

**ICTs IN SUPPORT OF HUMAN RIGHTS,
DEMOCRACY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE**

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INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION



This paper has been prepared by Audrey Selian <audrey.selian@itu.int>, ITU. *ICTs in Support of Human Rights, Democracy and Good Governance* is part of the Strategy and Policy Unit's (SPU) background papers in preparation for the upcoming World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2003. The author wishes to acknowledge the valuable guidance and direction of Tim Kelly of the ITU, as well as of Taylor Reynolds and Kelby Johnson in the development of this paper. The paper was edited by Joanna Goodrick of the SPU. The opinions expressed in this study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Telecommunication Union, or its membership.

Table of contents

1	Introduction	5
1.1	ICTs and the ‘information society’	5
1.2	The international system	7
1.3	New technologies and civil society stakeholders.....	8
2	The Millennium Declaration	11
3	Human Rights.....	13
3.1	Universalism vs. Cultural Relativism	13
3.2	Human Rights and the International Arena.....	13
3.2.1	The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.....	14
3.2.2	The Covenants.....	15
3.2.3	Redress for Human Rights Violations.....	15
3.3	Intergovernmental Institutional dynamics.....	15
4	ICTs and Human Rights.....	16
4.1	Information Sharing and Systems.....	17
4.2	Statistical Analysis.....	18
5	ICTs, Democracy and Governance	20
5.1	Representatives and their Constituents	21
5.2	E-Government.....	22
5.3	Free Press	24
5.4	Power and global trends.....	25
5.5	Legitimacy and violence	27
6	Case Studies	27
6.2	Case A: Electronic media as a grassroots weapon of democracy	30
6.3	Case B: Using the Internet to gain pledges and defend children’s rights	30
6.4	Case C: Bangladesh: Creating a Human Rights Portal	30
6.5	Case D: El Salvador: Probidad*.....	30
6.6	Case E: Armenia: Promoting democratic participation through “Forum”*.....	30
6.7	Case F: Vietnam: CD-ROM puts laws in citizens' hands*	31
6.8	Case G: Zimbabwe: Harnessing email and the Internet*	31
6.9	Case H: South Africa: The PIMS Monitor*.....	31
6.10	Case I: Radio as a tool for inciting violence and human rights violations.....	31
6.11	Case J: Dual-use technologies increase surveillance capabilities	31
6.12	Case K: Cutting Internet access to international human rights organizations.....	31
7	Conclusion.....	32
8	APPENDIX	34
9	Bibliography.....	36

Tables and Figures

Table 1: Functional interactivity of various ICTs.....	6
Table 2: Comparison of Communications Media.....	7
Table 3: The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).....	12
Table 4: Basic Facts on the UN Commission on Human Rights.....	14
Table 5: International Entities and ICT Applications.....	17
Table 6: Number of Free/Partly Free/Not Free Countries - The Global Trend.....	18
Table 7: Freedom House Rankings	19
Table 8: The 2001 E-Government Index.....	34
Table 9: E-Government Index by Geographical Region.....	35
Figure 1: Mapping International ICT Decision-Making – Key Players	10
Figure 2: Mapping International ICT Decision-Making – Non-Governmental Actors.....	10
Figure 3: Human Rights Conventions Participation/Signatories 2001.....	16
Figure 4: Democracy and Interconnectivity	20
Figure 5: The World of e-Governance	23
Figure 6: Free Press Violations	25
Figure 7: The Diffusion of Governance in the Twenty-First Century.....	26

“Rapid changes and new developments in technology have improved our ability to communicate and spread the human rights message around the world. The fact that some racist groups have misused the Internet to spread repugnant hate speech needs to be addressed urgently. In considering this issue, however, we must keep in mind that the right of freedom of expression is a precious fundamental right - any attempt to restrict it must be approached with absolute care and considered within the strict parameters of human rights norms.”

Mary Robinson, High Commissioner for Human Rights.

1 Introduction

The common ground upon which information and communication technologies (ICTs) and human rights can be analyzed was forged two years ago at the United Nations Millennium Summit, which resulted in a declaration that affirmed common global commitments to the protection of the vulnerable, the alleviation of poverty, and the rectification of corrupt structures and processes – particularly in those countries in which there is a dearth of ‘rule of law’. The world’s leaders resolved to “spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development.”¹ The current period of preparation for the upcoming World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)² – in which the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has a leading managerial role - offers an excellent opportunity to address tensions that exist between national, regional and global models of governance – particularly where hotly debated topics like human rights draw to the forefront of discussion key issues like transparency, accountability, and the universality of human rights principles.

This paper will analyze human rights and governance issues as they pertain to ICTs for the WSIS forum, with a focus on the role of those who protect human rights and foster good governance. Various players are increasingly leveraging and applying ICTs amidst various contending national, corporate and supranational interests, and this represents a significant change for traditional distributions of power in the international system. The way in which new communication technologies may be able to help realize some of the goals of the 2000 Millennium Declaration will be explored in this paper, and various case studies will illustrate the relevance and importance of these discussion points. The goal of such analysis is to adopt a rights-based perspective on major development goals – specifically encompassing the protection of human rights – that are to be realized through the Declaration. It is where international institutions and their national/civil society counterparts meet and leverage electronic communications networks, that various UN-defined development goals and resolutions have the potential to be realized. Indeed, this is exemplified in part by the fact that “... as human rights groups form international linkages [for instance through the use of ICTs], their frame of reference shifts from national law to international human rights”³.

1.1 ICTs and the ‘information society’

The convergence between telecommunications, broadcasting multimedia and information and communication technologies (ICTs) that is driving the development of the global ‘Information Society’ is responsible for the transformation of a variety of economic and political sectors, as well as the socio-cultural strata of nations around the world. The benefits of information and communication technologies (ICTs) lie not purely in the range of their functionality (See Table 1), but in the variety and versatility of their application. Much has been written about the potential of ICTs to ‘revolutionize’ society, particularly in the context of their role as catalysts of the ‘Information Revolution’. This ‘revolution’ is often juxtaposed with its predecessor, the Industrial Revolution, usually for the purpose accentuating the idea that communication networks are as integral to the process of development as was the birth and development of industry in the 19th century. While it is the question of access that has risen to the forefront of development agendas in the context of the famed ‘digital divide’⁴, much work remains to be done in analyzing and understanding how these technologies are utilized and *applied* to bring about expected revolutionary societal and economic changes and improvements.

Among the most important yet sensitive areas affected by ICTs are those of human rights and governance, thereby revealing the big question: what are the true benefits and changes that communications technologies can provide for *everyone*? While the conventional wisdom is that new technologies contribute to economic development, and that this in turn trickles down to the whole of global society, it is relevant to bear in mind that such diffusion depends on relatively equal patterns of income distribution⁵, as well as a variety of other variables that are not necessarily prevalent in the developing world. The subject of how modern communications alter the way in which various entities of the private sector, the public sector and civil society interact has spurred much debate. More specifically, such debate targets the underlying theme of whether they are conducive to fundamental shifts in the distribution of power towards the dissolution of strong, centralized political hierarchies. In the context of this paper, ICTs include the workings of all digital communications networks (principally the Internet), wireless networks, and radio broadcast networks. Across different phases of policymaking and information dissemination, they can be applied in various forms as database technologies, decision support technologies, networking technologies, and personal identification and tracking technologies.

Table 1: Functional interactivity of various ICTs

Medium		Functional Interactivity					Relative degree of functional interactivity
		Multi-directional	Participant Control	Supports exchange of roles	Possibility of Feedback	Nature of communication	
Networked electronic media	Telephone	Yes	Yes	Yes	Immediate	Synchronous or asynchronous	High
	Radio Communication	Yes	Yes	Yes	Immediate	Synchronous	High
	World Wide Web	Yes	Yes	Yes	Immediate or delayed	Synchronous	High
	Email	Yes	Yes	Yes	Immediate or delayed	Synchronous	High
Networked mass media	National TV	No	No	No	Limited, delayed	Synchronous	Low
	Local TV	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Synchronous	Low/ medium
	National Radio	No	No	No	Limited, delayed	Synchronous	Low
	Local Radio	Limited	Limited	Limited	Limited	Synchronous	Low/ medium

Source: Adapted from a model by R. Van Koert.

Note: Interactivity is defined by whether an electronic medium (i) makes multi-directional communication possible, (ii) allows for control over the communication act by the participants and (iii) supports an exchange of roles between participants in a communication process. Two more characteristics of multi-directional communication are (iv) the possibility of feedback and the speed with which feedback can be communicated and (v) its requirement for synchronicity in time. A basic telephone conversation is an example of synchronous communication and requires sender and receiver to communicate at the same moment in time, as opposed to asynchronous communication in the case of e-mail or the use of an answering machine for telephone conversation.⁶

One key to uncovering the complexities of the relationship between ICTs and social change – in a human rights context – may lie in the assessment of the degree of functional interactivity of a given technology (See Table 1). “A relatively high level of functional interactivity of networked electronic media [as shown above to include Internet, telephone, and radio-communication] confirms the presumed suitability of those electronic media for multi-directional communication processes”⁷, which support the idea that ICTs, in the process of empowering people to exchange information, may help to effectuate change by supporting decentralized, participatory development. Conversely, lower levels of functional interactivity are more likely to render a technology supportive of more centralized power structures. A similar type of analysis across communications media, as shown below in Table 2, also emphasizes the interactivity element – in this case referred to as ‘reciprocity’. The unit of analysis is a subjective measure of each technology’s capacity to support an ‘ordinary’ individual’s activities, with darker shading indicating greater capacity for reciprocity in each of the five major categories. E-mail unequivocally stands apart from its predecessors as being more conducive to reciprocity in communication.⁸ The aim of this table below is contrast and not precision.

Table 2: Comparison of Communications Media

	Communication Mode			Message Content		Boundaries (freedom from)		Cost (low)		Speed (high)
	Uni-Directional	Bi-Directional	Multi-Directional	Images	Data	State Institutions	Geography	Equipment	Transmission	Speed
Newspapers	Dark	Light	Light	Dark	Light	Light	Light	Light	Dark	Light
Postal Mail	Light	Dark	Light	Dark	Light	Light	Light	Dark	Dark	Light
Telegraph	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Dark	Light	Light
Radio	Dark	Light	Light	Dark	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Dark
Telephone	Light	Dark	Light	Dark	Light	Light	Dark	Dark	Light	Dark
Television	Dark	Light	Light	Dark	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Dark
Facsimile	Light	Dark	Light	Dark	Light	Light	Light	Light	Light	Dark
Email	Dark	Dark	Dark	Dark	Dark	Dark	Dark	Light	Dark	Dark

Note: Darker shading indicates greater capacity for 'reciprocity' (for more detail, see text) in each of the five major categories
 Source: Kedzie, C., "Communication and Democracy: Coincident Revolutions and the Emergent Dictator's Dilemma" Link: <http://www.rand.org/publications/RGSD/RGSD127/sec3.html>

The idea that new communication technologies may bring about social change – here defined as the enhanced awareness and protection of human rights in the international system - is "... one of the theoretical underpinnings of the positive perspectives on the benefits of the communications revolution."⁹ At the same time, it appears that a decisive factor in the way human rights are asserted and protected lies in the way power is governed and managed by those who control and regulate various communications apparatus. (Further information in ICTs, Democracy, and Governance, Section V.)

"Governments are keenly aware of the need to protect themselves from politically and economically destabilizing use of information."¹⁰

"... The very notion of centralizing hierarchies is itself an anachronism in our fluid, highly dynamic and extensively networked world—an outmoded remnant of nineteenth century mindsets."¹¹

1.2 The international system

ICTs have indeed permeated the structural workings of the international system, often challenging (though not necessarily undermining) top-down 'command and control' power hierarchies by facilitating the decentralization of information vital to the workings of national and international governance. Vertical relationships between governments and society are being replaced by horizontal network relationships between public, semi-public and private agents, and ICTs (through their control, surveillance, communication and knowledge management potential) are revolutionizing the internal workings and external relations of public administrations.¹² This is in part because information has become itself a resource and commodity, surpassing its traditional role as mere facilitator to political and economic decision-making.¹³

In many ways, the sensitivity of governments to the potential use of information and communications systems against them is itself a sensitive subject area, in part because historically, the deployment of telecommunications networks and informatics have been closely related to the workings of the military complex and the realization of political, ideological and military goals (as was the case in the Cold War).¹⁴ The realm of communications has been seen "... as having a hypodermic effect in international politics, bringing their favored ideas of capitalism and civil society from the West..."¹⁵.

In light of this generalization, it seems that where the lines of the dissemination of information, the diffusion of culture and activism, and access provision to new markets cross with those of national security, it is vital that 'Information Society' imperatives are treated with paramount diplomacy. It goes without saying that communications networks facilitate the broadening of scope and perspective in a way that empower all those who utilize them, and a realistic vision and discussion of the Information Society must be inclusive of this phenomena. Held is indeed one author who argues that nation-states are drawn together by complex processes of interdependence on problems such as AIDS, migration, human rights, crime, trade, environmental pollution, and new challenges to peace, security, and economic prosperity which spill over national boundaries.¹⁶

In the human rights arena, "... there has been a clear shift in attitudes towards human rights protection by Member States. Once considered to be the sole territory of sovereign states, the protection of human rights is now viewed as a universal concern, as evidenced by the recent conviction for genocide, rape, war crimes and crimes against humanity handed down in the International Criminal Tribunals..."¹⁷ (More information in Human Rights Section III). The rise in transnational human rights networks (comprising both public and private actors) has been referred to by some as the 'third globalization' - and has helped to develop a global civil society capable of working with governments, international institutions, and multinational corporations to promote internationally accepted standards of human rights and democracy.

Examining the economics and politics of ICTs is an integral part of understanding the broad development agendas espoused by a variety of institutions (World Bank, etc.), and a rights-based approach to this development upon the basis of equality and participation is a constructive one. While the World Summit itself is likely to incite just the beginnings of collaboration and cooperation between the 'powers that be', it is possible that through it, global civil society and international organizations may together successfully emphasize "...the relationship between the global citizenry and the state, whereby the former is seen not as the passive object of the latter's machinations but rather as an active participant in shaping not only immediate policies but also long-term parameters of legitimacy of the state."¹⁸

"Civil society today is stronger and better equipped to carry out the daunting task of empowering communities. Whether as election monitoring crews or micro-credit teams, grassroots groups can provide the social, economic and political education the population needs to demand change."¹⁹

"The only way to pry open the eyes of the international community to lesser known situations is to ensure that reliable information reaches it. In this context, it is impossible to overestimate the importance of the role of NGOs..."²⁰

"...Human rights NGOs are the engine for virtually every advance made by the United Nations in the field of human rights since its founding".²¹

"If information is the key, then it is fair to say that NGOs are the key-bearers."²²

"NGOs are known as the conscience of the UN..."²³

1.3 New technologies and civil society stakeholders

While indeed the private sector and governmental institutions are vital to any study of the international system, and while the roots of state-centered governance are alive and well, due attention must be directed towards those which comprise the key component of civil society – "... the national and international NGOs [which have] ... extended the range of citizen action beyond the institutional parameters of the sovereign state"²⁴. The definition of global 'civil society', according to Lipschutz, refers to the trans-nationally organized political networks and interest groups that are largely autonomous from any one state's control.²⁵ The broad array of nongovernmental organizations, clubs, societies, trade unions, and political parties that are the domestic counterparts to transnational networks, have a vital role in illustrating how new transnational networks of common interest are effectively leveraged. They often represent the social interests of individuals and the protection of basic human rights, and are usually not motivated by profit or power. Civil society uses the same tools that commercial organisations and mass media institutions use to influence their audiences: publishing technology, mailing lists, collaboration technologies, conferencing, virtual communities, and electronic polling and surveys.

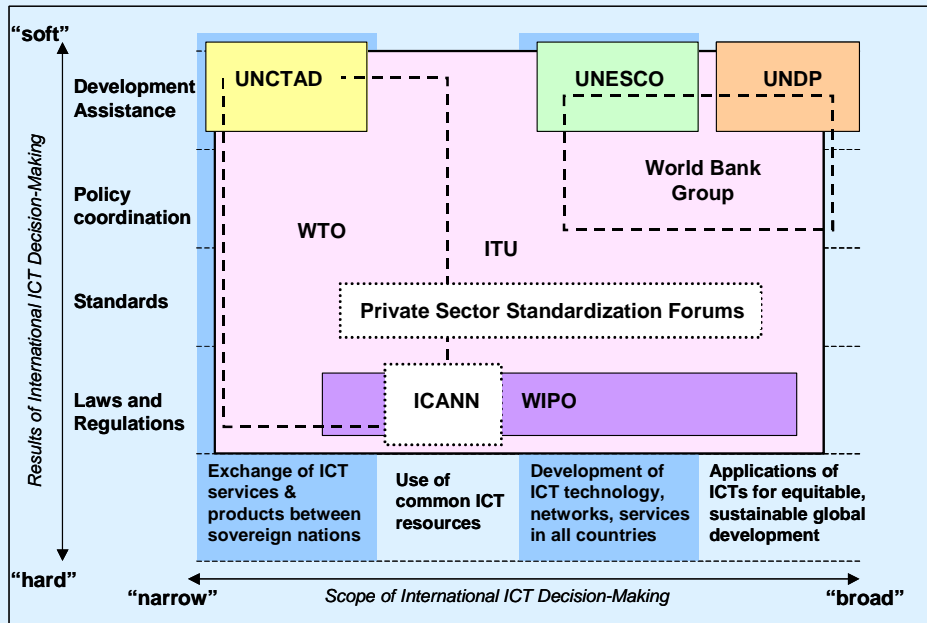
Examining the resonance of such voices in global fora is vital to the appraisal of shifting power dynamics in the international system. “The emergence of an international civil society seem[s] to be taking place due to the so-labeled ‘democratization’ movements in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia... and new international communications technologies seem to be giving the promotion of these ideas more force than might have been the case 50 years previously.”²⁶ Overlooking the importance of this group of stakeholders risks compromising not only the richness and integrity of the ‘global knowledge networks’ facilitated by ICTs, but also their ultimate utility and purpose. This is true only if indeed, “...the advent of technology must be seen as an absolute advantage in terms of the potential that it opens up for individuals.”²⁷

The consultative status of various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at high levels in many international organizations ensures their participation in processes and institutions of global governance, and the fact that they spill across national boundaries forces a certain re-casting of general notions of political participation and citizenship. According to C. Giffard, the dependence of international bodies on NGOs is such that an absence of unhindered NGO activity in a particular country may very well mean that international attention may not be drawn to the situation in that country, even where human rights violations on the ground might merit it. This is because it is easier to focus attention and resources on those states about which information is plentiful.”²⁸

The practice of the accreditation and participation of civil society (referring mainly to NGOs) in UN conferences and special sessions has evolved and developed during the 1990s, when many of the major UN conferences took place. In the Millennium Declaration and its follow up resolution, enhanced partnership and cooperation with civil society as a whole was called for to ensure its contribution to the implementation of the Declaration. “The United Nations has had a relationship with civil society since its establishment. The first NGOs were granted consultative status by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as early as in 1948; the first set of rules on this relationship was adopted in 1950 by the ECOSOC in resolution 288 B(X), and were reviewed by the General Assembly in 1968 in resolution 1296, which became the basis for establishing criteria for the participation of NGOs at the UN.”²⁹

A report entitled ‘Louder Voices’ issued by the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organization and The Panos Institute (London) present an interesting means of conceptually mapping the work and role of NGOs in the wider processes of international ‘ICT-decision making’, which refers essentially to the range of technology-oriented development and policy coordination activities of key players. According to the report, the ICT policy ‘universe’ is categorized into three main groups, comprised of the UN family organizations (the ITU, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)), the international trade and finance organizations (the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank Group (WBG)), and various private sector bodies. According to Figure 1 below, their general areas of activity and collaboration map as follows:

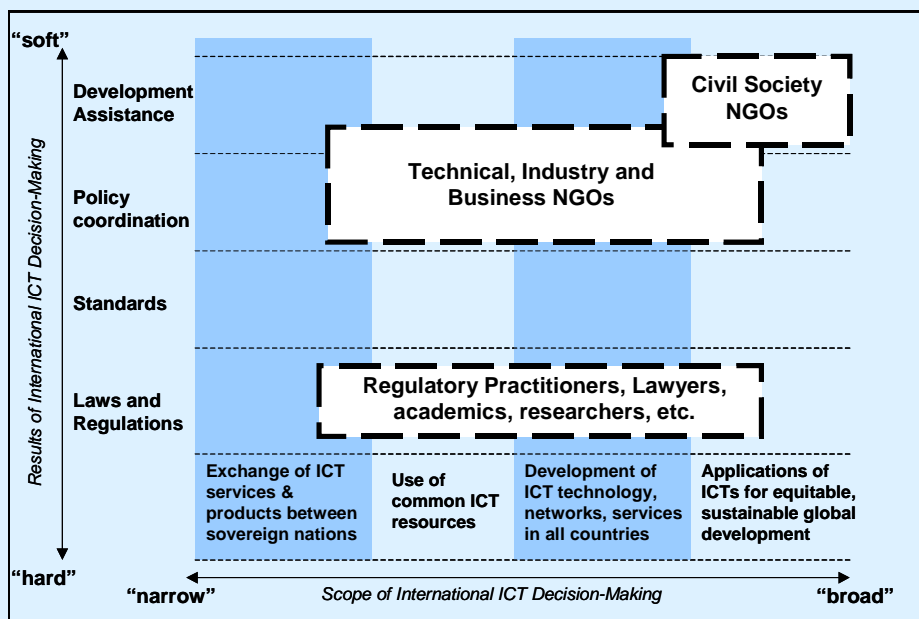
Figure 1: Mapping International ICT Decision-Making – Key Players



Source: “Louder Voices”, Commonwealth Telecommunications Organization and Panos, London, Adapted from pp.12-14.

The main kinds of issues upon which international decisions are made lie upon the horizontal axis, while the main types of decision-making process lie upon the vertical axis. As new governance arrangements are forged in conjunction with more traditional arrangements (which tend to be generally founded upon the principle of national sovereignty), partnerships are developed between various private and public entities, and the increasing role of non-governmental fora emerges strongly.³⁰ The further conceptual mapping seen below in Figure 2 of the activity areas of technical, industry, business and civil society NGOs helps to clarify the complex nature of their involvement in international decision-making and supranational governance.

Figure 2: Mapping International ICT Decision-Making – Non-Governmental Actors



Source: “Louder Voices”, Commonwealth Telecommunications Organization and Panos London, p.15.

NGOs are indeed among the newer players with clout in the international arena and continue to be a major reason why ICTs have emerged to challenge existing development and power paradigms. While on the macro level there continues to be debate vis-à-vis the ultimate cost effectiveness of ICTs in development given other contending priorities, on the micro level, there appears to be near-universal acceptance of the fact that development strategies should be based on partnerships between government, the private sector, and civil society as well as the creation of human capacity (i.e. which some refer to as ‘social capital’). Despite ‘revolutionary’ notions associated with ICTs, there appears also to be a collective acceptance of the fact that governments should be the appropriate policy-makers and leading users of ICTs.³¹

“It is often said that global targets are easily set but seldom met...”³²

- UNDP Bureau for Development Policy

2 The Millennium Declaration

The Millennium Declaration was adopted by 147 Heads of State & Government members of the United Nations in September 2000, with close consultation and collaboration with the UN, the World Bank, the IMF, the OECD, and other regional experts. The Declaration sought to identify and document 48 social and economic indicators, listed by country and spanning a twenty-five year period (retroactively from 1990 through 2015), giving each country a profile of progress towards development and the eradication of poverty. “The Declaration acknowledged that progress is based on sustainable economic growth, which must focus on the poor, with human rights at the centre”³³; indeed, social, cultural and economic rights are at the heart of its goals.

The Declaration itself is structurally comprised of eight major sections, starting with ‘Values and Principles’, and including ‘Peace, Security, and Disarmament’, ‘Development and Poverty Eradication’, ‘Protecting our Common Environment’, ‘Human Rights, Democracy and Good Governance’, ‘Protecting the Vulnerable, Meeting the special needs of Africa’, and ‘Strengthening the United Nations’. Section V, “Human Rights, Democracy and Good Governance”, is most relevant to the context of this paper, and reaffirms that fundamental human rights are the foundation of human dignity and must be protected. It outlines the power of democracy to effect change and the empowerment of the citizenry, and reaffirms the need to work collectively for more inclusive political processes, with genuine political participation.

Strategies for moving forward include the fostering of national human rights institutions, support for the practical application of a rights-based approach to development, the provision of electoral assistance to help the consolidation of new and restored democracies, and progress toward the implementation of democratic principles through institutional reform programs. They also incorporate encouraging the continued ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, working to protect the rights of migrants and their families, and helping to ensure the freedom and independence of the media.

A very basic critique of the Millennium Declaration touches upon the question of credibility: how much can credit can it be afforded, given that in the past 55 years and countless declarations, half the world’s population continues to subsist on less than \$2 per day? The Declaration sets out to attain several specific human rights objectives, including upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And yet, of the 190 UN member states, only a few over a hundred have signed the existing protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. This chasm between the Declaration’s espoused values and reality is a troubling one. An attempt to provide redress for these resounding doubts is the articulation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) listed in Table 3.

Table 3: The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Goal 1	Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
Goal 2	Achieve universal primary education
Goal 3	Promote gender equality and empower women
Goal 4	Reduce child mortality
Goal 5	Improve maternal health
Goal 6	Combat HIV/AIDs, malaria and other diseases
Goal 7	Ensure environmental sustainability
Goal 8	Develop a global partnership for development

Source: United Nations.

Article 9 under Section II of the Millennium Declaration is particularly focused on strengthening international respect for the rule of law, bolstering cooperation between the UN and regional organizations, ensuring implementation of treaties in areas of human rights law (among others), and striving toward the elimination of the global drug problem and international terrorism. In each one of these areas, ICTs can and do play a vital role if national governments allow for the development of networks that enhance transparency and impose accountability on those who may seek to evade it. Article 20 under Section III is also particularly amenable to this paper, whereby the development of partnerships between civil society and the private sector can be initiated, strengthened and confirmed via their utilization. Herein also lies the specific delineation by the United Nations of the benefits of new technologies and ICTs and the importance of their availability for all. Articles 24 and 25, also under Section III, focus specifically on the other main areas of this paper, namely the promotion of democracy, rule of law, and above all the collective agreement to uphold the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to strengthen the capacity of all nations to implement human rights practices and principles. Also cited in this article is a crucial reference to the importance of more inclusive political processes, allowing for the participation of the citizenry, as well as the right of the public to have access to information through the workings of a free press.

While the Declaration supports the notion that globalization is a positive force, it is important to note that for each success story, there have been setbacks – in some places, mortality rates for children under-five have increased, school enrollment ratios have dropped, gender gaps in primary education have widened, and malnutrition has not been conquered.³⁴ One main question that remains is whether or not measurements of progress toward the MDGs – which stem essentially from averages – actually include or bypass the poor and the disadvantaged, given the fact that much demographic data is not sufficiently disaggregated. When this is the case – whether by region, gender, ethnic group, human development data reveals discrepancies that are not acceptable from a human rights standpoint. A key application of ICTs in this context is the way in which they can be used to elucidate the plight of those who may be overlooked – bringing their voices, their stories and their images into the realm of global networks even when they fall below the averages.

Our belief in the centrality of human rights to the work and life of the United Nations stems from a simple proposition: that States which respect human rights respect the rules of international society. States [that] respect human rights are more likely to seek cooperation and not confrontation, tolerance and not violence, moderation and not might, peace and not war. States [that] treat their own people with fundamental respect are more likely to treat their neighbors with the same respect. From this proposition, it is clear that human rights -- in practice, as in principle -- can have no walls and no boundaries.

- Kofi Annan, Address to the UNESCO Ceremony marking the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Paris, 8 December, 1998

Justice breaks out beyond the bounds of particular cultural traditions and territorial boundaries. It transcends generational barriers and imposes on every generation duties towards those who are to follow. It reaches beyond the bounds of the discipline of law and fertilizes the interface area between law and any discipline one may care to name.³⁵

3 Human Rights

According to the “Road Map towards the implementation of the UN Millennium Declaration”, all human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural – are universal and interdependent; they comprise the foundations of human dignity. Human rights are a central part of UN reform, which emphasizes the centrality of human rights in all activities of the system. “People throughout the world remain victims of summary executions, disappearances and torture. Accuracy on numbers is difficult to ascertain because violations take place in too many countries of the world and are rarely reported.”³⁶ Where there are major violations of human rights, there is also often a lack of democracy, poor governance, negligible rule of law, as well as general conflict and injustice. Pervasive poverty and broad disparities in the distribution of power also often go hand in hand with human rights violations, which include transgressions against cultural, socio-political, economical, and civil rights.

3.1 Universalism vs. Cultural Relativism

A major area of debate over the past several decades has been the conflict between the two major perspectives on human rights: the universalist and the cultural relativist. The former holds that an individual is a social unit, possessing inalienable rights and driven by the pursuit of self-interest. In fact, universalism is used by many Western states to negate the validity of more ‘traditional’ systems of law, and posits that more ‘primitive’ cultures will gradually evolve to espouse the same approach to rights and law as Western cultures. In the latter cultural relativist model, a community is the basic social unit, and concepts such as individualism, freedom of choice, and equality are relatively absent. Cultural relativists tend to believe that a traditional culture is unchangeable, and implicitly that there is no unanimity across the determination of that which represents the rights of all individuals everywhere. As an approach, it appears to be in itself a rather arbitrary idea, as cultures are rarely unified in their viewpoints on different issues. Needless to say, however, sensitivity to the imperialism of western conceptions of human rights is high in nations that embrace it.

“The Commission on Human Rights has been the central architect of the work of the United Nations in the field of human rights...”
- Mary Robinson, *High Commissioner for Human Rights*

3.2 Human Rights and the International Arena

It has become evident over the past several decades how mechanisms of supranational governance and intergovernmental collaboration have facilitated progress towards a universal system of human rights. The recent adoption of the International criminal court in June 1998 is an important step in the direction of enforcing and promoting the values agreed upon by the member nations. International organizations/committees “... are responsible for using the implementation of the international system for the protection of human rights - it is through them that it is possible to invoke a state’s obligations under international law in order to obtain a formal or official response to allegations of torture and obtain some form of remedy.”³⁷

The International Bill of Human Rights is comprised of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR). The Commission on Human Rights (see Table 4) - a prime example of a non-treaty mechanism/body – drafted a preliminary international bill of human rights in 1947. The Commission consists of the participation of about 3,000 delegates from 53 member and observer States and from various NGOs. Originally, the Commission on Human Rights sought an International Covenant on Human Rights (CHR) in order to vivify the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; many drafts of this document were created in the nearly two decades between 1949 and 1966. Ultimately, however, it was decided in 1966 that two specialized treaties, the CESCR and the CCPR, would exist instead of just the CHR; over 130 countries have since ratified them.

Table 4: Basic Facts on the UN Commission on Human Rights³⁸

The UN Commission on Human Rights		
Origin	How was it created?	By two 1946 resolutions of the UN Economic and Social Council 1947
	When did it become operational?	
Composition	How many persons is it composed of, and are these persons independent experts or state representatives ?	The diplomatic representatives of 53 States
Purpose	General objective	To consider questions relating to human rights, both in relation to Member State and from a general perspective, and to adopt measures with a view to improving the situation of human rights across the world.

Source: www.hrea.org.

"For those who had to fight for their emancipation, such as ourselves, who, with your help, had to free ourselves from the criminal apartheid system, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights served as the vindication of the justice of our cause."

- Nelson Mandela in address to the UN General Assembly in September 1998

3.2.1 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights came into existence on December 10, 1948, born in the aftermath of WWII, prior to which human rights were in large part considered a subject of domestic concern. The Declaration's thirty articles universalized global concern for a set of inalienable human rights, including the basic right to life, to safety from unfair persecution, to the freedom of thought, expression and religion, and to more culturally based rights pertaining to marriage, employment, education and shelter. René Cassin of France, a leading figure in drafting the Universal Declaration, called it "an authoritative interpretation of the UN Charter", while U Thant of Burma, UN Secretary-General in the 1960s, saw it as "the Magna Carta of mankind."³⁹ Although adoption of this Declaration was limited to the UN General Assembly and has thus been non-binding and un-enforceable, the document itself has served as a basis for the development of other regional human rights agreements, including the European Social Charter, the African Charter of Human and Peoples Rights, and the Helsinki Accords (which demanded that signatories adhere to 'human rights and fundamental freedoms' - Principle 7).

As a yardstick for addressing democracy in a given society, Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) is particularly important to note in understanding global human rights. It states that everyone has the right to "... hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers. It was further stipulated that news personnel were to have the right to "... the widest possible access to sources and information, to travel unhampered in pursuit

thereof, and to transmit copy without unreasonable, or discriminatory limitation, [and] should be guaranteed by action on the national and international plane.⁴⁰

Needless to say, NGOs played an important role in the development, adoption and publicizing of the UDHR, starting with the International League for the Rights of Man (now the International League for Human Rights), one of the earliest NGOs to practice the tactic of ‘shaming’ of totalitarian regimes, military dictatorships and even democratic societies.⁴¹

3.2.2 The Covenants

The main purpose of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) that came into force in 1976 was to further clarify rights declared in the Universal Declaration, protecting specifically the rights of workers (to choose one’s job, fair wages and appropriate conditions) and families (to paid leave for working mothers, and protection of children, etc.). Broad rights to health, to protection from discrimination (by race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, etc.) and to an adequate standard of living were also a major part of this covenant, and are monitored by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR) came into force on March 23, 1976, also clarifying rights stated in the UDHR, and elaborating upon new rights associated with the protection of the sanctity of life, rights protecting accused persons and criminals, mobility rights, and civil rights.⁴² These fall into the realm of the right to be free from capital punishment (except under very grave circumstances), the right not to be unfairly arrested or detained, the general right to free movement, the right not to be tortured; and the freedom of thought and expression. The CCPR bounds signatory countries to the protection of their inhabitants, and is monitored by the Human Rights Committee established in 1977.

3.2.3 Redress for Human Rights Violations

On the international level, there are a variety of predominantly non-violent means employed by the United Nations to deal with violations of human rights among member nations, the majority of which tend to fall under the category of ‘sanction’. These include suspension (deferring the privileges of a member state), embargoes (limiting or halting a country’s economic activity or communications flow), expulsion (leading to the forced withdrawal of a member state from the United Nations) and force (military action used as a last resort against an offending nation).

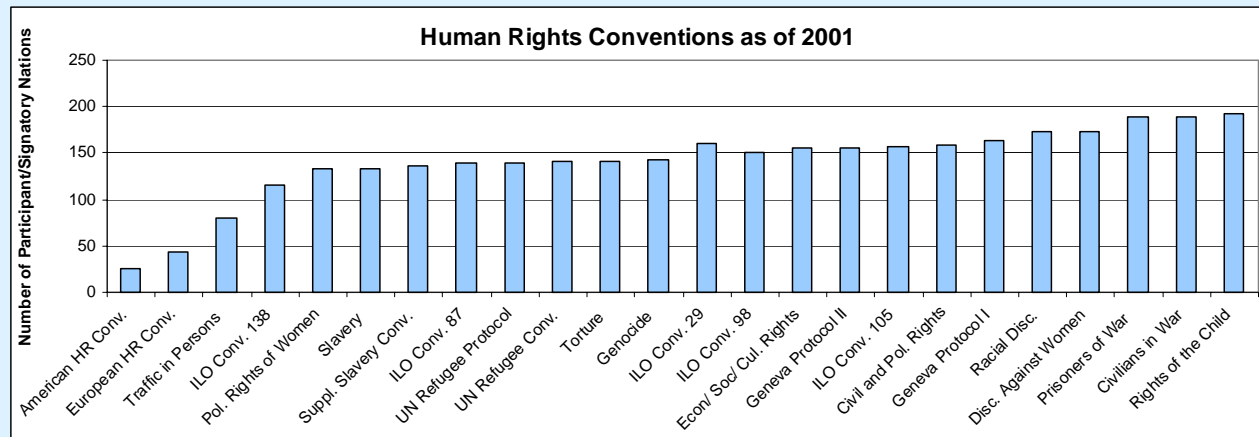
3.3 Intergovernmental Institutional dynamics

A significant portion of the work of the UN Commissions on Human Rights now takes place on the margins of formal sessions, in informal networking among governments, and between NGOs and other stakeholders. Other UN bodies, such as UNICEF, UNIFEM, and the offices of the UN High Commissioners for Refugees and Human Rights often seek out the counsel of networks of like-minded governments, NGOs, and regional organizations such as the European Union, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the Organization of American States, and the Organization for African Unity.⁴³

The Paris principles, which were endorsed by the Commission on Human Rights in 1992 and the General Assembly in 1993, have become a particular reference point for UN activity in the area of human rights. More than 50 national human rights institutions have been established according to them, and nearly 40 countries have undertaken the process of adopting national plans for human rights (following the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Program of Action).⁴⁴ Up until the present, most members of the United Nations have become either participant or signatory to existing major human rights conventions (See Figure 3). Indeed among the most important milestones in advancing human rights through the United Nations system occurred at the World Conference on Human Rights, held in Vienna, Austria, in June 1993. Here, as previously, NGOs played a crucial role, organizing an effective worldwide campaign to ensure their participation; along with governments, they were able to achieve a number of major breakthroughs, including winning unanimous endorsement for the creation of a UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (office now held by Mary Robinson) and a declaration reaffirming the universal nature of human rights.

Figure 3: Human Rights Conventions Participation/Signatories 2001

(From Total UN Membership)



Source: U.S. Department of State, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2001 Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Link: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2001/app/8415.htm>

“There is nothing new about man’s inhumanity to man. What is new is the known scale of violations. Modern communications ... put a global spotlight on once invisible victims of repression.”⁴⁵ (1979)

“... human rights are not a Western discovery.”⁴⁶

- Raul S. Manglapus, Former Foreign Minister, Philippines

“Human rights are your rights. Seize them. Defend them. Promote them. Understand them and insist on them. Nourish and enrich them ... They are the best in us. Give them life.”

- Kofi Annan, Address at the University of Tehran on Human Rights Day, 10 December 1997

4 ICTs and Human Rights

The use of ICTs in the realm of human rights can be broken down broadly to four main realms whose level and quality of interaction - amongst themselves and with one another - has been vastly heightened as a result of the deployment of communications networks. Individuals, NGOs, national governments, and supranational institutions have all been empowered insofar as they have the means to effectively communicate their stories, agendas, laws and agreements, respectively and with maximum impact (see Table 5). Indeed, the ICTs like the Internet may facilitate the networking and mobilizing functions of many NGOs working across national borders, as a countervailing force to the influence of technocratic elites and government leaders running traditional international organizations, and may be even more effective as a force for human rights, providing a global platform for opposition movements challenging autocratic regimes and military dictatorships, despite government attempts to restrict access in certain countries.⁴⁷ The evolving relationship of each of civil society entities with one other – as enhanced and strengthened by ICTs – is significant to any analysis of governance (See Figure 7).

This changing dynamic has contributed in many ways to the development of a new ‘diplomacy of human rights, which highlights the alleged tension between power and morality, and which supersedes the predisposition of organizations like the UN to focus ‘selective morality’ on certain areas of the world over others. Whereas national governments and supranational institutions have long been positioned to guide, respectively, the formation of national/international policies through various well-oiled gears of public diplomacy – individuals and civil society representatives have not. While ICTs have contributed greatly to the enhanced transparency and accessibility of information from the ‘top’, particularly insofar as legal and administrative information is concerned, they have done even more to improve the administrative,

organizational and management skills of the ‘bottom’, and thus to tip the scales of power slightly back toward an equilibrium.

A wide range of governments throughout the world continue to utilize a variety of tools, including licensing, limits on access to newsprint, control over government advertising, jamming, and censorship, to inhibit independent voices. The growth of new, Internet-based media did help facilitate public access to a wide range of information, but some governments continued to develop means to monitor e-mail and Internet use and restrict access to controversial, political, news-oriented, and human rights web sites. Other governments have chosen to prohibit Internet access or limit it to political elites.⁴⁸ For those who subscribe to a ‘technological determinist’⁴⁹ approach, these types of examples are indeed supportive of the idea that communications technologies are fundamental drivers in the transformation of society at every level – including social interaction between institutions and individuals.

Table 5: International Entities and ICT Applications

Sectors	ICT Applications
Individuals	Empowered through the use of wireless communication (voice and SMS/data), email, the internet (with access to reporting procedures like the Options Protocol under CCPI), as well as radio/television
Activist NGOs	Empowered through the use of internet, email, and wireless communications to contact media, other NGOs, national governments, and supranational governing bodies from all locations; ICTs have facilitated transnational networking as well as fundraising
National Governments	Practice traditional forms of public diplomacy (including traditional broadcast (uni-directional media like TV and radio), and utilize networked communications for enhancing transparency and access to laws and national policies
Supranational governing bodies	Use communications to optimize engagement of member states in international organizations, and for consultation with major non-governmental organizations, as well for heightening accessibility of all to international documentation of treaties, accords, agreements and international dispute settlement

Source: ITU.

4.1 Information Sharing and Systems

The importance of general information sharing and more transparent and accessible knowledge management systems (typically private sector specializations that are now being transposed upon organizations of the public sector) are being emphasized through ICT coordination in the promotion of humanitarian aid. Most notably, the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which coordinated a symposium in February 2002, has called for: information systems driven by operational needs (particularly in assessments and “who is doing what where” databases); the development of standards of information quality; the identification and dissemination of successful technology applications; the establishment of ways to connect disparate information systems; and general improvement to preparedness, including baseline data for high-risk areas and rapid response humanitarian information centers.⁵⁰ The idea that ICTs can help to avoid the duplication of work and enhance the organizational efficiency of those working in the field of humanitarian aid is only just beginning to be explored.

Information gathering as far as ‘human rights data’ is concerned is in itself a tremendous challenge, for prior to the actual sharing of information between various organizations and networks arises the question of how to quantify and represent acts of violence. Only thus can researchers make systematic, comparative analyses of patterns of human rights violations in time and space. Dr. Patrick Ball, Deputy Director of the Science and Human Rights Program with the American Association for the Advancement of Science is, for example, particularly concerned with the design of information management systems that provide quantitative analysis for large-scale human rights projects for truth commissions, grassroots human rights NGOs, monitoring missions, etc.⁵¹ ICTs thus obviously play an instrumental role – not only in terms of spreading ‘the word’ about human rights violations and protection through communication networks between civil society,

national and international entities – but also in terms of formulating what ‘the word’ is, and determining how real world incidents can be communicated to the realm of factual, accessible information and data.

4.2 Statistical Analysis

While there is precious little ‘hard’ data that effectively measures the extent to which human rights are defended/protected on a relative country-by-country level, there are proxies that can help to get a general idea of what is happening on a comparative basis. One index, created in 1987 by the Population Crisis Committee and entitled “The Human Suffering Index”, attempted to rank 140 countries on criteria including life expectancy, daily calorie supply, clean drinking water, infant immunization, secondary school enrollment, gross national product per capita, rate of inflation, communications technology, political freedom and civil rights. This index appears to have since been transformed and discontinued. Another interesting index that relates to human rights and governance is that developed by Transparency International (TI), an NGO that works at both the national and international levels to curtail the supply and demand of corruption by raising awareness through the Internet, advocating policy reform, and working towards the implementation of multilateral conventions. TI chapters work to increase levels of accountability and transparency, monitoring the performance of key institutions and pressing for necessary reforms.

Freedom House, since 1972, has published an annual assessment of state freedom by assigning each country and territory the status of ‘free’, ‘partly free’, or ‘not free’ by averaging their political rights and civil liberties ratings (See Tables 6 and 7). Despite the fact that this kind of analysis is usually rife with difficulty given the subjective nature of the topic, the fact that it is multi-dimensional, and the fact that countries are highly complex systems, some basic means of appraisal is valuable, particularly once the definitions of the basic elements – political rights, civil liberties, institutionalized checks and balances – are clarified. These rankings encompass the rights of people to participate freely in political processes, through which the polity chooses authoritative policy makers and attempts to make binding decisions affecting national, regional, or local communities, and the freedoms to develop views, institutions, and personal autonomy apart from the state.

Table 6: Number of Free/Partly Free/Not Free Countries - The Global Trend⁵²

Period	Free	Partly Free	Not Free
1990-1991	65	50	50
1995-1996	76	62	53
2000-2001	86	58	48

Source: Freedom House International.

In an effort to more deeply examine the relationship between ICTs and the Millennium Declaration goals associated with human rights, democracy and good governance, statistical analysis was undertaken to determine whether or not a quantitatively based correlative relationship exists between the deployment of communication networks and the above-mentioned principles across 161 countries. Several dependent variables were tested as proxies for the growth of ICTs (from the ITU Indicators Database 2001), including the year-to-year growth of main telephone lines per 100 people, the year-to-year growth of mobile subscriptions per 100 people, and the year-to-year growth of Internet subscribers (all data from 2000). These were run against the weighted rankings of Freedom House, which can be considered as a general proxy for measuring the likelihood of a national environment to be amenable to acceptable standards of human rights protection, given a reasonable ranking of protected civil and political liberties. It is important in such analysis to control for GDP (or GDP per capita) levels, given the strong likelihood of a positive relationship between the wealth of a country and the capacity of its population to adopt use of mobile technologies and the Internet. Year-to-year growth numbers were used in favor of absolute penetration numbers because of this same issue of high positive correlations; the extremely high correlation between absolute penetration numbers and the GDP variable lends to problems of multicollinearity (and thus to explanatory significance) in the analysis if absolute numbers are used.

Running a regression analysis yielded interesting results, which were not entirely surprising. Despite the fact that the data did not yield significant results for the impact of mobile and Internet subscriber growth on Freedom House rankings, the increasing growth of main telephone lines per 100 people – combined with controlling for higher GDP levels - did prove to reasonably explain (with an $R^2 = .35$) corresponding lower Freedom House Rankings (for which lower numbers signify higher levels of freedom). It is crucial to bear in mind that Freedom House rankings are reversed such that *lower numbers correspond to higher levels of freedom*. Dropping the mobile and Internet variables entirely yielded the following conclusion:

For every 100% growth in telephone Mainlines per 100 people, there is likely to be a beneficial corresponding change of -1.2 on the ‘freedom scale’ *towards* a “Free” ranking by Freedom House. In other words, it is a reasonable claim to make that the more enhanced the basic communications infrastructure of a country, the more likely this will be conducive to the assertion and manifestation of liberties and rights for the citizenry.

Table 7: Freedom House Rankings

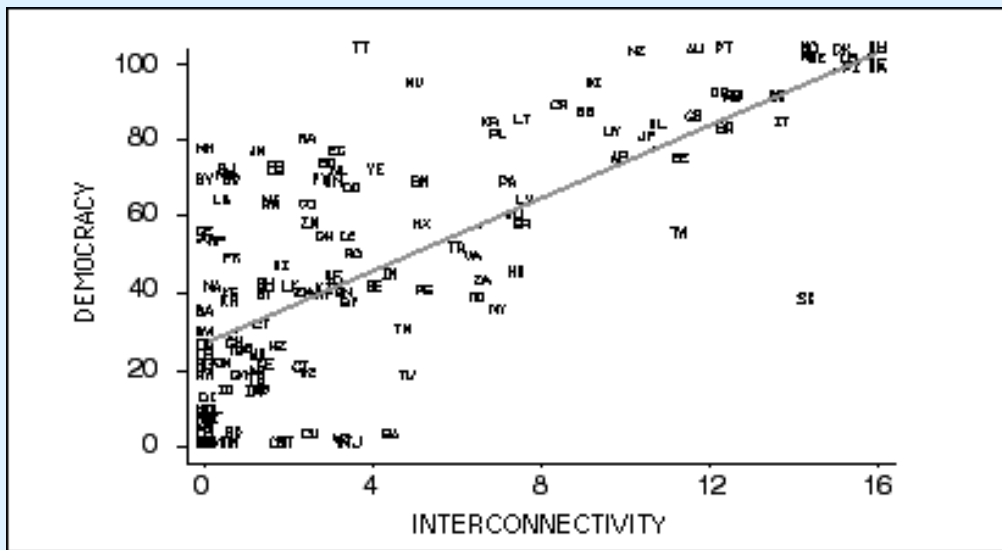
Freedom House Rankings	
FREE	1 – 2.5
PARTLY FREE	3 – 5.5
NOT FREE	5.5 - 7

Note: Lower rankings indicate freer countries.

Source: Freedom House, Link: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/ratings/index.htm>

Further evidence of this comes from another set of quantitative analysis conducted at RAND (see Figure 4), indicating a strong correlation between democracy (which also utilizes data from Freedom House as a proxy measure of democracy) and electronic network interconnectivity, which in this case consists of a metric based on e-mail⁵³. The Freedom House metric is derived from scores assessed relative to checklists of questions about fair elections, freely elected representatives, independent media, free businesses, corruption, etc., and objective and subjective assessments. At the end of each year, Freedom House reports a rating from 1 to 7 for every country, from the greatest freedom to the least, respectively; this scale is then inverted and normalized to 100. The result of these cosmetic conversions is a metric with 13 discrete values, the maximum democracy rating is 100 (instead of 1) and the minimum is 0 (instead of 7).⁵⁴

Figure 4: Democracy and Interconnectivity



Note: The Democracy variable is derived from Freedom House Data; the interconnectivity variable is derived from an email metric (see Footnote 53)

Source: RAND, Link : <http://www.rand.org/publications/RGSD/RGSD127/sec4.html>.

The strong clustering of data points indicates a trend line that represents the strength of the relationship between interconnectivity and democracy. If one believes the contention that democracies are more conducive to the protection of the human rights of their citizens, this analysis supports the further assertion that freedom of information on the Internet [and as facilitated through other ICTs] likely plays a vital role in strengthening human rights.⁵⁵

“In the polis, as conceived by Aristotle, direct communication among and between all the political actors in the system was an attainable ideal.”⁵⁶

“... the process of deepening liberal democratic practices is complex and requires long-term development of civic democratic consciousness and the rule of law.”⁵⁷

“[In the aforementioned 1999 largest ever Gallup survey] ... two thirds of all respondents considered that their country was not governed by the will of the people. This opinion held even in some of the oldest democracies in the world.”⁵⁸

“New communications technologies, especially satellite TV, now seem to serve the same purpose in international politics as they do at the domestic level. Tyrannical behavior can be exposed, dissident opinions can be aired, and public opinion can be relayed back to governments (if only by the unscientific means of mass demonstrations).”⁵⁹

5 ICTs, Democracy and Governance

There is little utility in analyzing the relationships between ICTs and human rights if the key topics of democracy and good governance are not concomitantly addressed, for before one can help to propagate the other, both must be contextualized as the by-products of the same system. The main impact of ICTs [and the internet] “... on democratic life concerns [their] ability to strengthen the public sphere by expanding the information resources, channels of electronic communication, and the networking capacity for many organized interest groups, social movements, NGOs, transnational policy networks, and political parties with the technical know-how and organizational flexibility to adapt to the new medium.”⁶⁰

For those who are convinced that the ideological role of communications systems is vital to the shaping, structuring or ‘framing’ of domestic and international relations⁶¹, examining the role of communication technologies must precede any analysis of democracy and good governance. Indeed, rights associated with communication have often been viewed as among the primary gauges of democracies (such as ‘freedom of communication’ or the ‘right to communicate’), amidst some broader criteria like individual civil rights,

stability, and free elections with opposition parties.⁶² Further confirming the integral role of ICTs in international relations is the proposition that the democracies they help to facilitate do not war with each other; this is very nearly considered empirical law in international relations (although this does not take into account the ‘covert’ activities of democratic states that use journalists and media as tools of destabilization).⁶³ The extent to which ICTs – since their most basic inception – have been used to fulfill strategic purposes in international relations must not be underestimated.

While ICTs are indeed touted as the tools of bottom-up empowerment and democratization that actively thwart the ability of highly centralized dictatorial governments to take form, it is important to bear in mind the contradictory danger of facilitating a “tyranny of the majority.” That ICTs help to lower the ‘barriers to entry’ to the political marketplace is not enough of a benefit to posit an assumption that equality of representation is the default outcome. In countries – particularly in the developing world – where the tendency toward political factionalism is high, this can provide reinforcement for a political dynamic that is not conducive to development goals and human rights agendas. Indeed, such “weak states are one of the main impediments to effective governance today, at national and international levels alike.”⁶⁴ Moreover, the capacity for ICTs to mobilize mass segments of a population and to empower all the various players of civil society should not predispose one from recognizing that the pendulum does not always swing towards democracy as a model of governance. Historical references to the various uses of audio/video technologies in various countries can be easily made to reflect this point. According to Aldous Huxley,

“Mass communication, in a word, is neither good nor bad; it is simply a force and, like any other force, it can be used either well or ill. Used in one way, the press, the radio and the cinema are indispensable to the survival of democracy. Used in another way, they are among the most powerful weapons in the dictator’s armory.”⁶⁵

Nevertheless, there has been a marked increase in the emergence of democracies over the past 20 years, supported by the Commission on Human Rights’ articulation of a number of elements for their promotion and consolidation – including fair and periodic elections, an independent judiciary, a transparent government and a vibrant civil society. According to Freedom House, there are more democracies in the world today (120), and the highest proportion of democratic states (63%), than ever before in history.⁶⁶ “States that respect the rights of all their citizens and allow them all a say in decisions that affect their lives are likely to benefit from their creative energies and to provide the kind of economic and social environment that promotes sustainable development.”⁶⁷ Since 1989, the UN has received over 140 requests for electoral assistance from Member States on the legal, technical, administrative and human rights aspects of conducting democratic elections. Occasionally, as in the cases of Kosovo and East Timor, the mandate has expanded to the provision of transitional administration, with supervision of an entire political process designed to promote human rights and democratic participation.⁶⁸

5.1 Representatives and their Constituents

The nature of political interaction between representatives and their constituents is particularly interesting as it changes through the empowerment of citizens with access to information at ever-decreasing costs. Increasingly, electronic communications and networks are playing an important role in facilitating information sharing. Reduction of the opportunity costs of participation is a potential ray of hope for the concomitant reduction of the negative political implications of geographical urban-rural divides. As the number of people with the capacity to have their voices ‘heard’ gradually increases despite the ‘digital divide’, so too does the range of considerations for their representatives, who must to a certain extent re-cast themselves and find balance between their jobs as decision-makers, and their role as active proxies for public opinion. In some ways, representatives in a democratic system risk being marginalized at the hand of new technologies, as the information for which they are ‘middlemen’ now easily bypasses their filters and in a sense, undermines their position as focal point for their constituencies.

Many hope that the Internet can strengthen the institutions of representative democracy including parliaments and political parties, as well as providing a platform for opposition parties, protest groups, and minorities seeking to challenge authoritarian regimes.⁶⁹ Although the Internet does bring an added component of asymmetrical interactivity unmatched by unidirectional radio and television predecessors,

assumptions of its impact on political participation must be measured carefully. Basic literacy is naturally a prerequisite for the effective usage of these technologies in the forms envisaged by theorists. Even in places "... where many avenues to political participation already exist, and where the opportunity cost of participation is quite low... the Internet does not provide a sufficient 'added value' to make it a better alternative than more traditional methods of political communication."⁷⁰ Many theorists have attempted to find a working model that explains the intuitive – albeit mysterious – relationship between democracy and technology.

Some (Kedzie, 1996) have attempted to build a case for the parallel linkage between democracy and interconnectivity (defined in his analysis as 'access to email') in Africa, attempting to prove through statistical analysis a positive and causal relationship between the two. A previous study in 1993 in 141 countries found a strong correlation between democratization and interconnectivity, even controlling for economic development.⁷¹ However conclusive empirical findings supporting the claim that electronic media have contributed to democracy in Africa are undermined by the lack of good aggregated data on the subject, by stagnant literacy rates, and by the fact that private radio and television have only recently been allowed to exist in most places. Lag time may be necessary for the effects of such technologies to be manifested.⁷² Others (Van Koert, 2001) have taken another analytical approach, positing that it is the 'democratic deficit' (the extent to which democratic processes and structures are lacking) of a nation state that determines the level of interactive use of ICTs (specifically for rural development, in this case). In other words, the extent to which the 'liberating potential' of ICTs is unleashed is contingent upon the way governments can influence/control the content, direction and nature of information flows. Neither empirical evidence nor theoretical frameworks appear to provide clear answers to this question.

*"On the one hand, global communication has made the task of development easier by providing rapid and efficient access to sources of information on science, technology, and markets. On the other hand, it has made the control of human behavior that much more difficult for the centralized and mobilized states focused on strict moral codes and national development goals."*⁷³

– Majid Tehranian

*"Revolution [in] information, and communication and technology and production, all these things make democracy more likely..."*⁷⁴

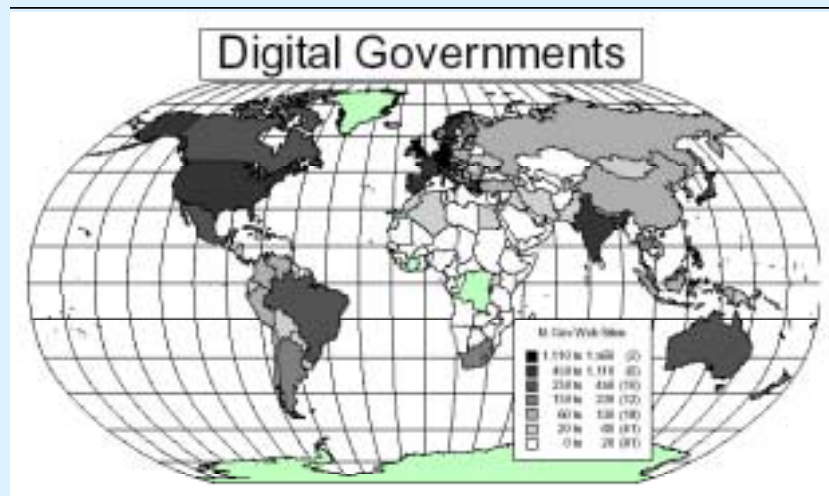
– Former U.S. President Bill Clinton

5.2 E-Government

E-Government - and specifically the enhanced ability to collect and share information is revolutionizing the way we look at traditional concepts of political legitimacy, representation and ministerial accountability. According to the OECD, the key issues include the necessity of addressing the needs of the polity as a whole, of facilitating the use of e-channels by disadvantaged groups early in the implementation process, and of building trust and confidence in e-services.⁷⁵ While ICTs provide obvious access to information about various topics (including justice and human rights), they also touch upon crucial interfaces vis-à-vis the direct participation of voters, thereby contributing to significant changes in electoral systems digital advocacy and lobbying, and online consultation are all part and parcel of the transformations of governance shaped by ICTs.

That said, however, it is important to note that these observations are themselves not yet established facts. An OECD study of e-governance, based on a series of interviews with information specialists, public officials and the policymaking community in eight post-industrial societies in 1996-7, presented evidence that the overall impact of the Internet has failed to increase access to policymakers, to improve the transparency of government decision-making, or to facilitate public participation in policymaking.⁷⁶ There has been research conducted that supports the idea that traditional methods like letters, written submissions and informal meeting continued to predominate, and that digital technologies have had greater impact in the dissemination of information to senior decision-makers and policy elites.⁷⁷ A key problem is the fact that opportunities for 'bottom up' interactivity in communicating with official government departments are far fewer than the opportunities to read 'top down' information. Government websites rarely facilitate un-moderated public feedback, for example few published public reactions to policy proposals, or used discussion forums, listservs and bulletin boards, although there have been occasional experiments with interactive formats.⁷⁸

Figure 5: The World of e-Governance



Source: Norris, Pippa. <http://ksghome.harvard.edu/~pnorris.shorenstein.ksg/acrobat/digitalch6.pdf>, p. 17.

According to Pippa Norris, there are two camps in the arena of e-governance: cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists. Cyber-optimists are hopeful that the development of interactive services, new channels of communication, and efficiency gains from digital technologies will contribute towards the revitalization of the role of government executives in representative democracies, facilitating communications between citizen and the state. In contrast, cyber-pessimists express doubts about the capacity of governments to adapt to the new environment effectively and with positive result insofar as the questions of access and digital divide have repercussions for political participation.⁷⁹

Some countries have already started to draw up principles or adapt existing guidelines for discussion in the online environment, and most have started to digitize information relevant to the citizenry. One important question is how governments are to manage the publication of their information: do they publish only policies that have been agreed upon by parliament, or do they also publish information in the stage of preparation of policies? How complete is that information? The basis of e-democracy, and thus of online public consultations, involves giving the public the chance to consult government information electronically. It is not enough to give formal permission for information to be accessed, which is why a distinction is made between access and accessibility. The former refers to the real possibility of consulting or acquiring government information electronically, while the latter refers to the ease with which one can actually make use of the possibility of consulting government information online.⁸⁰

E-governance is taking rapid hold around the world (See Figure 5, and Appendix Tables 8 & 9). Affluent postindustrial societies characteristically have the widest access to multiple forms of communication technologies (including traditional media as well as digital in form of computers and Internet hosts), and it makes sense that such an environment is most conducive to the spread of e-governance.⁸¹ The United Kingdom is a good example of a country that has been very active in bringing government online. Amidst changing public perceptions and expectations of the British Parliament, and authoritative evidence indicating a decline of public participation in the political process, efforts are being made in the U.K. to leverage ICTs in order to influence public perceptions, help meet public expectations, and facilitate the inevitable transition that Members of Parliament are bound to face as new technologies proliferate amongst their constituencies.⁸² As another example, the United Arab Emirates is also investing in ICT solutions toward facilitating e-government, bringing online and working across over 40 government departments employing 25,000 people.⁸³

According to a biannually released survey conducted by the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) and the United Nations Division for Public Economics and Public Administration (UNDPEPA), the US was ranked first for its e-government initiatives ahead of Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Norway. In all, sixty-one member state countries scored above the mean global index of 1.62; geographically by region, North America, Europe, South America and the Middle East all registered an index above the global mean, while Asia, the Caribbean, Central America and Africa fell below the index.⁸⁴

Of the 190 UN member states, 169 were providing some degree of information online in 2001, although for over 25% of these countries, the content of the websites was deemed to consist of insufficient information less geared toward public participation than to pure public relations.⁸⁵ The capacity to conduct transaction of any kind online at the national government level was available in just 17 member states in 2001.⁸⁶

“...of the 523 journalists killed between 1992 and 2002, 374 were intentionally murdered: 128 for their political opinions, 67 for having exposed corruption, and 179 because they were in conflict areas but were killed despite having identified themselves as reporters.”

- Reporters Sans Frontières & Damocles Network.

5.3 Free Press

As referred to in the introductory quote by Mary Robinson, High Commissioner for Human Rights, the freedom of expression and information is vital. It also happens to be a cornerstone of democratic, pluralistic systems, as well as a major indicator for the extent of effective application of ICTs to human rights causes. Certainly, full democracy cannot be tacit without an analogous full enjoyment of the freedom of expression, and the public debate that it engenders. This is in line with a wide range of theorists – from Milton to Madison to Mill – who have argued that free and independent press within each nation can play a fundamental role in the process of democratization by contributing towards the right of freedom of expression, thought and conscience, strengthening the sensitivity of governments to all citizens, and providing a pluralist platform of political expression for a array of groups. According to Amartya Sen’s premises, such political freedoms have an intrinsic link with economic and human development, particularly in low-income countries.⁸⁷ The monopoly of or interference in ICTs and media for the purpose of controlling information can be a core obstacle to the realization of the needs of a democratic society,⁸⁸ and can be perpetrated by private and state entities alike. In this regard, it lies in the obligation of states “... to guarantee or promote a climate of open and plural public debate, and to correct a situation in which these characteristics are absent or distorted.”⁸⁹

This obligation has been articulated in the international arena, confirming the right of the public to be informed and to free expression: It has been encapsulated as a basic human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN in 1948, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights. The European Commission of Human Rights, for example, has officially affirmed the duty of the state to protect against excessive concentration of the press, while the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe declared in 1982 that “states have the duty to prevent infractions against freedom of expression and information and should adopt policies designed to promote... a variety of media and pluralism in the sources of information...”⁹⁰ The United Nations Human Rights Committee has stated similarly that, with the development of modern mass communications media, effective measures are needed to prevent the control of these media that interfere with the right of all to express themselves freely, contrary to the guarantees contained in the International Covenant in Article 19(3).⁹¹

In many ways, the impact of ICTs in the human rights context is tempered by the same factors that determine the extent to which a free press is able to manoeuvre in those countries where abuses are prevalent. The ability of the media to function unfettered by government fosters the creation of strong social networks, while engaging citizens in public affairs. Arguably, the extent to which there is a functioning free press is indicative of the likelihood that human rights are going to be effectively impacted through ICTs. Out of the top sixty countries (See Figure 6) with the most ‘free press’ violation alerts this past year according to the International Freedom of Expression Exchange, twenty-one of them– according to Reporters Sans Frontières, have been in active violation of the human rights of journalists – indicating major challenges to be faced particularly in Asia and Africa (see Figure 6 for breakout). These are listed on the ‘Impunity Blacklist’, comprised of those countries in which murderers, abductors and torturers of journalists are being granted full or partial impunity by their government.

Figure 6: Free Press Violations



Number of Countries on the “The Impunity Blacklist”

Human Rights Abuses in Context of Press Censorship

Regional Breakout	
Asia	9
Africa	6
Latin America	3
Europe	3

Source: <http://www.ifex.org/> (Top chart); Reporters Without Borders & Damocles Network, at: www.rsf.fr/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=194 (Bottom table).

Information technology is driving nation-states toward cooperation with each other. It has created a new world monetary standard, an ‘information standard’, which has replaced the gold standard and the Bretton Woods agreements. There is no way for any nation to opt out of the Information Standard.”⁹²

“Governance is not synonymous with government, and considerable governance underlies the current order among states...”⁹³

“The electronic global market has produced what amounts to a giant vote-counting machine that conducts a running tally on what the world thinks of a government’s diplomatic, fiscal, and monetary policies. That opinion is immediately reflected in the value the market places on a country’s currency. Information is the pre-eminent form of capital...”⁹⁴

Much depends on how the characteristics of the global system are perceived: either as the continuing dominance of states or states as a part of a larger new order. There is no clear-cut evidence to support or reject either of these perspectives, and “a new or reconstituted global order may take decades to mature.”⁹⁵

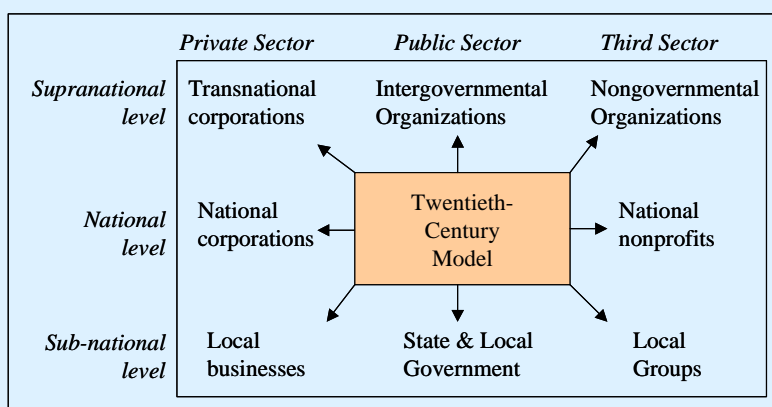
5.4 Power and global trends

Any discussion on democracy invariably leads to the broader issue of governance – incorporating the dynamic of the institutions, the people, and the various types of agency they wield in the process of governing a nation. As ICTs propagate, the power to influence is more increasingly widely distributed, and hence the tasks of governance – on both national and international levels – become progressively more complex and challenging. A wide variety of modern trends are affecting the state-centric system of governance from all angles: these include international organizations like the UN and the E.U., nationalist separatist movements, international terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda, multinational organizations like

General Motors, and international NGOs like Amnesty International.⁹⁶ The majority of these fall squarely within the confines of the ‘realist’ paradigm – in part because they are statist in orientation, or because they seek the control of power in the form of land and resources. Those that distinguish themselves from the rest are groups like those referred to by R.B. Walker in 1988, espousing ‘critical social movements’– women’s movements, environmental movements, antinuclear movements, and movements struggling for human rights.⁹⁷ These types of entities are unique because they are geared toward the “... general transformation of public consciousness, which in turn affects the parameters of legitimacy within which traditional institutions must operate.”⁹⁸

Some – like Wriston – believe that the information revolution is profoundly threatening to existing power structures in the international system because the nature and powers of the sovereign state are being challenged in fundamental ways. The constitutions of national governments and their treaties have been challenged by the demands of increasingly well-defined ethnic and other subgroups, confrontations to traditional borders created by new information technologies, and the globalization of economies. “As power increasingly resides in the people, the world will become more complex, and we will live “in a kind of international democracy.”⁹⁹ On the other hand, Hirst and Thompson argue that the nation state retains its power in the modern era and the main trend has been towards the growth of regional blocs, where nation-states remain the primary actors, not the emergence of a new world order that transcends states.¹⁰⁰ In any case, the more information is disseminated in the direction of those who have not been privy to it in the past, the more of a challenge there will be to political ‘incumbents’; escalating pressures on governments for attention to freedom and human rights causes are a case in point.

Figure 7: The Diffusion of Governance in the Twenty-First Century



Source: Nye, Joseph S., “Information Technology and Democratic Governance”, Governance.com (Cambridge, MA: Visions of Governance in the 21st century), 2002, p.4.

As the various entities presented in Figure 7 – including transnational corporations/banks/ financial institutions, and investors engage with counterparts at the sub-national and national levels, they increasingly serve as a bridge for the propagation of human rights norms and advocates for human rights improvements. According to the U.S. State Department, some of the most successful transnational networks are those that partner with, respond to, or support government initiatives on behalf of democracy and human rights. While there is no international consensus on how best to address the questions of past human rights violations, particularly in the context of complex democratic transitions, a great deal of concrete progress has nonetheless occurred, including the establishment of International Criminal Tribunals. Certainly, no international consensus yet exists on international justice issues, the controversial subject of the International Criminal Court being one example of this debate.

5.5 Legitimacy and violence

Legitimacy is a cornerstone of good governance, and to a very large extent, civil society representatives like NGOs and the tools they use to heighten global awareness and public sensitivities are indispensable to the solid construction of that legitimacy. "... Citizens express more confidence in the system of government where, according to the Freedom House classification, there are widespread opportunities for civic participation and protection of human rights."¹⁰¹

It is also extremely important, through the course of a discussion on global governance, to point out that mention of a 'global civil society' in no way implies the obliteration of discord or conflict within its framework – for the rights of individuals can easily come in conflict with the rights of groups, and the means by which entities (like councils in traditional villages) resolve such issues are not necessarily exclusive of violence or power-mongering. The role of violence has indeed been considered central in state-centric politics, and in the process of state formation and evolution of the state system. States are in fact the main perpetrators of human rights abuses within their own borders – with examples of genocide and ethnic extermination rife even in the last fifty years. Yet, "... while critical social movements are not free of violence altogether, sundry cases illustrate that a philosophical commitment to non-violence is a prominent feature of the globalist community."¹⁰²

"The same Internet that has facilitated the spread of human rights and good governance norms has also been a conduit for propagating intolerance and has diffused information necessary for building weapons of terror."

- Kofi Annan, "The Work of the Organization", A/54/1; para. 254

In the largest survey of public opinion ever conducted - of 57,000 adults in 60 countries, spread across all six continents ... the centrality of human rights to peoples' expectations about the future role of the United Nations was stressed... Respondents showed widespread dissatisfaction with the level of respect for human rights. In one region fewer than one in 10 citizens believed that human rights were being fully respected, while one third believed they were not observed at all. Discrimination by race and gender were commonly expressed concerns.¹⁰³

- Gallup International, 1999

6 Case Studies

Since the earliest emergence of new ICTs like radio, proselytizers of all kinds, since the era of the telegraph, have evoked images of the 'welding of humanity into one composite whole...' ¹⁰⁴, and the "...[revitalization] of citizen-based democracy" ¹⁰⁵; as it has turned out, radio did not eliminate the inequalities of the world, and the capacity of the Internet or other new technologies to do the same is equally dubious. While indeed the Internet does create a new digital 'public sphere' due to its disintermediated nature, whether or not it can be actually free from the control of dominant political and economic powers is a tenuous point. Theorists like Habermas believed that the existence of such a sphere would be a stepping-stone toward a higher quality of public participation in governance provided it was characterized by equality, inclusion, rationality and transparency. Yet, can "informed interactive debate [facilitated by ICTs]... flower independent of government or commercial control" ¹⁰⁶, and actually make a difference to the predicament of those who suffer human rights abuses? Some like Leggewie simply point to the under-utilization of multi-directional communication in cyberspace in refutation of the above notion of 'informed debate', citing instead an increasing trend of centralization that renders ICTs unable to fulfill their potential to bring about true "digital participatory democracy... and tele-democracy" ¹⁰⁷.

According to optimists, however, the Internet serves multiple functions for organizations fighting for human rights and democracy, including email lobbying of elected representatives, public officials, and policy elites; networking with related associations and organizations; mobilizing organizers, activists and members using action alerts, newsletters and emails; raising funds and recruiting supporters; and communicating their message to the public via the traditional news media. ¹⁰⁸ The Internet is most useful for transnational advocacy networks, exemplified by diverse campaigns such as the movement against the production and sale of land mines, demonstrators critical of the WTO meeting in Seattle, environmentalists in opposition of genetically modified foods, and anti-sweatshop campaigners. ¹⁰⁹ Indeed, see information technologies as the "backbone of NGO collaboration." ¹¹⁰

Conducting research in this area yields a great deal of information vis-à-vis online initiatives created by aforementioned civil society stakeholders, that espouse international human rights protection and target the general development goals encapsulated in the Millennium Declaration through the application of ICTs. In conjunction with the relevant websites of UN organizations like the ITU, UNHCHR, etc., the following list provides a sampling of what can be found online:

- *Human Rights Watch* (www.hrw.org) is a good example of a website dedicated to investigating and exposing human rights violations, in the attempt to hold abusers accountable. Stated goals include the prevention of discrimination, upholding political freedom, protecting people from inhumane conduct in wartime, and bringing offenders to justice. The organization challenges governments and those who hold power to end abusive practices and to respect international human rights law by publishing findings in numerous books and reports every year, thereby generating extensive coverage in local and international media.
- *Amnesty International* (www.amnesty.org) is a very prominent online campaigning movement that works to promote all the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international standards. Amnesty International campaigns to free prisoners of conscience; ensure fair and prompt trials for political prisoners; abolish the death penalty, torture and other cruel treatment of prisoners; end political killings and ‘disappearances’; and oppose human rights abuses by opposition groups. The organization has around a million members and supporters in 162 countries and territories.
- *Derechos* (www.derechos.org / www.derechos.net) works online for the promotion and respect of human rights all over the world, for the right to privacy and against impunity for human rights violators, using the Internet as a primary information and communication tool. Derechos works with human rights organizations in Latin America and around the world. Their work consists of educating the public about human rights and human rights violations; investigating human rights abuses (including their causes, development and consequences), contributing to the development of international and national human rights law and the rule of law, preserving the memory of victims of human rights violations, and carrying out projects of assistance to human rights NGOs, activists and victims.
- *OneWorld.net* (www.oneworld.net) – founded in 1995 - is another good example of such an initiative, dedicated to harnessing the democratic potential of the Internet to promote human rights and sustainable development, promoting the rights of individuals to inform and be informed (with access for all to the benefits of new technology), and aiming to be the online media gateway that most effectively informs the world about human rights and sustainable development, while empowering local communities and encouraging mutually rewarding partnerships between organizations and individuals in the global community. The site (available in four languages) contains approximately 15,000 pages with almost 100,000 links to progressive organizations promoting human rights and sustainable development. Oneworld is an excellent example of an organization exploring various channels of ICTs, with their use of video on the Internet – dubbed OneWorld TV - as a powerful tool in raising the impact of organizations working on human rights. This represents, in a sense, a different kind of ‘reality TV’. According to some, “... we have never had so much reality TV; the only problem is, it has never been less real”.¹¹¹ OneWorld International has the support of more than 1,250 partner NGOs around the world, with supporters including Oxfam, Greenpeace, Unicef, the Rockefeller Foundation, BT and the Guardian. For optimal exposure, meetings are currently underway with the BBC in order to discuss the possibility of a broadcast version via digital satellite.¹¹²
- *The Panos Institute* (www.panos.org) is an international NGO working with partners in Africa and Asia in order to stimulate informed public debate, particularly by working with the media and building media capacities. Along with catalysing debate on national and regional levels, Panos works to ensure that perspectives from developing countries reach the Northern public through the media, thereby increasing the exchange of ideas, information and experience between developing countries and the industrialised world. Panos has a decentralised structure with regional centers in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

- *Reporters sans Frontières* (www.rsf.fr) was founded in 1985 with the aim of producing follow-up reports on catastrophes that the established press has been criticized of neglecting. Their homepage features a daily count of illegally imprisoned journalists, and the Internet is widely leveraged as a source of detailed information as various countries are featured with their latest news on Internet freedom, human rights and incarcerated media professionals.
- *Freedom House* (www.freedomhouse.org) is a proponent of democratic values and a steadfast opponent of dictatorships, led by a Board of Trustees composed of leading American Democrats, Republicans, & Independents; as well as business and labour leaders; former senior government officials; scholars; writers; and journalists. This organization leverages its presence on the web and is widely used as a reference point for those seeking indicators of the extent of political rights and civil liberties afford to citizenry in nations around the world.
- *Fahamu.org* (www.fahamu.org) is a website committed to supporting progressive social change in the South through ICTs by producing electronic newsletters, disseminating information about social justice in Africa, producing distance learning materials for human rights and humanitarian organizations, providing training through face-to-face workshops, managing websites, making web-based resources available for offline use, and undertaking general social policy research on the continent.
- *The Institute for Global Communications* (www.igc.org) was established in 1990, serving as an umbrella site containing several hundred thousand links to a wide variety partner sites like Idealist/Action Without Borders, Project Change, Entango, Independent Source, MetaEvents and Protest.net. As early as 1987, IGC was officially formed to manage PeaceNet and the newly acquired EcoNet (among the first computer networks dedicated to environmental preservation and sustainability). The mission of IGC is to advance the work of progressive organizations and individuals for peace, justice, economic opportunity, human rights, democracy and environmental sustainability through strategic use of online technologies.
- *Witness.org* (www.witness.org) is a human rights website that focuses on strengthening local activists by giving them video cameras and field training. Witness uses an arsenal of computers, imaging and editing software, satellite phones and email, and partner groups are committed to revealing human rights violations that go unnoticed and unreported -- to governments and communities, to international tribunals and UN committees, and to TV viewers worldwide via outlets like the BBC, CNN, ABC, Court TV and Worldlink Satellite Television. Their videos have been used as evidence in legal proceedings, for grassroots education, in news broadcasts, and for web broadcasting via the Internet.

6.1.1.1 Mini-Case Studies

ICTs have been applied in a wide variety of cases and contexts, many of which have positively contributed to the protection of human rights in a given country by raising international awareness and mobilizing public opinion accordingly. The cases of South Africa and East Timor are most notable in this context. New technologies have been instrumental in the development of networking between all kinds of inter-communal and inter-ethnic groups, who have as a result of their coordinated activities, succeeded in having a real impact on all manner of government initiatives and projects. Positive examples abound in India (where they particularly numerous), Brazil, Canada, etc. On the other hand, there have also been many cases in which these same technologies have been used to provoke violence and promote hatred amidst the struggle of various entities to maintain power in their various locales. The most authoritarian regimes pass laws, monitor and censor with the greatest fervour. And yet, nothing reconfirms the potency of ICTs better than the formalized actions taken by governments in attempt to repress them; Cases A-H reflect positive applications of ICTs in the human rights sphere, Cases J and K are examples of banning/prohibition of new technologies for the purpose of retaining control, while Case I illustrates how ICTs can actually have an extremely detrimental roles in places where democracy, governance and rule of law are not intact.

6.2 Case A: Electronic media as a grassroots weapon of democracy

Many NGO groups, through the use of websites, camcorders, and email, convey their uncensored messages to the world in order to activate and motivate. For example, the success of many international grassroots campaigns have been contingent upon usage of the web and the collaboration of a variety of international citizens' groups as they coordinate their positions, exchange information, and alert politicians. The WTO meeting in Seattle in late November 1999 is a good example of this phenomena, bringing together an alliance between labor and environmental activists – the Turtle Teamster partnership – along with a network of consumer advocates, anti-capitalists, and grassroots movements that attracted a media 'feeding frenzy'.¹¹³ Groups integrated the Internet into their strategies, for example the International Civil Society website, which provided hourly updates about the major demonstrations in Seattle to a network of almost 700 NGOs in some 80 countries, including groups of human rights organizations, environmentalists, students, religious groups, and others. Other well-known examples include the anti land-mine campaign in the mid to late-1990s, the anti-globalization protests against the World Bank and IMF in Prague, against the EU meetings in Gothenberg, and the G8 in Genoa, and the widespread anti-fuel tax protests that disrupted European politics in October 2000.

6.3 Case B: Using the Internet to gain pledges and defend children's rights

A global Internet campaign (entitled "Say Yes") was launched in London, New York and other capitals last year to amplify the cause of children's rights. The goal was to leverage the power of the Internet to gain millions of individual pledges supporting the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with pledges gathered online and offline to be delivered to world leaders. The online hub of this Global Movement for Children was Netaid.org, designed to enable organizations and individuals to download ballot papers and carry them to poor communities on the 'other side of the digital divide'.

6.4 Case C: Bangladesh: Creating a Human Rights Portal*

The Bangladesh Human Rights Portal (www.banglarights.net) will actively promote human rights reforms within Bangladesh and across geographical, social and political boundaries, supporting marginalized communities, women and children. More information is available at: <http://www.banglarights.net/HTML/significantcases.htm>. Bangladesh also happens to be home to one of the key global success stories¹¹⁴ of cellular telephony access provision (GrameenPhone) to the rural poor, leveraging Bangladesh-based Grameen Bank's networks to bring ICTs to village-based micro-enterprises.

6.5 Case D: El Salvador: Probidad*

Probidad (www.probidad.org) promotes democratization efforts through diverse and integrated anti-corruption initiatives, most of which rely on the use of ICTs and an extensive network of contacts. The activities are designed to monitor corruption and control mechanisms, mobilize awareness about the complexities and costs of corruption and increased interest and participation in curbing it, enhance the anti-corruption capacity of other civil society organizations, media, government, business, and researchers in our region; and contribute to more informed local and context-specific measures that undermine corruption and promote good governance.

6.6 Case E: Armenia: Promoting democratic participation through "Forum"*

Armenia's National Academy of Sciences has launched a new website (www.forum.am) with support from UNDP to harness information and communications technology to promote democracy. The website helps to increase public participation in governance, create new opportunities to broaden public awareness about democratic issues and establish new opportunities for interaction.

6.7 Case F: Vietnam: CD-ROM puts laws in citizens' hands*

“Your Lawyer”, a new CD-ROM, is making Vietnam's laws and information on citizens' rights readily accessible, spelling out in simple language how to start a business, protect land rights and get a divorce. As a first step, the Office of the National Assembly (ONA) is distributing copies of the CD-ROM to offices of delegates to the National Assembly in all 61 provinces, offices of provincial People's Councils, and media organizations.

6.8 Case G: Zimbabwe: Harnessing email and the Internet*

The NGO Network Alliance Project (NNAP) aims to strengthen the use of email and Internet strategies (www.kubatana.net) in Zimbabwean NGOs and civil society organizations. The NNAP will make human rights and civic education information accessible to the general public from a centralized, electronic source.

6.9 Case H: South Africa: The PIMS Monitor*

Idasa's Political Information and Monitoring Service (PIMS) (www.pims.org.za/monitor) aims to support democracy and promote good ethical governance in South Africa through the building of government and civic capacity for democracy, in particular through training and related activities. The Monitor aims to help audience engage with democracy, intervene in the legislative process and make submissions to parliament. The PIMS Monitor also offers comprehensive, plain-language summaries of complicated documents.

6.10 Case I: Radio as a tool for inciting violence and human rights violations

“Potentially radio is a very democratic medium, which, when used in a decentralized manner may give local people and communities an opportunity to express their grievances in representative discussions. This however presupposes the establishment of decentralized structures and local and community radio stations as well as radio stations representing the views of organizations in civil society such as trade unions.”¹¹⁵

The use of ICTs in a manner exceptionally detrimental to the protection of human rights is best exemplified in the case of Country C, wherein NGO human rights organizations and UN officials asserted publicly that radio transmissions were used to incite ethnic tension and murder on a mass scale. This took place in a country wherein the inadequacies of basic information infrastructure provided a stark contrast to the highly systematic and synchronized manner in which ethnic extermination was perpetrated. Extremists from the military, the government, and business communities were responsible in this case for the widespread use of broadcasted communications to achieve their political aims. In many ways, this case became a hallmark example of the dilemma posed to the international community vis-à-vis the rights of sovereign states under international law and justifications for radio jamming.

6.11 Case J: Dual-use technologies increase surveillance capabilities

In Country J, the very transnational companies responsible for developing communications technology developed for commercial purposes are also now being reviewed due to the dual-use of the technology, which is being used by police and security forces to refine the targeting and repression of political dissidents. The networks apparently allow main authorities an unprecedented ability to conduct surveillance and to monitor the activities of human rights and democracy advocates. With more than 20 million Internet users already, this country trains brigades of police officers to fight a war against anti-governmental articles published on the Web, and passes highly repressive laws: cyber-crime is punishable by the death penalty.

6.12 Case K: Cutting Internet access to international human rights organizations

Some countries have categorically decided: no servers, no connections possible. According to information collected by Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) in a news report at the end of 2001, fixed and mobile telephone lines of many government opposition figures in Country K have been cut, preventing access of nationals of the country to RSF, the International Federation of human Rights (IFHR), Human Rights Watch, as well as to various journalists and members of the European Parliament. Access to the Internet has been curtailed in some areas, and many news sites – particularly those associated with human rights protection – have been blocked. The RSF, in the meantime, pointed out that the president of Country K is included on its list of the

world's thirty-nine press freedom predators. In another Country L, the government telecommunications monopoly's decision to regulate the Internet in the country to block cheap telephony and pornography has come under fire for intruding on personal rights and freedoms. Yet others, like Country M, prefer to build huge 'national intranet' systems to filter addresses and content.

"All the world's a stage..."

- William Shakespeare

7 Conclusion

Just as 'equality must begin in real life before permeating cyberspace'¹¹⁶, so must human rights movements be translatable to the real world as their mission expands along with the proliferation of ICTs. If the exponential growth of cost efficiencies associated with Moore's Law¹¹⁷, combined with the network incentives associated with Metcalfe's Law¹¹⁸ had half as much impact on human rights as they do on computer prices and network value, one could posit indeed that analyses of 'ICTs and human rights' would not be relevant for long. One would assume in such a world that the mission of the civil society organizations that work in this realm would resonate clearly with all concerned entities, and that good governance and rule of law would be attainable in as much time as it takes for communication networks to be fully deployed in nations around the world. Unfortunately, the simplicity of such economic formulations is easily undermined in the reality of complex social systems of the international arena.

The intricate nature of the various systems that comprise governance at its various supranational, national and sub-national levels require more than a single model or trend line to explain key dynamics. Likewise, the goals of the Millennium Declaration are manifold, and its principles inclusive of a great many topics that each equally comprises a rung on the ladder of development. Therefore, examining ICTs in the context of the realms of human rights, democracy and broader governance yields a few key lessons.

One lesson lays in a realistic conceptualization of the power of ICTs vis-à-vis those in the international system who wield them: communications technologies are unlikely to bring about anything better than the best intentions of those who use them. While many look at modern technology as a panacea for old problems, unfortunately it appears that their power for enhancing transparency, imposing international accountability and fostering cooperation stretches only as far as the will of respective nation states bends to embrace and adopt them. Even assertions about the enhancement of democratic participation by ICTs must be tempered by a broader understanding of the dynamic between the entities of greatest influence, and how much the empowerment of the public can affect those who govern and sell to them.

Fortunately, with the increasing commodification of information and decreasing costs of access (in most, but not all places) has emerged a sense of urgency (in LDCs and developed countries alike) to partake in 'the information society'. Herein lies the power of a 'virtuous cycle' associated with ICTs: as inclusion translates to the physical realm technology deployment, so does deployment translate in large part to global accessibility, and ultimately, to government and business accountability across a wide spectrum of activity. Even as a new ICT network may provide a nation the eyes with which to see across the global 'information superhighway', so too does it render it an object of global scrutiny.

Another lesson comes from assessing the expansion and maturation of the international political landscape, as it grows to incorporate the voices of those entities not traditionally infused with power. The efforts of civil society transnational actors are being increasingly rewarded as global/national public opinion becomes significant in international relations. With them, organizations like the ITU are providing the international legal framework upon which cooperation between governments, the private sector, and other actors can be forged. It appears all told that governance is not so much about imposing rigid control as it is building an environment that fosters cooperation and trust.¹¹⁹

To conclude, ICTs have proven to be very effective instruments for disseminating information relating to human rights violations on a worldwide scale. How governments of the world react to the various claims and complaints they facilitate does actually now translate to the realm of international commitments to uphold universally agreed upon principles for human rights. Violations of these commitments can no longer be covered by the cloak of national sovereignty, or even indeed by the suppression of free press. The instant, asymmetrical nature of digital communication networks increasingly lends to the subversion of attempts of human rights transgressors to hide their deeds. Meanwhile, what remains is again the implementation and application of the conclusions that are drawn from having seen or learned what images and information ICTs can convey. Certainly, as long as NGOs and their civil society counterparts can continue to be an integral part of strengthening a bottom-up approach to governance, ICTs will continue to be vitally important tools for democratization and the formation of the infrastructure and content of the 'information society'. And despite the fact that the enforceability of UN-sanctioned mechanisms may still be limited, it appears increasingly valid that in today's world, the reputations of human rights violators who defy the rule of law and shirk good governance do indeed matter on the world stage.

8 APPENDIX

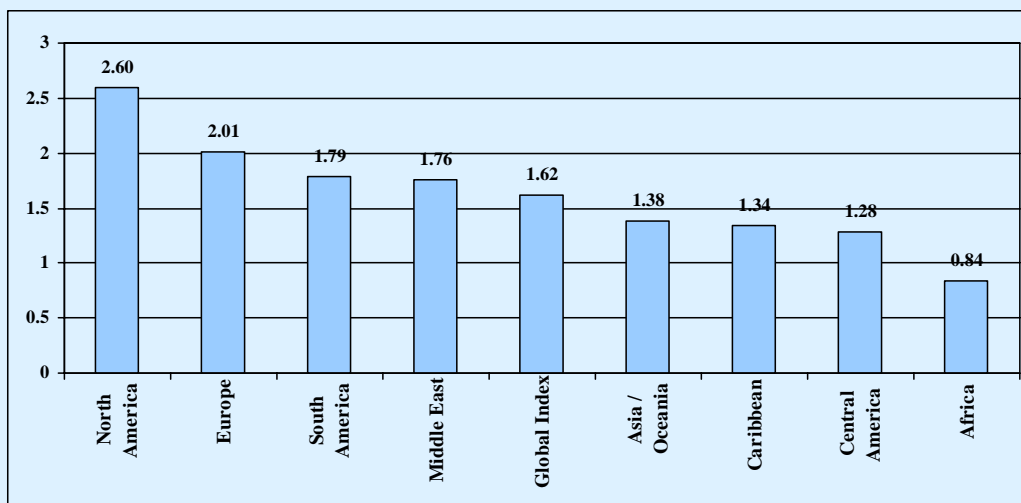
Table 8: The 2001 E-Government Index

Global Index: 1.62

High E-gov Capacity 2.00 - 3.25		Medium E-gov Capacity 1.60 - 1.99		Minimal E-gov Capacity 1.00 - 1.59		Deficient E-gov Capacity Below 1.00	
USA	3.11	Poland	1.96	Armenia	1.59	Cameroon	0.99
Australia	2.60	Venezuela	1.92	Brunei	1.59	Cent African Rep.	0.98
New Zealand	2.59	Russian Fed.	1.89	South Africa	1.56	Ghana	0.98
Singapore	2.58	Colombia	1.88	Paraguay	1.50	Nepal	0.94
Norway	2.55	Latvia	1.88	Cuba	1.49	Thailand	0.94
Canada	2.52	Saudi Arabia	1.86	Philippines	1.44	Congo	0.94
UK	2.52	Turkey	1.83	Costa Rica	1.42	Maldives	0.93
Netherlands	2.51	Qatar	1.81	Panama	1.38	Sri Lanka	0.92
Denmark	2.47	Lithuania	1.81	Nicaragua	1.35	Mauritania	0.91
Germany	2.46	Ukraine	1.80	Djibouti	1.35	Bangladesh	0.90
Sweden	2.45	Bahamas	1.79	Dominican Rep.	1.34	Kenya	0.90
Belgium	2.39	Hungary	1.79	Trinidad & Tobago	1.34	Laos	0.88
Finland	2.33	Greece	1.77	Indonesia	1.34	Angola	0.85
France	2.33	Jordan	1.75	Jamaica	1.31	Haiti	0.84
Rep. of Korea	2.30	Bolivia	1.73	Iran	1.31	Mauritius	0.84
Spain	2.30	Egypt	1.73	Azerbaijan	1.30	Tanzania	0.83
Israel	2.26	Slovakia	1.71	India	1.29	Senegal	0.80
Brazil	2.24	Slovenia	1.66	Kazakhstan	1.28	Madagascar	0.79
Italy	2.21	Mongolia	1.64	Belize	1.26	Zimbabwe	0.76
Luxembourg	2.20	Oman	1.64	Barbados	1.25	Eritrea	0.75
Unif. Arab Emk.	2.17	Ecuador	1.63	Guyana	1.22	Zambia	0.75
Mexico	2.16	Suriname	1.63	Honduras	1.20	Mozambique	0.71
Ireland	2.16	Malaysia	1.63	El Salvador	1.19	Sierra Leone	0.68
Portugal	2.15	Romania	1.63	Guatemala	1.17	Cambodia	0.67
Austria	2.14	Belarus	1.62	Gabon	1.17	Comoros	0.65
Kuwait	2.12	Peru	1.60	Turkmenistan	1.15	Guinea	0.65
Japan	2.12			Uzbekistan	1.10	Namibia	0.65
Malta	2.11			Vietnam	1.10	Togo	0.65
Iceland	2.10			Samoa (Western)	1.09	Gambia	0.64
Czech Republic	2.09			Cote d'Ivoire	1.05	Malawi	0.64
Argentina	2.09			China	1.04	Mali	0.62
Estonia	2.05			Pakistan	1.04	Ethiopia	0.57
Bahrain	2.04			Nigeria	1.02	Chad	0.55
Uruguay	2.03			Kyrgyzstan	1.01	Niger	0.53
Chile	2.03			Botswana	1.01	Uganda	0.46
Lebanon	2.00			Tajikistan	1.00		

Source: UNDEPA

Table 9: E-Government Index by Geographical Region



Source: UNDPEPA

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- ¹¹⁵ Helge Ronning, *Media and Democracy: Theories and Principles with Reference to the African Context* (Harare: Sapes Books, 1994), 16.
- ¹¹⁶ Cynthia J. Alexander and Leslie A. Pal, *Digital Democracy – Policy and Politics in the Wired World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 95.
- ¹¹⁷ In the 1960's Intel founder Gordon Moore predicted that, for the foreseeable future, chip density, and hence computing power, would double every eighteen months while costs would remain constant. Every eighteen months, you can get twice as much power for the same cost.
- ¹¹⁸ Metcalfe's Law states that the usefulness, or utility, of a network equals the square of the number of users. In other words, the power of a network increases exponentially by the number of computers connected to it. Therefore, every computer added to the network both uses it as a resource and adds as a resource in a spiral of increasing value. Robert Metcalfe founded 3Com Corporation and designed the Ethernet protocol for computer networks.
- ¹¹⁹ Cynthia J. Alexander and Leslie A. Pal, *Digital Democracy – Policy and Politics in the Wired World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 77.