frog development by rapid infrastructure development via cheap wireless technologies and cheap terminal devices; investing in basic material and human resource development, not ICT infrastructure; or doing both simultaneously. As it is already known that levels of literacy and access to even basic resources differ widely in many developing nations in the Muslim world, investments in ICT-powered civil society will not

¹³ Wheeler, D.L. (2009). Working around the state: Internet use and political identity in the Arab world. In "Handbook of Internet Politics." Chapter 22.

¹⁴ Norris, P. (2004). Deepening Democracy via E-Governance. Working paper.

¹⁵ Dijk, Jan A. G. M. van. 2005. *The deepening divide: inequality in the information society.* SAGE.

by themselves increase literacy. However, increasing the capacity for CSOs to better network with one-another will lead to better and more efficient allocation of resources, as well as innovations for addressing problems.

Democratic divide. The democratic divide reflects the differences between those who utilize digital resources to engage, mobilize and participate in public life, through the four spheres of engagement discussed earlier. ICT investments have the potential to improve the organizational ties of civic society and CSOs, and allow citizen movements to network horizontally to engage with their societies more effectively in collecting resources and social capital to address issues. Developed nations have countless examples of transnational advocacy networks organizing around issues such as: environmentalism, globalization, human rights, world trade, and conflict resolution. Developing societies and weak states are now positioned to tap into this potential by investing in strengthening civil society actors' ability to engage and mobilize in addressing their needs.

In the context of the Muslim world, considering the large number of young people in Muslim-majority nations, these weak nations and developing societies should think critically about investing in social and economic development programs that target the young. Reducing these divides, and allowing more equal as well as autonomous opportunities for engaging with their societies is vital to reduce the opportunities for these future generations so as to prevent alienation from their communities. Simply put, the reason many disaffected youth resort to the appeal of politically extreme movements is because of (1) their lack of opportunities to advance socially as well as economically; and (2) the per-

ceived disrespect and humiliation some experience when fragmented from global discourses having to about them but without their direct participation. Investments in ICT infrastructures and online civic spaces can engender both the economic development, as well as providing them with alternatives to extremist movements to air their grievances and (re)negotiate identities, social problems, and experiences.

PARTICIPATORY CULTURES AND ENGAGEMENT PREFERENCES

Youth engagement is a particularly complex challenge for developing societies. A major study of the United Nations Development Programme on "Youth and Violent Conflict: Society and Development in Crisis?"¹⁶ found that young people, defined as between the ages of 15 and 24, are often the most at risk members of society, and the largest untapped potential source for national development. In turn, youth in developing societies are also often the most frustrated segment, due to the lack of meaningful participation possible for them in their societies and nations. Given the lack of opportunities and spaces to contribute to their communities, they are more likely to join extreme political movements, as summarized previously. Tribal societies in particular may be at risk of not providing spaces for young people to engage in their communities' economic, social, and political spheres. While public attention on how to reduce political extremism and religious radicalization has usually fixated on understanding how terrorists use the internet¹⁷ and ICTs,¹⁸ policy initiatives and investments would be better served trying to understand the factors that alienate young people in the first place, and in what ways online civic spaces can be nurtured to promote organic and incremental inclusion of alienated publics.

¹⁶ United Nations Development Programme (2006). Youth and Violent Conflict: Society and Development in Crisis? Retrieved from the United Nations Development Programme: <www.undp.org/cpr/whats_new/UNDP_Youth_PN.pdf>.

¹⁷ Weimann, Gabriel. 2006. *Terror on the Internet: the new arena, the new challenges*. US Institute of Peace Press.

¹⁸ Cragin, K., Chalk, P., Daly, S.A., & Jackson, B.A. (2007). Sharing the dragon's teeth: Terrorist groups and the exchange of new technologies. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from the RAND Corporation: <<http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG485/>>.

The research suggests reasons to be optimistic about the potential of digital media to engage Muslim audiences, and the positive outcomes of greater youth engagement. A comprehensive study of youth engagement in the Middle East¹⁹ found that youth participation in civic activity is integral to their inclusion in their societies. For example, youth inclusion in civic participation often also leads to positive development outcomes, by facilitating collective action, yielding more effective services, and reducing corruption. Youth exclusion, on the other hand, increases the likelihood of deviant behaviors, such as crime and political extremism. While improving access to education and addressing economic issues must remain a priority in addressing the needs of young people in the Muslim world, a key component in doing so should incorporate young people in promoting civic engagement. Recent scholarship in citizenship studies has identified that young people are interested and willing to partake in civic and political life, though they are more likely to self-define the kinds of participation they find valuable. Whereas advanced Western democracies have been witnessing a steady decline of young people's interest and involvement in public life, some have argued that the networked information society is promoting a civic culture that places more value and importance in self-defined conceptions of civic engagement. Here, scholars have noticed that though young people are likely to read the news less, vote less, and care about party politics less,²⁰ they continue to be interested in volunteer activities and consumer politics where they have greater agency in self-defining not only what is political, but the way in which they address the causes that interest them.

Contemporary examples of these engagements²¹ include preferences for: 1) branded political discourse

and consumer politics, 2) mixing music and entertainment with formal political activities such as voting (ex: Rock The Vote), 3) participating in online petitioning, and most innovatively 4) using participatory media and their personal voice to advocate for their interests. Some have characterized these as a generational shift in how one thinks about civic participation, evolving from the assumption that citizens should participate in government-centered activities and formal civil society organizations, towards a networked approach better suiting the information society frameworks where citizens—especially the young—see a diminished sense of obligation to formal politics and prefer loose networks of community action via their personal peer social networks organized around ICTs and digital media.

While traditional perspectives on citizen participation question both the merit and effectiveness of more autonomous and prototypical civic engagement preferences, optimists see this as one of the best reasons why new media environments can play such an important role. Today's youth demand early and frequent access to interactive technologies. The universality of this access and use, therefore has shifted the onus of the development and implementation of civic life to youth populations. Theorists have discussed these issues under the rubrics of *participatory media* or *convergence culture*, but the concepts²² of *participation*, *remediation*, and *bricolage* perhaps best define contemporary youth media engagement preferences.

Here, *participation* broadly refers to the increased active role of individuals in the consumption and production of media; *remediation* refers to the remixing of old and new media being done through the technological affordances digital media; and *bricolage* refers to the personalization of politics and

¹⁹ Assad, R., & Barsoum, G. (2007, September). The Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper: Youth Exclusion in Egypt. Retrieved from the Middle East Youth Initiative: <<http://www.shababinclusion.org/content/document/detail/540/>>.

²⁰ Zukin, Cliff. 2006. *A new engagement?: political participation, civic life, and the changing American citizen*. Oxford University Press, U.S.

²¹ Bennett, W. Lance. 2008. *Civic life online: learning how digital media can engage youth*. MIT Press.

²² Deuze, Mark. 2007. *Media work*. Polity.

increasing focus on citizens' individualized "voice" as a crucial component of civic engagement (for more on these topics, see recent publications of the MacArthur Foundation's Digital Media & Learning initiative, <http://digitallearning.macfound.org>). Put more simply, today's cohort of young citizens do not care to be told what to do and how to participate in their communities. This is particularly true in developing societies where they experience daily dissatisfaction in the way their communities work, they have little faith in the old habits. Rather, they prefer to participate, but on their terms. However, it is up to strategic investments in creating the proper spaces for socialization and positive engagement, and curtailing the possibilities of young people falling into alienation and extreme mobilization.

The most important take-aways here include:

1. Social and economic development in the Muslim world, and especially in weak states should aim to better include young people;

2. Providing spaces for Muslim youth to participate in their communities, states, and societies reduces tendencies for deviant behaviors, while channeling their potential for social and economic development;
3. Strategies for inclusion must adapt to young peoples' contemporary engagement preferences, especially their need for greater autonomy and agency in defining and shaping their participatory behaviors; and
4. Digital media, being an integral part of their social lives, are a crucial ingredient and space for investment.

Online public spheres have organically proliferated in many sectors of the world, while many programs are also experimenting with online civic commons models, which are reviewed below.

SOCIAL MEDIA, ONLINE PUBLIC SPHERES AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Online civic commons such as discussion boards and newspaper commenting sections nurture not only online civic engagement, but also allow audiences to work through, and even respond to, contentious issues that challenge their identities, such as acts of violence committed in the name of their religion. These innovative online civic spaces have so far mostly come about by grassroots developments and citizen-led action and mobilization (and are usually autonomous of state control, and often enough in contention to them), but lack the resources required to fully actualize their engagement capabilities and require concerted investment in order to draw out their benefits to civil societies and social development. This section highlights some of these prototypical examples with a focus on youth attention, and juxtaposes them to similar models from developed nations and advanced societies. By understanding what is already happening in Muslim societies in this area, along with what is working best in advanced nations, policy makers and digital diplomats²³ can begin to identify the gaps and future directions for investing in online civic commons and spaces for youth engagement.

THE MUSLIM (YOUTH) CIVIC WEB SPHERE

Studies of the online Arab public sphere are limited, but of those that have been conducted, one such example is a study of the *Al-Arabiya*²⁴ website. This research identified that online discussion spaces are vital for allowing audiences to discuss public issues, input their own version of the truth, and bring together a diverse set of perspectives; a set of findings that should not be easily overlooked considering the relative lack of open discussion spaces allowed to citizens under most autocratic regimes. The fact that these spaces exist in public spheres of states that are traditionally controlled and closed, the *Al-Arabiya* website is surely a game-changing development.

A separate study²⁵ of the three most popular Arabic-language online message boards (Masrawy: www.masrawy.com; Islam Online: www.islamonline.net; and Arabia: www.arabia.com) found that a vast portion of online discussants on these popular public venues engaged in nuanced discussions regarding the attacks of 9/11. These engaged citizens participating in political discussions mostly condemned

²³ Retrieved from *The New York Times Magazine*: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/18/magazine/18web2-0-t.html>>.

²⁴ Al-Saggaf, Yeslam. (2006). The Online Public Sphere in the Arab World: The War in Iraq on the Al Arabiya website. Retrieved from the Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication: <<http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue1/al-saggaf.html>>.

²⁵ Abdulla, Rasha A. (2007). Islam, Jihad, and Terrorism in Post-9/11 Arabic Discussion Boards. Retrieved from the Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication: <<http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue3/abdulla.html>>.

the attacks as a criminal act contradicting the teachings of their faith, and while some saw the attacks as having some justification, most understood it as a political, not a religious issue. This is another example of the positive developments that occur when citizens are given the spaces and autonomy to understand events such as 9/11. This research shows that Muslim publics are willing and capable of concluding through open online discussions that there is a contradiction between their religious beliefs and practices, and the violent actions perpetrated in the name of their faith.

In one of the few in-depth, qualitative analyses of the online Muslim spaces, el-Nawawy and Khamis (2009)²⁶ investigated Islam Online (www.islamonline.net), Amr Khaled (www.amrkhaled.net), and Islam Way (www.islamway.com). These spaces have clear religious overtones, many dealing with the contemporary religious issues in Muslim societies. However, they are much more, representing spaces where Muslims create and negotiate their identities both globally and in relation to the state powers and actors. For example, Amr Khaled was a popular preacher in Egypt until he was banned for political reasons by Egyptian authorities from the country. But using his website and global satellite channels, he continues to engage “young Arab youth’s confidence in their ability to improve their lives and achieve their goals in life through a balance between piety and hard work [...] [embodying a] message to the Arab and Muslim youth, which is that ‘True change [can come] into existence, not by restricting thought and forcing direction, but by accepting accountability and believing in one’s ability.’”²⁷

This study also highlights the transnational characteristics that embody these communities, and

increase the potential for networked young Muslim citizens to see a wider and more pluralistic segment of Muslims around the world. By being exposed to differences and alternatives, young people might find not only others going through similar experiences, but also alternatives and solutions to their predicaments. This is to say that increasing access and opportunity to experience diversity and difference may nurture tolerance as well. In fact, online portals such as Islam Online²⁸ provide global Muslim audiences opportunities to engage a wide range of social, political, and cultural issues, via specialized content in the following categories: News and Analysis, Islamic Law, Islamic Normativity, Muslim Affairs, Spiritual Purification and Development, Euro-Muslims, Health & Sciences, Science and Hadith, Culture & Art, Family, Youth, and Dawah.

Another cutting-edge analysis of the online public sphere in the Muslim world has been a recent study²⁹ of Iran’s vast and diverse political and cultural blogosphere. This massive computational social network mapping and content analysis of Persian blogs found that most Iranian bloggers are young and democratic, and often critical of the Iranian regime. The full volume of the Iranian blogosphere is difficult to pin, but is estimated to be around 60,000 active blogs ranging in content and ideology, with the largest hubs coalescing around: secularist-reformists, religious-conservatives, and poetry and literature enthusiasts. The analysis also concludes that while offline Iranian society is known to be heavily censored by governmental authorities, online censorship and control is not as pervasive as expected—due partially to the advantage of peer-to-peer networking, whereby much of the Iranian blogosphere “remains a viable arena of political contestation and forum for viewpoints challenging

²⁶ El-Nawawy, Mohammed, and Sahar Khamis. 2009. *Islam Dot Com: Contemporary Islamic Discourses in Cyberspace*. Macmillan.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

²⁸ Graf, B. (2008). IslamOnline.net: Independent, interactive, popular. Arab Media & Society, January (2008), 1-21. Retrieved from Arab Media & Society: <<http://www.arabmediasociety.com/?article=576>>.

²⁹ Kelly, J., & Etling, B. (2008). Mapping Iran’s Online Public: Politics and Culture in the Persian Blogosphere. Berkman Center Research Publication. No. 2008-01. Retrieved from the Berkman Center for Internet & Society: <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/publications/2008/Mapping_Irans_Online_Public>.

the ruling ideology of the Islamic Republic.” Simply put, one of the best forces for democratization in Iran is not necessarily the strong power initiatives of political economic coercion, but the slow yet consistent nurturing of a new generation of citizens that is pluralistic, less antagonistic, and more receptive to change. Policy makers and digital diplomats should take note that this cannot happen without the rich online public sphere that is shaping their political socialization in Iran.

Like the experiences of other youth around the world, Muslim young people also use the internet to navigate and negotiate their identities as they reach adolescence. In fact, many Arab and Muslim internet users do not see ICTs as overt political tools, but rather as platforms which allow them to “(1) build a political consciousness; (2) building social networks and knowledge capital; and (3) transgress boundaries, especially lines of gender, nation, and social class.”³⁰ Relying on blogging as a popular tool to engage in these activities, bloggers in the Muslim world—particularly in the Arab world—have begun to engage in three forms³¹ of blogging: 1) as activists (direct involvement in political movements, coordinating political action, spreading information, and magnifying the impact of contentious politics), 2) as bridge bloggers (addressing Western audiences, communicating their cultures and explaining their societies), and 3) as public-sphere bloggers (not directly involving themselves in political movements, but engaging public affairs in general). A recent example includes that of Nasim Fekrat,³² a self-trained journalist and blogger and founder of the *Association of Afghan Blog Writers*, who is recruiting bloggers from around Afghanistan in cultivating an online

public sphere for Afghanistan. Another contrasting example is that of Raed al-Saeed,³³ of Saudi Arabia, who has become a popular blogger after he created a 6-minute YouTube video responding to Western audiences. Al-Saeed joins approximately 500 bloggers in Saudi Arabia ever-so-slowly liberalizing the information environment of a traditionally ultra-conservative society.

In summary, advancements and developments in the online public spheres of Muslim societies have thus far occurred organically, despite the crackdown of autocratic regimes and closed societies. Nevertheless, they are perhaps the single most important trend reshaping the political cultures and socialization of young people. While many disaffected youth move towards alienation and radicalization, engaging in prototypical civic engagement via online civic spaces allows them important alternatives to extremism. CSOs and civil society investments that not only make use of this, but more importantly, adopt ICTs and digital technologies would be best served investing in these key developments.

THE WESTERN YOUTH CIVIC WEB SPHERE

Recent analyses of the North American youth civic web spheres have found many similarities in how young people use the web for civic and social purposes, with the main distinction being greater access to more sophisticated tools and online communities. For example, a comprehensive analysis³⁴ of the 90 most-trafficked U.S. youth civic engagement sites found a rich presence of many civil society actors investing in online youth engagement: 1) traditional interest groups (ex: Sierra Club), 2) brick-and-mortar youth organizations (ex: YMCA),

³⁰ Wheeler, D.L. (2009). Working around the state: Internet use and political identity in the Arab world. In “Handbook of Internet Politics.” Chapter 22.

³¹ Douai, A. (2009). Offline Politics in the Arab Blogosphere in “International blogging: Identity, politics, and networked publics.”

³² Stern, J. (2008). Meet Afghanistan’s Most Fearless Blogger. Retrieved from Slate Magazine, Jul 3, 2008: <<http://www.slate.com/id/2194806/>>.

³³ Schmidle, N. (2008). Inside Saudi Arabia. Retrieved from Slate Magazine, Apr 17, 2008: <<http://www.slate.com/id/2189366/entry/2189367/>>.

³⁴ Bennett, W.L., Wells, C., & Freelon, D.G. (2009). Communicating Citizenship Online: Models of Civic Learning in the Youth Web Sphere. A Report from the Civic Learning Online Project. Retrieved from the Civic Learning Online Project: <<http://www.engagedyouth.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/communicatingcitizenshiponlineclreport.pdf>>.

3) governmental agencies and political parties (ex: Peace Corps, BarackObama.com), and 4) online-only youth civic communities (ex: Do Something, TakingItGlobal). The analysis also found that some of the richest examples of successful online engagement sites were from the online-only category, which engaged in cultivating innovative methods to illicit youth civic participation. The following highlights three of the most interesting and innovative communities:

1. Youth Venture (www.genv.net): This online-only community allows young people to create and implement their own civic projects, form teams, and complete action-plans. The community provides information and how-to-guides for fundraising, networking, and event planning;
2. Do Something (www.dosomething.org): This online-only community allows young people to learn about and participate in youth-designed campaigns on issues like: animal welfare, discrimination, environment, HIV and sexuality, poverty, war, peace and politics, education, health and fitness, international human rights, and violence and bullying. Shaped heavily by the site-designers values and topics of interest, the site provides a more guided approach to youth civic engagement online, but manages to keep young people involved through an active investment in networking with other sites where young people are present, such as: Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, and Twitter; and
3. Taking It Global (www.tigweb.org): TIG web is perhaps one of the most successful online communities examined in the U.S. youth civic web sphere, given its wide and global appeal. The site offers a wide array of collaboration

spaces for young people to gather and discuss, and from these grassroots discussions, more substantive civic engagement sometimes mobilizes. TIG web's mark of distinction however is in the massive forum spaces where young people actively discuss issues of a wide range from global importance (ex: terrorism, religious violence, HIV, natural disasters, etc.) to deeply personal (ex: personal struggles, sexual identities). In this community, youth from around the world engage each other, and resolve differences, in ways that before would have been difficult to even conceive.

Studies of the European youth civic web sphere highlight stark similarities with the North American sphere. Researchers investigating youth engagement sites³⁵ in Hungary, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom recently concluded that:

1. The internet is an important tool for already engaged young people. Focus groups of these young people found that already active young citizens used the internet as a 'hub' for their civic and political activities;
2. The internet is also an important resource for minorities (political, ethnic, regional or religious)—“it's open architecture—the fact that it opens up spaces for voices to be heard and for people to meet and interact—provides a basis for these groups, and for their expressions of and debates about identity, in ways that the traditional media landscape has not done;
3. The internet is a public sphere for a number of young people in Europe. The internet opens up spaces for public, or semi-public, discussions between young people;

³⁵ Hirzalla, F., & van Zoonen, L. (2008). Uses of the Web for Civic Participation. Young People, the Internet and Civic Participation. No. 028357. Retrieved from CivicWeb: <<http://www.civicweb.eu/content/view/28/7/>>.

4. Despite the lack of any simple cause and effect relationships between specific websites and young people's civic engagement, tools which allow file sharing and user-participation were very important in sustaining youth interest;
5. Young people on European youth civic sites were most interested in: music, movies and news, and least interested in formal politics; and
6. Six factors underpin the expressed interest in different websites: entertainment, life style, digital culture, social justice issues, new social movement and spiritual issues and electoral politics. While interest in electoral politics was the lowest, young people are most interested in environmental, new social movement, and spirituality-related issues.

IN THE ABSENCE OF CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT ... CYBER SECURITY VS. CONTENTIOUS MOBILIZATION

Recent events such as the arrests of Northern Virginia men seeking jihad in Pakistan,³⁶ and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the Nigerian suspect of the attempted Christmas day bombing plot, have raised concerns about the potential of the internet being used by extremists to recruit and radicalize Muslim youth. However, as Mona Eltahawy of *Time Magazine*³⁷ points out, this news is not new news. Extremists and terrorists bent on violence have and will continue to attempt to use technologies and strategies for their purposes. Rather than focusing on closing the internet due to these risks, our argument is that this is precisely the reason why greater investments must be placed in cultivating online spaces to challenge jihadist rhetoric and recruiting. With the presence of richer, more diverse,

online engagement spaces, young people will have greater options to exercise their voices, express their concerns, and discuss their grievances—instead of resorting to alienation and radicalization.

Unfortunately, many governments, especially in closed societies and weak states are suspicious of non-state organizations' activities because of the lack of control they have over their actions. Particularly, those countries that have traditionally controlled political discourse have attempted, often in futility, to stop the proliferation of digital media and online civic spaces. In this section, some of the most recent high-profile examples in the Muslim world are highlighted. The negative ramifications of these examples to the legitimacy and capacity of certain countries to govern effectively further supports the call to invest in online civic commons where productive communication can take place, and positive engagement can grow from it.

ICTs and collective-action in Pakistan's state of emergency and massive floods

Pakistan is a developing nation rife with low levels of literacy and basic access to resources. Between March 2007 and February 2008, this nation experienced some striking examples of citizen-led mobilization in response to then President General Pervez Musharraf's decision to suspend the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Beginning with an online petition in response to the suspension, over a thousand signatures were collected to protest the decision through circulating the petition over email lists and blogs. Following this, citizen-media outfits, such as *Dawn*, an English-language media group, organized citizen journalists to generate news, discussion, and political mobilization in response. According to Huma Yusuf of MIT's Center for Future Civic Media, "Digital technologies that were harnessed during this time for political advocacy, community

³⁶ Retrieved from the *Washington Post*: <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/12/10/AR2009121000919.html>>.

³⁷ Retrieved from *Time Magazine* <http://www.time.com/time/video/player/0,32068,61644663001_1953518,00.html>.

organizing, and hyperlocal reporting include cell phones, camera phones (mobile-connected cameras), SMS text messages, online mailing lists, and internet broadcasts (live audio and visual streams). Meanwhile, popular new media platforms utilized during the Pakistan Emergency include blogs (live blogging), YouTube, Flickr, Facebook and other social networking or sociable media sites.”³⁸

Though literacy is below 50%, and only a small fragment of the total population have access to the internet, for a nation with the size of Pakistan, over 17 million citizens had access to this phenomenal period of networked public sphere creation, and online political mobilization. Though the government strictly controlled other media outlets such as television and radio, they were not as successful in restricting civic activities taking place online. Through the combined uses of digital activism, citizen journalism, and mobile phone uses, disaffected Pakistani citizens broadcasted live-coverage of governmental corruption such as rigged elections and political suppression.

The very same civic media platforms which were used in 2008 to restore the country’s popular Chief Justice of the Supreme Court after General Pervez Musharraf’s decision to suspend Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry are being utilized again in 2010. This time, however, they are being used to help in the relief efforts for Pakistan’s massive floods. United Nations experts expect the scale of the humanitarian crisis to exceed the combined total of three recent major natural disasters: Haiti’s January earthquake, the 2004 tsunami and the 2005 Pakistan earthquake. By employing both the Internet and mobile technology, Faisal Chohana, TED Fellow³⁹ and an Islamabad-based innovator, initiated this application of the open-source Ushahidi platform, primarily to avoid duplicate relief efforts

and to track—in real time—the affected areas and relief supply chains. This was the same system that was tried and tested during the Haiti earthquake, and worked. Anybody can use the system via text message, e-mail, the internet, Facebook, or Twitter and the results are posted in real time at <http://pak-report.org>. Pakistan has over 100 million mobile phone users, and therefore has the potential to be the largest deployment in history of a civic media toolkit around a natural disaster.

ICTs and contentious mobilization in Iran’s general elections

Similarly, in June 2009, having strictly enforced censorship of dissident voices in its offline public sphere,⁴⁰ Iran experienced the full force of mobile and digital technologies’ uses for organizing demonstrations in response to its election, by local and transnational activists. “Civil society in Iran is incredibly wired. Estimates of the number of blogs in Iran range anywhere from 40,000 to 700,000. Even the Revolutionary Guard has developed a strategy to generate 10,000 blogs (though the Basij militias have not proven up to this particular task). The Bureau for the Development of Religious Web Logs offers blogging workshops to Iran’s clerics. During the protests, even the most apolitical bloggers covered the demonstrations, and traffic at the dominant blogs swelled. There is one mobile phone for every two people in Iran, and in urban areas, the vast majority of residents have a mobile phone. There are more than 80 internet service providers operating throughout the country. Young people—a relatively large segment of the country’s population—are particularly sophisticated with digital technologies, social networking or sociable media sites.”⁴¹

A particular rallying cry for the protests occurred when video footage of Neda Agha-Soltan whose shooting

³⁸ Retrieved from the Center for Future Civic Media: <<http://civic.mit.edu/watchlistenlearn/old-and-new-media-converging-during-the-pakistan-emergency-march-2007-february-2008>>.

³⁹ Retrieved from Technology, Entertainment, Design: <<http://www.ted.com/fellows/view/id/9>>.

⁴⁰ Retrieved from the Committee to Protect Journalists: <<http://www.cpj.org/mideast/>>.

⁴¹ Retrieved from Miller-McCune: <<http://www.miller-mccune.com/politics/iranelection-1643.print>>.

and death captured on cell phone footage, was spread throughout the web and elicited worldwide condemnations of the Iranian government. These events allowed movements in Iran to coalesce with transnational supporters to draw significant coverage of, and cause significant damage to, the Iranian government's legitimacy and capacity to govern effectively.

New Media and the Gaza War

In addition to grassroots mobilization facilitated by ICTs, more established organizations, such as *Al Jazeera*, have increasingly begun to build the tools and capacity to effect the scenarios of issues as significant as military warfare. In December 2008, when Israel launched its major offensive in the Gaza strip, *Al Jazeera* was present primarily through new media technologies to report on-the-ground realities of Gazans, despite Israel's tight information control and public relations expertise. Riyaad Minty, Head of Social Media at *Al Jazeera*, successfully implemented popular tools such as Twitter, and lesser-known citizen-reporting digital technologies, such as Ushahidi, to create maps of the conflict in real-time.⁴² *Al Jazeera's* new media platform "Your Media"⁴³ also allowed people to contribute their own stories of the carnage and chaos to the website before the Israeli military blacked out communications. While governments engage in closing-down access, organizations such as *Al Jazeera* become more credible and trustworthy in the eyes of the public precisely because of their openness and willingness to incorporate citizens into their work.⁴⁴

Corporate responses to the Great Firewall of China

China has been perhaps the most effective and sophisticated state in carefully controlling its online

public sphere against deviant civic voices. Alas, powerful corporations, such as Google, are now challenging even its most advanced censorship systems.⁴⁵ Google reports that in addition to its own intellectual property, over twenty large companies had come under attack from hackers originating from China, particularly going after Chinese human rights activists—resulting in Google's decision of possibly terminating its relationship with China: "These attacks and the surveillance they have uncovered—combined with the attempts over the past year to further limit free speech on the web—have led [Google] to conclude that we should review the feasibility of our business operations in China. [Google has] decided we are no longer willing to continue censoring our results on Google.cn, and so over the next few weeks we will be discussing with the Chinese government the basis on which we could operate an unfiltered search engine within the law, if at all. We recognize that this may well mean having to shut down Google.cn, and potentially our offices in China."

The above four case studies reveal that the more governments attempt to suppress citizens' voices and need to engage in political discussion, online technologies provide them with the capacity to find new and alternative spaces to do so. First, while the Musharraf government tried its best to suppress Pakistani citizens' mobilization in response to its suspension of the Chief Justice, citizen-journalism, in combination with ICTs and mobile phones, dealt decisive challenges to the Pakistani governments' legitimacy and capacity to govern. Similarly, as the Iranian government engaged in forced suppression of demonstrations and protests, Iranian activists in cohort with transnational supporters broadcasted live the brutal suppression of the regime. Second, even advanced nations with significant public

⁴² See <<http://www.slideshare.net/riyaadm/media140-sydney-case-study-riyaad-minty>> and retrieved from media140: <<http://media140.org/?p=722>>.

⁴³ Retrieved from ammartalk: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQ0b9TX8_Lg>.

⁴⁴ Retrieved from Al Jazeera English: <http://english.aljazeera.net/focus/war_on_gaza/2009/01/200912112395904603.html>.

⁴⁵ Retrieved from the Official Google Blog: <<http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2010/01/new-approach-to-china.html>>.

relations expertise and strict control of information, such as Israel and China, have had their power severely challenged by transnational corporations such as *Al Jazeera* and Google, respectively. When Israel launched its major offensive and bombing of Gaza, *Al Jazeera* was on the ground, engaging in a sophisticated campaign of citizen-journalism, conflict coverage, and war-journaling, sharing the most gruesome details regarding the effects of modern warfare. Similarly, Google is now challenging China regarding its human rights violations, and censorship of information that challenges its legitimacy. These cases showcase the common thread that closed regimes can and do exercise censorship at various levels of success and

expertise, but inevitably face increasing difficulty in staying closed and unreceptive to the needs and desires of their citizens. In Muslim-majority developing societies especially, governments that focus instead in building their capacity to provide services will fare best in growing their support, trust, and cooperation from their constituencies. ICTs and digital media, though they can and are used by terrorists for violent ends, are real, and will need to be combated. However, the correct response is to strengthen the capacity of their civil societies so that citizens can orient themselves toward mutually beneficial development, not coerced alienation and radicalization.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Communication is the key to the transformation of developing societies because of its ability to connect people and common interests. It is true in families, in relationships between people, and in relationships among whole peoples. What might be called “global communication” tells the large mythic stories that govern broad relationships (such as between the Palestinians and the Israelis and between the Arab countries and the United States), while personal communication engages individuals, promotes social trust, and lays the foundation for deep collaboration and partnership. The above review highlights the ways in which communication, especially internet technologies, are connecting citizens and civil society actors. Future policy initiatives to engage Muslim communities, especially young people, cannot ignore these developments. Investing in information-infrastructures, both broadly by proliferating ICTs through greater access and literacy, and particularly by fostering youth civic commons, should be seen as investing in the long-term development of civil society institutions in developing societies. These civic commons allow youth from the Arab and Muslim world to engage in discussions and explorations of identity, while also connecting with like-minded individuals transnationally.

Furthermore, the nurturing of information society facilitates the possibilities for non-state dissenters to

organize and mobilize toward common democratic goals. The massive protests that broke out in Tehran after the questionable re-election of Ahmadinejad as President of Iran are a timely example. Information, including visual information flowed in abundance within Iran and from Iran to Arab countries and even to the West. Activists based locally in Iran, collaborating with others outside Iran showed a sophisticated understanding of bypassing traditional censorship filters. The end result, though it is too soon to pen the final chapter, was that mobilized and engaged citizens were able to challenge the legitimacy of autocratic leadership through broadcasting their experience to the global public. Young people in Iran showed a highly sophisticated understanding of how Iranian citizens could utilize indirectly the hardware and software of other countries in order to circumvent the attempted government censorship. These bloggers and users of social networking sites are giving the world new access to the internal life of societies and states and giving civil society a new peaceful avenue of social change and advocacy. The importance of the Iranian example cannot be over emphasized, but it should also be understood correctly. “Technology is neither good nor bad, nor is it neutral. Democratic revolutions are not caused by new information technologies. But in the Muslim world, democratization is no longer possible without them.”⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Howard, Philip N. (2010). *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Information Technology and Political Islam* (Oxford Studies in Digital Politics).

We continue to witness the Obama Administration embrace technology and innovation. Its continual promotion of young talent to carve out new areas of Global Engagement, such as in the field of digital diplomacy,⁴⁷ is reflective of how critically important new media and ICTs are to our shared global security interests with the Muslim world. Critics may argue that new media is overrated, and it may well be, but only in the short term. New media is underrated in the long term. The overarching objective of bringing together the findings in this workshop paper is to consider new strategies for leveraging the affordances of digital media and information-communication technologies (ICTs) in assisting weak states and developing stronger societies in the Muslim world.

Communication is a strategic foreign policy tool for the Middle East and Islamic World. Interactive, digital, new media communication technologies can play important roles in what people are doing to promote economic and social change, and—in more intimate, personal ways—it can intensify interactions between people and strengthen the personal relationships between them. Investments in future civic media are currently recognized by many governments and initiatives within advanced democracies. For example, a recent report on Canada identifies that these investments⁴⁸ promote social innovation, democratic entrenchment, political inclusion, and societal unity.⁴⁹ Furthermore, transnational engagement is also a key issue that was identified in the report, and the opportunities for promoting these connections are proliferating.

The gaps that were highlighted between the developed world, not only at the levels of the digital divide on access, use and literacy, but also at the level of online civic commons, will soon narrow. While the online public spheres of the Muslim world are developing independent of any concerted effort and investment, the youth civic spheres of Europe

and North America have developed some innovative models to engage young people in public issues and political and civic engagement. These spaces, if created and invested in adequately, have already been demonstrated to serve as important spaces for transnational engagement, discussion, and even internal societal cohesion.

Communication technologies that promote a civic media culture therefore are very sharp tools that should be utilized to further Global Engagement policy efforts. Civic engagement empowers citizens by expanding identity and loyalty beyond tribe and religion. Civic engagement is the key to promoting a culture of citizenship that is essential to advancing developing societies and weak states towards modern information societies. Investments in civil society through IT infrastructures and online civic commons, however, will only be as helpful in designing and implementing such an organic change strategy if the strategy is substantively grounded in allowing young people to engage and participate in the ways that appeal to them. Promoting participation of young people requires more spaces for these young people to self-define, discuss, and engage civic issues. Without the substance of real participation and engagement, alienation will only increase; and increased communication will only intensify fragmentation and instability. For these reasons, it is essential that equal weight be given to development and implementation of engagement strategies that invest in technologies which nurture spaces for youth engagement, and reduce alienation.

For example, the Knight Foundation has seeded many examples of such cutting-edge platforms for civic engagement: Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes's JUMO is building the infrastructure to connect individuals with organizations working towards global change; Code for America is

⁴⁷ Retrieved from *The New York Times Magazine*: <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/18/magazine/18web2-0-t.html>>.

⁴⁸ Retrieved from Canada25: <<http://www.canada25.com/policy.html>>.

⁴⁹ Retrieved from: <<http://docs.docstoc.com/pdf/1878282/ea8f4b39-6a2a-46fb-a2c4-5e802cf01aab.pdf>>.

proliferating opportunities for open-source software development making city governments more transparent and participatory; and communityplanIT is developing interactive gaming platforms to engage younger citizens with newer orientations for engagement, even giving them the virtual opportunities to help design their own neighborhoods.⁵⁰ While these technologies grow under various rubrics, most frequently under *technologies for engagement*,⁵¹ they are currently limited to advanced media systems and mostly western societies.

To this end, in our Brookings working group, we identified the use of new media connection technologies to further Global Engagement and derived the following recommendations for the development and use of connection technologies as we usher in a digital era of civic engagement in the increasingly interconnected Muslim world. The below recommendations reflect the consensus of the New Media working group at the 2010 Brookings Doha U.S.-Islamic World Forum.

First, we recommend a systematic embedding of technology innovation into U.S. government statecraft and the statecraft of Muslim-majority countries. The particular area where this is most needed is within the diplomatic and development agendas. In other words, new media connection technologies should be wholly integrated into each and every foreign policy strategy, and not be an afterthought or a stand-alone add-on. There should not be a separate and distinct “new media strategy” or “new media department,” rather connectivity technologies and digital diplomacy tools should be fully systematized and benchmarked into every strategy in a country’s statecraft at an institutional level. As one example, every newly minted Foreign Service and Public Affairs officer should command a certain level of sophistication in new media connectivity technologies. Additionally, the U.S.

government officials that are conducting outreach to the Muslim world, such as Rashad Hussain (Envoy Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Organization of the Islamic Conference) and Farah Pandith (Special Representative to Muslim Communities for the Department of State), should each expand their team to hire experts in the space of digital diplomacy in order to integrate and build new media projects to promote participatory cultures and civil societies in the Muslim world. Finally, continuing education in this space should be mandated, and there are a plethora of resources for this, such as the Center for Future Civic Media at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (<http://civic.mit.edu/>) and the Project on Information Technology and Political Islam at the University of Washington (<http://pITPI.org/>). The U.S. government should recruit students for government service from these high caliber cutting-edge programs, and Muslim-majority governments should encourage and fund their students to study at these centers.

Second, partnerships for training teachers, curriculum collaboration, and student exchange program between Middle Eastern and American institutions specializing in diplomacy, journalism, communications, media, and informational literacy should be encouraged (for example between University of Southern California’s Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism and the Mohammed bin Rashid School for Communications at the American University in Dubai). Supporting such existing institutional training programs that have a track record of success and then leveraging new 1) content partners such as film studios (like Sundance), 2) technology application partners (like Android Labs), 3) global media partners (like *Al Jazeera*), and 4) advertising and marketing partners (like Saatchi & Saatchi) will inevitably yield tremendous creativity, which can be applied collaboratively to regional as well as global challenges and hotspots.

⁵⁰ Retrieved from the Knight Technology for Engagement Initiative: <<http://www.knightfoundation.org/initiatives/technologyforengagement.dot>>.

⁵¹ Retrieved from communityplanIT: <<http://communityplanit.blogspot.com/>>.

Third, we recommend building platform applications (i.e. apps) *and* content for connectivity specifically for hand-held mobile devices and tablets first and then secondly for netbooks, laptops and computers. As per my analysis above, the digital divide is being closed not by computers with fiber broadband but by mobile phones with wireless connectivity. With more than 4.5 billion cell phones currently in circulation, SMS over wireless networks is already being used in the most remote parts of the Muslim world for mobile banking, humanitarian relief efforts, dissemination of user-customized breaking news, local electoral matters, and health screenings. Add to this the freely available and freely upgradeable open-source mobile operating systems (available to both developers and manufacturers), such as Google's Android OS and Chrome OS, and we believe that the proliferation of smart phones and their growing library of user-generated and web-based apps will leapfrog the computer as the primary tool for multi-directional communication. Access to technology is dynamic in the Muslim world, and as such statecraft should understand how to best catalyze civil societies by building on the technologies that are ubiquitous and not simply wait until every country implements broadband internet and every denizen has access to a laptop computer.

Fourth, western governments must recognize the limitations of their engagement in this space. In many parts of the world, access to digital media platforms remain severely limited. The voices we hear online are not necessarily truly reflective of the pulse of the entire society. In fact, it remains methodologically difficult to establish firm numbers of the amount of bloggers or online activity originating from a particular country. In order for these new media strategies and digital diplomacy efforts to succeed, it is critical for both state and non-state actors to first understand the demographics of the

online user base, before assuming that the voices heard online are what the majority of people want. "While one South African is tweeting another is not eating," is a phrase that exemplifies the reality of digital media proliferation in Africa and the Middle East.⁵²

Fifth, as apps and content are constructed to promote civil society efforts, focus on creating vehicles that will protect the identity of the ICT end-users in the Muslim world. Because of the increase need for internet security to track down cyber criminals, user identification and authentication is quickly becoming a standard across the world. However, recognize that this is a double-edged sword that also exposes the identities of online activists. Policy makers should be mindful of this as it may—in some instances—render barren the very media that were built to promote civic action.

Sixth, conventional metrics, such as polling, should continue to be used to measure Global Engagement in the absence of fully-developed metrics to measure the effectiveness of exchange programs over social networks using connectivity technologies. The platforms for such visual peer-to-peer exchange programs are numerous and should continue to be employed, including AllVoices, Soliya, Terrana, Skype, YouTube, Ning, Seismic, ChatThePlanet, Qwidget, among others. In addition, a globally televised and YouTubed international music festival with celebrity talent and run-up contests can also break down cultural barriers and build trust between and among different people. However measurements for effective public diplomacy and messaging strategies in conjunction with the promotion of NGOs and civil society activities and cross-border virtual exchanges still need to be perfected.

Seventh, often times an unintended consequence of economic sanctions are information sanctions.

⁵² Riyaad Minty: "Providing context: The role of Social Media in Iran," Retrieved from <<http://riyaadm.com/2009/08/02/providing-context-the-role-of-social-media-in-iran/>>.

Policies should be crafted that permit cross border communications despite imposed economic sanctions on a particular country. As has been shown above, new media technologies provide virtual spaces for conversation, organizing, and political and social action. These digital safe harbors are critical for the rise of civic media, particularly if the Press and Broadcast Media are state-run or heavily censored. Keeping the internet open allows for information exchange and activism both internally and externally.

Eighth and finally, we recommend that an independent new media fund be created that focuses on training, content incubation, and co-productions between the U.S. and the Muslim world. The purpose of the fund would be to provide micro-grants to support the training of content creators and promote that actual creation of civic media platforms. We recommend more small grants of lesser amounts that focus specifically on the creation of a participatory youth culture. The goal is not just the product which will be created, but the actual process of democratization of cultural engagement and consumption that is bolstered by the use of Creative Commons licensing, open-source technologies, and online trainings. New media makes it relatively cheap to fail. So funders should expect that there will be many failed attempts at building civic media vehicles in the Muslim world. Fundamentally, funders should view the grants as investments, not in the projects themselves or the institutions, to which they are attached, but the people who run

them and the digital communities that emerge because of them. The grants should not be administered with the intention of finding and funding the silver bullet, but rather to promote the creation of a culture of new media expression and civic media production. Funders should seek out projects that use new media to improve peoples' livelihoods by discovering innovative fixes to the mundane issues in their communities, such as unemployment or increasing crop yields. Allowing local needs to drive organically the use of technologies promotes a culture of trust, civic engagement and cultural consumption, which is the first step in promoting new media as a vehicle for civic participation to affect Global Engagement. More often than not, such projects do not demand that new technologies be invented, but rather require an application of existing marketplace technologies to a localized problem. Therefore funding should focus on innovative solutions that borrow from past learnings and do not reinvent the wheel. The expectation should be that the vehicles that emerge as game changers will likely originate organically and authentically, by someone who has been influenced or touched by a connectivity technology project but probably not directly funded to create one. Therefore the fund's success would be measured by the creation of an ecosystem of trusted, networked advocates and creative self-starters who, because of their shared histories of online civic participation, have a collective stake in the success of independent civic media, separate and apart from any funding mechanism.

About the Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World

The Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World is a major research program housed within the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. The project conducts high-quality public policy research, and convenes policy makers and opinion leaders on the major issues surrounding the relationship between the United States and the Muslim world. The Project seeks to engage and inform policymakers, practitioners, and the broader public on developments in Muslim countries and communities, and the nature of their relationship with the United States. Together with the affiliated Brookings Doha Center in Qatar, it sponsors a range of events, initiatives, research projects, and publications designed to educate, encourage frank dialogue, and build positive partnerships between the United States and the Muslim world. The Project has several interlocking components:

- The U.S.-Islamic World Forum, which brings together key leaders in the fields of politics, business, media, academia, and civil society from across the Muslim world and the United States, for much needed discussion and dialogue;
- A Visiting Fellows program, for scholars and journalists from the Muslim world to spend time researching and writing at Brookings in order to inform U.S. policy makers on key issues facing Muslim states and communities;
- A series of Brookings Analysis Papers and Monographs that provide needed analysis of the vital issues of joint concern between the U.S. and the Muslim world;
- An Arts and Culture Initiative, which seeks to develop a better understanding of how arts and cultural leaders and organizations can increase understanding between the United States and the global Muslim community;
- A Science and Technology Initiative, which examines the role cooperative science and technology programs involving the U.S. and Muslim world can play in responding to regional development and education needs, as well as fostering positive relations;
- A Faith Leaders Initiative which brings together representatives of the major Abrahamic faiths from the United States and the Muslim world to discuss actionable programs for bridging the religious divide;
- A Brookings Institution Press Book Series, which aims to synthesize the project's findings for public dissemination.

The underlying goal of the Project is to continue the Brookings Institution's original mandate to serve as a bridge between scholarship and public policy. It seeks to bring new knowledge to the attention of decision-makers and opinion-leaders, as well as afford scholars, analysts, and the public a better insight into policy issues. The Project is supported through the generosity of a range of sponsors including the Government of the State of Qatar, The Ford Foundation, The Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, and the Carnegie Corporation.

The Project Conveners are Martin Indyk, Vice President and Director of Foreign Policy Studies; Kenneth Pollack, Senior Fellow and Director, Saban Center; Bruce Riedel, Senior Fellow in the Saban Center; Stephen R. Grand, Fellow and Director of the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World; Shibley Telhami, Nonresident Senior Fellow and Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland; and Salman Shaikh, Director of the Brookings Doha Center.

The Saban Center for Middle East Policy

The Saban Center for Middle East Policy was established on May 13, 2002 with an inaugural address by His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan. The creation of the Saban Center reflects the Brookings Institution's commitment to expand dramatically its research and analysis of Middle East policy issues at a time when the region has come to dominate the U.S. foreign policy agenda.

The Saban Center provides Washington policymakers with balanced, objective, in-depth and timely research and policy analysis from experienced and knowledgeable scholars who can bring fresh perspectives to bear on the critical problems of the Middle East. The center upholds the Brookings tradition of being open to a broad range of views. The Saban Center's central objective is to advance understanding of developments in the Middle East through policy-relevant scholarship and debate.

The center's foundation was made possible by a generous grant from Haim and Cheryl Saban of Los Angeles. Ambassador Martin S. Indyk, Vice President of Foreign Policy at Brookings, was the founding Director of the Saban Center. Kenneth M. Pollack is the center's Director. Within the Saban Center is a core group of Middle East experts who conduct original research and develop innovative programs to promote a better understanding of the policy choices facing American decision makers. They include Bruce Riedel, a specialist on counterterrorism, who served as a senior advisor

to four presidents on the Middle East and South Asia at the National Security Council and during a twenty-nine year career in the CIA; Suzanne Maloney, a former senior State Department official who focuses on Iran and economic development; Daniel Byman, a Middle East terrorism expert from Georgetown University; Stephen R. Grand, Fellow and Director of the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World; Salman Shaikh, Fellow and Director of the Brookings Doha Center; Ibrahim Sharqieh, Fellow and Deputy Director of the Brookings Doha Center; Shadi Hamid, Fellow and Director of Research of the Brookings Doha Center; and Shibley Telhami, who holds the Sadat Chair at the University of Maryland. The center is located in the Foreign Policy Studies Program at Brookings.

The Saban Center is undertaking path breaking research in five areas: the implications of regime change in Iraq, including post-war nation-building and Gulf security; the dynamics of Iranian domestic politics and the threat of nuclear proliferation; mechanisms and requirements for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; policy for the war against terrorism, including the continuing challenge of state sponsorship of terrorism; and political and economic change in the Arab world, and the methods required to promote democratization.

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