

Chapter 7

Information and Communication Technologies as Drivers of Social Unrest

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ABSTRACT

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are alleviating frictions associated with the gathering and distribution of information, as well as reducing transaction costs related to the identifying, monitoring, and coordination of citizens dissatisfied with certain government policies. We conducted a random-effect logit tests based on a uniquely developed panel dataset of 138 countries from 2005 to 2014 to determine, ceteris paribus, whether or not ICTs play a role in facilitating changes to the status quo that gravitate against government policies. We found that ICTs although it can reduce hysteresis, the tendency to remain passive, inertia, is stronger. In addition, because ICTs are multi-purpose technologies they also support other beneficial economic and political activities which can explain why we don't see greater evidence of social unrest with these technologies. The literature on social unrest provide some clues about this phenomenon. People are willing to engage in these movements but it appears that only during a crisis.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this chapter is to understand why information and communication technologies (ICTs) can be a powerful tool for citizens to protest against what they perceive to be unjust. We focus on the attributes of ICTs that are able to reduce friction in information gathering and distribution, as well as

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reduce the transaction costs of searching for information and or people, monitoring their behavior, and coordinating participation among similarly concerned citizens. These attributes, we believe, can facilitate and enhance the emotional connections that people have with the problems they face. This century has seen, much more tangibly, the manner in which these technologies have facilitated, to a certain extent, social movements such as the Arab Spring in the Middle East, the Occupy and the Black Lives Matter movements in the U.S. and *Los Indignados* in Spain, among others. We believe that ICTs are opening virtual public spheres where the members of civil society are able to engage with peers and, at times of distress, to organize to protest against their governments.

Many scholars have studied social unrest and have tested different hypotheses to try to elucidate the causes of these movements. The main contribution of this paper is to make connections between neuroscience (in particular the emotional connections that are needed for people to get engaged in a social protest) and economics (in particular the manner in which fundamental concepts such as information friction and transaction costs are significantly reduced by ICTs), while also taking into consideration the contributions of the social sciences (in particular the factors that contribute to unrest). From this analysis, we find that, indeed, ICTs contribute to social manifestations of discontent.

Using data from the World Bank and other international organizations, we constructed a model to empirically determine if information technologies, specifically mobile devices and Internet access, lead to greater social unrest.

In addition to ICTs, we included three control factors that previous scholars have identified as contributors to a society's need to protest. These are: economic factors (income per capita), governance, and the size of the population.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Explaining Social Unrest

Social unrest can have different manifestations. It can be displayed in violent and uncontrolled ways, in more planned and organized public protests, and even in the form of nonviolent resistance, which, we believe, in the future may even take place exclusively online. There is a large body of scholarly work about social unrest.

Regarding social unrest specifically, Castells (2013) notes that social neuroscientists have shown that social change involves individual or collective actions that have emotional motivations. The main emotions involved in social change are fear, which results in precautionary behaviors such as withdrawal, and anger, which acts as a trigger to action. In other words, emotions push individuals towards action, which, with others, can evolve into collective action.

Castells' (2013) ideas about the role of emotional motivation in social change is supported by the social psychological theory of protest. Van Stekelenburg and Klandermans (2013), for example, have provided a sound literature review on social psychological issues explaining peoples' reasons for protesting. The authors stress that group-based emotions, including anger, are important motivators of protest participation.

The literature about protests has found that individuals are relatively slow to respond to the problems they face. There is, therefore, a delay between a problem and a reaction from citizens. Scholars have modeled the process in terms of movement from a passive state, when civil society is not engaged, to

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