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New Media vs. Old Politics

The Internet, Social Media, and
Democratisation in Pakistan

By Marcus Michaelsen

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New Media vs. Old Politics

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List of Acronyms

APC	Association for Progressive Communications
BBC	British Broadcasting Company
CNN	Cable News Network
DW	Deutsche Welle
GNI	Gross National Income
HuT	Hizb ul Tahrir
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDI	ICT Development Index
ISP	Internet Service Provider
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
LUMS	Lahore University of Management Sciences
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
PEMRA	Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority
PIE	Pakistan Internet Exchange
PTA	Pakistan Telecommunication Authority
PTI	Pakistan Tehreek-e Insaaf
PIPS	Pak Institute for Peace Studies
PPP	Pakistan Peoples Party
PTV	Pakistan Television Corporation
TBTT	Take Back the Tech!
TTP	Tehreek-e Taliban
VoA	Voice of America
WAR	War Against Rape

About the author

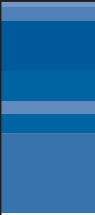
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Abstract

- In order to use Pakistan as a case study in current debates on the political potential of new information and communication technologies, this report develops an analytical framework based on political transformation theory and research on media in processes of political change. Democratic development in Pakistan seems to be challenged by the resistance of the political elite to changes in the distribution of power and wealth; deficits in economic and human development; a significant risk of social conflict; and the international community's perception of the country as a failing state in need of control and stabilisation. Most importantly, Pakistan has to develop a political culture of rational debate, tolerance, and non-violent conflict resolution.
- Pakistan needs an open debate on the country's future and identity in order to reach an authentic discourse on democracy and human rights. Extremist ideas gaining ground in the public sphere have to be countered by transparent information and inclusive opinion formation on the causes for the country's various problems as well as possible solutions. The media play an essential role in this process. Despite significant progress, Pakistan's media need to continue a path along of professionalisation and internal reform resisting current tendencies of sensationalism and political bias. Alternative media such as blogs, websites and social media may support this process by giving room to underreported topics and critical discussions.
- The political use of the internet in Pakistan is still in an early phase. There are about 20 million internet users, approx. 11 per cent of the population – relatively low in comparison to Egypt (21 per cent), Tunisia (34 per cent), and Iran (43 per cent). Internet proliferation is mainly hindered by deficits in education and infrastructure. Yet with a large young population, a comparatively high mobile phone penetration, and an as yet unexploited market of Urdu online media, Pakistan has a significant potential for user growth. For some progressive layers of civil society the internet has already opened up a space for debate and civic engagement.



I. THE INTERNET, SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL CHANGE: *AN ONGOING DEBATE*

The political uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011 have further intensified discussions on the political potential of internet communication which, since the very beginning, have been closely tied to the worldwide expansion of the medium: the new information and communication technologies (ICT) are generally seen as facilitating a more open information exchange, the formation of alternative political opinions, and the mobilisation of social actors previously excluded from political participation. Six months after Twitter messages about the protests of Iranian voters against the manipulation of the presidential elections in June 2009 had mobilised worldwide attention, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton declared internet freedom a new priority in American foreign policy. Drawing on Cold War rhetoric, Clinton warned of a descending “new information curtain” and likened the battle against internet censorship to an overall fight against authoritarianism (Clinton 2010). Coupled with the powerful impressions from Egypt where protesters allegedly used social media like Facebook to organise their vast presence in Cairo’s central Tahrir Square, the perception of the internet as a means for democratisation and development is bound to shape future political expectations and decisions. As a consequence, the new medium increasingly attracts the interest of civil society activists, policy makers, and development organisations. In the US, as in many other Western countries, this has already led to a sharp increase in projects and funds dedicated to harness the supposed democratic potential of the internet.

Yet the narrative of the “Twitter/Facebook-Revolutions” has been contested. In his detailed rebuttal of “cyber-optimism” Evgeny Morozov argues that a mere focus on information freedom and technology access neglects the way authoritarian rulers are using the internet for propaganda purposes, online surveillance, and targeted censorship. A one-sided approach to supporting net-activism would risk not only a waste of funds and resources but also carry dangers for the very activists the assistance is directed at (Morozov 2011). Also, research on the Kenyan post-election crisis of 2007 has shown that the new communication technologies actually exacerbated conflict and violence (Goldstein/Rotich 2008, BBC 2008). The Tunisian blogger Sami Ben Gharbia points out that the sudden interest in digital activism, the politicisation of cyberspace, and the proliferation of funding affect the independence, autonomy, and authenticity that have characterised online initiatives in the Arab world so far. Moreover, due to the involvement of giant private companies like Google and Facebook he considers the “Internet Freedom Agenda” a new strategy for

advancing the geopolitical and economic interests of the West (Ben Gharbia 2010).

While there is no doubt that internet communication does play an increasing role in the activities of opposition groups and civil society, it is rather difficult to verify that the various internet applications effectively caused any of the results they have been associated with. A more nuanced approach is required when examining the internet's potential contributions to processes of political change. The simple disposability of communication technology does not automatically lead to the same usages and effects in different social settings. It is therefore necessary to contextualise internet use in order to gain a deeper understanding of how and why social actors appropriate the medium and what the influencing factors and possible effects are. Only then it will be possible to effectively encourage the online communication of political and civil society activists seeking reform and democracy. Here, case studies of different countries and settings seem particularly useful as they can provide a basis for comparison permitting the evaluation of the democratic potential of the new media. For this purpose, this paper proposes an analytical framework that uses studies of political transformation and the media's role in these processes as a background for the critical discussion of current research on the internet and social media in contentious politics. By distinguishing several possible effects of the internet on the communication and activities of civil society and political challengers the study seeks to provide a flexible guideline for the examination of online and social media usage. In the second part, this guideline will then be applied to the case of Pakistan.

1. Political Transformation: A Theoretical Approach

The transition to democracy designates a process of political change leading from an authoritarian to a democratic system¹. According to the paradigms of transformation studies democratisation evolves in succeeding phases starting with a crisis in the established regime that engenders the erosion of its legitimacy and power. During the following transition phase, the authoritarian elite loses political power either through a revolutionary or a reformist process ("pacted transition") and free elections as well as other criteria for a democratic system can be introduced. The consolidation phase encompasses the institutionalisation

¹ The minimal criteria for a democratic system are generally considered as: 1) participation of the people in the choice of government through regular and free elections 2) division of political power and independence of the judiciary ensuring a rule of law 3) guaranty of human and civil rights.

of democracy in the form of repeated elections, a new constitution, and also the development of a healthy political culture. These successive steps obviously represent a simplified model; democratisation is in fact a long and fragile process that is prone to blockages or reversals at any time. Significant factors influencing the initiation, pace, and result of a transition are: a) the socio-economic stratification of society and whether underprivileged social groups are pushing for a change in the distribution of power and economic resources; b) the capacity of contentious groups to challenge power holders through presenting credible political alternatives, mobilising larger parts of the population, and connecting to other opposition groups; c) the development of civil society and political culture; d) the international framework and external influences. Although the validity of the transition paradigm has been put into question by an increasing number of aborted transitions and authoritarian backlashes leading to so-called hybrid regimes (i.e. "defective democracy", "electoral authoritarianism"), its postulations provide an essential analytical framework (Merkel 2000, Schubert et al. 1994).

2. Media in Political Transitions: Limits and Potentials

The political changes in Latin America and Europe in the 1980s and 1990s as well as the rapid evolution of communication technologies during the last decades have generated increasing interest in media within processes of political transition. Theoretical generalisations generated on the basis of different case studies indicate that possible roles and effects of the media depend on media types and transition stages.

Authoritarian regimes generally subject "big" media (press, radio, television) to mechanisms of state control and censorship of varying strictness. In exchange, "small" media (leaflets, cassettes, CDs) develop into essential communication channels for the political opposition and dissidents. In Eastern Europe, for example, small print publications for censored literature (samizdat) became a forum for political discussions. In Iran prior to the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the ideas of Khomeini were propagated through audio-cassettes. In environments where the free circulation of information is restricted, these flexible media open up alternative spheres for the exchange of news and opinions, permitting the dissemination of new political ideas and strategies for collective action. As such, alternative media strengthen the capability of subaltern groups to challenge dominant power structures (Sreberny/Mohammadi 1994, Downing 1996).

With the decline of authoritarian control, the press and particularly television broadcasts gain more manoeuvring space. Due to their greater outreach capacities, these media have the potential to involve more people into ongoing political changes. However, big media institutions remain vulnerable to political interferences and require the protection of elite factions supporting further liberalisation. The different parties involved in the negotiations for the transition of political power need to agree on a new legislative framework governing the media sector. At the same time, the mass media themselves have to embark on a process of internal reform to gain distance from the former ruling elite and integrate professional journalistic ethics (Hafez 2005).

During the consolidation phase of democracy, mass media gain even more importance as forums for information and debate. By discussing the decisions of the government and highlighting underrepresented issues the media play a significant role in strengthening the values of a democratic political culture. Freed from central state control, however, the media landscape is hereafter governed by the laws of a liberalised market. Therefore, the typical escalation in the number of press publications during the initial period of regime change generally gives way to a re-concentration of media ownership that follows economic criteria. The increasing influence of the affluent elite on the media market and an orientation towards consumer-culture represent risks to the democratic functioning of the media. Independent financing and the education of qualified media personnel can counter these tendencies, which is one of the reasons why external media assistance appears essential during this transition phase. Also, the persistence of an alternative media sector closely linked to civil society can provide critical corrections to the contents of mass media (Blankson 2007, Thomaß/Tzankoff 2001).

In addition to this general outline of the media's role in the different stages of political transitions, several influencing factors come into play (Hafez 2005):

- State control and repression: The extent to which a regime monitors information circulation determines the manoeuvring space of media. While so-called "hard" authoritarian regimes leave room only for small or clandestine media, other "softer" regimes allow for a certain amount of freedom as long as political taboos are respected.
- Development of society and political culture: literacy rates and general education obviously shape the media's public. Illiteracy intensifies the role of television, a media more easily influenced by dominant political and economic actors.

- State of civil society and political challengers/their relation to the media: without collective actors seeking to challenge dominant power structures the potential of alternative media cannot be put into use. Also, if journalists agree with the orientations of the opposition and/or important civil society movements, they are likely to use their position in the media to support these actors and the quest for change.
- Evolution of professional journalism: ethical standards and professionalism of journalists determine the media's proper functioning within the emerging democracy.
- Existence of private/independent capital: private investments in the media sector diminish central state control and pluralise the media landscape. Wealthy elites, however, are often tied to the established political class and therefore show little interest in significant changes.

3. The Internet as a Potential Tool for Democratisation

Given the role that small and flexible media are able to play in the initial phase of political transformation, it is not surprising that the internet has raised high expectations regarding its possible effects on authoritarian regimes and the advancement of worldwide democratisation. The internet allows for a quasi instantaneous transmission of information at low cost and free from the typical barriers that confine access to the traditional media. The evolution of the new media during the last decade has made it easy to transmit messages in different formats (text, sound, and image). Furthermore, online communication transcends geographical borders permitting the formation of transnational communities based on shared language, culture, or interests. Due to its network-like and non-hierarchical structure, the internet has been considered as the ideal means of communication for social movements and subaltern groups challenging established power structures (van de Donk et al. 2004). In Western democracies, it was expected to eradicate the democratic deficits of corporate-dominated media systems, influenced by consumer-culture and intertwined with powerful elites. As for authoritarian systems, the World Wide Web promised not only to undermine the state's control on information circulation but also to open up new communication channels for suppressed opposition groups and dissidents (Ferdinand 2000, Tsagarousianou 1998).

3.1. *Factors Restraining the Impact of the Internet*

Up till now, however, it has become evident that the internet's potential for fostering democratic change is restrained by several factors. First of all, the different aspects of the so-called "digital divide" shape, size, and composition of online public groups as well as possible forms of usage: not only infrastructural development and access quality but also education, media literacy and socio-economic stratification create unequal conditions within the population for accessing and using the Internet (Norris 2001).

Secondly, the characteristics of online communication itself influence its political outreach. The internet is considered a "pull-medium"; i.e. users have to actively search for the content and applications they are interested in. Consequently, political information and debate enter an uneven rivalry with entertainment – as it is the case in other media too. In addition, users tend to visit the websites of well-established traditional media, like newspapers or TV-stations that generally have significant resources at their disposal to compete with independent online publications or weblogs (Hafez 2007, Schmidt 2006).

Thirdly, non-democratic regimes have developed sophisticated mechanisms for the surveillance and control of online communication. Administering the national infrastructure and legislation of telecommunication, authoritarian states successfully block access to specific internet content, and monitor and persecute dissident online authors. The recent events in Iran and Tunisia have shown that security agencies employed internet technology to identify protesters and networks of resistance. Furthermore, regime actors actively produce online content in order to extend their ideological hegemony into cyberspace. In China and Russia, for instance, not only all are important state media present on the internet but the government also organises bloggers who engage extensively in online debates in order to drown out dissident voices. Saudi-Arabia and Thailand provide internet users with the option of reporting websites considered offensive to ruling norms and values, thereby "crowd-sourcing" censorship. The Singaporean government uses internet forums to absorb critique that could otherwise seek different channels to emerge in public. These various forms of pro-active internet use ultimately contribute to strengthening the legitimacy of non-democratic rulers (Kalathil/Boas 2003, Morozov 2011).

Finally, aside from authoritarian regimes other non-democratic actors benefit from the internet too: extremist groups of various orientations discovered long ago the advantages of online communication, underlining the fact that the internet as such does not necessarily function along democratic norms.

As a consequence of these restricting factors, the internet's use for the spreading of political information and debate in developing and transitioning countries remains generally limited to the educated and urban layers of society. Nevertheless, these information elites by and large originate in the middle classes and can be considered as upwardly mobile social groups who, in an authoritarian setting, are often affected by political exclusion. In many transformation processes, educated professionals such as journalists, academics, lawyers, and engineers have formed the core of movements that have challenged established regimes. In civil society, these actors are often committed to social development and change. By creating awareness of existing grievances and formulating demands for change they influence public opinion. With regards to democratisation processes, it is therefore necessary to evaluate the capability and inclination of internet-active social actors to challenge the status quo. Subsequently it can be examined whether and how the internet is supporting the activities of these actors. For this purpose, several potential effects of the internet on the communication and activities of civil society and political challengers will be distinguished in the following.

3.2. *Potential effects of the Internet*

Creation of alternative public spheres: Despite the restricting factors mentioned above, the emergence of news websites and weblogs has resulted in a diversification of the information landscape in countries under authoritarian rule or transitioning towards democracy. On the internet, journalists banned from publication, dissidents, and civil society activists find various ways to publish information and opinions. In restricted media environments, online media thus act as forums for voices not necessarily represented in the mass media and take on the form of a subaltern public sphere. By disseminating suppressed information and political critique they bring more transparency into the acts and decisions of the political elite and facilitate the formation of alternative political opinions.

In moments of crisis or intensified political conflict, these alternative public spheres can be expanded temporarily through various forms of citizen journalism, i.e. the gathering and distributing of news and information by ordinary citizens, as opposed to professional journalists. This tendency could be observed during the protests in Iran 2009 and in Burma 2007. Although the authoritarian rulers had blocked the national and foreign news media's coverage, the demonstrators recorded photos and videos on their mobile phones in order to publish them online, thereby documenting the unfolding events and the violence of the security forces. In Egypt and Tunisia 2011, where both regimes relied on financial and political support from the West, the exposure of repression through online media resulted in the regimes' reluctance to squash the protests in order to avoid alienating international public opinion and political allies. However, in Iran and Syria, more internationally isolated countries, such a response to the exposure did not occur and both regimes showed less restraint in their use of violence against the opposition.

In addition to the disseminating of information, the alternative public spheres on the internet also work as a platform for debate. Weblogs especially produce discussions that, although restricted in their outreach, can achieve a high intensity and quality of deliberation. While it is rare for blogs to succeed in transmitting their topics to the mass media and function as "agenda-setters", they elaborate on the content of other media acting as an "echo-chamber" (Schmidt 2006). Through journalists and other opinion leaders participating in these debates, blogs can nevertheless exert a certain influence on the process of opinion formation. Popular bloggers/activists with links to mainstream journalism, act as "central nodes" transmitting claims from the grassroots level to communication channels with larger audiences. In the struggle for the recognition of their rights as a religious minority, bloggers from the Egyptian Baha'i community, for instance, succeeded in further publicising their claims by connecting to influential journalistic bloggers who then debated these issues in the national press (Faris 2010).

Finally, the alternative online media can also contribute to the internal democratisation of the media landscape itself which, as already mentioned, is considered as a significant element within the overall process of democratic transition. Younger journalists find an open training ground in weblogs and smaller online publications to improve their skills in reporting and analysis. Up to a certain degree

online media can also act as a counterweight to the established media by criticising and commenting on their content. Often mass media respond to the trends of blogging and social media by integrating these formats into their own websites. If taken seriously, this convergence with online appliances can open up the established media towards emerging opinions and uncovered developments in society.

Formation of political culture and collective identities: Another important aspect that needs to be considered when examining the role of the internet for democratic change is the impact that online media have on the internal communication of civil society. Social movements have to develop a shared perception of their goals and how to achieve them before they can target larger audiences and the political sphere or initiate collective action. A strong collective identity sustains the commitment of followers who are connected rather by common ideas than organisational structures. Within civil society these social actors practice the communicative aspects of a democratic political culture such as rational deliberation and tolerance towards other opinions by constantly negotiating identities, reinterpreting norms and values, and developing different forms of solidarity (Cohen/Arato 1992). The internet can support and intensify this process, especially if other channels of communication are blocked. Under severe pressure from the Ahmadinejad government, the Iranian women's movement, for example, had to retreat more and more to the internet in order to continue its activities. When public meetings became impossible and organisations were dismantled, online communication helped activists to keep in contact, debate future activities and the reorientation of the movement, as well as to express solidarity with fellow activists in prison (Michaelsen 2011).

Networking and Organising: Social movements not only need to sustain communication among their immediate followers but also to reach out for the support of bystanders and other resources in order to be able to influence political decision making. While its impact on larger audiences in authoritarian or transitioning countries is restricted by the factors mentioned above, the internet has been proven very efficient as a means of transnational communication. Local activists can more easily make contact with international NGOs and advocacy organisations and relay their knowledge on the specific situation in their country. In exchange they get access to international

expertise and more leverage over policy makers. If activists succeed in communicating their cause to global media and mobilising international opinion, they can exert pressure on their own government by circumventing the censored national media in a “boomerang effect” (Keck/Sikkink 1998). These mechanisms have been observed especially in the field of human rights advocacy. Transnational civil society actors are able to unfold significant “discursive power” vis-à-vis national governments, international organisations, and the global economy (Holzscheiter 2005). Other forms of internet based activism aggregate individual participation and donations (Kiva.org, Avaaz) or crowd-source reporting on specific issues (Ushahidi).² Facilitated by the internet, “networked activism”, combining different types of civic engagement and advocacy, is expected to permit both broad mobilisation and “deep” participation – that is the member’s active and meaningful involvement in the activities of the respective initiative or movement (Beutz Land 2009).

Mobilisation for Collective Action: The role that internet and social media might play in the mobilisation of people for collective action is not only the most debated effect of the new media but also the one which is hardest to demonstrate empirically. With the initial enthusiasm about the Iranian “Twitter Revolution” ebbing away, it became clear that Twitter actually played a minor role in the organisation of the protests on the ground: Iranians were already highly mobilised by a polarising election campaign so that frustration about the manipulated results quickly turned into public anger. Twitter rather served for transmitting information about the events on a global level and thereby attracted the attention of international audiences (Esfandiari 2010, Michaelsen 2011). In Egypt and Tunisia, Facebook groups certainly formed a significant force within the anti-regime movements by tapping into existing frustrations about a corrupt and ineffective state and linking them to specific faces or causes. Thus, social media supported the formation of open networks of participants without charismatic figures or central

² Kiva.org is an internet-based organisation connecting individuals for micro-financing development projects in different parts of the world. Avaaz.org provides a platform for organising worldwide movements, campaigns and petitions on different issues. The open-source software Ushahidi has been used for the first time in Kenya for collecting testimonies on violence in the aftermath of the disputed 2007 elections and placing them on a Google map. Relying on crowd-sourcing for the collection of information, Ushahidi helps to visualise events in moments of crisis in order to increase public awareness and allow for a coordinated response. It has also been used in Haiti, after the earthquake of 2010, and during the beginning of the rebel uprising against Qaddafi in Libya in March 2011.

organisations. The content and activities generated by these networks, however, were mostly transmitted by the satellite channel Al-Jazeera which increased the scale and outreach of the protests’ messages tremendously (Lynch 2011).

While the internet and online media allow for a diversification of information landscapes in transition countries, more influences come into play when this intensified information exchange comes to be transformed into political action. By connecting physically distant people social media certainly increase the speed and scope of collective campaigns. Also, they can amplify the visibility of even small protests by instantaneously transmitting pictures and information. One risk that has been debated in this context is so-called ‘slacktivism’: internet users supporting various causes and campaigns in front of their computers without ever engaging in real political action. Once more, a political culture of civic engagement and resistance to autocratic rule appears as a key factor. In addition, public space as the central stage for collective action is strictly administered in non-democratic states in order to prevent demonstrations and protests. Authoritarian rulers also obstruct the development of civil society organisations and repress oppositional key-figures or dissidents that could foster the mobilisation of challengers. Consequently, social media above all seem to play a role in assembling people for so-called smart- or flash-mobs: rather spontaneous and episodic public appearances of protesters mobilised by mobile phones or social networks. As the increased contact and exchange on the internet involves more people into social or political communities, the number of potential activists who will oppose the most obvious forms of rights violations, injustice, or corruption could also be growing. If organised civil society activism is restricted, new communication technology may thus lead to “an upturn in bottom-up spontaneous protest focusing on specific high-profile issues, local events, and the most visible abuses of power” (Etling et al. 2010).

While the horizontal and network-like structure of protest campaigns generated by social media can certainly be considered an advantage, since easy repression and the identification of key leaders become more difficult for repressive rulers, these characteristics can also present a weakness once change is initiated. Even if these forms of protest succeed in challenging or destabilising established rulers, they are not equipped for the complex process of persistent

contention and negotiation that precedes the replacement of one political system with another. Here, again, factors such as a unified opposition, a clear political agenda, and political figures willing to push for systemic change come into play (Lynch 2011).

4. Conclusion and Research Guidelines

The overview on current research on media and political transformation has shown that the internet can actually play different roles in the activities of social actors seeking to resist and challenge established forms of power. Whether this leads to a process of democratic change, however, depends on various factors. Research in this regard therefore needs to be contextualised, taking into account the specific social and political settings of the country under examination. The comparison of different case studies, then, allows for the identification of common patterns and structures, providing a basis for a realistic perspective on the internet's potential as a tool for democratisation. For that purpose, this study proposes the following research questions as a guideline for evaluating the internet's possible roles in processes of political change and transformation:

I. *Socio-political context and political development*

- How can the political system and transitional status be classified (e.g. authoritarian, transitional, consolidating, blocked, hybrid etc)?
- What are the bases of the current regime's legitimacy? Are there any ongoing forms of crisis or weaknesses?
- What are the main indicators of socio-economic development (e.g. GNI per capita, urbanisation, literacy, 'youth bulge')? How developed are the middle classes?
- Who are the main political actors seeking or blocking change? How are they organised and what are their resources?
- What influence do international factors exert on domestic developments and politics?
- What is the status of civil society?
- How developed is the political culture? Are there any political discourses or alternatives challenging the existing political system?

II. *Media system*

- What is the legislative framework for the media system?
- Does the state control or censor the media?
- Which political/economic actors exert influence over the media? Is the media landscape characterised by a certain diversity and independence?
- How does the society access and use the media? What media are important/ influential?
- How developed are the professional standards of journalists?
- Is the media's coverage characterised by variety and balance?

III. *General development of ICT*

- What are the main indicators for ICT-usage and expansion (e.g. number of users, penetration, mobile users, infrastructural development etc.)?
- What is the legislative framework for the internet?
- What is the state's policy towards the internet (e.g. censorship and control, support of expansion, pro-active use, e-government)?
- Are there any particular usage tendencies in society?
- What role do social media (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) play?

IV. *The internet and civil society*

- What role do online media play for the dissemination of news and information?
- Who are the main social actors using internet?
- Is there an active blogosphere or other alternative online media?
- Is there a convergence between traditional and online media? Do online media exert any form of influence on the traditional media?
- What role do online media play in debate and exchange within civil society?
- Do online and social media support the formation of campaigns or social movements?

- Do online and social media open up new opportunities for contentious politics?
- Do these media support the networking and coordination of civil society groups between one another?
- Are there any forms of transnational networking or “boomerang effects”?
- Does the internet support the recruitment and mobilisation of followers in social movements?
- Are there any examples of mobilisation (campaigns, protests) that the internet has facilitated?

II PAKISTAN AS A CASE STUDY

1. Pakistan’s Political Transformation

Since its foundation in 1947, Pakistan has not succeeded in establishing a stable system of democratic governance. Alternating intervals between civilian governments and military rule remain a characteristic feature of the country’s political evolution. After the removal of the military government led by former Army Chief and President Musharraf in 2008, Pakistan has, again, embarked on a fragile course of democratisation. However, even if no longer directly involved in government, the army still casts a long shadow over the political sphere as well as the economy and the national culture, thereby hampering the evolvement of functional democratic institutions. Combining elements of authoritarian rule, hesitant liberalisation and democratic consolidation, Pakistan has to be situated in the “grey zone” of hybrid systems.

1.1. *A State of Crisis?*

The consolidation of a democratic system in Pakistan faces multiple challenges. Although the country ranks among the most populated in the world, there is neither a congruent strategy nor the political will to manage demographics. The population growth exerts significant pressure on all sectors of public life. The education and health system particularly are unable to cater for the needs of society. Pakistan is far from its declared goal of providing basic primary education to all children by 2015: currently only 56 per cent of children between the age of five and nine years attend school. With nearly half of the population being illiterate, the literacy rate is among the lowest in the region. Moreover, a lack of efficient training and qualification for the labour market leads to high numbers of un- and underemployment, particularly among the youth. These trends coincide with an increasing migration into the cities where a poor and overstrained administration often results in energy, water, and housing shortages. The unfulfilled promises of both education and urbanisation are generally considered as catalysts for feelings of resentment and alienation among the affected layers of the population, fermenting social tension and radical ideas (Khan/Yusuf 2011).

The economic development that would be necessary to absorb the rapidly growing workforce is hampered by inflation, low tax

revenues, an endemic energy crisis, and the volatile security situation. Without the assistance of international donors, the country would have already ended up in bankruptcy. Pakistan's image of a nuclear-armed "failing" state and its strategic position in the "war against terror" have guaranteed a consistent flow of external aid that allowed for a policy of "borrowed growth" (Lodhi 2011: 57), but has so far delayed necessary structural reforms.

The federal structure of the country is not well developed. The most populated province, Punjab, still dominates national politics, for example by providing most of the personnel for the state administration, the military, and the security forces. The resulting imbalance not only exacerbates ethnic rivalries but also reduces the overall recognition of the central government. In fact, many challenges to the state authority have been articulated on the basis of ethnic frustrations (Akhtar 2010: 110). This is probably most evident in the province of Baluchistan where the government's neglect of human development and regional aspirations has ended in a vicious circle of violent insurgency and suppression.

Aside from these structural development deficits, the conflict with militant extremists surely represents the most significant challenge to Pakistan's political progress. The explosive alliance of Islamist ideology and armed violence came into being during the 1980s, when Pakistan formed the central base for training and facilitating religiously motivated fighters against the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan. After 9/11 and Musharraf's alignment with the U.S. in the "war against terror", Pakistan pursued the double strategy of cracking down on Al-Qaeda members in order to secure American assistance, while at the same time upholding covered relations with the Taliban, considered as strategic assets in the quest for "strategic depth" vis-à-vis the rival India. A fatal consequence of this approach, however, has been the emergence of an indigenous movement of Pakistani Taliban in the border regions, defying the state authority with incursions into the mainland and terrorist bombings in major cities. In response, the army has launched several offensives against the militants which have reinstalled the government's authority but also produced a significant number of civilian casualties and damaged essential infrastructure in the border regions (Rahman 2009, Hussain 2011).

The army's inconsistency in dealings with Islamist extremists has tainted its reputation amongst the people. On the one hand, the establishment's unbalanced alliance with the U.S. is seen very critically, especially as the latter continues to launch drone attacks on Pakistani territory regardless of civilian casualties. On the other, terrorist assaults on central army institutions, sometimes facilitated by radical members within the military, have raised doubts about the capacity and the will of the security establishment in dealing with the militants. This ambiguity has been perfectly epitomised by the public debate in Pakistan that followed the killing of Osama bin Laden in the garrison city of Abbotabad: while some felt outraged over the incursion of a U.S. elite force on Pakistani territory, others were perturbed by the possibility that the army had played a role in providing shelter for the world's most-wanted terrorist, while others still were worried by the thought that the authorities had been incapable of tracing him themselves.

Despite repeated predictions of chaos and breakdown, Pakistan has maintained a certain level of stability throughout the years. This apparent contradiction seems to be the result of a balance of power and strategic interests among the different groups composing the political elite who benefit from the current situation by maintaining their respective zones of influence and resources, and therefore show no interest in finding durable solutions for a multilayered crisis (Schetter/Mielke 2008: 26).

1.2. *Blocking Change: The Political Elite*

Within Pakistan's power elite the army plays the central role in national and foreign politics. Under the banner of protecting sovereignty and the security of the country, it has legitimised and expanded its intrusion into state affairs. The army has also accumulated significant economic wealth through entrenchment in the corporate sector, thereby initiating self-perpetuating dynamics: "political power guarantees economic benefits which, in turn, motivate the officer cadre to remain powerful and to play an influential role in governance" (Siddiq 2007: 248). Characteristically, the army does not always act as a homogeneous entity but consists of different groups of interest that interfere, sometimes with contradicting agendas, into politics (Ibid.).

The political class is principally composed of wealthy elites and the owners of large land estates. Benefiting from feudal structures which still characterise social relations and property distribution outside the urban areas, these actors exert influence through networks of patronage and clientelism. Rather than organising the formation of political opinion, the major political parties build cartels that keep power within restricted circles. None of these parties is seeking to overhaul the current power structure or to seriously break with the predominance of the army. Even the parties' internal politics are heavily influenced by nepotism, so that it is difficult to envisage significant contributions towards democratisation from their side (Akhtar 2010).

The influence of religious actors on Pakistani politics and society has increased as a long-term result of Zia ul Haq's drive for Islamisation in the 1980s. Since that period, a growing number of religious schools, often supported by Saudi-Arabian donations, has partly compensated for the failures of the education system, recruiting students from the lower urban and rural classes. Even if the madrasahs' repeatedly debated role in the recruitment of militants and suicide bombers deserves a more nuanced approach, they have certainly contributed to the propagation of narrow interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence which further a rejection of liberal values, which are associated with the 'West', as well as sectarianism against other branches of Islam. These schools have also produced a class of religious leaders who are not necessarily well-trained scholars of Islam and are sometimes even self-proclaimed, but utilise religiosity to win political and social sway.

Between the established religious parties, which play a minor role in parliamentary politics, on one side, and the militant extremists on the other, there is now a broad spectrum of religious figures and organisations advancing a larger Islamist agenda. In a society that has become manifestly more conservative during recent decades, they are able to exert significant influence on the formation of public opinion and social norms. Their ideas resonate also within the wider state bureaucracy: while many leading functionaries entered the administration in the years impacted by the Zia regime, new recruits mostly hail from the lower middle class and support conservative and religious values as well as a rather hierarchical style of service (Akhtar 2010, Shafkat 2011).

The extent to which public culture and politics are penetrated by religious intolerance and fanaticism became clear with the murder of Salman Taseer, the provincial governor of Punjab who had publicly opposed a controversial law against blasphemy. The assassination in January 2011 was the shocking result of a vilification campaign led by the clergy and sections of the media. Even rather moderate religious associations declared the killer, one of Taseer's bodyguards, a hero. With such hate speech going unpunished and school curricula and TV-shows perpetuating radical views, moderate voices among Pakistan's political and religious elites can barely be heard (Economist 2011). Up till now, there is neither an articulate opposition to the political instrumentalisation of religion nor do progressive interpretations of Islam gain much attention.

1.3. *An Unfavourable International Setting*

The historical roots of Pakistan's blocked democratic evolution lie in the foundation of the state itself and the country's resultant position in the region. Gaining independence from colonial rule, Pakistan was established as a country for the Muslim inhabitants of British India. The Partition and the ensuing wave of migration led to the killing of about a million people, creating a breeding ground for enduring mistrust and hostility between India and Pakistan. The chronic conflict between the two neighbouring countries prevents regional stability and economic relations. In Pakistan, it also sustains the doctrine of "national security" as a central element of state ideology, which legitimises the overarching role of the military in national politics. Sentiments of existential threat and inferiority have been further nourished by developments such as the secession of East Pakistan/Bangladesh in 1971, the unresolved conflict over Kashmir, instability and war in Afghanistan, the growing economical, political, and even cultural power of India, and last but not least the frequent intrusions of global powers in the country's affairs, pursuing their respective geostrategic interests. Consequently, any discourse on political worldview and national identity is shaped by nationalism, religion, and security issues rather than liberal or pluralistic ideas (Akhtar 2010).

Pakistan's strategic location in the "war against terror", its nuclear arsenal, and the persisting challenge of militant extremists as well as its position as the second most populated Muslim nation are all

factors sustaining international attention in the country's future evolution. The initiatives of the international community towards assisting development in Pakistan, however, are above all influenced by strategic considerations. Consequently, democratisation does not appear to be a priority since any serious transformation would inevitably lead to temporary volatility. The Western countries militarily involved in Afghanistan are mainly seeking stability in the region in order to be able to withdraw their troops. Although external donors repeatedly state their frustration at stalled development and drained financial resources in Pakistan, their strategic preoccupations prevent a fundamental change of approach. In particular, the U.S. as a major donor maintains a close, though not always amicable, relationship with the Pakistani establishment in which it is "buying" influence, but only reluctantly pressuring for democratic change. As for Pakistan's political elite, the Western focus on stability serves not only as a welcome pretext for delaying any alterations in the balance of power, but also as an incitement to prevent any durable solution for ongoing conflicts since the country's perceived fragility guarantees a steady flow of resources (Fair 2011).

1.4. *Where Are Civil Society and Political Culture Heading?*

Given the lack of political and economic progress, discontent amongst the population is rife. According to a survey carried out by the Washington-based Pew Research Centre from May 2011, only 20 per cent of the respondents in Pakistan judged the current national government as having a good influence on the evolution of the country. The police and the judiciary received equally low ratings: respectively 26 and 41 per cent saw their role as positive. These results contrast with a still largely positive voting for the army whose overall conduct is supported by 79 per cent (Pew Research Centre 2011). Obviously, the insufficient performance of the government and other institutions undermines the legitimacy of the state. On the one hand, the gap between electoral politics and the demands emanating from society is at risk of increasing frustrations and voter abstinence, thereby further eroding the representative quality of elected institutions. On the other, the state's legitimacy void could be filled with alternative political visions. The demise of the established political parties lends social movements a greater significance, and as open and flexible networks, they seek to alter existing norms and

values on an issue-based agenda. These developments carry an actual potential for change, yet, it is not clear in which direction.

Due to the frequent interventions of the army into the political sphere and the overall hierarchical structure of society, a vibrant civil society that could pursue political emancipation vis-à-vis the state and at the same time provide an exercising ground for the development of a participatory political culture, is still underdeveloped in Pakistan. Most civic initiatives centre on social welfare and are led by personalities or groups from an elite background. Numerous religious institutions and foundations pursue their activities within a traditional framework. Modern civil society organisations are often dependent on external donors and based on formalised organisational structures, meaning that their societal outreach is rather limited (Schetter/Mielke 2008).

However, the capacity of Pakistani society to mobilise for a cause has been proven repeatedly in recent years. During the massive floods of 2010, for instance, various private initiatives organised relief for the affected areas, compensating for the weak response of the government and working alongside the army to help the victims. As for the "lawyers' movement" of 2007/2008, it has shown that parts of the population were willing to publicly engage for the secular principles of an independent judiciary and the state of law. Although the protests against the dismissal of the Chief Justice in March 2007 were spearheaded by the lawyers as a distinct social group, they had a wider appeal to other professionals and members of the urban middle class. Musharraf's autocratic intervention alienated these layers of society as it was a blatant contradiction to the course of controlled liberalisation that the military ruler had permitted so far. The movement thus reflected a larger agenda of pro-democratic aspirations. Its contribution to the ouster of Musharraf from power has increased the political self-consciousness of the upper middle-classes who experienced new channels for influencing politics outside the framework of party politics and elections (Akthar 2010, Lodhi 2011).

Some analysts see the lawyers' movement as one expression of the increasing role that a presumably moderate middle class plays in Pakistani politics. According to Lodhi, urban society has gained confidence and together with the liberated media constantly subjects the government to critical oversight (Lodhi 2011: 75). Yet it

is not at all evident that increasing consumer culture, media exposure, and political awareness within Pakistani society necessarily leads to progressive and democratic ideas taking root. Especially in the lower middle class a nationalist, restricted worldview and anti-Western stances often combine with a puritanical, rigidly conservative form of religiosity that shows no links to Pakistan's traditional currents of spiritual Islam. Politically, these social layers seek orientation in the economic progress of the Muslim nations in the Gulf region or Malaysia rather than the European democracies (Burke 2010). So if urbanisation and short-term economic progress during the Musharraf years have effectively permitted a certain part of the population to climb the social ladder, their status is currently threatened by inflation, increasing costs of living, and stagnation. Without any perspective for political participation society becomes receptive to populist or radical rhetoric. This is clearly evident in the growing popularity of former cricket star Imran Khan and his party Tehreek-e Insaf who pits himself against the political establishment and the big parties without offering any substantial programme. The current surge of religious extremism can certainly be understood in this context, too. Also, the rise of reactionary nationalism seems probable in a society that feels insecure about its cultural identity and position among other nations.

Ever increasingly it is important for an inclusive and rational debate about the country's future to take place. Pakistan needs to develop a discourse on democracy that is authentic to its culture and history. The political involvement and mobilisation of society's progressive actors has to go beyond restricted short-term campaigns in order to put constant pressure on the political sphere and to develop programmatic alternatives to which larger parts of the population can adhere. In this context, the media play a significant role in the course of Pakistan's democratic transformation.

2. The Media in Pakistan

Pakistan's media landscape experienced an impressive evolution during the last 10-15 years. The previously non-existent sector of private electronic media especially has flourished after the state monopoly on broadcasting was lifted in 2002. Overall, the media enjoy freedom of

expression but are faced with political pressure and safety issues when approaching certain topics. Also, a lack of professional education and weak journalistic ethics restrain the media from fully playing their required role in the democratic consolidation of the country.

2.1. A Growing Media Market

Television is nationwide the most popular medium. In addition to the state-run PTV with different channels for news, entertainment, and regional programmes, more than 70 private channels had been issued a license by the end of 2009. Nevertheless, there is a considerable gap between rural and urban areas. In some remote areas, where electricity shortages, limited coverage, and high poverty levels restrict the outreach of television, radio usage is almost equally as prevalent. In addition, the television market remains divided between PTV, still the only network with terrestrial emission, and the private channels operating via cable or satellite. According to a survey, only 11 per cent of the rural population have access to satellite or cable, versus 69 per cent in the urban areas (AudienceScapes 2010a). The costs of equipment or subscription also restrict the usage of private television. Although purchase prices for satellite equipment are decreasing and several households often share a single connection, the usage of private channels increases with the level of income and education. Thus, among the urban and educated television consumers with higher income rates, the private news channel Geo News has already outranked PTV's news programme. Other private news channels such as Express News, ARY News, and Aaj TV also enjoy growing popularity within these audience groups (AudienceScapes 2010b).

Despite the impressive progress in the sector television, radio remains an important medium in Pakistan. Particularly for the rural and poorer sections of the population with limited access to television and other media, radio is an essential source of information and entertainment. Due to the increasing circulation of mobile phones with a radio device, more and more people listen to radio programmes via their telephone. More than 100 private FM radio stations have been licensed in Pakistan, but they are not allowed to broadcast their own news programmes. Consequently, the options of obtaining news on the radio are restricted to state programmes, illegal (mostly militant) radios, and the programmes of

foreign broadcasters such as the BBC, Voice of America (VoA) or Deutsche Welle (DW). Remarkably, the BBC's news programme is most popular among those sections of the population who otherwise access only the state-run radio as a source of information (AudienceScapes 2010c). In the Federally Administered Areas (FATA) and the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province (KPK), many illegally operated radical radio stations distribute propaganda and erroneous information, undermining efforts towards education and development. To counteract the detrimental effects of these radical radio stations, a number of media assistance initiatives support the development of local radio stations, focusing, for instance, on women's or human rights' issues (AudienceScapes 2010d).

The printed press has a long tradition in Pakistan and there is a lively and diverse newspaper industry. As per official records, in 2010 the total number of periodical print publications reached 952, with 360 dailies,³ but according to media practitioners only around a dozen of these newspapers can actually be found at the newsstands (Asia Media Barometer 2009: 26). The total circulation of newspapers is estimated at 6 million, although figures are not reliable (AMB 2009: 27). The language divide between the country's two administrative languages, Urdu and English, that characterises the overall media landscape is most distinctive in the press. English media have only limited circulation but target the urban elite, thus having an impact on opinion makers and political circles. The Urdu press reaches much larger audiences and therefore unfolds a greater influence among the general public. There are also numerous publications in Pakistan's other vernacular languages, most importantly in Sindhi. The low literacy and education rates of Pakistan's population represent a significant hurdle to the outreach of the press. There is also a large gender divide among newspaper readers, which is even more accentuated in the rural areas where only 5 percent of women report to read a newspaper once a week (AudienceScapes 2010e).

The press market is dominated by three major groups, which have also expanded into the general media market and respectively show different political inclinations: The Jang Group, considered moderate conservative (i.e. dailies Jang and News International, Geo TV), the liberal Dawn Group (Dawn Newspaper, Herald magazine, Dawn TV),

³ Government of Pakistan, Statistics Division, Yearbook 2011.
<http://www.statpak.gov.pk/fbs/sites/default/files/other/yearbook2011/Social%20&%20Culture/19-1.pdf>.

and the rather right-wing conservative Nawa-e Waqt Group (dailies Nawa-e Waqt and The Nation, Waqt News TV). The Lakson Group is another player in the media market, producing amongst others the popular dailies Express (Urdu) and Express Tribune as well as the television channel Express News.

2.2. *Media Legislation: Freedom by Default*

The legislative framework for Pakistan's media is first of all provided by the Constitution. Article 19 stipulates freedom of expression and the press but subjects this pledge to "reasonable restrictions" in order to protect for instance Islam, the security of the country, and morality. Such ambiguous qualifications leave much room for interpretations seeking to restrict the freedom of expression. In addition, there are several other legislations potentially limiting the freedom of the press, though they are enforced only selectively. The most significant authority pertaining to electronic media is the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) which came into being during the course of the media liberalisation after 2000. Although originally drafted to provide independent oversight and to improve standards and content of the media, the PEMRA laws have been frequently employed to restrict the media. The majority of the members of the PEMRA-board are government officials; civil society or media representatives have little influence. With these possible legislative restrictions in mind, it is necessary to note that media in Pakistan enjoy a considerable amount of freedom – although media practitioners describe it as a "freedom by default" that can be partly attributed to the general shortcomings in maintaining a rule of law (AMB 2009: 13).

2.3. *Challenges and Shortcomings*

Aside from legislation there are other factors hindering the media from fully exercising their democratic functions. The security of journalists remains a major concern in Pakistan. Journalists are frequently harassed or even attacked by state and non-state actors. Critical reporting on military campaigns, government corruption, or religious extremism can have dangerous consequences, either from the side of the security establishment or from the militants. Also, events in Baluchistan or the activities of Karachi's urban mafias with

close links to political circles are considered sensitive issues. At the crossroads of various political interests and without legal or governmental protection, journalists become prone to self-censorship or the distortion of information. Last but not least, the violent conflict with extremists also takes its toll on the people of the press: with 17 journalists killed in 2010, Reporters Without Borders declared Pakistan the most deadly country for journalists in the world (Rehman 2011a, Sarwar 2011a).

Another significant issue is the quality of journalism. Due to the rapid evolution of the media landscape, the number of journalists has grown within a short time. Although there are various universities and institutes offering courses in journalism and mass communication, new graduates are generally not prepared for the requirements of the profession. The media institutions, too, rarely offer in-house trainings or mentoring programmes. The consequence is a considerable lack of professional standards. In the newspapers, the lines between comment, analysis, and news are blurred; many of the published articles reproduce statements rather than giving proper information (AMB 2009: 27, 60). The fierce competition among the private television channels has produced an unhealthy culture of “breaking news”. With sensationalism dictating the agenda of these media, stories on critical social developments or investigative reports are seriously underrepresented.

In addition to politicisation the influence of affluent and powerful elites undermines the diversity of the media and their content. The legislation does not prevent a monopoly in media ownership. Although Pakistan has no single “media-mogul”, a few important media groups dominate the market. As radio licenses are sold by auction, wealthy owners can acquire even more media. Low salaries and precarious working conditions make journalists vulnerable to bribery and economic pressure. The weight of politics can also be felt in the talk-shows that abound on private channels. Stirring popular views amongst the audience in order to increase ratings or hosting guests with an unquestioned political bias, some TV-moderators have turned into powerful agenda-setters for national debate (International Media Support 2009: 34).

2.4. *Outlook: Media Finding their Role*

When Musharraf and the military establishment decided to open the media market, they reportedly had the motivation of countering the growing influence of India’s satellite channels and strengthening national identity. This step can be seen as a characteristic expression of a “guided” liberalisation by which authoritarian regimes sought to consolidate power and legitimacy in the face of a globalising media landscape at the turn of the millennium. Accordingly, the media were given more freedom but had to respect certain taboos. That this was a double-edged calculation could clearly be observed in Pakistan. Without a doubt the media have played a decisive role not only by reporting on but also by giving momentum to the lawyers’ movement. In the run-up to the elections of February 2008, the private channels formed a platform for the representatives of the opposition parties who were largely excluded from state television. By doing so, the media have certainly contributed to a re-initiation of Pakistan’s democratic transition.

After the election of the new government, the private media have continued to put pressure on the executive. Conscious of their role in the recent political developments, they now play out their influence. This transgression of the line between journalism and political engagement is only one sign of the evolution that still lies ahead for Pakistan’s media. They have to complete their own process of reform and democratisation. While it is up to the state to uphold a legal environment which guarantees the functioning of the media, it should not interfere in their internal maturation. Rather, public debate and pressure from the audiences can drive forward the development of a healthy media landscape. Progressive circles of Pakistani society already express their concern regarding the trends of sensationalism and politicisation in the media (see for example: Bari 2011). Such critical discussion on the media’s performance needs to be further intensified along with efforts to create awareness and improve media literacy among the audiences. Also, independent media have to provide alternative readings on current affairs and raise topics that are underreported in the mass media. In this context, online and social media can certainly play a role.

3. The Internet in Pakistan

Pakistan has currently about 20 million internet users. In a country of more than 180 million people, this figure amounts to only slightly over 10 per cent of the population. With regards to internet penetration, Pakistan scores better than its larger neighbour India, but stays far behind the transition countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) where online communication reportedly fostered the development of civil societies that formed the core of the upheavals against authoritarian rule (see chart on p. 41).

3.1. *Expecting Internet Expansion*

In an overall ranking of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), which determines worldwide ICT development by using a composite index (ICT Development Index: IDI) made up of 11 indicators covering access, use, and skills, Pakistan reached position 127 out of 159 countries in the year 2007. At that point its progress rate was higher than that of any other country because at the time of the previous evaluation in 2002, ICT usage in Pakistan was barely existent. However, that progress stalled in the following year, 2008, with Pakistan reaching only rank 128 (ITU 2010).⁴

As a matter of fact, the expansion of internet use in Pakistan is as much slowed down by the insufficient development and quality of the network as by low levels of education. The internet is still accessed mainly through dial-up connections. There are only about 1.3 million broadband users in Pakistan.⁵ The urban-rural divide that characterises the country's overall development naturally has an impact on internet access and usage too. In a BBC survey in 2008, only 1 per cent of the respondents in the rural areas of Pakistan's four provinces used the internet. Various rural areas remain without any access at all (AudienceScapes 2010f, Freedom House 2011: 3).

⁴ The ICT Development Index (IDI) is composed of three sub-indexes measuring access (fixed telephony, mobile telephony, international internet bandwidth, households with computers and households with internet), use and intensity of use (internet users, fixed broadband and mobile broadband) and skills (adult literacy rate, gross secondary and tertiary enrolment.)

⁵ Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, Telecom indicators:
http://www.pta.gov.pk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=269:telecom-indicators&catid=124:industry-report&Itemid=599.

Another reason for the restricted development of internet usage may be seen in Pakistan's comparatively low Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, making computers and access subscriptions unaffordable to many people. The ITU report partly refutes that assumption though: An additional indicator, the "ICT Price Basket" classifies countries based on the relative costs for fixed telephones, mobile cellular and broadband internet services. Generally, a low ranking in the ICT Development Index corresponds to high values in the ICT Price Basket. Yet Pakistan deviates from that trend as it has a relatively low price-level but scores poorly in the ranking of access and usage. This points to the fact that barriers other than high costs hinder ICT development and proliferation, namely infrastructure, access to infrastructure, and usage skills (ITU 2010: 61). Since the level of secondary education is considered a decisive hurdle for internet usage, the ITU report thus confirms Pakistan's poor education statistics as a main factor in hindering many people from going online. However, as education is closely linked to economic status, there is admittedly a strong correlation between both factors. The results of the 2008 BBC-survey show that the majority of internet users are high-income earners and have a secondary or higher degree of education. There is also a certain preponderance of men among the internet users (AudienceScapes 2010f).

These restrictions notwithstanding, Pakistan's percentage of young population is comparable with (or even higher than) the transition countries in the MENA region. As people aged under 30 years typically constitute the largest user group within society, there is a huge potential for ICT proliferation. The impressive growth of the mobile phone market underlines the overall interest in modern communication technologies: with now six mobile companies on the market, the number of mobile phone subscribers reached about 108 million in mid-2011, according to official statistics.⁶

Another interesting factor shaping internet usage in Pakistan is the general language divide between Urdu and English that can be observed particularly in the media landscape. Despite more and more content being produced in other languages, English remains the lingua franca of the internet. While this is certainly to the

⁶ Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, Telecom indicators:
http://www.pta.gov.pk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=269:telecom-indicators&catid=124:industry-report&Itemid=599

advantage of the more or less bilingual Pakistani upper and middle class, it limits the usage of other social layers as there is relatively little content in Urdu on the internet. In fact, observers expect a significant surge in the number of internet users once the Urdu market is expanded. Already now the online publications of the English-language newspapers Dawn and Express Tribune, considered forerunners in the online news sector, gather only one third of the online audiences of the big Urdu papers Jang and Express. Another issue supposedly limiting a pro-active use of the internet in Urdu is the disparity between the fonts that are usually employed in publishing and those that are available for the internet. Urdu books and newspapers appear with an italicised version of the Arabic scripture (nastaliq) but many websites and blogs only offer the fonts that can normally be found on Arabic or Persian websites. Apparently the resulting unfamiliarity seems to heighten users' hesitance to employ Urdu as a language for communicating online, for instance when writing blogs.⁷

3.2. *Governmental Politics: Legislation (and Censorship) Taking Shape*

The Pakistani government deregulated the telecom market in 2003, allowing for competition in telephony and internet services. By the end of 2010, there were 50 Internet Service Providers (ISP) operating in Pakistan as well as 10 broadband service providers. Providers have to obtain a license from the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), the primary institution regulating internet communication. Cybercafés do not require a license and are largely unregulated by the police, although owners are expected to monitor the activities of their customers. Offering comparatively low rates of usage, these establishments cater to lower-income users. (Open Net Initiative 2010: 491, Freedom House 2011: 5).

The legislative framework for the internet is still ill-defined in Pakistan. In 2007, the Musharraf government introduced the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Ordinance (PECO) in which vaguely termed offenses were subject to severe punishment. The bill was considered as an attempt to choke online criticism of the president. At the end of 2009, the prime minister of new civilian government returned the ordinance to the parliament for further debate.

⁷ Interview with Jahanzaib Haque, editor of the online section of The Express Tribune, Karachi, June 27th 2011.

However, any re-evaluation of the bill or the development of a new draft has been delayed ever since. Advocates of internet freedom in Pakistan fear that should the need arise a law will be passed hastily and give pretext for stricter censorship. Imprecise legislation and insufficiently trained judges and lawyers as well as the influence of political interests are at the bottom of disproportionate verdicts pronounced in the field of cybercrimes: while the online posting of videos mocking government officials has been punished rather drastically, sexual harassment of women on the internet is not prosecuted at all. Representatives of the IT-sector, media, and civil society who have barely been involved in the process of legislation drafting express the need for a coherent regulation protecting internet freedom and user privacy. Some groups seek to influence the government's law making processes in this regard.⁸

According to the Open Net Initiative, internet censorship in Pakistan has evolved out of actions taken by alternating institutions of the state, such as government organs, the courts, and law enforcement (Open Net Initiative 2010: 492). Directives for blocking websites are delegated to the PTA whose members report to the Ministry of Information Technology and are appointed by the prime minister. Through its subsidiary, the Pakistan Internet Exchange (PIE), PTA controls all internet traffic in Pakistan. The country's main international gateway is situated in Karachi, others in the capital and in Lahore.

Access to most political, cultural, religious, and sexual online material is free for Pakistani audiences. So far the country does not employ a sophisticated filtering system. Blocking mostly takes place on the domain level, thus causing wide-spread collateral damage in the form of unintended closures of additional content. When seeking to block specific information, the authorities have often caused extensive disruptions in access to central websites such as Google, BBC, Yahoo and YouTube. Most comprehensively filtered are websites that relate to Baluchi dissidents, addressing the province's human rights situation or aspirations of independence. Also, websites considered anti-Islamic or blasphemous represent a specific target for filtering (Open Net Initiative 2010: pp. 495). In the absence of a specific legislation, the decision making process on internet filtering remains

⁸ Interview with Shahzad Ahmad of Bytes for All Pakistan, Islamabad, July 1st 2011, and Jehan Ara of the Pakistan Software House Association P@SHA, Karachi, June 28th 2011.

far from transparent. Open labels such as “national interest and security” or the sections of the penal code addressing blasphemy provide the basis for blocking websites. With filtering gradually evolving from the mere blocking of a domain to that of specific URLs and even key words, Shahzad Ahmad of the advocacy organisation Bytes For All sees a special form of “faith-based censorship” emerging in Pakistan. Thus, religion and the action against online content labelled as blasphemous serve as an excuse for a politically motivated filtering of websites.⁹

The first incident of blocking in Pakistan occurred in February 2006 when the PTA ordered a closure of all websites showing the controversial Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. Particularly affected was the domain of Blogspot, a website providing tools for generating weblogs. In February 2008, access to YouTube was blocked, again under the official claim that the website had distributed blasphemous content. But Pakistani bloggers believed that the real reason was actually the distribution of amateur videos showing rigging in the general elections which had taken place only shortly before (Yusuf 2009: 31). In May 2010, the PTA blocked the entire domain of Facebook in Pakistan for almost two weeks, following an order that the Lahore High Court had issued in reaction to a contest for drawing Muhammad set up on a Facebook page. Creating a huge stir in Pakistan and the worldwide media, the ban later extended to thousands of other websites including YouTube, Flickr, and Wikipedia (Freedom House 2011: 4). It also affected businesses and media institutions communicating with their customers through the social network (Haque/Aqueel 2010). Due to its extensive side effects, the Facebook ban provoked considerable protest from the media and civil society. It contributed to the formation of a vital movement against censorship. Moreover, the ensuing debate revealed itself as a crucial point in the controversies over blasphemy and religious tolerance, thereby touching on a key issue in Pakistan’s internal conflict of ideas. Many bloggers and social media users have been involved in the debate ever since (see p. 57).

Development and communication statistics for Pakistan and selected countries

		Pakistan	Egypt	India	Iran	Malaysia	Tunisia
Total population	2009	181,457,277	78,866,635	1,156,897,766	75,967,610	27,817,866	10,420,551
Population aged under 35 (% of total)	2009	73.2	69.5	65.1	68.0	64.0	59.6
Urban population (% of total)	2009	37	43	30	69	71	67
GNI per capita, PPP (current international \$)	2009	2,680	5,680	3,280	11,470	13,710	7,810
Literacy rate (% of population aged 15 and above)	2006	54.2	66.4	62.8	82.3	92.9 (estimation for 2009)	77.6 (2008)
ICT Development Index	2008	1.54 (rank 128)	2.70 (96)	1.75 (117)	3.08 (84)	3.96 (56)	3.06 (85)
Mobile cellular subscriptions (per 100 people)	2009	61	67	45	72	111	93
Internet users (% of total population)	2010	10.4	21.2	6.9	43.2	64.6	34.0
Facebook users (% of total population)	2011	2.5	9.1	2.3	n. A.	41.5	24.0

¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, Mid-Year-Population by 5-year age groups, International Data Base, <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/db/groups.php>, [accessed June 2, 2011].

¹¹ World Bank Database, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS>, [accessed June 2, 2011].

¹² Gross National Income (GNI) converted to international dollars using purchasing power parity rates. World Bank Database, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.PP.CD>, [accessed June 2, 2011].

¹³ Country profiles of UNESCO Institute for Statistics, <http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/tableviewer/document.aspx?ReportId=143>, [accessed June 2, 2011].

¹⁴ ICT Development Index (IDI) established by the ITU for 159 countries with Chad ranking last at a value of 0.79 and Sweden first at 7.85. ITU 2010, 10.

¹⁵ World Bank Database, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.CEL.SETS.P2>, [accessed June 2, 2011].

¹⁶ Country profiles on Internet World Stats, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/>, [accessed June 2, 2011].

¹⁷ Facebook statistics by country, Socialbakers, <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics>, [accessed June 2, 2011].

⁹ Interview with Shahzad Ahmad of Bytes for All Pakistan, Islamabad, July 1st 2011.

4. Political Internet Use in Pakistan

Most of Pakistan's mainstream political actors have not yet recognised the internet and social media as means for political communication. It is evident that when access to much more effective broadcast media or the press is available, the internet is not a priority for established politicians. The internet is thus at most considered as a supplement to other communication forums to get in touch with voters. President Zardari, Prime Minister Gilani and opposition leader Nawaz Sharif do not show any significant activity on the internet or social networks. However, with a view to the next general elections, scheduled for 2013, many observers expect a surge in the online activities of the established parties who may at last recognise the potential of social networks for mobilising larger groups of young voters.

4.1. *Social Networks and Politics: Digital Precursors*

One of the most active political organisations on the internet is the Pakistan Tehreek-e Insaaf (PTI) led by former cricket star Imran Khan. The organisation has an active website with news and announcements about its activities. There are also blogs by members of the organisation, online chapters for the U.S., U.K., and other countries with a significant Pakistani community, a Twitter account and even an application for smart phones. Of course, PTI has also established several Facebook profiles for the organisation and its chairman, so that followers receive news and can partake in debates on the social network. The party also uses the internet to raise funds from its followers in Pakistan or abroad. Due to his extensive media presence and a discourse underscored by populism, Imran Khan has been able to attract a significant following of mainly young people. However, this media prominence stands in sharp contrast to the political significance that his organisation has shown so far: apart from the celebrated leader, there are no influential or recognisable political figures in the leading circle of his party. Behind the attractive rhetoric on "a new beginning", there is actually no substantial programme being offered. Although Khan has been able to raise interest in urban circles, he does not have any power base or influence in Pakistan's rural areas where established networks of loyalty and patronage decide the vote of the population.

Another political figure showing an even greater discrepancy

between online popularity and actual political impact is the former president and army chief Musharraf. He tries to portray himself as an alternative to the current government, promising economic prosperity and moderate politics. His Facebook profile shows more than 400,000 followers. However, a YouTube channel with Musharraf's statements was less successful, underlining the limits of online popularity and mobilisation: while many users may easily "like" the Facebook profile of the former president, they are less inclined to listen in more detail to what he actually has to say (Haque 2010).

According to Alexa, an online service ranking worldwide internet traffic, Facebook is the most popular website in Pakistan. In mid-2011, the website had an estimated five million users. It is followed by other central internet sites such as Google, YouTube, and Wikipedia. The most visited news websites are those of Jang Newspaper, Express, and GEO TV – all in Urdu. The Urdu edition of the BBC website also counts among the most visited news sources on the internet. Last but not least, the micro-blogging service Twitter has gained considerably in popularity with currently about two million users in Pakistan. People tweeting on news, political and social affairs are usually journalists and avid internet users, but also politicians. The assassinated Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer was known for his activity on Twitter, sending out regular messages with comments on daily politics. The Minister of the Interior Rehman Malik and the former mayor of Karachi, Syed Mustafa Kamal also use the micro blogging service, the latter with a large following on Facebook too. Former parliamentarian Marvi Memon used among other channels a Twitter message for justifying her decision to resign from the National Assembly and party membership in PML-Q.¹⁸

According to Jehan Ara, president of the Software Houses Association P@SHA, Twitter has become an important outlet for initiating or steering debates, but also for fund-raising and knowledge sharing. Herself very active on the network, she says that Twitter has allowed for the formation of small communities or networks in which people belonging to a sort of information elite share information, ideas and advice. For instance, her expertise in the field of ICT has been

¹⁸ For an overview on the most important figures in Pakistan's Twitter-community see: Tribune Twitterati list: 140 characters of Pakistan. The Express Tribune, June 24th 2011. <http://tribune.com.pk/story/194831/tribune-twitterati-list-140-characters-of-pakistan/>.

solicited more than once via Twitter by young entrepreneurs or others active in this field.¹⁹

Twitter is also used for breaking news, thereby following a trend of sensationalism that is already quite popular on the news channels. Some journalists observe that politicians who use Twitter have been forced to develop closer relationships with ordinary people as the readers of their tweets are able to directly confront them with questions regarding their decisions. The former anchor of Dawn News, Naveen Naqvi, also took live questions from the audience via Twitter to pose them to her guests. At the same time, the ambition to circulate spectacular news leads to rumours and false information being transmitted via Twitter, undermining its credibility as a media source. During the attack by militants on the Pakistani Naval Base in Karachi, end of May 2011, several tweets called for urgent blood donations although the army had not issued such call and it was in fact dangerous for potential donors to come to the site of the ongoing battle.²⁰ And, as in other countries, there are of course fake twitter accounts being set up for prominent public figures. The new Foreign Minister, Hina Rabbani Khar, for instance, has been the 'victim' of messages being circulated under her name.

4.2. *Extremism and Militancy on the Net*

Documentation on the online activities of Pakistan's militants is scarce. A report by the Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) examining militants' media in Pakistan justifies its exclusive focus on print publications with the fact that potential militant websites and blogs are frequently blocked by the government as soon as their affiliation becomes evident. Also, the regular changes in the addresses and outlook of these online publications would impede thorough analysis (PIPS 2010: 15). Additional and extensive research is required to evaluate the ways in which militant groups use the benefits of the internet to transmit their message and what impact they can achieve.

Among the numerous extremist groups active in Pakistan, the militants of the Tehreek-e Taliban (TTP) are certainly the most prominent. Similarly to their brethren in Afghanistan, the Pakistani

Taliban operate as a sort of militant guerrilla movement against a superior military force. As such the TTP cannot convene larger rallies or hold public speeches. Neither are they able to set up regular press conferences or offices for developing closer ties with the media. To gain access to public discourse, the Taliban can therefore either rely on spectacular (violent) acts to capture the media's attention or establish their own alternative channels of communication. Yet, only this second option will allow for control over the narrative the movement seeks to convey in order to justify its cause and to mobilise supporters and resources. Propaganda work thus forms an essential part of the activities of a militant movement such as the Taliban, challenging the dominant state power on the basis of ideology.

Reports on the media activities of the Taliban in Afghanistan allow for drawing certain parallels. Here, too, the main website of the Taliban frequently changes its address to circumvent filtering by the authorities. The website seeks to mobilise an online public for the cause of the Taliban by publishing films of the war against Soviet forces, of the fighters' training, images of successful attacks, and sermons. Stories, poems, and even songs on popular nationalistic or religious themes seek to glorify a culture of jihad and armed resistance. In addition, the internet has replaced the fax for the quick transmission of public releases, for instance, when claiming responsibility for an attack (International Crisis Group 2008). Since 2011, the Afghan Taliban apparently also use Twitter to release information and links to new publications on their website.²¹ The distribution of films can also be observed in the case of the Pakistani militants. Amateur videos circulated on the internet portray damaged villages as alleged consequences of American drone attacks, show raids on army convoys and the NATO-transport to Afghanistan, or even show suicide bombers. In July 2011, for instance, a film showing the execution of 16 Pakistani policemen who had been abducted after militants raided the border to Afghanistan region deeply shocked the public. The extremists had filmed the killing and then uploaded the video to the internet (Kazim 2011).

With the availability of other "small", cheap and effective media as

¹⁹ Interview with Jehan Ara, president of the Software Houses Association P@SHA, Karachi, June 28th 2011.

²⁰ Interview with blogger Sana Saleem. Karachi, June 29th 2011.

²¹ Pakistan on Twitter for Afghan Internet Age. AFP, May 14, 2011.

<http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jgovrTfiic0KCYKdapRI-AnsoPw?docId=CNG.d6b33dbd6cbec1036d87f814a9179ab7.2a1>.

well as a very low internet penetration in the areas of their activity, it is evident that the internet plays only a minor role in the Pakistani militants' attempts to influence the average population. As part of their communication strategy the Taliban regularly contact journalists and foreign correspondents via mobile phone to pass on information on attacks or kidnappings. The TTP has also invited journalists to various locations in the tribal areas to give ad-hoc press conferences. In meetings with journalists the new chief of the movement, Hakimullah Mehsud, has sought to portray himself as a vigorous fighter to assure his succession to the leadership.²² However, contact with the Taliban carries high security risks for journalists. The militants aggressively seek to impose their message, threatening and even killing journalists who do not report accordingly, so that independent and direct coverage is rare.

The main communication channel used by Pakistan's militants to get their message out is clandestine radio stations. During the height of the TTP's activities, in 2009, an estimated number of 150 stations operated in the frontier region. Based in mosques or compounds of militant leaders, the programmes transmit religious sermons, agitate against the government and the West, or try to recruit fighters. In a region where electricity and television are scarcely available, these stations have proven highly effective for influencing the population (Azami 2009). Other means of communication include audio-cassettes, DVDs, and traditional leaflets, the so-called night-letters. Pictures and short amateur videos of attacks are also passed around on mobile phones.

Besides the TTP there is a large spectrum of religious outfits active in Pakistan that seek to convey a radical or extremist agenda through media work. In fact, the use of media as a propaganda tool for militants began during the war against the Soviet army in Afghanistan. The PIPS 2010 report lists a large variety of print publications by extremist religious groups or madrassahs, among them banned organisations such as Jamat ud-Da'wa and Jaish-e Muhammad. The political party Jamaat-e Islami, as a major producer of religious-ideological media in Pakistan (22 publications), has a share in a handful of militant publications too and wields influence over other publishers adhering to its beliefs. Some of them targeting

²² A Profile of TTP's New Leader – Hakimullah Mehsud. Combating Terrorism Centre Sentinel, October 3, 2009. <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/a-profile-of-the-ttpps-new-leader-hakimullah-mehsud>.

even women and children, the overall goal of these publications is to promote a restrictive reading of Islam and a culture of "jihad". According to the authors of the report, online media of the militants carry a similar ideology and identical content. In 2002, the government attempted to reduce the influence of the militants' publications by banning 22 outlets of different organisations and detaining several editors. Yet, figures involved in the militant propaganda went underground and the general production remained intact (Ibid: 204). One organisation actively using the internet is the Hizb ul Tahrir (HuT), a pan-Islamic movement seeking to establish an Islamic state on the basis of Shariah, refuting democracy and secularism. Working on a transnational level, the organisation has established branches in various Central Asian countries, in the Arab World, and also in the West where its activities are directed at Muslim migrants. In many countries, however, the organisation is banned. In Pakistan, HuT has developed influence particularly through British Muslims with Pakistani roots. Although the organisation is officially banned, its propaganda posters and pamphlets can be found in various cities and members seek to influence people through direct conversations in mosques. In May 2011, the highly publicised arrest of a Pakistani Army Brigadier working in a senior position at the General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, and of four other officers with links to the HuT raised questions about the influence of the organisation and religious extremism in the army (Farooq 2011). HuT actively propagates its ideas through new communication technologies. The Pakistani branch publishes an extensive website with a manifesto and numerous declarations. The organisation also has a Facebook profile and regularly sends out mass SMS messages, thereby benefiting from the high mobile phone penetration in Pakistan. Similarly, other organisations have discovered the internet as a tool for spreading sectarian hatred against Shiites or the Ahmadi community, a minority branch of Islam considered apostate which has repeatedly been victim to terrorist attacks (Ahmad 2010).

As internet censorship in Pakistan is not very sophisticated, extremists find quick solutions for getting around filters and setting up new websites. Also, the Pakistani government appears unwilling to proceed systematically against extremist propaganda, apparently to avoid conflict with the religious and right-wing parties that are closely intertwined with the more radical outfits. In the end, it is also

worth questioning whether a mere blocking of these online publications would prevent the influence of radical ideas on society. Rather, it is important to address the country's various problems in an open debate and to offer credible alternatives to extremism. Misinformation about the roots of Pakistan's stagnant development provides a breeding ground for conspiracy theories and helps extremist groups to recruit new followers.

4.3. *Online Media and Civil Society Mobilisation: The Emergency Period and the Lawyers' Movement*

The lawyers' movement of 2007/08 and above all the political crisis at the end of 2007 can be considered as an important turning point in the political usage of online communication in Pakistan.²³ On November 3rd 2007, then President and Army Chief Musharraf declared a state of emergency which had a particular impact on the media. Reacting to the public influence that private television channels had developed throughout the preceding months when covering the nation-wide protests of lawyers against his dismissal of the Chief Justice, Musharraf ordered for almost 30 private channels to be taken off the air. Although the president had always highlighted the emergence of a diverse and open landscape of electronic media as one of the major achievements of his rule, he did not hesitate to swiftly curtail the freedom that he had granted only a few years before as soon as his regime came under threat. This clearly showed the vulnerability of mass or 'big' media in a soft authoritarian system: dependent on the good will of an undemocratic ruler and with easily interrupted transmission structures, these media were among the first victims of a tightening censorship. The resulting news vacuum gave the impetus for the creative usage of new communications technologies for information dissemination and opinion exchange.

The two private channels GEO TV and ARY One World continued their broadcasts from studios in Dubai, reportedly prompting a surge in the sales of satellite equipment. At the same time, along with another channel, Aaj TV, they also put up a live stream of their coverage on their websites. These broadcasts were also circulated on

²³ A detailed account on the use of digital media and their convergence with the traditional media between March 2007 and February 2008 is delivered in Yusuf 2009. The following section is mainly based on the findings of that paper.

YouTube and other websites.

Most of the private channels were given permission to continue broadcasting a few days later, after they had agreed on stricter guidelines set up by the government. The two Dubai-based channels, however, refused to abide by these rules, hoping to continue their independent coverage via satellite and internet. Musharraf finally successfully stopped their transmissions by intervening with the Emir of the Emirates. According to Yusuf, the Pakistani public, now accustomed to consuming current news on the private television channels, not only turned to other sources in this time of political crisis, but also participated in the production and dissemination of information (Yusuf 2009: 10).

Cell phones and SMS messages became an important means of communication during that period. Apparently, the numbers of SMS messages increased noticeably during the first days of crisis. The closure of mobile networks during specific events, such as a speech that the disposed Chief Justice wanted to transmit via mobile phone to his followers on November 6th, proved that the government very much realised the potential of this communication channel (Ibid: 12). The Karachi based blogger Awab Alvi, whose weblog became an active platform for news distribution during the emergency, remembers how he and his friends used SMS networks to organise small flash-mobs in Karachi. Activists would be alerted only a few hours in advance about when and where to show up for shouting slogans and holding placards. Although these gatherings attracted a very restricted number of people and lasted only a short time until security forces appeared, Alvi says that they were able to attract the interest of passers-by and initiate discussions.²⁴

Students at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) participating in the protests against the crisis used a combination of SMS messages, blogging, and email-lists to distribute information about the ongoing events. Some students recorded videos of the protests on mobile phones and digital cameras to be uploaded to YouTube. Others posted these films to a CNN-website for citizen journalism from where certain footage actually found its way into the main news of the international broadcaster. A weblog aptly named "Emergency Times" published news, protest videos and photos, and

²⁴ Interview with Awab Alvi, Karachi, June 29th 2011.

opinion pieces as well as announcements on upcoming meetings and lectures. The blog, principally maintained by two students, one of them residing abroad, claims to have reached about 150,000 people at the peak of its activities. It worked in combination with a mailing list, transmitting messages to key figures within the media, civil society, and political circles who then forwarded the list's information to their respective contact networks. The list and the Emergency Times blog also became a credible source of information during the ensuing volatile period after Benazir Bhutto's assassination in December 2007 and the election in February 2008. Later, it integrated more and more articles from the mainstream press and finally ceased its activity in June 2008.²⁵

In addition to mobile phones, blogs, and emails, Facebook started to play a role in the dissemination of news and also involved the Pakistani diasporas in the events unfolding in their home-country. Facebook groups also served as a means for the expression of solidarity and grief after the shocking assassination of Benazir Bhutto in December 2007.

Before that time, online media were not greatly significant in the distribution of news and information in Pakistan. However, among the civil society activists and media practitioners involved in the protest movement, the emergency period heightened awareness of the internet's potential. The use of new media during the emergency period showed similar patterns to that of the protest movements in Iran, Tunisia, and Egypt: the role of SMS-messages for mobilising protesters, blogs as forums for discussions and information dissemination, the use of online networks for connecting the people involved in the protests, and the convergence of online channels with mass media to reach larger audiences.

That is where similarities end though. The role of online media in the anti-emergency protests should not be overestimated. In Iran and to a lesser extent also in Egypt thriving blogospheres had already formed in the years before the actual uprisings. Bloggers and internet activists had established networks of exchange and solidarity, and had tested their potential as a platform for mobilisation. Also, the press in Pakistan did not face censorship to the extent of the Middle Eastern countries and was more or less free to report on the events.

²⁵ <http://pakistanmartiallaw.blogspot.com/>

Any possible influence (or the absence of such influence) of the press on the anti-emergency protests thus needs to be considered in relation to the role of internet media, given the fact that the internet reached even fewer people. Moreover, the anti-emergency movement in Pakistan was not able to build up a comparable challenge to the established system compared to the other countries. The movement had been built mainly on the protest of the lawyers who, as a distinct professional group, were able to mobilise a nationwide network to resist the dismissal of the Chief Justice. The lawyers were joined by the electronic media who saw their freedom threatened by authoritarian censorship and the progressive civil society, probably the only force with a pronounced democratic agenda. The major political parties seeking an end to military rule in order to be able to return to activity in the government also supported the movement.

The combination of these collective forces was able to build up a challenge to Musharraf and to mobilise parts of the population. With the end of emergency, the holding of elections, and finally the re-installation of the Chief Justice, this alliance dissolved because it no longer had any shared interests. Left on their own the progressive forces of civil society who admittedly used the internet in a skilled manner were too weak to continue pushing for further democratisation and the impact of their communication platforms on society remained restricted. During the emergency period, the internet had clearly been a communication tool that held significance in an extraordinary situation, facilitating information exchange and coordination among a restricted circle of society. Thus, Yusuf raises the right question when she asks if the new media tools that proved so efficient during a moment of political crisis can also be used in a more sustainable way as a medium of expression and participatory debate (Ibid: 20). The emergency crisis certainly increased the awareness of civil society actors in Pakistan of the potential of new media. The social capital generated during that period could partly be sustained during moments of crisis such as the floods 2010. However, the permanent use as well as the outreach of online media as a forum for the exchange of information and opinion need to be further expanded and sustained if the internet is to have more impact on the development of civil society and political culture.

4.4. *Social Networks and Citizen Engagement: The 2010 Floods*

The 2010 floods provide another example for how civic activism in Pakistan has been sustained by online communication and social media networks. In summer 2010, heavy monsoon rains caused devastating floods along the river Indus, covering one fifth of the country's surface and affecting about 20 million people. The extensive destruction of houses and agricultural lands coincided with rising food prices, particularly harming the poor population in the rural areas. While Pakistan's President Zardari continued with a scheduled trip to Europe, the government appeared unable to cope with the disaster. Corruption and inefficient bureaucracy intensified the reluctance among international organisations as well as ordinary Pakistani citizens in giving money to official institutions for organising aid in the affected areas. Neither did the Islamist groups that stepped into the void to deploy relief for the flood victims engender confidence among most of the middle and upper classes.

As a consequence, aside from the many NGOs active in the field, educated and professional Pakistanis started numerous private initiatives for fund-raising and distributing shelter, clothing, and food directly in the affected areas. With the floods rising before and during the Islamic month of Ramadan, traditionally a time of charity, people were even more inclined to help.

In part these initiatives were organised using the benefits of online communication and social media networks. Some people solicited donations from friends and family, both inside the country and abroad, through their Facebook profiles. Others established new Facebook groups to raise funds and share information on the floods. One website visualised reports from the affected areas sent in by SMS or email on a Google map following the model of Ushahidi in order to keep track of the flooding and coordinate relief activities. The blogger Awab Alvi, who had previously organised relief for people fleeing the conflict between the army and the militants in 2009 by using online networks, collected funds through his blog and social media. Activists involved in the relief work documented the collection and distribution of the goods online, thereby increasing accountability and keeping individual donors involved. They posted videos of food distributions on YouTube or updated the progress of the relief expeditions in the affected areas through Twitter messages. Partly, these initiatives relied on the same networks that had been

formed during the lawyers' movement and the time of emergency. Their achievements spanned from raising small sums of money as donations for projects including supplying food packages to specific villages, to the organisation of several expeditions with considerable budget and outreach.

Within the overall disaster, these initiatives may have played only a minor role, but they certainly showed that citizens were ready and capable to act outside the realm of the state. As well as being a result of the distrust that Pakistanis have developed vis-à-vis the government and the state bureaucracy, the private initiatives during the floods were a sign of civic engagement and solidarity. These are indeed genuine qualities of a civil society even if not (yet) sustained and mostly activated during times of crisis within a limited segment of the population. The social media, in this case, facilitated the networking and communication among the activists and the mobilisation of resources.

4.5. *Citizen Journalism and Traditional Media: Influence, Completion, and Convergence*

Some of Pakistan's mainstream media have reacted to the growing popularity of online journalism and social media. The popular television channel GEO, for instance, has established the website "GEO Dost" offering ordinary citizens the possibility of uploading videos or photos on any event they consider newsworthy. However, the clips are not sorted by topic and at best represent a colourful collection of amateur views on everyday life.

A very popular website among Pakistan's English newspapers remains the website of Dawn. Founded in 1947, Dawn is an established newspaper with a long tradition in Pakistan. Many of the country's liberal-secular public figures and commentators write for Dawn. In 2007, Dawn launched an English news-channel; however, the channel had to switch to Urdu in May 2010 due to restricted audience figures and financial difficulties. In response to the role that citizen journalism played during the state of emergency and the 2008 elections, Dawn News started a campaign soliciting the contributions of amateur journalists who were given the promise of seeing their work on television. The newspaper also has a selection of bloggers contributing regularly to the website.

One of the most active newspapers in the field of online news and social media is The Express Tribune, a daily launched in April 2010. It has a print edition supplemented by the Asian edition of the International Herald Tribune and an extensive website. According to the editors of the Tribune's online section, the newspaper has attempted a close association between the print and the online edition from the beginning. Very early on, the website integrated a Facebook application allowing readers to share and spread articles on the social network. The comment section pursues an open policy and readers are encouraged to debate the articles. The Tribune intentionally chose to give room to young bloggers for publishing their comments and op-eds on the website. The editors say that articles are selected according to their quality and not the name or political standing of the author. Thereby, they seek to diverge from other Pakistani press publications that reserve their comment section for the deliberations of well-known commentators and analysts. The Tribune claims to have contributed to the emergence of new voices challenging established opinion leaders and their involvement in debates. Critical comments from the readers' section have pushed commentators to expand on their views and react to the public. The editorial team considers the website as a participatory project in which topics and ideas are offered to the readers for further elaboration and debate. Pakistan's current affairs thus become the subject of vivid discussions among the Tribune's readers. Articles and opinion pieces on topics such as the 2010 floods and the uncoordinated response of the government, the case of US-citizen Raymond Davis who killed two Pakistanis in Lahore, or the crash of an airplane near Islamabad produced discussion threads with up to 500 contributions (Syed/Haque 2011).

Aside from the established media's integration in upcoming trends of online expression, there have been several cases where amateur journalism on the internet has been able to influence the agenda of the mass media and take the lead in the dissemination of information. Excerpts from a video of Bhutto's assassination, for example, which clearly showed that the popular politician had been shot before the actual explosion officially claimed to have caused her death, were first distributed on the internet before being picked up by main stream media. When the circulation of the video widened, the government was forced to adjust its narrative on the assassination, thereby admitting severe security shortfalls in Bhutto's

protection (Yusuf 2009: 23). In August 2010, a mob in Sialkot lynched two teenage brothers who were mistaken for robbers while police officers stood by and watched. The case only found mainstream media attention when an amateur video of the incident was uploaded to YouTube and engendered vivid discussions.²⁶ Another example is the film of a popular television anchor for religious advice, Aamir Liaquat Hussain, a former parliamentarian and advisor for religious affairs to the president, who was caught using extremely vulgar language towards his co-workers in the studio, thereby totally contradicting the moral authority he had sought to build up for himself. The film was leaked on YouTube and created a considerable reaction in public circles (Kari 2011).

While these cases provide examples of the influence that the leakage of information on the internet can have on mass media and even the political sphere, they do not necessarily represent qualified citizen journalism persistently reporting on less covered aspects of society. It is not always clear whether the videos are distributed and watched out of a kind of sensationalism or to increase transparency. Although they engender discussions and can create a certain public pressure, the consistent formation of public opinion needs a more sustained debate and continuous participation.

The attention of Pakistan's mainstream media is largely focused on the main urban centres, leaving major cities and vast rural areas without constant coverage. The increasing interest in news and information that the growing media landscape has generated within society remains mostly unanswered when it comes to local information. According to Adnan Rehmat, country director of Internews Pakistan, social media partly fill this gap by serving as an outlet for the exchange of information on local events and thus providing "a people-centred perspective on issues affecting Pakistan". Rehmat says that radio producers are beginning to turn to the products of citizen journalism and social media to get ideas for their local programmes.²⁷ Other initiatives seek to encourage active contributions of amateur or citizen journalism through video. Founded at the beginning of 2011, the web television channel Maati

²⁶ Police look on as mob beats teenagers to death. The Observers, France 24, August 26, 2010. <http://observers.france24.com/content/20100826-mob-beat-two-teenagers-death-police-look-on-pakistan-Mughees-Muneeb-Sialkot>.

²⁷ Interview with Adnan Rehmat, Internews Pakistan, September 14th 2011.

TV, for instance, promised to provide a platform for the works of a network of local correspondents who had received training in filming and video reporting (Rehman 2011). The website actually offers short reports on various social issues but it is still lacking a clear editorial line and consistent updates (see also the section on the website and project of Gawaahi on p. 62).

In this regard, the online newspaper The Baloch Hal serves as an excellent example of local and/or regional reporting through the internet. Run by a very small editorial team the website provides information and analysis on Pakistan's probably most underreported province. However, access to the website has been blocked due to the authorities' apparent sensitivity concerning information on the conflict situation in Baluchistan.

Finally, weblogs serve as an important forum for sharing information and opinion. A small but vivid blogosphere has emerged in Pakistan, discussing news, politics, and questions of social relevance. Many bloggers see their online journals as alternative channels for communication, allowing for a more open debate on various issues. The popular blog platform "Tea Break", for instance, has over 3000 registered Pakistani bloggers and seeks to promote local content by providing a free channel for distributing blog entries on various topics. Tea Break has also launched a separate Urdu section to promote bloggers who write in the national language in a bid to connect with other layers of society. Additionally, they seek to expand from textual blogs to video and photo blogs.²⁸ Some blogs specialise in various topics such as media or information technology, others focus rather on the individual life of their creators, thereby giving insight into current Pakistani society.

Since blogs with a larger audience are often written and read by journalists or media-affiliated people they provide a platform for criticism regarding the performances of an evolving media landscape and thereby act as a form of watchdog. In October 2010, for instance, the TV-anchor and journalist Syed Talat Hussein published an editorial in the Urdu daily Express in which he attacked U.S. celebrity Angelina Jolie, questioning her moral conduct and describing her private life in an openly misogynist style. In her role as the Goodwill Ambassador of the UNHCR, Jolie had visited Pakistan to draw

²⁸ Email-correspondence with Ammar Yasir, co-founder of Tea Break and blogger.

international attention to the situation of the flood victims. Weblogs like Café Pyala and Kala Kawa, well-known among informed online audiences in Pakistan, took issue with the editorial and expressed their doubts on Talat Hussein's aptitude to work for his new employer Dawn TV.²⁹

Overall, the emergence of online media and citizen journalism in Pakistan has thus contributed to a more diversified information landscape. In selected cases citizen journalism and the leakage of information on the internet has induced more transparency into the political landscape. Some traditional media benefit from these developments by integrating new voices and topics into their content. Also, newspapers and TV-programmes seek to enhance their outreach to audiences through the use of internet applications. On the other hand, it is obvious that the mainstream media do not face significant political restrictions in Pakistan so blogs and online media do not take on the same role of circumventing information blockages as they have done in some Middle Eastern countries. All the more it seems important that websites and blogs fully exploit all facets and possibilities of internet publishing in order to acquire their distinct character as online media and/or platforms of citizen journalism. Some Pakistani blogs simply re-publish articles that have already appeared in the press, many others are not as frequently updated as the genre of blogging actually implies. Ambitious and innovative initiatives for online publishing and civic activism via the internet are not sustained and peter out after an initial period of activity. In order for online media to play a greater role in the expansion of open and critical debate practices, knowledge, and ethics of blogging and citizen journalism need to be further propagated among potential contributors.

4.6. *Debating On and Over the Internet: Facebook, Blasphemy, and the Conflict over Pakistan's Identity*

On May 19th 2010, the Lahore High Court ordered a ban of Facebook across Pakistan, in reaction to a call for cartoon drawings of the Prophet Muhammad that had been distributed on a profile page of

²⁹ See the following blog entries on Kala Kawa (<http://kalakawa.wordpress.com/2010/10/25/168/>); Let Us Build Pakistan (<http://criticalppp.com/archives/27053>); Café Pyala (<http://cafepyala.blogspot.com/2010/10/beard-in-stomach.html>); A Reluctant Mind (http://tazeen-tazeen.blogspot.com/2010_10_01_archive.html).

the social network. When a few people organised a press conference at the Karachi Press Club to discuss the ban, they were faced with a surprising reaction from some of the journalists present. The organisers - bloggers and online activists - argued that the filtering of the particular controversial profile would have been sufficient to show a stance against the perceived insult on Islam, while the blocking of the entire Facebook domain amounted to a significant restriction of the people's right to freedom of communication and information. In response, however, they were themselves accused of disrespecting the Prophet and being blasphemous. Protesters outside the press club, mustered together by different religious groups, even tried to attack one of the speakers, the popular blogger Awab Alvi (Aziz 2010a).

The defenders of internet freedom were in a decidedly difficult position. Bloggers who criticised the ban received hate mail, abusive comments on their blogs, and even threats through SMS. They were labelled as non-believers and suspected of supporting a Western agenda. As well as the self-declared guardians of Islam in the right-wing religious parties and their followers, ordinary Pakistani internet users supported the ban too. Although Facebook was at the time already one of the most popular websites in Pakistan with an estimated 2.5 million users, people were of the opinion that the company had to face the consequences of having hosting the provocative cartoons and that Pakistan, as a country with Islam enshrined in its Constitution, needed to defend the religion. Those holding this view felt that the ban on Facebook was a matter of protecting Islam and the nation. The Facebook debate thus exposed a deeper conflict within Pakistani society with crucial significance for the future path of the country: the question over the place of religion in the state (Aziz 2010b, Tahir 2010).

The government did not take a clear position on the controversy. Instead, the authorities expanded the Facebook block to include numerous other websites on the grounds that these were also blasphemous or "anti-Islamic". Some of these online publications were of political content, such as websites by Baluch separatists. Although the ban of the popular social network carried considerable economic damage for businesses of different sizes who advertise their activities on Facebook, most of the companies did not speak up, fearing the consequences (Farooqui 2010). However, for Pakistani bloggers and internet adepts the Facebook controversy proved to be

another crucial moment to get involved in politics. As well as heated debates on the internet, an ad-hoc group formed called Pakistan Citizens Against Censorship and Intimidation which published an open letter in which individuals and groups from civil society protested against internet censorship as well as the threats and slander which had been brought up against people demanding a nuanced approach to individual rights and religious tolerance.³⁰

The debate on blasphemy further intensified when, in December 2010, a Christian woman was convicted to death for having insulted the Prophet; a verdict later revoked. Shortly after, Provincial Governor Salmaan Taseer was killed by his own bodyguard, followed by the assassination of Minority Minister Shahbaz Bhatti in March 2011. Both men had openly demanded an amendment of the blasphemy law in Pakistan's Penal Code. In the first half of the year, the number of people accused of blasphemy increased and some of the alleged culprits were even killed in acts of 'vigilantism'. In other cases, clerics instigated hatred against Christian communities and people falsely accused of insults against Islam were beaten up by mobs (Aziz 2011a).

The shock over the assassinations was also reflected in weblogs and online publications. Bloggers expressed their sorrow for the victims and the growing influence of extremism on society. Some showed despair over the direction society was heading in; others sought to fend off hopelessness by urging their readers to break the silence and demonstrate resistance to religious intolerance (Qizilbash 2011, Saleem 2011). The campaign "Citizens for Democracy", describing itself as an "umbrella group of professional organisations, political parties, trade unions, and individuals outraged by the consistent misuse and abuse of the Blasphemy Law and of religion in politics", called for rallies in different cities to express solidarity with the victims and raise awareness of the negative effects of the laws on society (Aziz 2011b). It also published a weblog and several Facebook groups to spread information about its activities and provide a platform for debate. In March 2011, the campaign collected thousands of signatures for a letter addressed to the heads of state institutions demanding the guarantee of a rule of law and citizens' protection against religious extremism (Aziz 2011a, Sarwar 2011b).

³⁰ Pakistani Citizens Demand their Right to Speak without "Fear of Threats". Newsline Blog, May 31, 2010. <http://www.newslinemagazine.com/2010/05/pakistani-activists-demand-their-right-to-protest-without-fear-of-threats/>.

It is, however, an uneven battle: to shape public opinion the broad spectrum of the religious right can rely on mosques, street rallies, and media that are open to its ideas such as the television channels Waqt and Dunya or the daily Nawa-e Waqt. The government and major political parties try to stay clear of the controversy fearing an extremist backlash and a loss of votes. The ruling PPP, for instance, only took an official stance on the assassination of its own minister and governor long after the incidents. Facing the silent majority of the people, the right-wing tendency successfully instrumentalises religion for political purposes. Influential public figures like the self-declared security-expert Zaid Hamid and the TV-sermoniser Aamir Liaquat combine restrictive religious interpretations with disdain for the West, grandiloquent nationalist views on Pakistan's position in the world, and a refusal of democracy and liberal values (Aziz 2011c, Shamsi 2010, Ahmed 2010). They find a stage on television channels that are seeking to benefit from the public's agitation in order to increase their audience numbers. This is the context within which the progressive sectors of society consider the internet as an important platform for communication allowing for the expression of alternative opinions and critique. The internet has opened up new channels for debate and civic engagement. Online media and weblogs have facilitated exchanges among people concerned over the growing intolerance in society and have promoted initiatives to act against extremism. The debate on blasphemy exemplifies how the internet is at the same time tool and object in a deeper conflict over Pakistan's national identity and the role of religion in politics.

4.7. *Transnational Networking for Local Activism: The Take Back the Tech! Campaign*

Take Back the Tech! (TBTT) is an interesting case of a transnational initiative, based and focusing on new communication technologies, which has been implemented within a Pakistani context. TBTT was originally initiated in 2006 by a women's network within the U.S.-based Association for Progressive Communications (APC) that sought to support women's empowerment and social change through the use of information technologies. The campaign addresses the intersection between women's rights and communication rights, particularly the relationship between violence

against women and ICT. The campaign's central website gives advice on how to organise and plan activities and proposes different plans of action or creative steps.³¹ Proceeding according to the patterns of transnational "networked" activism, TBTT supports the emergence of local branches in various countries of the world that act independently to solve an issue which is certainly of global relevance but manifests itself differently according to the cultural setting. It is thus an example of how the internet allows for combining local knowledge and expertise with the transnational framing of a problem in order to promote change.

TBTT came to Pakistan in 2009, when Bytes For All, an internet freedom advocacy organisation, and the Pakistan Software Houses Association P@SHA began activities to promote the campaign's goals. Through workshops, media presence, and public activities the campaign seeks to create awareness of the risks of online communication and surfing, such as privacy intrusions and stalking, as well as to teach young women on how to maintain their online security. At the same time, it wants to dispel existing fears towards ICT and promote women's usage of the technology's potential for social interactions and professional growth (Aziz 2010c, Aziz 2010d).

As a matter of fact, the harassment of women via mobile phones is quite frequent in Pakistan and also spreading on the internet and social networks. Attacks on young women are even filmed and then distributed online or via mobile phones. In autumn 2010, a group of men in Sindh filmed their gang-rape of a young woman and uploaded the video on several websites. Apparently, such films are used to blackmail the families of the victims who are ready to pay money out of fear of public humiliation. Restrictive social values prevent women from reporting incidents of harassment, so awareness-raising on such issues and the responsible usage of communication technologies appears essential (Dharejo 2010).

In Pakistan, TBTT can build on existing initiatives of women's rights activism such as War Against Rape (WAR) and others. It has been able to attract the support of social activists, media and technology professionals, students, lawyers, and artists. One of the campaign's leading figures, Jehan Ara of P@SHA, publishes short videos on her blog in which some of these personalities explain their motivation for

³¹ <http://www.takebackthetech.net/>

joining the campaign and why they think it is relevant.³² Among other activities, TBTT has funded the creation of a website providing information and resources for victims of violence and abuse.³³ Another online medium that grew out of the initiatives around Take Back the Tech! is the project of Gawaahi, presented below in more detail.

4.8. *Digital Media for Awareness and Advocacy: Gawaahi.org*

The Gawaahi project started with the website Gawaahi.com, established in 2010 by Naveen Naqvi, a journalist and former television anchor on Dawn News, and Sana Saleem, an outspoken blogger publishing regularly on different news websites. The main focus of this website was to publish stories on sexual abuse, minority rights, and women's rights (Gawaahi means 'testimony' in Urdu). While some of the entries were produced by the two founders, the website also used social media to invite text, photography, or video submissions from others. Films and animation videos dealing with child abuse in particular generated a response among the website's audience, inciting some readers to share their own stories and others to express solidarity and reflect on a topic marked by taboos. In another series of videos, school children were asked to express their views on the future of Pakistan with the aim of stimulating their independent thinking and to understand what ideas were occupying young Pakistanis. Within a short time, Gawaahi.com was able to attract significant media interest.

Another aspect that the website dealt with was the rising significance of online and social media for civic activism. In blogs or short videos bloggers and online activists from different countries explained how they use internet media for their respective causes. A tutorial section offered guidance to aspiring citizen journalists on the use of video, online editing, and journalistic principles.

Motivated by the success of the website, Naqvi decided to continue her activities by founding an NGO. Gawaahi.org continues with the format of testimonies and animation films in order to raise awareness on different issues concerning the situation of women in

³² <http://jehanara.wordpress.com/>

³³ <http://www.raahnuma.org/>

Pakistan, for instance the harassment of women in public places. Expanding these online activities, Gawaahi.org also organises meetings between victims of abuse, women from lower social layers, and women activists to promote an exchange and open up new possibilities of support. Altogether, Gawaahi thus provides an example on how the potential of online publishing is used to push for a more inclusive discussion. Creating a public exchange on marginalised issues and inciting participation in this exchange is thereby understood as a first step towards social change.³⁴

5. Conclusion

This report sought to place Pakistan as a case study within ongoing debates on the internet's significance for processes of political change and democratisation. The analysis of Pakistan's status of political transition has shown that the country can be situated in a phase of hesitant democratic consolidation. After years of military rule a relatively free and open election in 2008 has brought a civilian government to power. The completion of its tenure up to a new round of regular elections will actually be a step of historical proportions for Pakistan. Nevertheless, the country faces major obstacles on the way to a stable democratic system: from stagnant economic development and the violent conflict with Islamist militancy up to an alarming potential for social tensions and the elite's resistance to any change in the distribution of power and property. Last but not least, the military's frequent intrusions into the political sphere and the hierarchical structure of society have hindered the development of a political culture that would encourage political participation, rational debate, and cultural tolerance. The evolution of such a culture and the strengthening of civil society need to be seen as central preconditions for Pakistan's future course towards democracy.

The study further underlines the fact that the media play an essential role in the process of democratic consolidation. Media facilitate the circulation of information and opinions so that an informed citizenry can articulate its demands and influence the political decision making process. In addition, the media subject the political elite to critical oversight and highlight social issues. It has been argued that Pakistan is in need of an open debate

³⁴ Interviews with Naveen Naqvi and Sana Saleem, Karachi, June 28th and 29th 2011.

to develop a stable and inclusive national identity as well as an authentic discourse on democracy and human rights. The country's development issues and their causes have to be addressed in a rational manner in order to prevent extremist ideas from taking further root in society. Pakistan's media landscape has made remarkable progress during the last 10 years but it needs to continue along a process of internal reform and professionalisation. External pressures, too, from powerful political and economic actors hinder balanced media coverage and even create black holes with completely underreported topics. The democratisation of the media certainly requires the support of the state concerning the guarantee of fundamental rights of information freedom, but it also needs critique and influence from the public and society. In this regard, online media and social networks actually gain significance for they facilitate the emergence of alternative public spheres and provide a communication structure for certain civil society actors.

Internet use in Pakistan is still restricted by low levels of education, an underdeveloped infrastructure, and the restricted purchasing power of society's poorer sections. However, the country has a large young population with a general curiosity for communication technology. The overall interest in news and information which the electronic media have generated, as well as a noteworthy mobile phone penetration, speak for a coming surge in internet proliferation. Also, the largely untapped market of Urdu online publication will allow for a growth in the number of internet users once it is exploited.

The introductory chapter of this study has identified several possible contributions of the internet towards processes of political change, namely the creation of alternative public spheres, the formation of political culture and collective identities, networking and organising, and mobilisation for collective action. All these effects can be observed in Pakistan – albeit still in a restricted manner. Online media and social networks have certainly opened up room for sharing information and opinions. In the English-language press and to a small extent also in Urdu papers, the convergence with formats of online publication has facilitated the emergence of new opinion leaders who express their views through blogs and op-eds. During moments of crisis such as the emergency period in 2007 and the floods of 2010 the internet supported information sharing and civic mobilisation within certain educated milieus. To some extent citizen journalism has brought about more transparency in the political sphere. The examination of the Facebook-ban and the blasphemy debate has made it clear that the internet facilitates exchange and networking

among progressive actors who had to come up with a response to the threat of mounting extremism in society. At the same time, the internet itself became the object of a deeper debate on cultural tolerance and fundamental rights. Finally, the case of the Take Back The Tech! campaign shows how the internet supports networks of transnational activism seeking to develop local solutions to social issues of global relevance.

These developments notwithstanding, the internet's function as a tool for participatory debate and persistent information sharing has to be further broadened and sustained. Many online media only serve as transmitters of articles from the press without developing a distinct approach to reporting and commenting. Websites or blogs that attempt to deal with issues of social and political relevance sometimes lack a clear editorial line, oscillate between information and entertainment, and are insufficiently maintained and updated. There is definitely a requirement for more news websites or online newspapers that operate independently from the traditional media and follow a specific topical focus or concentrate on niche markets (e.g. reporting on a specific region or locality, articles on human rights, dealing with environmental issues). Aspiring citizen journalists need to be trained and become aware of basic ethical guidelines in order to assure the accuracy and credibility of the practice. The publication of online media in Urdu or the vernacular languages has to be encouraged in order to reach different layers of society. The traditional media, especially the radio, could then build on the content of recognised online media to attain more diversity and authenticity in their programmes.

It has to be underlined that this study does not see the internet as a major remedy for the development of political culture and civil society that is so essential for Pakistan's further democratic consolidation. To understand possible contributions of the new information technologies towards political progress it is important to consider them within the context of society. If the new media are integrated into ongoing struggles for change they can actually open up the landscape of 'old politics', providing additional possibilities for civic engagement and mobilisation. This is perhaps most evident in the efforts for women's empowerment on and over the internet which in fact represent a new approach to the long-term activism against violence against women and for women's rights in Pakistani society. The necessary attempts to reach a coherent legislation for internet use in Pakistan might provide another example in this regard - when pursued in a concerted manner. Here, civil society and the private sector could seek to develop a unified position vis-à-vis the state and to

influence the government's decision making process, thereby indirectly touching fundamental issues such as civil rights and cultural tolerance.

Websites and blogs

Initiatives and organisations:

Citizens For Democracy	http://citizensfordemocracy.wordpress.com
Bytes for All	http://content.bytesforall.pk
Gawaahi	http://gawaahi.org
Intermedia Pakistan	http://www.intermedia.org.pk
Take Back The Tech!	http://www.takebackthetech.net

Blogs and online media:

Teeth Maestro (Awab Alvi)	http://teeth.com.pk/blog
The Baloch Hal	http://www.thebalochhal.com
Café Pyala	http://cafepyala.blogspot.com
Kala Kawa	http://kalakawa.wordpress.com
Maati TV	http://www.maati.tv
Reluctant Mind	http://tazeen-tazeen.blogspot.com
Mystified Justice (Sana Saleem)	http://sanasaleem.com/
Tea Break	http://teabreak.pk

Newspapers:

The Express Tribune	http://tribune.com.pk
Dawn	http://www.dawn.com
Newsline	http://www.newslinemagazine.com
Jang (Urdu)	http://www.jang.com.pk
Express (Urdu)	http://www.express.com.pk/epaper

List of Interviews:

Jahanzaib Haque, Faria Sayed (The Express Tribune)	June 27th 2011
Jehan Ara (Pakistan Software Houses Association P@SHA)	June 28th 2011
Farieha Aziz (Newsline Magazine)	June 28th 2011
Naveen Naqvi (Gawaahi.org)	June 28th 2011
Awab Alvi	June 29th 2011
Sana Saleem	June 29th 2011
Shahzad Ahmad (Bytes For All)	July 1st 2011
Adnan Rehmat (Intermedia)	September 14th 2011
Ammar Yasir (Tea Break), Email-correspondence	August 20th 2011

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