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Political expression is a tremendously important institution in government, as it allows the citizens to both be informed and express their beliefs, as well as greatly affecting political actors. However, in authoritarian regimes, political expression is often limited, as dictators attempt to limit opposition as much as possible. Typically, this is done through traditional media forms—television, radio, newspaper, etc.—being controlled by the government, propagating state rhetoric. However, new social media creates issues for rulers as to how to control political communication, as their function serves a much different role than prior media forms. Social networks allow for citizens to communicate directly with each other rather than through news professionals; thus authoritarian leaders must decide how to limit oppositional networking. However, strict limitation on new media may have adverse consequences for these authoritarian leaders, such as online activism. Cyberprotest is one of the most powerful new media forces, as it allows for greater connectivity amongst suppressed citizens. Political expression through social has caused many authoritarian leaders to restrict uses of this new media in hopes of preserving power. Despite this, online activism continues to be higher in countries with greater limitations on new media.

The use of scholarly work provided the ideas and evidence to postulate these abstract and empirical theories on political communication. There are varying theories on the relationship between censorship and cyberprotest. Some argue that netizens (Internet using citizens) use new media for this as outlets for oppositional speech when it is otherwise banned (Shirky). It is also seen that online activism is a result of citizens' self-organization, which is one of the most important compoents of the Internet. As such,

when the traditional media is restricted, citizens see a greater use for the Internet for such self-organization (Fuchs). However, others believe that there is little correlation between the two variables, as social media has little impact on revolutions since it reduced the motivations of protestors and social connectivity does not necessarily always yield functional activism (Gladwell). Despite this, empirical evidence from Reporters Without Borders, Freedom House, and the Web Index provides important data sets that support a connection between government restrictions on media and online activism. As such, it can be seen that there is both theoretical and empirical backing of the concepts relating authoritarian censorship and cyberprotest.

Censorship and online activism are connected through a causal relationship in that limiting the oppositional voice does not limit opposition, but diffuses it through different medium channels. Misinformation and disinformation are core values of authoritarianism, much of which is instituted through media censorship. By the same respect, authoritarian governments see the need to limit the use of social media, as it represents a growing threat to the power of the state. The issue for an authoritarian leader with social media is not just the ability of one person to express their opposition; it is that connectivity of networked people represents a threat to all hierarchical institutions (Shirky). Although relatively new, social media is rapidly becoming one of the most important political tools for its expressive capabilities. By connecting people all across a nation, and even throughout international borders, social media presents a new platform that dictatorial rulers need to attempt to limit. Authoritarian leaders are forced to impose their will over expression both through the use of "legal censorship and extralegal intimidation [that] tend to induce self-censorship (Schedler). The result of tremendous

rise of social media in recent decades has been a rampant increase in censorship as a response from authoritarian rulers. However, the censorship of social media and the Internet creates great activism through the use of cyberprotests, which are "the structural coupling and mutual production of self-organization processes of the Internet and self-organization processes of the protest system of society" (Fuchs). As authoritarian governments seek to limit the political expression through social media, they can create more instances of cyberprotest against this restriction. However, in countries were censorship is less severe cyberprotest is less prominent, as self-censorship causes citizens to be less willing to challenge the authority which has granted them minimal freedoms. Further, it can be postulated that citizens of authoritarian nations with more relative freedom have more, different outlets to voice opposition, and thus have less need for new media to serve as important a political force. Therefore, it can be seen that censorship of social media is a casual variable in relation to cyberprotest and Internet activism.

Countries that had higher instances of censorship were recognized to have greater values of impact and empowerment. Reporters Without Borders' Freedom of the Press rankings quantify censorship of expression across countries, while the Web Index provides a data set of "Political Impact" and "Impact and Empowerment" of the Internet in various nations. "Political Impact" is the rating of how citizens shape the political landscape using the Internet, and "Impact and Empowerment" shows the magnitude of such activity of citizens through new media (Web Index). Using these resources, authoritarian nations could be grouped into respective groups of "High Censorship," "Low Censorship," "High Political Impact," and "Low Political Impact." These categorizations must be taken within context, as the figures used were only authoritarian

nations, therefore countries determined to have "low" censorship is a relative term to other authoritarian nations, not to be confused with free speech exhibited in democratic nations. From this empirical data, a moderate correlation can be drawn between countries that have high ratings in both categories. China serves as an exemplar of these nations, as it was among the highest ranking in both categories. Reporter's Without Borders ranked China 173 out of 179 of countries studied in freedom of Internet expression, putting it in the lowest 5% (thus the highest 5% of censorship) (Reporters Without Borders). Further while the Web Index scored "Political Impact" in China as a 31.2 out of 100, which is quite high amongst the surveyed authoritarian nations (Web Index). This is reflective of case studies of Internet use in China and the relationship between government censorship and consequential protest from netizens. With growing concerns about the potential weakening of central authority, the Chinese government instituted "keyword filtering, site blocking, and other means of watching and controlling what people do online" (Yang). It can be seen that in wanting to preserve its authority, the Chinese government increased censorship over expression and information. This represents the typical causal response from authoritarian leaders to growing concerns about social media and its relation to dictatorial power. However, as political control of the Internet from the government has become more sophisticated, so have forms of resistance to it. Technically savvy Chinese netizens have found ways to overcome these restrictions from the government, such as the use of secret chatrooms and embedding Chinese language in computer coding (Yang). A correlation can be drawn between high censorship and high social media political impact in other countries, such as Bahrain, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Vietnam (Web Index, Reporters Without Borders). The evidence provided confirms a moderate

empirical correlation between censorship in authoritarian nations and cyberprotest in these countries.

Whereas countries that were high in Internet censorship saw high rankings in online activism, it can also be concluded that there is an empirical connection between countries with low rankings in each category. When the censorship in countries was lower, the amount of online activism was lower as well. Saudi Arabia illustrates this connection between low censorship and lower rankings of online activism. Saudi Arabia, amongst authoritarian countries, has relatively low censorship, as it amongst the highest of the Reporters Without Borders rankings amongst authoritarian countries (authoritarian countries as defined by the Freedom House rankings). Important defining factors in the lesser censorship of Saudi Arabia are in its allowance of "Major video-sharing, social networking, and micro-blogging sites like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter [that] are freely available, as are international blog-hosting services" (Freedom House). This represents the greater Internet freedom that is experienced in such low censorship countries as Saudi Arabia, as these connectivity sites are most often banned in authoritarian nations with higher censorship (Freedom House). As such, it should be expected that Saudi Arabia received low scores in both of the online activism categories. The nation scored only a 5.8 out of 100 on "Political Impact," which was the sixth-lowest score of all countries in that category, placing it in the bottom 7% (Web Index). The Web Index also gave Saudi Arabia a low score in "Impact and Empowerment," registering only an 11.1 and placing it in the bottom 10 countries (Web Index). Online activism in Saudi Arabia is not as prominent since censorship restrictions are not as tight, relative to other authoritarian countries. This can be attributed to the fact that "self censorship is

exercised mainly to avoid crossing red lines, thus it is possible to enjoy a modicum of freedom of expression online as long as the red lines are not crossed" (Freedom House). Countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Ethiopia reflect this relationship between censorship and online activism as well, as they all placed in the lower percentiles of both Internet restriction and impact categories (Web Index, Reporters Without Borders). This reveals the correlation between the two variables, and that as censorship decreases, as does the impact of online activism.

While there is a significant connection in the empirical evidence that suggests a connection between heightened censorship and greater online activism, not all countries reflect this. The United Arab Emirates has a high score in both "Political Impact" and "Impact and Empowerment," but it has one of the lowest censorship ratings of authoritarian countries, and is on the fringe of ranking with flawed democracies (Web Index, Reporters Without Borders). Still, there is enough evidence supporting this connection to assert that there is an empirical connection that correlates with the abstract theories. It can be inferred that in other authoritarian regimes, the attempts to limit the access to political communication by the government only made these efforts stronger; such was the case in China. The netizens in China represent a growing faction of citizens in authoritarian nations who are fighting dictatorial power through their refusal to have their means of communication shut down. Conversely, Saudi Arabian' use self-censorship them to enjoy less government-imposed restrictions, similar to other nations lower activism with less restriction. Censorship of new media in hopes of retaining hegemony by authoritarian leaders can be seen to in fact increase online activism and its impact on the political landscape of a nation.

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