“Socialism Networking:”

The Potential for Social Media Revolution in China and Venezuela

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .......................... 2

Abstract .................................... 4

Introduction ................................. 5

Background Concepts and Literature Review .......... 10

Case Study 1: China .......................... 28

Case Study 2: Venezuela ........................ 53

Conclusion ................................... 69

References .................................. 75
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Abstract

This thesis examines the driving factors for social media-driven revolt in countries around the world. Through in depth case studies of the Chinese and Venezuelan Internet governance systems, the research presented suggests that growing online connectivity does not necessarily lead to democratic revolution. Furthermore, the conclusions drawn from case study research outline several important conditions that must be met within a country in order to successfully engage in social networking revolution in the present day. Based on these conclusions and conditions, this thesis finally shows that the democratizing nature of social media-driven rebellions during the Arab Spring is inconclusive, thus prompting an important avenue for further research.
Introduction

Today’s world is one that is extremely interconnected. As a result, information and communications technologies (ICT) have emerged as a key development in this modern age of hyper-connectivity. The speed in which new forms of instant communication have come about is striking. Ten years ago, social media was unheard of; now it is enhancing social, political, and entrepreneurial discourse around the globe.

This thesis will explore the challenges facing different developing nations with regards to importing ICT and technology-related knowledge for economic development and political stability. My research has shown that, contrary to popular Western (cyber-utopian) belief, liberal democracy is not the only regime type for effective Internet governance. Indeed, the adoption of political norms within a state looking to enhance the benefits of ICT is more dependent on the following factors:

- (Digital) Infrastructure
- Digital Education / ICT Savvy
- Large and Active Youth
- Economic hardship
- A large informal economic sector

The Cyber-Rebellion Model, circa 2012

Based on this current debate, there are a number of central characteristics of successful cyber-related rebellion: The first, and foremost quality of a successful cyber-
rebellion is a hatred of the current leadership to the point that regime change is an optimal option in the eyes of the citizenry. Although this is generated offline, I have concluded that social media can encourage and influence this if several conditions are met:

- Social media can bring hatred into the realm of revolution through exposure and organization. With the proper digital infrastructure (this includes access to Internet and the establishment of well-known and trusted blogs, groups, etc.), posts made via social media sites can support and even create a narrative of regime incompetence in protecting their citizens. Here, I cite the example of Neda, a young woman fighting for justice in the 2009 Iranian elections whose gruesome death at the hands of the authorities was vividly displayed and broadcasted via YouTube.¹

- As previously mentioned, digital infrastructure is vital to any form of cyber-advocacy, particularly when that advocacy involves the coordinated and sustained fight of a political revolution. Therefore, Internet access is key to cyber-rebellion in several forms. For one, the physical equipment needed to go online must be available, whether it be a PC or a smartphone. In addition, the Internet policy regime must be such that cyber-rebels can create or find cyber meeting space to bond, discuss, and coordinate. Here, cyber-rebels, even in a tightly-controlled country like China, have a potential advantage, because the physical equipment needed to connect is necessary for development and desired by every government. Software to censor, on the other hand, is a much more complex undertaking. As a result, if the physical infrastructure is present and available for citizens, discontent

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¹ *A Death in Tehran*, Dir. Monica Garnsey, FRONTLINE (PBS), 17 November 2009.
online is possible, as are the development benefits for the government and country in question.

• A sufficient level of technological skills and higher education must be attained in order to properly exploit Web 2.0 realities in an offline political context. Without tech-savvy activists, there is no way dissidents can effectively communicate with each other, and without people with quick critical thinking and leadership skills, movements fail to gain the kind of direction they need to sustain themselves. Additionally, education gives people the intellectual background to not repeat historically-made mistakes as well as provide movements on strong ideological footing.

• Demographics will matter even more than they do now for influencing social rebellion—this includes cyber-rebellion. This is to say that a young population is more likely to engage in cyber-fueled rebellion than are countries with older populations. This is due to two factors: the tendency of older people to pursue peaceful lives and the large generational gap created in the current Information Technology boom. As such, younger people are more likely to be more comfortable with social media and will use it more to organize because so many more of them hang out in virtual spaces.

• Economic factors will continue to play a catalyst role in cyber-rebellion, as they do with traditional rebellions. The clearest indicator of this reality is unemployment, particularly when it is high and/or a large percentage of the unemployed are young.
• A large informal sector can aid a country in its quest for rebellion. Offline, this is due to the large amount of de facto autonomy given to citizens as a result of the government’s failure to assert authority. Online, this can translate into more vociferous criticisms of the government, as more people sense the government’s inefficacy. Social media organization can make a difference in these sorts of situations by organizing and legitimizing groups loosely tied in the offline informal sector for the purposes of achieving political goals.

Summary of Application to Case Countries

According to the conditions that need to be fulfilled for successful cyber-revolt (youthful population, high access to ICT, high levels of education, persistent informality in the state, and most importantly an issue that cuts across social divisions to unite people on- and off-line), both China and Venezuela, unlike Egypt, do not appear to be hotbeds of social media resistance, at least to the point of instituting regime change. However, a more on-the-ground study of these two case countries shows that each has different characteristics that disprove the position that social media is a major global driver of democratic revolution.

Here, I examined two nations as a focus of analysis: the People’s Republic of China and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. I have chosen these countries for two reasons. First, both China and Venezuela appear to have regimes that could be considered authoritarian/undemocratic by liberal Western standards; thus, from the Western point of view, these countries’ leaders could be the next target of revolutionary Arab Spring-type uprisings. Secondly, each country has shown (through its currently
successful manipulation of ICT within their borders) that there is more than one regime type that can effectively control ICT and reap the economic benefits of the new technology within the domestic market. I thus hypothesize that China engages in notoriously strict censorship while Venezuela uses theoretically-open media to saturate cyberspace with pro-government messages.

Through these case studies, and the in-depth analyses of key areas influencing Internet governance in contemporary states (cyber-political theory, country-specific issues, and current global factors), I hoped to show that the rise of ICT, particularly social media technologies, has and will inevitably democratize the world. While much of international studies in this area have focused on recent supposedly social media-driven events in the Middle East, I sought to display that phenomena like the Arab Spring are not solely tied to the emergence of lightening-fast and highly inexpensive media technologies. Rather, through my individual focus on two countries in the international system (China and Venezuela), I wanted how differences in history, culture, language, and ideology are interacting with social media in ways that may strengthen all types of present-day regimes, particularly those that are dictatorial or authoritarian in nature.

Although current academic research at first glance supported this hypothesis, country-specific data proved that a more complex situation was present in the Internet governance of both China and Venezuela. Here, the data showed that ICT, while a growing presence in the lives of people around the world, was nonetheless unable to be used by all states (especially Venezuela) nor politically-motivated and digitally-connected citizen organizations (potential cyber-rebels) to effectively control domestic new media.
Background Concepts and Literature Review

The hypothesis elaborated above and the cyber-rebellion model upon which it will be tested are the result of research in several contemporary fields, above all the study of modern cyber-politics and social media-driven conflict.

The Arab Spring: A Facebook-Fueled Revolt?

Global events in recent years, particularly the Arab Spring, have collided with rapid developments in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) fed by an equally dizzying growth in globalization and worldwide connectivity. In the political sphere, this phenomenon has manifested itself through the use of social media and other Web 2.0 tools, which are becoming increasingly available around the world.² The thesis seeks to observe this development by combining several different disciplines to create an outline for effective global cyber-activism to be tested in the Asian and Andean regions (specifically China and Venezuela).

In this way, the recent social-media generated events of political opposition in the Middle East must not be ignored within this thesis, for they constitute much of the basis of social media political thought from which I make my conclusions about cyber-rebellion in China and Venezuela. That being said, when looking at the Middle East, I am seeking to broaden the scope for analysis. The Arab Spring, in my view, is just one half of the online political reality. For a clearer picture of what is going on in today’s Middle East, and more importantly, how young people are using social media technologies to foment meaningful political opposition against repressive regimes, I think

it is essential to look at not only the countries where opposition was successful in regime change but also attempt to explain why movements such as the Green Revolution in Iran failed. For these reasons, my analysis of social media theory as a whole will center on the Middle East and follow the following processes:

First, it is necessary to describe and outline what happened in the Middle East vis-à-vis Internet-fueled rebellion. Scholars such as Philip Howard highlight the usefulness of social media in recent political activities. However, in two key examples (Egypt and Iran), offline factors appear to be equally if not more important in political protest outcomes:

In Egypt, the 2011 uprising was a success in that it drove President Hosni Mubarak from power. David Faris, in his dissertation *Revolutions without Revolutionaries? Social Media Networks and Regime Response in Egypt,* provides evidence of pre-existing factors that aided the later social-media perpetuated revolution; they include the lowering of communication/transactions costs thanks to social media. well-established institutions off-line that provide a foundation for protest, and a lack of strong state presence in broadcasting and media regulation/censorship. Additionally,

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6 Ibid, 6.
7 Ibid, 7, 17.
issues discussed via social media in Egypt were relevant to many Egyptians, thus constituting a strong base of support.\(^8\)

In Iran, the result in 2009 was not as dramatic or decisive, as President Ahmedinejad remained in power. There, as described by Evgeny Morozov in his *The Net Delusion*, the protests were not as universal. Fueled by Twitter, and supported by the West, the protests represented a miscalculation on the part of the democratic world as to the liberating influence of social media by itself. It is unknown how representative the Iranian activists were of the entire Iranian population at the time.\(^9\)

**Global Trends**

*Structure of the Global Economy*

Before heading into specific details about the Venezuelan Internet policy regime, several key principles of the contemporary global economy help characterize the uniqueness of the Venezuelan and Chinese system of digital political control. These principles are also important to outline so that the case studies of China and Venezuela can be introduced into broader regional and global trends that have emerged since the advent of affordable and user-friendly information and communication technologies. China demonstrates the political dilemmas that can accompany economic development, while Venezuela provides an important angle for a future projection on the fate of the globally integrated economy in the global South.\(^{10}\)

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8 Ibid, 99.
In this way, Internet policy regimes like China’s and Venezuela’s lend themselves well to an examination of a country’s attitudes towards development. As such, the basic structural components of the global economy that are relevant to ICT regimes are as follows.

- Knowledge as a currency required for entrance into global trading networks.

- Blurring yet still significant lines drawn between central and frontier economies, particularly in the trade and international relations arenas.

- Domestic Governance and Policy in light of the new realities described in the two points directly above.\(^{11}\)

**Knowledge**

One of the most significant transitions seen in global economy today has been the greater importance that has been placed on knowledge as a good and a skill to be used within the international marketplace. Indeed, when applied to the national/domestic unit of analysis it is clear that the development of knowledge clusters can provide countries with innovation and growth.\(^{12}\) In addition, the proliferation of a wide range of powerful, high-speed technologies in recent decades has changed the way society views work, productivity, and human contributions to economics and trade. Simply put, the rise of advanced manufacturing techniques and large, globally integrated pools of cheap labor threaten the jobs of many blue-collar workers in industrialized and under-populated

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nations. As a result, structural unemployment has potentially emerged, particularly following the 2008 Western financial crisis.

Given such a mix of potent factors, the increasingly interconnected and global economy of both today and tomorrow will be a knowledge-based economy. Due to the increasing importance of knowledge skills for people in the global economy, international economics has experienced a shift away from just production and capital towards knowledge as a good for trade and export. For the world, this means that education and knowledge networks are essential for domestic development.

Today, this translates into providing ICT access to both educate and inform citizens. In addition, this technology not only allows a country to leapfrog through tapping into global information networks but also assists a country in increasing per capita productivity gains, decreasing brain drain, and encouraging innovation and investment. Therefore, the confluence of knowledge and ICT as major drivers of the global economy can, if properly addressed through policy, develop the underdeveloped nations of the world.

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15 Dicken, 113-115.
16 Ibid, 70-99.
Significance of Emerging and Frontier Markets

Figure 1: Emerging Markets


The above image (Figure 1) is a graphic depiction of the realities presented in the preceding introductory section. The highlighted countries with flags shown represent emerging market economies that have benefited from the increasing globalization of commerce. Figure 1 also clearly shows the implications and importance of bringing the rest of the world into contemporary political and economic analysis, for the map also shows the un-shaded nations of Eastern Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa that make up the frontier economies just outside globalization’s potential prosperity. China is emblematic of this phenomenon and is thus directly represented in this diagram.
For this more precise case study analysis, this figure also depicts the choice of Venezuela as internationally relevant quite well. On the map, this is expressed in the juxtaposition between Venezuela’s un-shaded status and the inclusion of border countries like Brazil and Colombia as emerging markets. This defines much of Venezuela’s current situation as well as its vital connection to much of the world. On the one hand, it has a wealth of natural resources and proximity to major markets from which to benefit from trade. On the other hand, it is crippled economically by many problems that define undeveloped nations on the frontier, particularly corruption. Thus, as will be elaborated in succeeding sections of this paper, Venezuela, its government, and its ICT policy deal with factors associated with both emerging markets and countries currently outside globalization’s reach.

*The Role of Government in National ICT Structure*

The background concepts presented in this paper have been established for the purposes of elaborating the role of governance within an interconnected, ICT-driven international political system. In this way, government’s place within globalization is clearly seen; it plays a commanding role in a country’s economic health and societal well-being. Based on the aforementioned model, this entails tapping into global knowledge networks so as to gain valuable expertise and innovative skills from which to promote economic development.

From a political point of view, it is in a ruling government’s interest to pursue global economic integration. However, as the case of Venezuela clearly demonstrates,

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17 “Background Note: Venezuela,” US Department of State, Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, 2 September 2011, [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35766.htm) (6 April 2012).
this priority is not as clear-cut as diagrams and tables may indicate. As a general rule of international policy, domestic politics usually supersede those on the international level. In this discussion, this principle is significant because the time-shrinking nature of ICT innovations and dissemination around the world have made the short term, domestic priorities of states increasingly essential for governments to address. At the same time, governments must promote themselves as effective, popular, and cutting-edge leaders in order to remain in power; this is the principle problem facing the Chinese Communist authorities in Beijing today. For developing countries like Venezuela, this shows that in order to maintain the legitimacy needed to stay in power, regime leaders are forced to make difficult decisions that frequently entail acquiescing to the seemingly myopic demands of the domestic constituency. As a result, the flows indicated in the traditional ICT government model are not universally applicable to every country.

Current cyber-protesters, though faced with repression are well aware of the importance of proper messaging in their own right. For microbloggers and artists who advocate online, language is essential not only to avoid the censors but also to create an identity and a following.

In addition, a few other principles seen in cyber-rebellions stand out. As noted by authors such as Bruce Feiler in his *Generation Freedom*, the combination of a baby boom followed by education and unemployment can breed instability. Here, a metaphor comparing cyber-rebellion to starting a car can be useful. Social media is the key that can unlock the car and start the engine, but only if youth (the driver) knows how to use it (is educated) and unemployment is present as a spark plug.

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Therefore, the power of social media lies in the following: it is a global tool that transcends culture and can contribute to activism through “weak-tie” connections that loosely (not immediately or strongly) bring people closer together.\textsuperscript{20} The proliferation of social media technologies have allowed for easier, more convenient, and more organized use of and access to ICT that gives more people larger rolodexes with which a network of social and professional connections can be readily used and maintained. New media, particularly in the form of Web 2.0 technologies that include participatory social networking tools, has thus changed human thought, identity, and action.\textsuperscript{21,22,23}

Through this broad theoretical discussion, online-evident principles appear. In general, there is a trend of likeminded members interacting with each other in social networks. Indeed, it seems, the saying “birds of a feather flock together”\textsuperscript{24} is an axiom of sorts for online social networking. In this thesis, this concept will be encompassed by the more technical term “homophily.”

David Ingenito describes a “cyber-balkanization” phenomenon in which identities have gained even greater importance than before. Even though the Internet has broken down many geographic barriers; in his research, Ingenito found that social media has fragmented humanity even though ICT breaks down geographical barriers.\textsuperscript{25} Additional

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 119.

\textsuperscript{25} David Ingenito, “Democracy in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century: Social Media and Politics- Global Village or Cyber-Balkans?” Master’s Thesis, University of Southern California, May 2010, pp. 5-6.
supporting research leads me to believe that this is a truism of online community involvement. The Internet, unlike other media (such as television), is a user-generated and user-defined experience. Given this, scholars like McPherson et al. provide further evidence of humans’ propensity to encircle themselves in selective communal bubbles. Here, 2 subcategories of this “homophily” relevant to all social networks, including those online, are outlined:

- That gender segregation is lower for young educated people.  
- That homophily can be related to personal values.

I believe this overview of homophily to be of particular importance to online political interactions. As mentioned above, rebel groups like terrorists use their small yet tight-knit unity to their advantage. In addition, homophily empowers the extremist and the loner as a result of increased and instant connection on social media platforms. As a result, homophily in social media networks, especially in the area of political opposition, is simply the 21st century extension of a human emotional reality: people are drawn to and often befriend others with tastes, interests, and personalities much like their own. Therefore, social media is not necessarily creating this phenomenon, but is rather bringing more like-minded people together and giving them the ability to communicate with greater speed. Thus, homophilic groups, if they have a clear purpose and strategy, can theoretically execute with greater reach and precision because it has become much easier to make sure all members are on the same page.

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26 McPherson, 423.
27 Ibid, 419.
These social Internet interactions, when applied to the political sphere, lead to the formation of netizenship, a concept described by several authors such as Stephen Coleman (The Network Empowered Citizen), Johnny Ryan (A History of the Internet and the Digital Future), and Guiliana Cucinelli (Digital Youth Praxis and Social Justice). Here, the central political question posed to society in the digital era is not “Will social media create democracy?” Instead, the degree to which people offline have concrete passions for social change and the ability to organize passion into action now plays a much larger role. In this way, social media only comes into the forefront after that grassroots groundwork has been laid. Without such preparation, social movements will fall apart, just like they would in previous eras; in the hyper-connected, globalized world, the difference that influences political opposition and new media is therefore not from the protester perspective but rather from that of the ruling government party forces, which are more quickly able to be alerted to threats to its legitimacy and power over their areas of jurisdiction.

Cyber-Utopianism versus Cyber-Skepticism

It is here where this thesis enters a central academic debate, that of cyber-utopianism versus cyber-skepticism. Cyber-utopians such as Philip Howard (Opening Closed Regimes), Clay Shirky (Here Comes Everybody) and Jody Jensen (Whose Rules? Globalizing Governance and the Great Disruption) feel that the advances in ICT will

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allow more people to interact on a larger/global scale, the result being an increase in
democracy around the world.30

As a result, social media aids the average citizen in becoming empowered enough
to forcefully demand accountability from leaders and institutions alike.31 What happened
in Iran in 2009 was thus both a success for social media growth and an aberration in
terms of the end political result (regime change). For cyber-utopians, therefore, the
events of the 2011 Arab Spring are not very surprising, and we should expect to see more
Egypts and Tunisias in the future. Cyber-skeptics, like Morozov and Charles Chappelle
(Social Media and the Changing Face of Rationalist Dissent in Iran), are opposed to such
an optimistic view of technological tools. They postulate that social media users are
susceptible to conditions such as “slackivism”32 that prevent productive political
participation.33

This idea of “slackivism” is seen on popular social media platforms such as
Facebook. There, many users are affiliated with a multitude of pages through their
single-click expression of interest. However, just because they “like” or “follow” a page
does not necessarily mean that any significant and organized social change will come out
of it. Naturally, according to this school of thought, social media paralyzes activists, and
in some cases even endangers their cause. In addition, governments, often with many

30 Clay Shirky, “The Power of Social Media,” Foreign Affairs, January/February 2011,
http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67038/clay-shirky/the-political-power-of-social-media (13 April
2012).
32 Morozov, 1. This term refers to “slacker activism,” or the false belief among many that participation in
online causes (such as “liking” a Facebook page) will have a tangible offline effect.
33 Charles Andrew Chappelle, “Social Media and the Changing Face of Rationalist Dissent in Iran: Lessons
resources at their disposal, are able to freely access valuable and politically-relevant information about any of their citizen users.

As a result, “repression 2.0” appears to be an easily implemented reality in countries with strongman regimes, because the publicly available and sharing nature of the Internet lends itself all too well to the strengthening of the current government’s intelligence capacity and internal threat assessment. Thus for the cyber-skeptic, external, pre-existing social factors contribute greatly to an online rebellion’s success.

Case Study Countries

The countries of China and Venezuela have been specifically chosen for a number of reasons. Each country has a unique Internet policy regime. Here, the term “Internet policy regime” refers to the use/manipulation of Web 2.0 technologies (social media, today’s Internet, etc.) by the ruling elites. This includes not just the rules and regulations legislated by political powers but also the broadcasting, access, and censorship policies and strategies that are employed by loyalists of those in power.

People’s Republic of China

China, as a nation and civilization, is unique in the world. It is the oldest continuous human culture/civilization and the world’s most populated state. In addition, its long history has perpetuated and ingrained a strong sense of nationalism (sino-centric) in the country. This is reflected throughout Chinese society in an ancient culture that plays a particularly important role in social networking. Commonly known as “guanxi,” (literally meaning, “connections”) this system of social interaction is specific and highly instituted in society. Such a concept is just one of many that makes China unique as a

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case for social study. In today’s world, this is a crucial distinction simply because
China’s rise to global prominence has underscored the importance of understanding Sino-
Western cultural differences. This reality has been brought by liberalizing reforms, yet
the ruling Communist Party also realizes that globalizing influences like open Internet
can create potent political opposition against its rule, thus posing as a major threat to
legitimacy.

This “guanxi” phenomenon influences social networking online in a number of
ways. For one, as pointed out by Yanjie Bian and Soon Ang in their Guanxi Networks
and Job Mobility in China and Singapore, guanxi emphasizes the group over the
individual, which might make it hard for individuals to successfully convert followers
to their cause. In addition, authors Scott Hammond and Lowell Glenn note another
cultural uniqueness of guanxi. They postulate that, unlike in the West (which created
many of these Web 2.0 tools observed in this thesis, including social networking and
other direct user-to-user interaction through media such as blogs and microblogs), weak
ties are mistrusted and therefore outside the social networking system. Jens Damm, in
his The Internet and the Fragmentation of Chinese Society, also notes that predictions
about Chinese behavior in social media are based on traditional media models, which are
now inverted thanks to the participatory nature of the new technologies.

34 Yanjie Bian and Soon Ang, “Guanxi Networks and Job Mobility in China and Singapore,” Social
35 “Weak ties” refer to social connections that do not entail close friendship or professional status
(acquaintances).
Chinese political discourse has, however, become an important function for social networks in China. The most influential and well-documented form of social political opposition discourse has been through microblogs. Here, it is important to note one of the unique consequences that has arisen thanks to the implementation of a strict, dictatorial Internet policy regime in China: the development of a different, “copy-cat,” and purely Chinese online social networking universe. As a result, Twitter, Facebook, and other popular social media technologies are for the most part entirely unavailable to the Chinese netizenry\(^\text{38}\) and are thus not useful as units of analysis. However, Twitter-style microblogging in the form of weibos\(^\text{39}\) is extremely well-known among Chinese Internet users and has been used to effectively mount protests against perceived injustices like the rapid, careless, and corrupt method of building transportation infrastructure, to name just one recent grievance responded to en masse online.\(^\text{40}\)

*Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela*

In Venezuela, the Internet policy regime is much like its offline political counterpart in that it is centered around one man, Hugo Chávez. In his decade and a half in power, Chávez has come to embody the growth of populist politics in the Americas as well as the dictatorial leanings posed by his electorally-mandated popularity and histrionic speeches, to name just two characteristics of the Venezuelan president. These aspects of Chávez’s personality, political style, and foreign policy are described in detail in Nikolas Kozloff’s *Hugo Chávez*. The conclusions drawn from this work fit neatly into


\(^{39}\) This is the Chinese term for microblogs (like Twitter).

literature and research data presented by organizations such as the International Telecommunications Union and the Venezuelan government agency CONATEL, both of whom have produced reports that clearly show the aggressive investment in ICT (Information and Communication Technologies). In his dissertation *IT Policies for Development: Analysis and Recommendations of Free Libre Open Source Software Initiatives of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela*, Edgar Maldonado Rangel says that the government has used investment in open Internet access infrastructure in order to achieve its goal of gaining an additional propaganda tool\(^{41}\) a point reiterated by Monica Rivera (*Latin America Plugged into the Internet*) which outlines several priorities for merging economic development with Internet access, including little/no censorship, conveniently located technology, and efficiently provided low-cost access to ICT.

This policy priority ironically stems from influences from rebel groups allied to the Chávez regime,\(^{42}\) especially the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC). Here, terrorism experts such as Gabriel Weimann and Bruce Hoffman have produced work on cyberterrorism that highlights how small, ideologically driven and unified groups can exert great influence.\(^{43}\) In the digital age, the FARC have, in many ways, defined what it means to be an intense yet intelligent cyber-rebel. Weinmann notes that the FARC has masterfully crafted a website that caters to several groups of potential followers, with different messaging strategies for different languages.\(^{44}\)

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\(^{42}\) Weimann, 76.

\(^{43}\) Ibid, 25, 117.

\(^{44}\) Ibid, 75-81.
Initial Impressions and Comparison of the Two Case Countries (Hypothesis)

Based on this research, I therefore have inferred two realities about social media and politics in Venezuela and China:

**Venezuela**’s Internet policy regime is a blend of many different international influences, from Russia to Iran to the United States. This contributes to its frequently contradicting principles of open access and political control. Venezuela also reflects many of the challenges faced by those countries firmly within the economic realities of lesser-developed countries. Similarly, the Bolivarian Republic presents a model case study into how the resource-concentration of a petrostate serves to further complicate problems that already are daunting to society (in this case, the spread of ICT and open Internet access for all). In short, Chávez and the political elites in the country appear to be restricting access and manipulating the media/social discourse in order to maintain power.

From a political/government perspective, **China** is much more repressive, extreme, and effective in preventing online dissent. China does not neatly fit into the developing country model by virtue of its status as a large, emerging market. It is a BRIC country, commonly associated with Brazil, India, and Russia as strong, large economies converging with the West. Culturally, China also fits a pattern more commonly associated with the rich countries in the global North (as opposed to Venezuela, which follows the model established in the poorer countries in the global South), as its long history of global-power status and technological greatness would indicate. As a consequence, China already has established means (maintain power and
growth) and motive (profits from growth) to strictly control both discourse and Internet access. Such a reality strongly suggests that with the opportunity to regulate both Internet access and political discourse (online), China will logically do so effectively.
Case Study 1: China

Figure 2: Communist China’s Governmental Approach to ICT
Sino-centrism and Growing Hegemony: A Political Background

The above diagram (Fig. 2) is a visual representation of the Chinese Government’s priorities and responses that results in the current Internet policy regime in that country:

Starting at the top row, the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is in control of ultimate policy decisions, which are greatly influenced by diplomatic, economic, and military interests. Since the CCP leadership also acts as the top officials within the Chinese government, they also have the power to fund ICT within China through the unique public-private companies that have emerged during the post-Mao reform era. In this case, this entails the following:

- The CCP is able to control the funding of ICT in China.
- The private sector provides some funding ability but also contributes much of the economic influence that faces the CCP leadership in their decision making.

Given this revolving door of political decision making within ICT policy in China, the “Great Firewall of China” is implemented to block outside threats or influences that may dampen the efficacy of the status quo elite’s power. In this section, I will outline two broad considerations that play the largest role in the formation of such a restrictive policy: Sino-centrism and China’s growing power in the international (economic) arena. Through this focus, I will show that a growing economy and

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46 Ibid, 70-83.
tightening censorship, while improving digital infrastructure in an environment of corruption, does not foster social media-fueled rebellion due to demographic inadequacies.

_Sino-centrism: Tradition, National Pride, and Culture_

Before further discussion into the intricacies of the Chinese Internet policy regime, it is important to outline the cultural perspective and worldview facing the Chinese leadership as they carry their country into the digital age. Given that this thesis is written from a Western perspective, it is all the more important to note how a different culture might perceive, use, and control globally-used technologies like online social media.

For China, this entails starting at the beginning of its existence. China is (proudly) the world’s oldest nation and has the longest continuing civilization. Consequently, Chinese language- from which much of the ancient cultural norms and traditions are articulated- has been passed down for thousands of years. This is significant today, at a time when the Chinese language is changing online. Terms to describe digitally-created phenomena are integrating classical language to preserve an ancient culture and civilization and adapt it to the modern era.

In this way, the intense national pride of the Chinese people is clearly seen in a digital context and contributes to the cyber-politics of that country.\(^{47}\) Here, I intend to explain how the uniqueness of Chinese history, culture, and nationalism collide with the realities of digital social networking to explain the fierce yet non-threatening positions of

netizen postings online. This intriguing juxtaposition is best explained through two concepts particularly important in Chinese culture: face and guanxi (which literally means “connection” or “relationship”).

The concept of saving face in many Asian cultures (particularly Chinese) is very strongly implemented within modern daily social life. This results in a culturally-induced conclusion in which direct criticism of even the most innocuous and constructive kind can be implied as a threatening attack of character. This is strongly seen in cases where respect for elders in society is not taken into account. In cyber-space, face-conscious cultures like that of China continue this tradition within social media, as seen in the “Online Posting Anxiety” phenomenon where users are reticent to post outlandish and/or controversial material online.

Such a term (“Online Posting Anxiety”) refers to the curious state of the Chinese activist blogosphere, in which Chinese netizens are involved but not as active in posting strong messages as their Western counterparts. A number of important critical factors contribute to this unique manifestation of culturally-sensitive online political discourse. For one, the nature of the blog is such that the audience/readership has more political clout than what is written within it. In the context of Chinese culture, Confucian norms dictate that this would entail a delicate reading of the social situation in order to maintain face (in other words, to keep up appearances in a society that values the perception of

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48 Translation provided by author.
49 Hammond, 28.
50 Ibid, 26-27.
Consequently, it is therefore unsurprising that research like Liu’s indicates that Chinese netizens are very thoughtful and careful about what they post online and how they do so, for their cultural perspective emphasizes consideration of possible negative effects. Based on these conclusions alone, it is understandable that strongly integrated national political opposition online is a huge challenge, for cultural norms significantly discourage the iconoclastic risk-taking needed to start and sustain a formidable movement.

As alluded to in the above description of saving face in Chinese culture, social connections and status are major elements of the contemporary Chinese perspective. Here, the principle of guanxi, or the culturally established system of tacit expectations of reciprocity in personal and professional relationships plays a large role in the development of social communities both on- and offline. New social media tools are complicating the principles of guanxi, contributing to the aforementioned “Online Posting Anxiety,” due to four factors:

- According to the Confucian-created guanxi, society is to value the group over the individual. Popular social networking tools like Facebook counter this philosophy, because the personalized user profiles amount to a strong expression of individuality within society, rather than the conformist qualities that make an individual part of the collective.

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52 Ibid, 11-14, 48.
54 Bian, 5.
55 Ibid.
• Guanxi (literally translated as “connections”) are expected to be made gradually.\textsuperscript{56} Social networking sites are built upon “friending” others instantly at the click of a link.

• Guanxi involves making connections through connections, where mutual acquaintances are responsible to set meetings and invite the parties involved.\textsuperscript{57} While social networking sites like LinkedIn have “People You May Know” algorithms that specify possible second- or third-degree connections for a user to pursue, these digital tools eliminate the culturally-important broker in the eyes of the Chinese.

• For the Chinese, a connection with another person is a tacit admission of trust in that person after they have demonstrated they are reliable and respected.\textsuperscript{58} On social media, users often have a large number of officially-listed “friends,” thereby diluting the meaning of friendship and connection-making within those networks.

This multi-part definition of guanxi in China provides additional cultural evidence of a lack of enthusiasm for the mass-generated, unified, and publicly critical political opposition that could be effectively spread via social media tools. As will be discussed in the statistical analysis below, advances in digital education combined with recent efforts to protest corruption\textsuperscript{59} do indeed point towards a more open Chinese Internet, while continued economic growth and aging demographics contribute to a currently stable

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 6.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, 11.
\textsuperscript{59} “Social media.”
society without a threatening, organized online opposition. These factors overwhelm the effects of contemporary policy, as nations like Egypt and Libya were dictatorial yet succumbed to highly organized opposition movements.\(^6^0\) In this way, an analysis of societal structure in China presents a much clearer indicator of its potential for serious social media-infused instability.

*Hegemony: China’s rise in the age of “Globalization”*

Another factor that defines the Chinese government’s perspective on cybersecurity and cyberpolitics is the primary strategic outcome of China’s rapid economic growth, namely the country’s sights towards regional and global hegemony. For China, this entails two concurrent ideologies that have converged at the policy level. First of all, there is heightened nationalism often directed against regional powers like Japan and the United States.\(^6^1\) In addition, US military presence in East Asia is, given China’s newfound economic might, seen as a threat to Beijing’s sovereignty and suzerainty over much of the region.\(^6^2\)

In this way, policymakers see contemporary digital technologies as a military tool worthy of control and intense competition for innovative new products.\(^6^3\) For these policy elites, such a nationalist focus reflects the government’s priorities to create common external enemies and gain regime support among the citizenry. Consequently, a more advanced digital infrastructure could be obtained through innovation. However, this

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\(^6^0\) Faris, 6-7; Feiler, 113-119.

\(^6^1\) Peter Hays Gries, “China Eyes the Hegemon,” *Orbis*, Summer 2005, pp. 403 and 408.

\(^6^2\) Bill Emmott, *Rivals*, Orlando: Harcourt Books, 2008, pp. 49-86, 187-277; According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, “suzerainty” refers to “the dominon over the foreign relations of a vassal state while allowing said vassal state the sovereign authority over its internal affairs.”

\(^6^3\) Gries, 401-402.
would only serve to benefit the ruling government to enhance their power, for the
government would not only be acquiring these technologies but would also implement
them within their current censorship regime, thereby strengthening the government’s
power.

Expression in Modern China: Western Technology, Maoist Repression

Investment in ICT

Given the cultural backdrop present in modern-day China, the failure to coalesce
a sustained and organized online political opposition is not entirely surprising. However,
Internet usage statistics from the People’s Republic paint a more complex picture in
which social activism, while not supported to the level of full-fledged rebellion, can
nonetheless be considered a possible growing trend in Sino-cyberspace due to the rise in
Internet access among the Chinese citizenry. In this way, the data presented below shows
a contradiction between the disconnected, traditional dominance of the ruling Party and
the economically liberalizing effects of the post-Mao era in which powerful IT products
are rapidly spreading across the Chinese consumer populace.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fig. 3: ICT Investment Growth in China 2011.</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Month</strong></td>
<td><strong>Monthly Growth Rate (%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Annualized growth rate (%)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>71.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar</td>
<td>91.8</td>
<td>82.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>84.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>67.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>67.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>67.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>62.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>60.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Chinese Ministry of Industry and Information Technology
Connectivity and Growth

The figure above (Figure 3) clearly shows that a capitalist economy has driven China to invest heavily in modern (digital) infrastructure. Here, the economic boom fed by opening up to foreign markets is reflected in information technology investment. As an economy that depends on export-driven growth in a world defined by globalization and instant gratification, high investment in ICT is essential for the country’s economic health. As a result, the significant percentage increases seen from both short (monthly) and medium term (annually) perspectives is indicative of the growing presence of ICT in Chinese life and business.

Below (Fig. 4), the data depict a significant sector encompassed by the above investment in ICT in general. Here, the focus is shifted to the role of mobile technologies. Innovations in nanotechnology and connectivity speeds have, in this context, dramatically increased the scope and power of the netizenry in any country. This is particularly the case in a large society like China, which not only is the world’s most populous country, but also consequently boasts the world’s largest population of Internet users. 

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64 Dicken, 15-23, 70-99, 247-249.
65 Deibert, 453.
Figure 4: Connectivity and Penetration in China 2011.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>December 2011 Data (in ten thousands)</th>
<th>Net increase from 2010 (in ten thousands)</th>
<th>Net increase from November 2011 (in ten thousands)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Mobile Phone Users</td>
<td>97533.5</td>
<td>11633.2</td>
<td>1134.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3G Users</td>
<td>11873.2</td>
<td>1768</td>
<td>822.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Dial-up Users</td>
<td>560.3</td>
<td>-29.9</td>
<td>-1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broadband Internet Users</td>
<td>15509.3</td>
<td>2880.2</td>
<td>259.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSL Users</td>
<td>11470.2</td>
<td>1398.6</td>
<td>54.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile Phone Penetration</td>
<td>71.10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Chinese Ministry of Industry and Information Technology
http://www.milt.gov.cn/n11293472/index.html

Based on this reality, what then is the central conclusion presented by the data?

In sum, it shows, as depicted in Figure 4, that the proliferation of consumer mobile technologies has skyrocketed within a short period. This simple fact has several large implications for Chinese society. For one, portable innovations such as affordable mass-produced smartphones, in tandem with their large presence within society (as reflected by the over 70% mobile penetration rate in China today), vastly increases the population of willing and able Internet users. This has substantial political impact, for the increase in the netizenry only adds to the power of messages posted on popular online platforms.

Secondly, innovations in nanotechnologies have come with concurrent improvements in connection speed and stability. In the table above, this accounts for not only the relatively low number of dial-up Internet users but also the inverse relationship between DSL and dial-up subscription among Chinese users; in short, as DSL becomes cheaper and more readily available/reliable, more customers (in a booming market economy, at least in theory) will make the switch towards a faster connection and improved
technologies. Thus the growing rate of mobile phone usage combined with the increase in high-speed Internet connection serve to prove China’s rise towards a fully and fast connected society.

In terms of promoting a social media-driven rebellion, these data point towards a peaceful status quo. For one, these technologies, as discussed above, are necessary for China to maintain breakneck capitalist growth. Here, Chinese investment growth in ICT reflects Chinese society’s (and the government’s) understanding of how crucial this is to the country’s future.

From an economic and infrastructural point of view, the prospects for social media rebellion are currently low, given China’s continued growth and the lack of motivation for regime change it brings to ordinary citizens. Such a reality is supported by government-sponsored education policy as well as the openly frank advocacy for technology education. In this way, the government has used a three-pronged strategy for implementing real-time ICT into people’s daily lives:

- Enhancement of Established Media (especially television) through Expansion of Services (channels), Products, etc.

- ICT Infrastructure Development. Here, this takes the form of building a large, advanced broadband network.

- Opening of Schools with a curriculum based in ICT literacy.66

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Although these numeric trends at a cursory glance suggest the rise of highly empowered and socially interconnected individuals thanks to superior technological infrastructure (especially that which improves mobile phone usership), this highlights only a part of the modern Chinese ICT experience. In addition, the statistics reflect not only the social and economic hurdles China must jump to become a truly developed nation but also underscores the role of government policy in shaping the bounds of the Sino-cybersphere.

In this way, China’s challenges can be interpreted through the internationally-recognized measurement of the Internet penetration rate (the percentage of Internet users in a given territory). Below, the data indicates that as of 2010, only approximately 35 of

67 Here, “Third-Generation” refers to mobile technologies that have multimedia and Internet capabilities.
every 100 Chinese is considered an Internet user. Although this would be considered low from a Western perspective, this number represents a middle ground among world nations’ current connectivity within society. As seen in the table below (Figure 6), the Chinese figure is significantly higher than that of a country like Egypt, where social media reportedly fed the fires of a growing revolt to the point of creating a revolutionary-like situation that still persists in Cairo today. Nonetheless, China’s Internet penetration within its society pales in comparison to its East Asian neighbors, and is insufficient to fuel cyber-social movements.

Figure 6: Internet Users Per 100 Citizens (Internet Penetration Rates)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year 2000</th>
<th>Year 2005</th>
<th>Year 2008</th>
<th>Year 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>21.02</td>
<td>33.83</td>
<td>40.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>8.52</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>18.01</td>
<td>26.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea (Rep.)</td>
<td>44.7</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>80.99</td>
<td>83.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>30.57</td>
<td>34.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>15.23</td>
<td>26.83</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>45.69</td>
<td>84.83</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>43.08</td>
<td>67.97</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>12.55</td>
<td>25.88</td>
<td>35.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: “Measuring the Information Society.”

68 “Measuring the Information Society.”
70 “Measuring the Information Society.”
Regulating Growth and Stability: Structure of China’s Internet policy regime

Another factor to be explored within this section may provide the most insight into this perplexing statistic. Here, the Chinese government’s “Great Firewall” policy of authoritarian control of cyberspace contradicts the capitalist principles that spurred the growth that led to the rise in penetration seen in the table above (Fig. 6).71 These findings suggest several major drivers that have created a highly repressive digital state in the midst of growing international connectivity among members of society. Observers note several features of China’s Internet policy regime and political cybersphere as important elements in this unique recipe for regime stability and economic (especially ICT) growth:

*Building the “Great Firewall.” Priorities and Repercussions.*

The first of these Internet policy regime features involves a government-supported project every bit as impressive (and potentially unsuccessful in the long term) as the ancient network of fortresses from which its name is humorously derived, the “Great Firewall” of China is one of the most influential features of Internet politics in China. Simply put, this system of state-organized control of the World Wide Web determines much of the Chinese people’s point of view,72 as would be the case with other forms of media.73 In addition, the ruling elites in China have, as discussed in detail throughout the previous data analysis of Internet connectivity in the contemporary People’s Republic, benefited a great deal from two coexisting realities within the country today; resources for investment and a culture which values obedience and saving face over protest and overt rebellion. Indeed, these two factors may by themselves account for the growing

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71 Deibert, 460.
72 Ibid, 450.
73 Damm, 274.
penetration without growing social tension, thus negating the rebel-empowering growth in digital infrastructure.

However, there are also specific mechanisms in place within the “Great Firewall” that facilitate a perpetuation of the status quo in terms of political discourse and leadership. Here, the Chinese government engages in a two-pronged strategy to control potentially loose elements of the Chinese netizenry (and thus constitutes the challenges potential cyber-revolutionaries must face):

- The first area of the “Firewall’s” focus is, of course, outright repression and infringement on users’ freedom of speech. From the Chinese perspective, this is more commonly known as “guiding opinion.” This leads to the bipartite division of discourse within Chinese online society; in other words, social and political conversations in Chinese Internet politics are inherently two-sided due to the draconian authoritarian nature of the Internet policy regime. On the one side lies tradition; here, the legacy of Confucius and Mao Zedong loom large over Chinese digital society, as public criticism of the government is both politically illegal and socially discouraged. On the other hand, blogs also represent a public and relatively free form of speech that attracts advantageous and/or circumstantial activists, for many of the official topics for discussion on blogs or Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) are not originally nor directly political in nature.

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74 Deibert, 412-413, 455.
76 Ibid, 752-755.
Consequently, the government faces a conundrum in this area. It is charged with balancing competing and contradictory interests, from maintaining ancient cultural norms of hierarchical order while embracing the necessarily elements of global capitalism that will drive growth. In this way, the economically liberalizing (and successful) role social media plays in the Chinese economy requires the Chinese government to make strictly-defined parameters for acceptable speech online.

- Simultaneously, the “Firewall” (more specifically, the implementation of the Green Dam advanced filtering software over Chinese networks) imposes a regulatory structure designed to promote a more “harmonious” and pro-government online culture that maintains social and economic stability. This has emerged in several forms: social divisions and regime policy.
  - Social Divisions

Since the emergence of the Western hegemonic international system, Chinese political and social discourse has been routinely influenced by both the threat of Western dominance in China and Asia as well as the largesse of the Chinese nation. In the contemporary era, this is seen in two elements of the current social hierarchy: geographic region and economic class. Geographically, the country suffers from a large rural (Western China)-urban (Eastern Coast) divide that, in this context, favors the urbanites in terms of connectivity and online presence. This also influences the above-referenced low but growing Internet penetration rate, for the data reflect the growing number of internal

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77 Chin-fu Hung, “The Internet Entrepreneurs and the Emergence of Civil Society in China,” Paper presented at the 54th Annual Conference of the Political Studies Association (University of Lincoln, United Kingdom), 2004, p. 18.
78 Deibert, 472.
migrants flocking to Chinese cities, with nearly three-quarters of all Chinese netizens hailing from urban areas and rural residents comprising approximately 28% of online users in the People’s Republic.\textsuperscript{79,80}

Concurrently, economic liberalization has led to greater exposure of foreign (particularly Western) products, lifestyles, ideas and technology. This frequently contradicts the CCP’s goals for maintaining political control.\textsuperscript{81} Another consequence has manifested itself in both the political and social arenas, namely that the distinction between Party and state as well as that between successful business and political figures is blurred. This means that wealthy, connected urbanites have a major advantage over poor rural residents in sustaining an online social presence in China.\textsuperscript{82} For these elites, a separate, more lenient enforcement of censorship policies exist, bringing economic inequality in China into the digital society.\textsuperscript{83}

\begin{itemize}
\item\hspace{1em} Regime Policy
\end{itemize}

The Chinese Communist Party faces an existential challenge to its unquestioned rule in the wake of the “Reform and Opening” period of economic liberalization begun by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s.\textsuperscript{84} This has become more acute since the spread of the “ICT revolution,” which has created a new wave of globalization that makes instant

\textsuperscript{80} “Statistical Survey Report on Internet Development in China” (Beijing: China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), January 2010).
\textsuperscript{82} “The Internet in China,” 7.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, 14.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid, 4.
international communication plausible and possible. From a political perspective, the response of policy elites has been to constantly monitor the balance between access to global markets and technological improvements for greater growth, and the looming threat of increased political liberalization and citizen expression associated with a major revolution or overthrow of the status quo powers in government.

This paradoxical position accounts for a series of important policy considerations that are strongly prioritized within the Party policy-making community. In China, and the norms that result from these priorities play a major role in the tightly-controlled Internet policy regime which ostensibly deters social media-fueled opposition within the People’s Republic. Simply put, economic growth is a top priority for the Chinese elites perpetuating the “Great Firewall,” for they believe that with a stronger economy will come a lack of enthusiasm to engage in lengthy (cyber-)rebellion.

**Fears of Foreign Intervention**

Chinese government fears of foreign intervention, taken from the point-of-view of regime stability as espoused by current leaders in Beijing, are well-founded. Here, two sets of evidence are presented as reference of specific politically destabilizing trends associated with increased contact with international markets and powers (particularly the West).

For one, the Chinese have a unique historical and cultural experience that, in fact, birthed the hyper-nationalism and strongly established regime framework of the current

85 “Measuring the Information Society.”
86 Coleman, 4-19.
Communist government. Chinese experiences with foreign intervention since 1800 have, for the most part, ranged from unfortunate to devastating due to the consequences of colonialism. Today, this translates into a determination to promote the strength of Chinese culture to save face and assert previously-damaged sovereignty over its vast East Asian holdings. As a result, it is unsurprising that this reaffirmation of sovereignty in the post-colonial era dovetails with a desire to move in a direction that may not necessarily be consistent with Western norms/priorities.

Secondly, recent events in the Eastern international sphere have shown elites the powerful possibilities offered by social media in the realm of political opposition. This is exemplified by the cases of the 2009 Iranian election and the 2011 “Jasmine Revolution” throughout several authoritarian Middle Eastern countries. In Iran in particular, China was able to take a glimpse into the nature of online opposition as well as how to curb its potentially destabilizing and revolutionary effects. Consequently, from the Chinese perspective, the Western-promoted “Google Doctrine” of open, active political online networks fighting for causes such as regime change can be effectively neutralized, for the Iranian authorities implemented a stricter electronic information-distribution regime.

As a result, it appeared that such a strategy could turn the tide against cyber-utopian realities, and the Chinese, like the Iranians, have come to see the merits of the theory that authoritarianism can flourish, and not fade, in cyber-political spaces. Put together with the Chinese insistence on promoting economic growth, it seems that this formula has been quite effective for the Communist government in Beijing.

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88 Morozov, 12.
89 Ibid, 6-14.
**Sudden News**

One of the ways the Chinese ICT regime upholds authoritarianism online is through an incessant dedication to keeping up with current events at home and abroad. Indeed, a large part of the censorship regulations employed in the “Great Firewall of China” regard the classification of politically-sensitive events within a broad yet deliberate category of “sudden news.” Such a term underscores the diligent consideration of news items and their potential effects on society, for this category encompasses a couple of different forms of media reports. Obviously, new news items exposing the mistakes of the Chinese or similarly-aligned regimes is noted and blocked from public consumption within the country. However, reports pertaining to seemingly-innocuous subjects can also face the same scrutiny if their release is timed within a period of political sensitivity.\(^{90}\)

**“Guiding Public Opinion”**

This refers to one of the primary public goals of the “Great Firewall of China.”\(^{91}\) In the Chinese case, pro-government ideals are spread online not only through censorship and draconian enforcement, but also via the proliferation of postings and comments on popularly-frequented social media platforms. The government’s priority to actively promote its ideology is so high that it is rumored that the Party actively compensates Internet users for their positive contributions to the regime and to the harmonious society it wishes to promote. In China, these users are often, therefore, called by their collective name- the “50 cent party.” It is said that each pro-government netizen working on behalf

\(^{90}\) Mackinnon; Deibert, 73.

\(^{91}\) Deibert, 412-413.
of the “Great Firewall” regime earns up to 50 Chinese cents for each short posting online. This amount, given the ability to post a seemingly unlimited amount of information online via social network websites, points to a significant economic interest in flooding the Chinese cyber-sphere with positive reviews of regime policies, thus increasing awareness and (theoretically) support for the government’s goals.92

**Blacklisting and Enforcement of Key Individuals**

As a footnote to the previous characteristics of the “Great Firewall of China,” this Internet policy regime is also known for its tough responses to public criticism, especially that performed online. Examples such as the struggles of internationally-awarded Chinese citizens like artist Ai Weiwei and Nobel Laureate Liu Xiaobo as well as the contrast made between these two men and other influential Internet personalities like HanHan93 reflect the Party’s desire to maintain one-party rule in a world where the liberal democratic ideals of the West can easily spread across regions and borders.94 This legal structure, consistent with ancient imperial norms within China,95 also accounts for some of the cultural reticence to engage in meaningful political opposition even with access to globally-integrated information technologies, as economic growth has improved lives more than suspected human rights abuses has harmed them.96

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92 Ibid, 455.
93 HanHan is a popular Chinese blogger and media personality.
94 Brockman, 130; Deibert, 453-455.
96 Morozov, 47, 70, 73, 86-87, 118, 138, 187.
Overview of Critical Findings

Based on the above analysis, a number of realities currently exist with regard to the state of cyber-politics in the People’s Republic of China as a direct consequence of cultural and political priorities implemented through tools such as the “Great Firewall” Internet policy regime.

- “Online Posting Anxiety”

As mentioned in depth in the cultural outline presented above, Chinese social and political norms have encouraged silence and subtlety over overt displays of anti-government grievances. This is only further encouraged by the public examples made of famous Chinese like Liu Xiaobo and Ai Weiwei, whose sufferings reflect just two modern instances of the Communist Party’s commitment to Party regime stability, a practice that dates back to the foundation of the People’s Republic in the Mao era when the Communist leaders tightly controlled music and other popular contemporary media. Here, we see the Communist Party’s effective limiting of open intellectual discourse, with the result being a rebellion-debilitating gap in global education and exposure for netizens.

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97 Liu.
98 Ibid.
• Social Networks as a Battleground

The Chinese authorities have played their hand most effectively. Their crackdown on social media discourse suggests that political opposition is indeed growing even in isolated China. This is clearly seen in recent cases such as the 2011 Wenzhou train crash. There, the accident was attributed to a lack of government oversight of safety procedures, and demands for accountability were begun and sustained via weibos, or Chinese microblogs reminiscent of Western social media sites like Twitter. This pursuit of accountability among the average Chinese netizen has extended across other online platforms as well. The most significant of these platforms is the morally-driven “human flesh search engines,” digital tools that research the records of officials and other public figures, often provoking uncomfortable investigations into the government’s corrupt practices. ¹⁰¹

Figure 7: Chinese Netizens by Age Group

Beijing: China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), January 2010.

¹⁰¹ Deibert, 454-455.
Through such expression, a gradual cultural change has emerged in Chinese society, particularly in the youth sector. In this relatively small portion of the Chinese population (1/3), around 70% of Chinese youth ages 18-30 are active in social media online, with over 80% of those users highly educated (college degree or equivalent).\textsuperscript{102} This has led to phenomena that counter the dominance of the “50-cent party.” Known as the “River Crab Society,” these mostly youth netizens use social media as a platform upon which accountability on a variety of social and political issues can be discussed, outlined, and demanded.\textsuperscript{103}

\textit{Figure 8: Chinese Netizens by Educational Level}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure8.png}
\caption{Chinese Netizens by Educational Level}
\end{figure}


\textsuperscript{103} Ibid, 22.
Concurrently, these resourceful and active users, cognizant of the various barriers to free and open discourse due to the presence of the “Great Firewall” within their country, have used their discussions and activism to form new linguistic dialects of Chinese, often employing puns, proverbs, irony, and sarcasm to create unique and undetectable euphemisms so as to bypass censors.\textsuperscript{104}

- No regime change (at least in the short term)

Even with the growing presence of social media-fueled opposition online, economic (rising GDP) and demographic (still mostly rural and/or aging population) issues prevail in the government’s favor.\textsuperscript{105} The government still holds the upper hand in controlling cyber-political discourse to its advantage, with direct policy and investment control over both digital education and Internet access within its sovereign borders. This, combined with the swift responses taken to the threat posed by the Arab Spring, points towards continued Communist Party sovereignty over Mainland China in the foreseeable future.

\textsuperscript{104} Esarey, 754; Gao, 300-306.
\textsuperscript{105} Alexandra Heyn, “China’s Less than Stellar Demographics,” (UC) Berkeley Political Review, 18 October 2011, \url{http://bpr.berkeley.edu/2011/10/china%E2%80%99s-less-than-stellar-demographics/} (13 April 2012).
Case Study 2: Venezuela

Figure 9: Venezuelan ICT Government Model
As stated in the introduction and depicted above in Figure 9, Venezuela presents an interesting case study in Internet governance strategy because it has implemented an Internet policy regime that blends principles from multiple political theory genres into an effective pro-government model of ICT policy. A mix between opening access and microblog-fueled message control\textsuperscript{106} have created a cyber-Venezuela that not only reflects the priorities of current-day Caracas but also the model of democratic authoritarianism (“populism”) commonly associated with much of Latin America in the modern era.\textsuperscript{107}

Offline, Venezuela is a country blessed with an abundance of valuable natural resources, especially petroleum.\textsuperscript{108} The country has suffered some of the consequences of becoming a petro-state, namely the close tie between oil prices and political stability and the high concentration of wealth among the elites of the nation.\textsuperscript{109} The Venezuelan government is democratically elected and relatively popular.\textsuperscript{110} \textsuperscript{111}

As a result, cyber-Venezuela is an open space for social and political discourse-for those with resources and connections. In this way, Venezuelan cyber-authoritarianism is less direct than its Chinese counterpart, as the corruption and economic inequalities of the Bolivarian Republic represent political issues endemic to Latin America. For this reason, in Venezuela the Internet policy regime takes on the

\textsuperscript{106} Morozov, 114.
\textsuperscript{108} “Background Note: Venezuela;” Dicken, 247.
\textsuperscript{110} “Background Note: Venezuela;”
form of a corrupt populist campaign, where powerful figures constantly work to gain more support through massive media appearances and favored policies to wealthy individuals. In Venezuela, this entails a media regime focused almost entirely on the country’s President: Hugo Chávez.

**Chávez: the Man and his Politics**

ICT in Venezuela is most influenced by the country’s strongest political figure: Hugo Chávez. President Chávez, a former army officer who has been in power since 1998, is a shrewd politician who has survived several attempts to destroy his legitimacy and multiple challenges to his rule.\(^{112}\) Interestingly, much of Chávez’s policies, which have been ostensibly designed to maintain his rule over the country, have been implemented through intentional manipulations of both ICT and global information networks.\(^{113}\)

**Foreign Policy Under Chávez**

Due to the global nature of ICT, Bolivarian Venezuela’s Internet policy regime received many influences from abroad. Therefore, a brief look into the Chávez regime’s contacts with foreign powers is illuminating. In many ways, Chávez has provided a blueprint into foreign relations outside the more commonly known (or accepted) realm of institutions and alliances within the pro-Western paradigm spearheaded by a superpower United States. Even when the US was the world’s unquestionably dominant power in the

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last two decades, Venezuela looked toward diversification of petroleum buyers and access into external markets.\textsuperscript{114}

Over time, this has led to a purely Chavista\textsuperscript{115} creation: a network of diverse bilateral and multilateral relationships between influential countries (China, Russia) and pariahs (Iran) in the international system. Relations with China, Russia, and Iran have given Venezuela a broad perspective of ways to oppose the United States and maintain a stable domestic cybersphere. At the same time, the country has also been able to pull off the equally spectacular feat of maintaining these relations while still keeping its vital trade relationship with the US market relatively intact. This paradox is most clearly seen in the consistent petroleum exports on which both the US and especially Venezuela greatly depend.\textsuperscript{116}

Given the Venezuelan President’s proclivity toward anti-American political stances,\textsuperscript{117} it is by no means surprising that Hugo Chávez would lead his country into a network of alliances that are well outside the US hegemonic framework. For Chávez, this is a plus and helps him assert influence internationally with countries like Iran that are normally outside the reach of the US hegemonic international system of the Americas.\textsuperscript{118} It also brings Venezuela into international negotiations that directly affect the health of the country’s economy and regime, particularly with regard to the politics being played within key international institutions such as OPEC (Organization of

\textsuperscript{114} Kozloff, 35-36.
\textsuperscript{115} This term refers to Chávez and his ideological supporters.
\textsuperscript{116} Kozloff, 35-36.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{118} “Background Note: Venezuela.”
Petroleum Exporting Countries, the world’s price-setting cartel for crude oil), to which Venezuela is a founding member.¹¹⁹

Through relationships with Middle Eastern nations that are OPEC members,¹²⁰ Venezuela effectively uses mutual interests and anti-US attitudes to place itself as a power broker. Venezuelans can tap into knowledge and technology implemented by major oil producers (like social media), thus increasing their own output. Also, it can use its leadership of a Bolivarian bloc of American nations (ALBA)¹²¹ to bring more countries into its foreign policy framework, thereby challenging US hegemony in the region. For Middle Eastern countries (particularly Iran), this benefits their interests and anti-US policy priorities; in addition, Venezuela’s strong influence over other OPEC members like Ecuador¹²² bring votes and a more globally unified petroleum policy among the key producers. For the Venezuelan Internet policy regime, such a foreign policy framework, gives the Chávez government the ideas necessary for creating their own unique “populist” regime online.

That being said, the energy exporter that has been most directly involved in Venezuela has been Russia. Both Venezuela and Russia are nominally democratic states in which one man plays the role of strong, authoritarian ruler. In Venezuela, Hugo Chávez is in charge, while in Russia Vladimir Putin dominates the political scene in that country. This is a key similarity, for it provides a basis from which the Venezuelan government may look to Russian policy as a model.

¹²⁰ Ibid; Kozloff, 35-37.
¹²² Kozloff, 153-155, 183.
For Chávez, the Russians provide a model for his path toward populist/socialist development and international prominence (both of which involve ICT in the modern era). Interestingly, the Chávez era in Venezuela has coincided with similar trends in Russia. Indeed, Russia has used its natural resources and Soviet military legacy as powerful negotiating tools that have challenged the West. This is clearly seen not only in the military interventions in Georgia, but also in the political games it has played against Europe to bring that continent to its knees over natural gas access from Russia. Chavista policy has looked to imitate this strategy and is empowering the developing world and the non-Western oil producers over the status quo powers like the United States. Recent social media-fueled demonstrations in Russia, which have been organized in the aftermath of arguably fraudulent legislative elections in that country, are most likely to be influencing the Chávez regime, at least in the short run due to the similarities in leadership style (both are very charismatic populists) and goals (namely, to dominate the political system in their respective countries).

However, the most pertinent country, economically speaking, is China due to its insatiable demand for oil and its well-documented, very strict Internet policy regime.

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126 Deibert, 461.
In addition, Beijing’s complicated and nuanced relations with Caracas show that the Chávez regime’s anti-American ways threaten to completely alienate the Chinese. Nonetheless, the Chinese provide an example to Chávez of a state digital governance model with a successful track record of maintaining stable regime continuity.

In particular, China has conflicting interests in Venezuela that both draw it to the South American nation while pushing it away toward other, less politically complicated developing countries where Chinese investment can pay off sooner. At the center of this dilemma for Beijing is the maintenance of relations with the United States, which does not support the Chavista way of doing business. Washington also puts pressure on Sino-Venezuelan relations through its own demand for raw materials; this results in a highly competitive market for the Chinese when it comes to Venezuelan oil, for to Chávez’s regret, the US is Venezuela’s primary petroleum export market, with nearly 1,000,000 barrels of oil sold per day to the Americans. As a result of these complications, the Venezuelans are less likely to adopt an American or Chinese-style ICT regime because of the political priority to present the Chávez government as an independent sovereign actor.

The Populist Internet policy regime

These adaptations of non-state actor Internet messaging strategy form the basis of the Venezuelan Internet policy regime. Through aggressive social media campaigning, it serves the purposes of the leadership while remaining democratic. Such a reality not only

127 Kozloff, 36.
128 Pereira, 14.
129 Kozloff, 36.
mirrors the social development of the World Wide Web but also the style and personality of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez.

In this section, I will focus on Venezuela’s media policy and elaborate as to how, particularly in the current age of advanced high-speed ICT, the Chávez regime is able to promote populism throughout Latin America. As a consequence, Venezuelan media policy since the late 1990s serves as a model for developing countries seeking to gain international influence while maintaining a level of cultural sovereignty that seeks to separate itself from dependence and/or inferiority to the West.

*Television: A Precursor to the Internet Policy Regime*

Before venturing into the Venezuelan government’s use of ICT in recent years, it is essential to view the charisma of Chávez through the lens of television programming/events because it represents the basis of the Venezuelan ICT regime. While other leaders around the world have used this medium to their advantage, Chávez has perfected the art of manipulating the airwaves to gain support and set in stone policies in both the domestic and international spheres.

A brief look into Venezuelan TV yields significant findings about the Chavista form of media campaigning and propaganda, both of which have been carried over into online portals. Simply put, Chávez uses TV as a tool to dominate the airwaves, forcing viewers to pay attention to him by limiting competition. This is best seen in the
President’s own television program as well as the state’s large presence in the broadcasting industry.\(^\text{131}\)

On TV, Chávez is straightforward and prone to theatrics; these qualities make him appealing to watch and help to garner attention to his causes. In this way, TV is also a great platform from which to reach out to the global community.\(^\text{132}\) From the government’s point of view, this controlled and consistent method of exposure, political messaging, and commentary from their leader projects a positive image of a man fully in charge of his strong, democratic country. Such a trend continues in the present day, as Chávez’s recent health, for example, has forced the government to push this policy more aggressively because the world is beginning to wonder if a power vacuum will soon emerge in Venezuela.

As a result, the Venezuelan President’s publicly televised insistence that his condition is improving\(^\text{133}\) correlates with an overall political priority that has dominated his time in office. This is seen in two ways. First, Chávez has insisted on treatment in Cuba.\(^\text{134}\) Both at home in Venezuela and abroad in countries like the US, such a retreat allows a weakened Chávez to avoid the cameras so as not to publicly appear frail.
Secondly, his medical visits to Cuba have included photo opportunities with Fidel Castro and his brother, President Raúl Castro. Both Castros are ideological allies of Chávez,\(^\text{135}\)

\(^{132}\)Kozloff, 1-4.
\(^{133}\)“The Bolivarian Patient.”
\(^{134}\)Ibid.
and continued contact from them allows the Venezuelan leader to assert the legitimacy of his socialist/populist rule.

*Figure 10: Investments in ICT (Venezuela)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Gross investment (Bolivares)</th>
<th>Inflation rate (%)</th>
<th>Real investment (2010 Bolivares)</th>
<th>Internet Penetration Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>692,463,000</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>5,707,055,845.64</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>772,867,668</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4,918,706,630.50</td>
<td>4.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>869,295,049</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>5,122,585,685.81</td>
<td>4.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>374,119,641</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>1,657,604,409.75</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>953,200,090</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3,130,707,614.23</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>1,700,314,212</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>3,610,296,549.85</td>
<td>12.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>2,517,636,369</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>4,761,476,426.80</td>
<td>15.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>3,620,859,602</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>5,808,266,238.83</td>
<td>20.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>3,041,653,387</td>
<td>30.5</td>
<td>4,298,814,356.65</td>
<td>25.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>3,391,978,528</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>3,673,512,745.82</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>3,682,908,626</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>3,682,908,626.00</td>
<td>35.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The table above (Figure 10) presents national statistical evidence of the government’s involvement in forming an effective policy of ICT connectivity. While these numbers reflect only the domestic situation in Venezuela over the last decade and a half, Venezuela’s pattern of ICT development follows a pattern seen throughout the developing world, as will be discussed and explored in depth below. For Venezuela, there is a strong correlation between gross investment in ICT and an increase in penetration rates.\(^{136}\) Here, a near ten-fold increase in gross investment has produced a near equivalent increase in the penetration rate, which now indicates that more than one-

\(^{136}\) This term refers to the number of citizens with Internet access.
third of the country’s people (10.4 million as of March 2011) are connected online.\textsuperscript{137}

However, the country’s consistently high inflation rates also suggest an inability for the government to adequately invest in more advanced ICT developments. Here, the real investment characteristics clearly show the economics surrounding Venezuela’s more hands-off approach to ICT fiscal policy, as real investment has been cut by over a third since 2000. Such a fact undermines the government’s efforts to adopt digital technologies to enhance its agenda (as represented by the gross investment figures above).

Venezuela’s statistics show several caveats that skew the figures and do not immediately account for the rise in both investment and penetration. From the investment angle, inflation is a key factor to consider within the analysis in two ways. First, over time there is a general rate of inflation that is necessary for an economy to function properly even in the strongest growing countries. Secondly, the Venezuelan currency, as a non-reserve currency (like the US dollar), is susceptible to larger and more frequent swings in exchange rates,\textsuperscript{138} and its consistently high inflation only exacerbates this problem. Consequently, these numbers show that countries like Venezuela which have a strong petroleum producing sector and thus must confront the pressures of demand volatility in that sector.\textsuperscript{139} From the perspective given from the calculated penetration rates above, the large increase in Internet access has been seen around the world because computer-based connectivity has become a more essential element of commercial and interpersonal communication. In addition, innovations in new ICT products since 1997,

\textsuperscript{137} “Venezuela Country Profile;” “Measuring the Information Society.”
\textsuperscript{139} Dicken, 251-260.
particularly in the area of mobile communications, has drastically reduced the costs of logging onto the World Wide Web.\textsuperscript{140}

Venezuela in particular has also employed its trade revenue to adapt to the growing presence and potential of newer, more mobile technologies, investing heavily in areas such as satellites to improve signal strength.\textsuperscript{141} Furthermore, the Venezuelan government has engaged in several successful programs to make more students ICT savvy. Such a policy priority alone brings with it a mitigating effect on social media-driven revolt, as the government is catering to popular demands for relevant education and opportunities (both of which ICT-based learning provide in today’s digitally-integrated global economy). However, as the data clearly show, societies in the developing world (like Venezuela, for example) still face serious challenges to free and open ICT access even though governments have invested significantly in ICT products for their native students.\textsuperscript{142} In this way, the low penetration rate found in a developing, young country like Venezuela\textsuperscript{143} has, for the time being, failed to have been effectively addressed in a way that would facilitate mass political discourse on social media networks.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid, 16-26, 79.
Venezuelan ICT: At a Global Midpoint

Furthermore, Venezuela’s connectivity is consistent with global trends. The number of Internet users has skyrocketed in the first decade of the 21st century as technologies have improved and connectivity has become possible for many developing nations. On the one hand, it is impressive that Venezuela’s ICT penetration nearly tripled from 2005 to today; on the other hand, its under-40% penetration rate indicates that a majority of the population is unable to tap into the knowledge networks empower economies in the modern world.

Here, a political breakdown of Chavista technology policy puts the numbers from Figure 6 (page 39) in perspective. These statistics reflect, together with modern Venezuelan political studies, that seemingly opposed policy priorities have merged together to contribute to the formation of a desired and effective Internet policy regime for political elites. In this way, Venezuela has implemented its own Bolivarian interpretation of what noted ICT development scholars (like Manuel Castells) believe to be a truism in modern development studies: that countries with an advanced and readily accessible telecommunications infrastructure are most likely to succeed in the global economy and thus attain greater growth.144 For the Chávez regime, there are also political and communications benefits for those in power as they struggle to maintain power and counter the more dominant norms imposed by countries like the US.145

144 Maldonado Rangel, 15.
145 Ibid, 22, 82-98.
Overview of Critical Findings

The preceding data sets, however, raise a serious question: why are countries like Venezuela, which has strongly prioritized open Internet access for all through telecommunications statutes and the formation of institutions (government ministries) specifically dedicated to the issue.\(^\text{146}\) In short, populist control of the media leads to two important outcomes:

- Competition is weakened and or eliminated by the ruling party, which has the resources and power to overwhelm private actors. Secondly, the lack of competition leads to (government) monopolization of communications.

Concurrently, the lack of social trust in areas such as Internet commerce significantly reduce ICT-facilitated trade, resulting in lower demand for ICT infrastructure improvements and a persistent problem of widespread high-speed Internet access throughout the country.\(^\text{147}\)

- The monopolization of relevant media combined with the overwhelming resources that are traditionally at the government’s disposal in a petro-state like Venezuela are causes for a culture of corruption within society. Venezuela is no different in this case, as it is one of the most corrupt states in the world and the least transparent of Latin American governments.\(^\text{148}\)

\(^{146}\) Ibid, 61-64.
\(^{148}\) “Global Corruption Report 2009.”
**Figure 11: Selected Statistics about Netizens in Venezuela**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Venezuelan Netizen Population</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Netizens under 35 years old</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netizens with high school education or above</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netizens living in Caracas</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

http://opennet.net/research/profiles/venezuela#footnote9_tjticac.

Venezuela, through a short urban-rural analysis, shows just how complex and interwoven these impediments to access truly are in developing countries in the global South. Based on the data above, one of the clearest statistical indicators of Venezuela’s distributive imbalance in Internet presence (and therefore social networking) is that a large majority of Venezuelan netizens are young, educated, and from Caracas, the capital and largest city. Venezuelans in cities like Caracas suffer from class-based distribution of resources, a problem commonly associated with developing countries but is nonetheless exacerbated by the convergence of government dominance in society and the strength of oil interests consistent petrostate political economy. Consequently, the tendency for Venezuelan netizens to be more likely to engage in anti-government protests is further complicated by the aforementioned popularly-sponsored initiatives by the Chavez administration to increase ICT awareness and education. Such a reality indicates that education alone may not be enough to create a strong online opposition in Venezuela.

That being said, in the rural areas, an interesting phenomenon has arisen in Venezuela thanks to the principles of homophily brought into the political realm.

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150 McPherson, 1.
Here, indigenous groups like the Yanomami live deep in remote sectors inside the Amazon rainforest but are surprisingly active online, promoting their political campaigns for autonomy and intolerance of state interference in their homeland through web-based tools like email and social networking.151

Such examples highlight the central feature of Venezuelan Internet governance in the contemporary era, namely that the Chávez regime has tried but failed to institute an organized, effective control over Venezuelan cyberspace. This stands in contrast to the official messaged broadcast by the Chávez government, which has sought to maintain an image of strong, constant, and popular leadership over various media. However, given the differences in usage and audience found between television viewers and Internet users, the data clearly show that the Venezuelan governments’ attempt to implement successful television broadcast techniques into an online campaign was a wholly ineffective strategy.

Conclusion

Global Significance

This paper has attempted to bring a greater focus towards national Internet policy regimes in the developing world, an area that is only now starting to see the wide-ranging benefits of ICT for its societies and their potential for impressive economic growth. Through a thorough understanding of global knowledge networks and the role ICT plays in accessing them in the 21st century, the analysis presented here outlines several trends that persist for governments in the developing world looking to maintain power, sovereignty, and economic growth.

In this way, China’s and Venezuela’s cases show the following attributes to be common in the developing world and relevant for assessing the future of ICT development and Internet policy regimes:

- More people are online than ever before. This is due to the rise of mobiles and other leapfrog technologies that assist underdeveloped countries by significantly cutting costs to connectivity. In addition, government elites see that it is in their countries’ (and their own) interests to promote ICT development for the purposes of attracting international trade and reaping the growth benefits that come with it. As a result, Internet penetration rates in developing countries have increased two, three, four or even ten-fold over the short span of under a decade.\(^\text{152}\)

- Increased Internet access hides what is actually a more complicated picture of ICT access and Internet governance around the world. Here, China and Venezuela are

\(^{152}\)“Measuring the Information Society.”
model countries. Venezuela stands out in that it sits near the statistical midpoint in terms of Internet penetration; this is significant because it means that only a minority of developing world citizens are online.\textsuperscript{153} China, on the other hand, presents the world with an active model in effective (though strict) governance over a potentially destabilizing series of technologies. In this way, both countries reflect a broad portrayal of the Internet’s impact in developing countries, with each supporting the cyber-skeptic view of a heightened state presence thanks to social media.

\textit{Figure 12: Prospects of Social Media Rebellion in Case Countries}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Condition for Social Media Revolt</th>
<th>Social Media Revolt Likely?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>1. Widespread Digital Infrastructure Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. High Levels of Digital Education Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Large and Active Youth No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Frequent Economic Hardship/Recession No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Large Informal Sector Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>1. Widespread Digital Infrastructure No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. High Levels of Digital Education No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Large and Active Youth No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Frequent Economic Hardship/Recession Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Large Informal Sector Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to the two countries in question, the data provided within this paper clearly show that the probability of a social media-fueled rebellion in either country (China, Venezuela) is, at present, low. While each country fails to provide all conditions

\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
presented in this thesis to be determinants of such an Arab Spring-type revolution (digital infrastructure, education, large and active youth, easy access to ICT), China and Venezuela present two sides supporting the argument that the rest of the developing world will not follow the Middle East’s lead in fomenting cyber-driven revolt.

A short analysis of the conditions present within each country yields the results presented above in Figure 12. This chart encompasses the primary comparison to be made between China and Venezuela in this thesis.

• China is currently too stable to be an epicenter for social media revolt, even though it possesses the ICT infrastructure necessary to connect citizens from across the country. This is paradoxically a byproduct of the government’s significant investment in these rebellion-essential technologies, which have spurred the economic growth necessary to placate the masses. China also currently benefits in this area from a substantially elderly population that is not only less likely to overturn the status quo but is also less likely to attain netizenship by using ICT.

• Venezuela, on the other hand, seems to be the more likely of the two case countries to be engaged in a major social media-fueled political upheaval. Economic instability and institutionalized corruption within society have brought with them domestic opposition to Chávez and scorn against the current government from powers abroad. This contrasts with the previously-mentioned hypothesis that the Venezuelan government appeared to impose direct control over the domestic cyberspace. On the contrary, the data clearly indicate that the regime has very little control over the connections and activities of its citizens online. This, combined with the existing
formations of educated (urban students) and politically-motivated (indigenous) groups lead me to conclude that social media-led political resistance against the Chávez government is possible, though not likely (due to issues of access and social trust).

Policy Implications

For China, these findings support much of the government’s views and policies towards ICT and social media. On the one hand, ICT’s power to drive economic growth and social advancement is unquestioned. Here, the Chinese Communist Party invests capital and permits through regulation the expansion of commercial use of social ICT. The result of this has been significant economic growth and the new global reality that China is the largest online market in the world. On the other hand, ICT, as seen in the case of the Arab Spring, has potentially subversive elements. The findings presented in this thesis show that the Chinese government’s two-sided strategy (restriction of potentially-destabilizing material and flooding the Internet with pro-government posts) has been extraordinarily effective in creating a stable political atmosphere in Sino-cyberspace.

For Venezuela, the findings in this thesis show in depth the social and economic inequalities that cripple many developing countries today. The government tries to overwhelm the media market while simultaneously funding those sectors of the economy benefiting the elite’s technological access (namely the petroleum industry). However, the data presented in this thesis show that the government has failed to exert such control over the online life of the Venezuelan people. That being said, social trust and economic
development issues mean that Venezuela lags behind in both economic prowess and ICT capability, even though the young netizens and organized indigenous groups protesting online have the vim and vigor that would normally be sufficient to carry out a meaningful social movement.

For Venezuela, the implications of such a complex ICT picture represent a mixed bag of consequences. In short, the entire country suffers from a persistent status quo of political protest/instability without necessary changes in access and (ICT) infrastructure.

For the Chávez government, the repeated attempts to address these connectivity issues have been popular. However, since they have failed to bring online penetration and commerce to significantly higher levels, this suggests that the government faces serious legitimacy issues in the digital realm. Whether such a need to successfully implement ICT policy will drive the Chávez and/or future governments into action remains a difficult and uncertain question, and the persistent economic vicissitudes emerging from the reliance on exporting petroleum could easily negate meaningful increases in ICT investment through inflation.

For opposition and activist groups, online-generated causes have uncertain futures as well, for the presence of organized and educated groups, however small, constitute a reliable base of support for the long haul. On the other hand, inflation, trust, and access problems threaten to prevent the increased knowledge flows facilitated by the Internet which allow for quick mobilization of larger movements.

**For the West**, both of these case studies show the ineffectiveness of applying Arab Spring logic to the rest of the world. Simply put, the cyber-utopian view that recent
events in the Middle East clearly show that social media inevitably brings democracy lacks substantiation across regions and regimes. As such, the cases of China and Venezuela present two alternative ICT regimes that successfully counter this worldview and account for politically/culturally-specific factors that serve as primary determinants for social media-fueled revolt.

In sum, the increasing rapidity of globalization fed by the proliferation of ICT innovations has come at a time when the developing world is becoming more powerful in international affairs. The rise of economies from developing regions such as Asia and Latin America has brought with it new challenges to global governance norms due to the introduction of new social customs, values, and philosophies from these various cultures. As a crucial aspect of development in the modern era, ICT policy reflects the uncertainty facing the world today, and countries like China and Venezuela show how claims of the Internet’s democratizing power may be unfounded.

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