



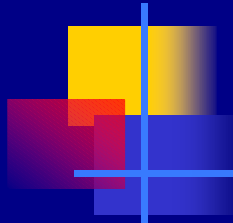
Opening up Authoritarian States Using ICT

Values Opportunities and Threats

**Lessons from the 2001 International IDEA
Democracy Forum**

By Milana Homsí
milana.homsí@sympatico.ca

November 6, 2001



> Outline

- Stockholm Synopsis
- Topic Overview
- Case Studies
- Workshop Conclusions
- Discussion Points



>Contributors

Premesh Chandran, Malaysiakini.com (Malaysia)

Zaw Oo, Burma Fund (U.S.)

Deyan Kiuranov, Centre for Liberal Strategies (Bulgaria)

Caroline Straathof, Sohu.com (China)

Alex Yong-Chuan Liu, RM Institute (U.S)

Srdjan Boguslavljevic, Strategic Marketing and Media
Research Institute (Serbia)

Sakuntala Kadirgamar-Rajasingham, International
IDEA



> Stockholm Objectives

- Understand the environment, obstacles and challenges to using ICT to open up authoritarian states.
- Provide specific recommendations of how ICT can be used to provide opportunities for democracy building



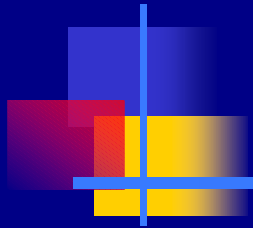
> Authoritarian States and ICT use – Topic Overview

- Fundamental Issues
- Who are we talking about?
- Opportunities
- Threats



> Fundamental Issues

- What is the impact of ICT?
- Can ICT help in opening up closed regimes?
If so how?
- Or do they enforce the legitimization and control of closed regimes?



ICT are tools to be used in
conjunction with other
initiatives



> Who are we talking about?

- Regimes where there are significant controls and regulations on ICT use
- Distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian states



>> Authoritarian Regimes

- Increase ICT use for economic purposes
- Control ICT use for political purposes
- ICT use most effective from inside a state
- Ex. Malaysia, China



>> Totalitarian States

- Limit and control ICT use
- No regard for economic benefit
- Effective for exile groups
- Ex. Burma, North Korea, Cuba



> What are the Opportunities?

- ICT as a force of democratization
- A tool for strengthening human rights and empowering activists



>> Opportunities...

1. Allows:

- Freedom of expression
- Dissemination of democratic ideas (political education)

2. Networking and mobilization (communication)



>> Opportunities...

3. Expands transparency and accountability
4. Keeps international community aware of events



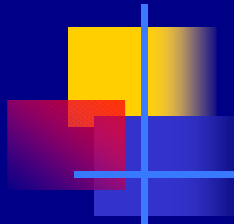
> > Opportunities...

5. Helps capacity building
6. A cost effective tool for democracy initiatives



> Threats

- ICT presents threats as much as opportunities



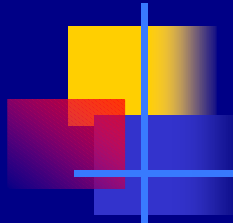
>> Threats

1. Restriction of access

- No/limited internet service providers
- difficulty getting accounts
- too expensive

2. Monitoring and suppressing

- filtering software, firewalls
- policies and regulations



>> Threats...

3. Use ICT for its own purposes

- Propaganda
- Reinforce nationalist sentiments

4. ICT will not make a big difference in democratization

- Self-censorship



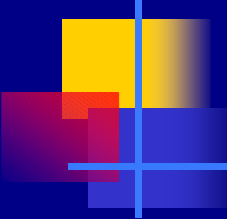
>> Threats...

5. ICT will promote an intellectual hierarchy



> Case Study - China

- 17 million Internet users (late 2000) out of 1.3 billion
- Heavy investment in ICT infrastructure and related businesses
- Presents a dilemma for Chinese government:
 - Recognize the potential for economic-purposes
 - Recognize its aid to democracy-building



>> China – threats

- Anti-democratic government policies:
 - Bans dissemination of 'political' information
 - Media websites are tightly controlled
 - Special Internet policing forces
 - Onus on ISPs and Internet Cafes to block access and monitor usage
 - Strong punishments



>> China- opportunities

Strengthen and mobilize movements:

- Internal movements
 - Falun-Gong
- Outside advocacy
 - Information Centre for Human Rights and Democracy



>> China- opportunities

- Has been used to increase transparency of regime
 - anti-corruption



>> China - summary

- China shows that authoritarian regimes can effectively counter challenges of ICT



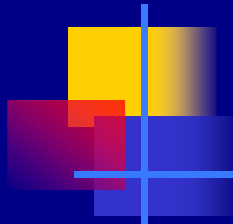
> Case Study - Burma

- Repressive laws against ICT use and flow of information
- Very low level of ICT diffusion



>> Burma - opportunities

- Promote international awareness
 - Media alertness
 - www.burmanet.org
- Building coalition within Burmese exiles
- Organize global campaigns
- Accountability of exiled democratic leadership



> Conclusion

- ICT use presents both threats and opportunities to authoritarian and totalitarian regimes



> Workshop Conclusions

- ICT offers the ability to challenge a regime's authority
- Private sector can help democracy initiatives
- Inexpensive technology can aid in diffusing democracy initiatives to all parts of society
- International foundations and organizations can help grassroots movements to learn and study from each other by offering the ICT platform and tools



>> Workshop Conclusions

- Authoritarian and totalitarian regimes share ICT best practises with each other
- ICT are only a tool!
- ICT provides opportunities for misinformation



>> Further...

- Understanding of the technology behind the Internet is vital
- 700 million out of 5 billion- 14%



> Discussion Points

- How can **private sector** and **government led** initiatives in authoritarian states be mobilized to advance democracy movements?
- How can ICT use help democracy activists carry out **cost-effective operations** against repressive regimes?
- In which way has the ICT-revolution had an impact **on the operations of authoritarian states?**



Background material

- ***Information Revolution and World Politics Program***

www.ceip.org/files/projects/irwp/irwp_home.asp

- ***Centre for Democracy and Technology***

www.cdt.org

- ***Enemies of the Internet***

www.rsf.fr/uk/homennemis.html

- ***MediaChannel***

www.mediachannel.org/