Information, Disclosure and Regime Stability

James R. Hollyer, University of Minnesota

Governments, whether autocratic or democratic, depend on at least a minimal level of consent from their populace to survive in office. Should large masses of citizens turn out in protest or revolt against their leaders, regimes of any type will rapidly find the polity ungovernable. Yet such demonstrations are collective acts—to be successful they require the participation of large numbers of citizens. In circumstances where citizens lack common knowledge of others’ intent to protest, how can such coordination take place? What is the effect of the broader informational environment on such coordination? How then does the informational environment affect the survival of autocratic and democratic regimes? Given these implications, when and why do governments tolerate an open informational environment?

In several recent articles and working papers, and in an on-going book project, I—along with Peter Rosendorff and Jim Vreeland—examine precisely these questions.


Online Censorship and Responsiveness in China

Jennifer Pan, Stanford University

There is ongoing debate over whether authoritarian regimes can retain control over the creation and dissemination of information in spite of the rise of new information communication technologies (ICTs). Some argue that new technologies disrupt the ability of authoritarian regimes to control information, and ultimately to maintain political survival. According to this view, technologies like social media allow any individual to act as a broadcaster, making information production incredibly diffuse and improving coordination of collective action against authoritarian regimes. However, others refute this perspective and point to the use of technology as well as and more traditional forms of repression by authoritarian regimes to retain control over information.

While speculation that new information technologies spell doom for authoritarian regimes may be premature, it is inevitable that technological advances, such as the Internet and mobile communications, which fundamentally alter interactions among individuals and organizations, will also affect political dynamics. How have authoritarian regimes, where information has traditionally been heavily controlled and manipulated, reacted to these
Collective action is often a product of coordination, and coordination is facilitated by information. However, in response to the introduction of personalized media, a revived debate on the role of information in collective political behavior strives to provide explanations for novel forms of political mobilization in societies with limited access to information: namely that some of the most spectacular acts of political contention under autocracies were utterly surprising, did not bear the marks of clear leadership, and proceeded with tremendous speed. In the following I argue that, in the discussion of clandestine contention, explanations based on coordination via selective incentives, focal points, common ideologies, and routine repertoires of action do not fully capture the properties of collective political behavior that only recently have become more visible in the mirror of new social media. To fully understand the dynamics of such connective acts of contention, it is necessary to emphasize temporal dynamics instead of statistical averages, interpersonal connections instead of total population parameters, and marginal network effects as much as centrally situated political activity. My goal in the following is to outline a logic that can provide explanations where a coordination-based logic of collective action cannot, and to enumerate a few methodological procedures for empirically testing the paradigm I propose.2 To summarize, public information and unifying informational elements such as ideology, focal points, repertoires of action, and selective incentives do not fully answer the question of why specific political movements achieve surprising degrees of organization and mobilization. Instead of exploring a unifying informational element such as ideology, focal points, repertoires of action, and selective incentives, we need to build a paradigm that can explain why the mobilization of social movements proceeded with such speed and without clear leadership: a connective logic of contention.2


welcoming our new editorial board members. Kyle Marquardt holds a PhD from U of Wisconsin-Madison and Anna Lührmann who holds a PhD from Humbolt University. Both are presently postdoc’s here at the V-Dem Institute, at the University of Gothenburg and make terrific additions to the team.

This issue’s focus is on media control and the editors write in more detail on that below. The remaining issues of our two-year tenure will feature conversations on opposition parties in authoritarian regimes (January), and democratization and civil conflict (June). As indicated at the last business meeting, however, we already have additional issues in the pipeline debating democracy support, the role of linguistic-ethnic divides in regime change, and the relationship between democracy and economic-human development, should we be asked to continue for another term.

On that note, let me hand it over to the editors of the present issue!

Staffan I. Lindberg
Executive Editor

From this issue’s editors:
We chose to focus this issue on media control in non-democracies and transitional regimes. Media is rapidly changing form and function, forcing political leaders to quickly adapt their media use and information control strategies to the modern information environment. This issue presents recent findings on information manipulation and control, highlights some gaps in the current literature, and suggests avenues for future research.

The authors in this issue represent the forefront of research on media control, and, together, their pieces highlight several critical outstanding questions. First, James Hollyer focuses on the role of vertical information transfer, from governments to citizens, in facilitating regime change. He argues that improving the informational environment constitutes a “risky gamble” for authoritarian leaders. Greater transparency may insulate the regime from internal threats but may also raise the risk of mass protest and democratization. For democracies, on the other hand, information transparency plays a legitimizing role, encouraging regime survival.

Continuing the thread of exploration about the dual power and threat of information, Jennifer Pan considers whether authoritarian regimes will be able to continue their control over horizontal information transfer between citizens, while simultaneously encouraging the use of information technology by business. Examining China, she highlights a tension between stability and economic growth, arguing that information technology undermines stability but fosters growth. She argues that, to date, the Chinese regime has been largely successful at bringing the state censorship apparatus to bear to undermine the coordination of collective action through social media. Yet, she leaves us with a compelling research agenda to investigate: how far can the repressive approach scale, and could horizontal information transfer, and regime responsiveness, perhaps serve as an alternative pressure valve for discontent, thereby reducing the likelihood of larger scale collective action.

In his piece, Navid Hassanpour also explores horizontal information transfer, arguing that the effect of information is increasingly contingent on structure of interpersonal connections. He advocates for a shift away from coordination-based logic of collective action towards analysis that considers network dynamics, degree of centralization, and hierarchical structure, and even offers suggestions to the discipline about how to collect data on these phenomena. Moreover, his works shows that, under some circumstances, limiting access to information can, paradoxically, stimulate collective action.

While the preceding authors focus largely on the role that information plays in fomenting collective action, Marc Lynch offers a cautionary tale about the potentially destabilizing effect of the modern information environment on transitional regimes. Examining the impact of new media on post-uprising politics in the Arab world, he concludes that many of the characteristics of the media environment that facilitated the Arab Spring may undermine the consolidation of the new regimes.

Finally, Maria Petrova offers a broad review of what we know about media control in non-democracies, focusing largely on a literature in economics that may not be well known to our readership. Synthesizing research from around the world, she discusses the commonly employed methods of, conditions for, and effects of authoritarian media capture.

Taken together, these pieces describe some of the most compelling outstanding questions in the literature on media control in non-democracies. We hope you enjoy this issue and that your fall semesters are productive!

Dan Pemstein and Brigitte Zimmerman
MEDIA CAPTURE OUTSIDE ADVANCED DEMOCRACIES

Maria Petrova, Barcelona Institute for Political Economy and Governance

In most countries, people get information about politics from mass media. As a result, politicians have incentives to control, or capture, the media, and, sometimes, engage in propaganda, especially in countries with weak democratic institutions. The goal of this article is to overview recent literature about the determinants and consequences of media control outside advanced democracies: i.e., in autocracies, hybrid regimes, and new democracies, with a focus on economic literature on the topic. I’ll talk about evidence of media capture, the political impact of captured media, the presence of alternative sources of information, like independent and social media, and the limits to propaganda.

Some formal theoretical literature suggests that mass media can increase political accountability by monitoring public officials and publishing stories about politicians’ misbehavior. To avoid this possibility, corrupt governments can exert control over mass media through a variety of channels, including direct ownership, provision of financial resources, and media regulation. Theoretically, competition between outlets can force even controlled media to reveal some information, although not to the same extent as independent sources. It is an open question whether controlled media can nonetheless promote accountability. In what follows, I first review the empirical evidence on media control in various countries, then discuss what are known determinants of media capture, then talk about the influence of controlled media, and, finally, sketch some emerging evidence on the role of social media in countries where traditional media is controlled.

What Are the Methods of Media Capture?

Governments can use different forms of media control. Bribing media managers or journalists is an obvious method. McMillan and Zoido (2004) provide evidence of direct bribery of media firms. They study Fujimori’s Peru, where the head of secret police, Vladimir Montesinos, collected the records of bribes he paid on behalf of the government to different actors. Essentially, the paper shows that directors of TV channels were getting higher payments than were politicians or judges. In total, Montesinos paid 100 times more in bribes to media outlets than to all judges and politicians combined. This suggests that media was viewed as a significant force in the Peruvian political system. Another popular method of media control is to ensure that the “right” politicians get the most broadcast time, while others almost never appear on radio or TV. For example, Enikolopov, Petrova, and Zhuravskaya (2011) show that the amount of time devoted to pro-government politicians in Russia in 1999 was disproportionately high on the state-controlled channels. For Berlusconi’s Italy, Durante and Knight (2012) find that politicians from the Berlusconi party had a higher chance to speak on public TV when Berlusconi was in power. Adena et al. (2015) show that Nazi politicians had almost no access to German radio before 1933, but were given disproportionate access to radio in 1933, after Hitler was appointed the Chancellor.

 Provision of governments’ advertising money is another method to ensure that media is favorable to incumbent politicians. Di Tella and Franceschelli (2012), for example, look at the content of the front pages and of advertising section for four main newspapers in Argentina in 1998–2007. They find that newspapers with government advertising are less likely to talk about government corruption, and these results are robust to controlling for newspaper-president and corruption scandal fixed effects. Similarly, governments use media regulation to avoid critical media coverage. For Mexico, Stanig (2015) shows that defamation laws are important determinants of media coverage of corruption, and local newspapers reported less corruption in 2001 in states in which defamation laws were stricter. This is consistent with the idea that government regulation of media markets, and especially defamation laws, is one of the ways to control mass media. Starr (2004) arrives at similar conclusions from his historical overview of media development and media regulation in different countries.

In recent years, with the advancement of new technologies, censorship has taken on new forms. When governments cannot perfectly control blogs or online news aggregators, they may engage in selective deletion of information. King et al. (2013) study selective deletion on content in modern China, trying to understand which types of online content are likely to get censored. They make snapshots of


Before one can determine the relevance of the informational environment to regime survival, one first must specify the type of information of theoretical relevance. When dealing with anti-regime protest, the relevant concern is whether any one citizen can infer that others are willing to take part in demonstrations against the sitting leadership. Since small protests are likely to fail—at high cost to participants—while large protests may succeed in upending the regime, each citizen is only likely to protest if she believes enough of her fellows will also participate. The willingness of others to turn out in the streets might be termed the distribution of discontent. Under autocratic rule, this distribution is unlikely to be common knowledge. However dissatisfied any one citizen is with the government’s rule, she is unlikely to be certain of the number of her fellow citizens who are similarly dissatisfied. Moreover, she is likely to be aware that other citizens cannot infer her level of dissatisfaction. That is, she is unlikely to be able to refine her higher order beliefs—her beliefs about the beliefs held by others—regarding willingness to participate in protest.

Certain types of information, however, may help to overcome this problem. Information may play this role if it is publicly observed (and known to be publicly observed), pertinent to government performance along dimensions of concern to many citizens, and credible. Since the issue in this instance is with discontent with the current government, information must credibly reflect that government’s performance in office. Similarly, this information must be relevant to a large swath of the citizenry—hence, information that reflects the aggregated experiences of many citizens is more likely to be relevant than information only pertinent to a select few.

Equally critical is the extent to which information is publicly observed. If a given citizen observes a bit of such information, she may naturally update her assessment of the government’s performance. But, she also knows that others are observing the same information and conducting the same updating process. Hence public information enables citizens to refine their higher order beliefs about the distribution of discontent. If a piece of damning news is publicly observed, each citizen knows that others have also received this news and that they cannot have too high an opinion of the incumbent government as a result. Conversely, publicly observed good news will cause each citizen to realize that others are updating their beliefs about the government in a positive manner, and hence cannot hold too negative an opinion of their rulers. Since all citizens are able to update their understanding about the beliefs of others, and can similarly deduce that others are engaged in the same updating process, public information facilitates the formation of a common understanding of the distribution of discontent. Public information therefore facilitates the formation of a shared understanding of when protest is likely to take place, enabling coordinated demonstrations by individual citizens.

In the forthcoming APSR piece referenced above, my co-authors and I explore a formal model with just such intuitions. Unsurprisingly, the model reveals that autocratic survival becomes more strongly conditioned on government behavior as the informational environment becomes increasingly rich. As more information becomes available, it becomes more likely that under-performing autocrats are revealed as such, and that these autocrats inspire protest by the public. Perhaps more surprisingly, a richer informational environment will unconditionally destabilize an autocratic regime so long as protest is ‘hard’—i.e., the consequences for participating in a failed protest are sufficiently dire and/or the numbers required to successfully unseat the leadership are sufficiently high. The reason for this is as follows: If protest is hard, citizens must be confident that demonstrating will be a successful tactic before they are willing to turn out in the streets. In an environment where public information is scant, this level of confidence is unlikely to ever be attained. Hence, regardless of their performance, autocratic leaders are unlikely to face much threat from the public. As the informational environment improves, under-performing leaders face greater risk of protest, while the risks faced by those autocrats who deliver economic growth and public goods are largely unchanged. Thus, the overall probability of regime collapse rises as greater public information becomes available. Hence, a rich informational environment serves to destabilize autocratic regimes against threats from their publics.

The informational environment plays a radically different role under democratic rule. This is because free and fair elections generate public information. Election returns, participation in election rallies, and public statements by candidates and citizens surrounding elections all serve as public signals to the citizenry of the distribution of discontent. It is for this reason that James Fearon argues that democracy is self-enforcing—should an incumbent fail to heed electoral results, any given citizen is likely to be convinced that the predisposition of the public is reversed—citizens will tend to take to the streets even if highly uncertain of a protest’s likelihood of success. In these circumstances, greater information may actually serve to decrease risks to the regime.

aware that many others are willing to protest this behavior and demand the incumbent’s ouster.\(^3\)

In the presence of free and fair elections, therefore, the broader informational environment is likely to play little role in facilitating protest. The distribution of discontent is already likely to be common knowledge due to the electoral process, and other forms of information are likely to play at most a marginal role in updating beliefs about this distribution. Public information about government performance is instead likely to shape the behavior of citizens at the polling booth. Such information plays two roles: First, it ensures that any individual citizen’s voting decision is more likely to be in line with the government’s performance. Voters are more likely to support governments that perform well and vote against governments that perform badly as they grow more informed. Second, the greater availability of public information ensures that any given voter is more likely to believe her fellow citizens are well-informed, and hence voting in a rational manner.

Both of these effects ensure that a richer informational environment legitimates democratic rule. A richer informational environment implies that voters are more likely to view their fellows as behaving in an informed and rational manner, vesting the democratic process with greater procedural legitimacy. As more information is made publicly available, it grows less feasible for antidemocratic forces to rally sub-groups of citizens against democratic institutions by claiming that others’ votes were ill-informed and illegitimate. Moreover, the greater availability of information ensures that democratic institutions better resolve problems of political agency. As citizens’ votes align more closely with incumbents’ performance, elections work better—whether this is defined in terms of selecting “good” types of politicians or inducing “bad” types to act in the public interest. As the democratic process better serves its intended role, political institutions are vested with greater outcome legitimacy.

Both of these legitimating effects point in the same direction with regard to democratic survival: Democracies are more likely to survive, and less likely to revert to autocracy, as public information becomes more readily available.

My co-authors and I empirically test the claims that a rich informational environment, respectively, destabilizes autocracies and stabilizes democracies. To do this, we rely on a measure of informational environment (which we term transparency) of our own construction.\(^4\) This measure is based on the presence/missingness of data from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators (WDI) data series. To construct it, we fit a scaling model to a dataset capturing the presence/absence of each of 240 indicators from the WDI for 125 countries from 1980-2010. Transparency is the captured as a latent term that predicts reporting of these 240 variables. Hence, our measure reflects the availability of economic information of great relevance to citizens’ level of discontent with the current leadership. It reflects the availability of credible information, insofar as disclosed data are subject to quality review by the World Bank. And it proxies for publicly available information, as the WDI are currently freely available and have long been made accessible to researchers and the press. While we do not expect citizens to directly access such data, we do expect that the availability of credible economic information to the World Bank proxies for the availability of credible information on the performance of the economy more broadly.

Across these two papers, we find that transparency is robustly associated with regime-type transition. We find that a one standard deviation increase in transparency in our sample of autocratic states is associated with a 39 percent increase in the hazard of transition to democracy (with a 95 percent confidence interval running from a 8 to an 78 percent increase), when growth is at its sample average. A one standard deviation increase in our measure of transparency in a sample of democratic states is associated with a 74 percent decline in the hazard of democratic collapse (with a 95 percent confidence interval running from a 91 to a 29 percent decrease), when growth is at its sample average.\(^5\) We plot graphs of these marginal effects on the estimated hazard of regime-type transition (based on Cox proportional hazards regressions) in Figure 1. These results include controls for GDP per capita, past experiences of transition, and economic growth—some of the most robust predictors of regime transitions. We further demonstrate that

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5. Our measure of democracy is from José Antonio Cheibub, Jennifer Gandhi, and James Raymond Vreeland, “Democracy and Dictatorship Revisited” Public Choice 143 (April 2010): 67–101. Estimated hazards of transition are based off a Cox proportional hazards model, including controls for economic growth rates, GDP per capita, and experience of past transitions. Models also include an interaction between transparency and growth. The marginal effect of transparency in both models is slightly reduced as growth increases. We explore the robustness of these results to a host of additional controls in both Hollyer, Rosendorff, and Vreeland, “Transparency, Protest and Autocratic Instability” and Hollyer, Rosendorff, and Vreeland, “Transparency, Protest and Democratic Stability.”
Hollyer

Figure 1: Hazard of Transition, Autocracies and Democracies

Hazard rate of regime type transition for autocracies and democracies, respectively. Regime type is defined according to the DD dataset. Estimates from a sample of autocratic states are to the left, those from democratic states are to the right. (Both graphs are based on sub-samples that have not experienced prior regime-type reversals.) Dark lines depict estimates when transparency is at its mean value in the respective samples. Dashed lines depict estimates when transparency is at one standard deviation above the mean. Results are from Cox proportional hazard models with additional controls. Note that the axes are not to the same scale across the two figures.

Transparent autocratic regimes are more likely to fall via mass unrest or transition to democracy, using the Milan Svolik’s definition of an autocratic regime: the continuous succession of politically affiliated dictators. However, the informational environment is not predictive of other forms of autocratic weakness—and, indeed, is negatively correlated with the frequency of coups. Similarly, transparent autocracies experience more frequent strikes and demonstrations, but are no more likely to experience other forms of unrest (assassinations, guerrilla movements) than their opaque counterparts.

Improvements in the informational environment are therefore valuable contributors to democracy and democratic consolidation. Transparency—here measured by the availability of credible economic information—is associated both with hastened transitions to democracy and with more stable democratic rule. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that democracies—particularly high income democracies—tend to have richer informational environments than their autocratic counterparts. Not only are citizens given greater opportunity to demand the collection and disclosure of information by the government under democratic rule, but such disclosure serves to reinforce the institution of democracy.

Why, however, would an autocratic regime ever tolerate transparency, given the threat a rich informational environment poses for the continued stability of the regime? In a recent working paper, my co-authors and I explore precisely this question. We contend that the answer lies in the interplay between mass and elite politics in autocratic regimes.

Autocratic leaders face two threats to their survival in office. One is the threat of collective protest by (portions) of the citizenry aimed at upending the regime. This might be termed the threat from below. The other threat is posed by regime elites, who might use violence or administrative maneuvers to replace the sitting leadership. This is the threat from within.

These two threats are interrelated. Actions by members of the elite against autocratic leaders may be difficult or impossible to disguise, and may signal to the public the fractured and weak state of the regime. Such actions at the elite-level may thus provide a spark for mass protest and the potential displacement of the regime as a whole. Before attempting to discipline their leaders, therefore, autocratic elites must consider the implications of their actions for their own continued survival in privileged positions.

Elites may then be cowed into quiescence when they perceive that the mass public is particularly capable of mobilization. Increased transparency, and other liberalizing reforms, may therefore reduce the threat autocratic leaders face from within the regime, even as it increases the threat from below. This argument is consistent with the results from our APSR paper, that transparency increases the likelihood of democratization or regime collapse due to mass unrest even as it reduces the risk of coup. It also suggests that autocratic leaders will tend to increase transparency when the threats from within the regime are particularly great—i.e., when legitimacy is vested in institutions rather than the personality of the particular leader, or when the leader is new to office. We find that, indeed, transparency rises when autocratic leaders are new to office and is lower in personalistic regimes as compared to other autocracies.

For autocrats, therefore, improving the informational environment constitutes a risky gamble. On the one hand, greater transparency may insulate leaders against internal threats. But, on the other, it raises the risk of mass protest and democratization. For democracies, a rich informational environment is an unambiguous good. Greater information complements democratic institutions and renders them more robust, reducing the threat of transition to autocracy.

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(picture of a protest in Hong Kong)

(photo courtesy of jerryofwong/flickr/creative commons)
new technologies? Here, the experience of China’s single-party regime presents an interesting paradox: a regime that has aggressively embraced these technological advances yet exerts great effort to manage the content produced and disseminated via these technologies.

What we can learn from the Chinese experience is that technologies like the Internet and social media are viewed as indispensable by the regime in its pursuit of economic growth, but at the same time, these technologies are also viewed as inherently dangerous because of their ability to propagate collective action and threaten stability. To balance this double-edged sword, the regime engages in censorship to prevent the spread of real-world collective action and promotes responsiveness to prevent discontent from fomenting real world action. While these efforts have been, in many ways, successful, a thin line separates the failure and success of these tactics in allowing the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to maintain its pursuit of stability and growth.

Pursuing Stability and Growth
In 1989, Deng Xiaoping said, “To China’s problems, the overwhelming priority is stability. Without a stable environment, nothing can be achieved, and what has been achieved will be lost.” These words, and the concept that stability trumps all, have been repeated countless times in CCP documents and the speeches of China’s top leaders, and this pursuit of stability is reflected in China’s institutions and governing structure. However, stability is not the sole priority of the CCP. Indeed, Deng pursued stability because it formed a necessary precondition to achieving his vision of an economically powerful China. This focus on stability and growth continues to this day, and the current president, Xi Jinping, has repeated emphasized the importance of economic development and stability.

For the CCP, stability at the most fundamental level refers to political stability or the continuation of CCP rule, but also refers to a society where protest, collective action, and lawlessness will not obstruct economic development and prosperity. In order to achieve this expansive type of stability, the regime needs to mitigate threats to its power such as cross-class mobilization but needs also to deter smaller-scale collective action such as labor protests from hindering the attractiveness of the Chinese market. However, stability is not sufficient to produce growth. Economic development also requires human capital that can engage in innovation and market competition.

The Paradox of Information Technologies
Economic growth is not possible without the flow of information between businesses, markets, suppliers, and customers. The type of information flow essential to innovation and business competition—what scholars refer to as horizontal information—is generated by, and shared among, societal actors. Horizontal flows of information contrast with vertical flows of information, where information generated by societal actors is gathered by the regime. Vertical information the 20th century, and of increasing per capita GNP to the level of medium-developed countries by 2050.

This tension inherent in horizontal information has generated a paradox in China, where the regime actively promotes and supports the development of technologies that bolster the horizontal flow of information, but at the same time, devotes substantial efforts to control the substance of information flowing via these technologies.

For example, China has invested a great deal in its Internet infrastructure, working to extend access to remote, rural areas. Because of these efforts, China has gone from less than 23 million Internet users in 2000 to nearly 650 million Internet users today, making China the country with the largest number of Internet users in the world, representing over 21 percent of among citizens.

1. According to Deng, stability is the first condition for the “three step” economic development strategy of doubling gross national product (GNP) from 1981 to 1990, of quadrupling the 1980 GNP by the end of 1990, of quadrupling the 1980 GNP by the end of

2. See Peter Lorentzen, China’s Controlled Burn: Information Management and State-Society Relations under Authoritarianism (unpublished manuscript, 2015). A third type of information flow is information transmitted to citizens by the regime, including objective information about the regime (transparency) or information aimed at persuasion (propaganda). I do not include this type of information in either horizontal or vertical information flows where societal actors are the source of information. The tension between horizontal and vertical information flows exists because the regime benefits from information from citizens but does not benefit when this same information is disseminated by the regime.

the world’s share of Internet users. To balance the need for horizontal information while mitigating its perceived dangers, the Chinese regime engages in censorship to prevent the spread of collective action and encourages government responsiveness to societal demands to prevent discontent from fomenting into real world action. Each of these strategies is discussed in turn below.

Censorship to Prevent the Spread of Collective Action

Through a large-scale observational study of content filtering—the manual removal of Internet social media content after it has already been posted online—King, Pan, and Roberts (2013) find that censorship is aimed at removing all discussions of real-world events with collective action potential, while allowing for a great deal of criticism of the regime. Through a randomized experiment of censorship on 100 social media sites including microblogging sites, blogs, and forums, King, Pan, and Roberts (2014) find that discussing real-world events with collective action potential causes censorship, regardless of whether discussions support or criticize the regime; in contrast, criticisms of the government unrelated to events with collective action potential do not cause censorship.

Removing discussions of real-world events with collective action does not prevent these events from occurring in the first place, but it limits the growth potential of these events. Let us suppose there is a sizable environmental protest in northwest Beijing, and the protest is discussed on social media for several hours before all mentions of the event are removed. Let us also suppose that there is a person living in eastern Beijing who is sympathetic to this cause, but who find no evidence of this protest by the time he goes online because all discussions of this protest have already been removed. As a result, this person is unaware of the event, and cannot be inspired to join in and to organize similar types of activities. By removing all discussion of events, for many, it is as if the event never occurred, and collective action cannot spread without awareness. Censorship in the form of content filtering prevents the spread of collective behaviors.

However, while censorship may prevent the spread of collective action, it does not appear to be an effective strategy for preventing collective action from emerging in the first place. While in theory censorship tactics such as keyword filtering—flagging content containing certain terms for removal—would prevent content deemed to be inappropriate from appearing online; in practice, these ex-ante censorship methods are largely ineffective. Through randomized experimentation, King, Pan, and Roberts (2014) observe that two thirds of Chinese social media sites use keyword filtering to flag posts for review, but keyword review has virtually no effect on what content is removed from appearing online because human censors correct errors after keyword filtering techniques are applied.

Responsiveness to Prevent the Emergence of Collective Action

Rather than censor, the government prevents the emergence of collective action through responsiveness. In recent years, there is growing evidence that officials in authoritarian regimes are responsive to citizens, and much of this research has been done in China. Through a survey experiment, Meng,
Pan, and Yang (N.d.) find that approximately half of provincial and city-level officials in China believe that suggestions from local residents should be seriously considered when making policy and expenditure decisions, even when these suggestions are expressed through the Internet rather than state institutions such as residential committees, people’s congress representatives, or the local CCP organization.9

Measuring responsiveness more directly, Chen, Pan, and Xu (N.d.) conduct a randomized field experiment among 2,103 Chinese counties by submitting online requests for help in obtaining social welfare and measuring the government response.10 Overall, one third of county governments responded to demands expressed online, but when a vague threat of small-scale collective action was appended to the request for help, local governments became considerably more responsive. The increased responsiveness to unrealized threats of collective action suggests that responsiveness is deemed to be a priority, and second, that many officials only pay lip service to the task. Responsiveness breaks down further in regions where there is antagonism between the state and citizens and, indeed, the CCP has identified antagonism as a main cause of collective action against the state. In regions with high levels of state-society antagonism, officials are much less responsive to demands residents express online, although responsiveness to demands expressed through in-person, formal channels remains unchanged.

These results show that while censorship efforts to prevent the spread of collective action have been largely successful, responsiveness efforts are more mixed. This is perhaps reflective of the general phenomenon that it is easier to mobilize in response to crisis than it is to vigilantly prevent crisis from appearing in the first place. When a crisis, such as collective action has already occurred, resources are quickly mobilized to impose control, but when faced with amorphous and unrealized threats, mobilizing resources to continually engage in prevention is difficult. However, China’s pursuit of growth and stability require information to continue to flow horizontally, and relying more intensively on repression and control when faced with the proliferation of information generated by new ICTs could thwart efforts to use these technologies to support growth, investment, and innovation.

New information technologies are a double-edge sword in China. Because the country aims to pursue both stability and economic growth, new information platforms are essential yet potentially dangerous. The tension between promoting and constraining new ICTs begs the questions of whether outcomes of the unconstrained information flow on the Internet and social media feared by the CCP regime are likely to transpire. For example, if there were no censorship, would there be more, and larger scale, collective action? Or would open debate and discussion provide a pressure valve for discontent? These and other questions require further research, but for now, China’s delicate balancing act continues.

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the puzzle of spontaneous and fast growing contention. Decentralization, spontaneity, and lack of hierarchy at times set into motion revolutions, bank runs and religious reversals that, unlike what the logic of coordination predicts, benefit from limited information, are faster growing when the size of the group is larger, and are led from the periphery of the sociopolitical network, not the center. The cognizance of such processes advances our understanding of contentious politics in autocratic environments, particularly because much of informational transactions therein are interpersonal, local and clandestine.

High risk collective action is deemed to be a product of strong social ties and a hierarchical line of command. First note that all solutions to the collective action problem as a giant prisoner’s dilemma emphasize elements that economize on coordination. Lichbach and Olson offer a solution based on selective incentives for participation, Tilly presents repertoires of action as unifying modes of contention, Schelling offers focal points as the unifying apparatus for coordination, Hardin takes common identity as a facilitator of coordination on a cause. Finally in the setup of global games accurate public information facilitates collective action. Nevertheless, I argue that lack of unification, accurate information, and centralized contention can set into motion contentious processes with dynamics different than well-rehearsed coordinated contentious politics. Neither of the two major models of collective action, Granovetter’s (and Kuran’s) threshold model, and Morris’ definition of global games, import network structure in their formulation of collective action processes. In Kuran’s formulation, everybody is visible to all. Such high levels of centrality are plausible towards the end of revolutionary processes, not at their beginnings, where my research question lies. Global games, too, assume a simplified information structure, in which stylized signals are either public, visible to all in the system, or private. There is no intermediate apparatus of information dissemination that could describe local networks of information propagation and contentious action. The dynamics of risk-taking based on the threshold models of collective action depend on the structure of underlying social network. The same is true of global games.

Note that many Middle Eastern capitals, the theaters of the 2011 popular confrontations, with dense local urban structure, fit well in the category of small world networks: they are comprised of interconnected dense neighborhoods with strong local features, a point that I will return to when I discuss the consequences of a total communication shutdown, and lack of public information. Furthermore, early studies of collective action in networks made clear that marginal risk takers are more likely to be the early adopters of risky social behavior. These early adopters are less likely to be influenced by the risk-aversion of the majority of the population, and in turn are more likely to influence their small social circle. Now if these speculations on the nature of mobilization from the periphery are plausible, then there is a need for formulating contentious processes that do not originate from the centers of attention, but instead take hold at the margins of a social network and move towards the center stage. The need is pressing because in autocracies much of contention is hidden from the watchful state apparatus.

Collecting empirics on decentralized and clandestine collective action is challenging, as they mostly happen before the process reaches levels that are visible to the public eye. New data rich environments, however, allow researchers to collect data that are inadvertently captured in communications leading to the ascendence of the movement. In the following, I discuss three classes of data sources: surveys, geographic data on conflict processes, and network experiments each can shed light on the dynamics of decentralized and clandestine collective action. I have put the predictions of the network models into the test using the same empirical strategies.


Surveys on contentious activity provide subjective information on the event, but there is a tension between the subject of the study, which is a dynamic event process, and methods for pinpointing a representative sample based on static socioeconomic parameters. Convenience and representative samples are easier to come by in the spatiotemporal proximity of the event itself. In the absence of survey data in conflict zones, Geographical Information System (GIS) analysis is another means for tracing the dynamics of conflict. Particularly, in urban environments, with the heavy presence of human recording, the contentious networks embedded within the spatial web of public squares, major and minor streets and dense neighborhoods are aptly susceptible to GIS methods. Real time spatiotemporal tracing reveals patterns of contention that are invisible to a local observer, or unavailable in a post hoc survey. A triangulation of social media reports in text, image, and video, as well as reports in online and news media outlets can help to pinpoint contention in space and time. Early examples of geographical analysis in the context of urban conflict can be found in Roger Gould’s pioneering study of the Paris Commune. Detailed geolocated data, often provided by handheld devices used by the parties in contention, leave traces of irregular rebellion in unprecedented formats, residues that facilitate novel modes of empirical analysis. I have applied GIS methods in the context of the civil conflict in Damascus in 2012; later I outline some of the results on the communication-conflict nexus. Finally, laboratory experiments of collective action are another venue for exploring the dynamics of risk taking in a controlled setting. Measuring risk propensity is a well-rehearsed practice in behavioral economics; knowing the risk propensity of a subject leads to an opportunity to test the dynamics of collective action in a heterogeneous network. Once the risk takers, or early adopters of a social innovation, are identified, then one can arrange them in different network positions, have them engage in a collective game of risk-taking, an online lottery in our case, and observe the dynamics of risk-taking diffusing from the margins to the other parts of the network. The results shed light on the dynamics of mobilization from the margins, otherwise invisible to aggregate measuring mechanisms.

To test the predictions of a contagion based dynamics I turned to contentious processes in 2011. I noted above that decentralized mobilization interacts with information regimes in ways different from mobilization based on coordination. Hence, it was imperative to find cases in which the access to information had drastically changed in the course of the mobilization process, and to test the dynamics of recruitment and risk taking in time and space. During the Middle Eastern contentious processes post 2011, at least on two occasions countrywide blackouts in Egypt and Syria, in early 2011 and in late 2012, provided grounds for detecting risk taking dynamics that often work side by side with coordination based, centralized dynamics, but are masked in the presence of more visible contentious elements. A vacuum of public information could bring their significance to the fore. To further examine the role of instigators situated in the peripheries of the social network, I also examine the findings with a number of controlled experiments of collective risk-taking.

In the months following the ill-fated Egyptian Revolution of January 2011, I ran a survey with a convenience sample of more than seven hundred Cairo residents on their protest participation and media usage behavior during the 18 days of the protests. I found that the vanguards, the early adopters of the contentious activity, those who had protested on the first day of the protests, January 25, 2011, had done so in substantially more geographically dispersed manner compared to the late adopters, and their levels of protest outside Tahrir was as high on the first day of protests, January 25, as they were on January 28, a day of blanket shutdown of all means of communication in Egypt. The protests, as a whole, were also the most dispersed on January 28; the rate of those who reported being in Tahrir, conditioned on participation, were the lowest among the 18 days of contentsions, although the total number of those in Tahrir Square itself was unprecedented. In other words, the protests were the most dispersed during the day of blackouts. Unlike January 25, when the protest processions converged in Tahrir, on the 28th they flared in multiple corners of the city, despite repeated prior public calls for convergence to Tahrir. Later I sifted through more than seventy emails sent out January 25 by the April 6th Youth Movement, which played an important role in organizing the protests on the first day of the Egyptian Revolution in 2011. The April 6th Youth Movement, emerged as an opposition group in the labor protests of Mahalla El-Kubra in April 2008, and played an important role in organizing the protests on the first day of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution in 2011.
Several of its leaders, including those who lead the movement on January 25, were eventually arrested and sentenced to prison. In particular, I traced the convergence and decentralization processes on the micro level. On the 25th, these emails were sent out from an operation room every hour (every 30 minutes in the afternoon), and contain an itemized list of protest movement reports around the city of Cairo and other major Egyptian cities. The emails were sent out to hundreds of April 6th activists. Tahrir, the eventual destination for protesters on the 25th, was not in the list of four distinct Cairo locations designated for congregation on that day. The emails start to report on the presence of protesters in Tahrir only in the early afternoon. There were no such convergence mechanisms in place on the 28th, the protests were effectively decentralized during the blackout.\(^6\)

If mobilization in Cairo streets was solely based on coordination processes, then the complete absence of the means of communication that had proved crucial on the 25th, should have had a devastating effect on mobilization. Instead disrupting the opponents’ means of communication brought about the exact opposite of what Mubarak’s regime had planned. The blackout amplified face to face interpersonal and local dynamics, decentralized and leaderless protests became much harder to control than a sole colossal meeting in Tahrir. The Syrian case I detail below, provides further evidence on the contagious nature of decentralized contention.

\(^6\) The effect (dispersion hypothesis) can not be solely explained by either police blockage or Friday prayers in mosques, Navid Hassanpour, “Media Disruption and Revolutionary Unrest: Evidence from Mubarak’s Quasi-Experiment.” Political Communication 31(January 2014): 1–24.

Intended—and unintended—interruptions in communications in conflictual situations happen often,\(^7\) therefore there are a number of cases where the very same dispersion hypothesis, decentralization of contention during a blackout, can be put into the test. In November 2012 another countrywide disruptions of communications happened in Syria in the midst of civil conflict in and around the city of Damascus and lasted for three days. I used a detailed dataset of daily violent conflict locations in Damascus during 2012 to study the dynamics of the conflict before and during the blackout. For doing so I divided the area under study (a spatial window of 14 by 18 miles) using a one-mile square grid that contained Damascus and its satellite neighborhoods. The grid division facilitated tracing the patterns of contagion in time. Again, unlike the predictions of the coordination logic, the geographical dispersion of conflict in Damascus was unprecedented during the blackout. Neither conflictual business as usual, extrapolated from the patterns of violence during the first 11 months of the year 2012, nor the pattern of government attacks on the rebels, extracted from the data which differentiates between rebel and state violence, can fully account for the decentralization of the conflict on November 30 and December 1. Controlling for a number of structural variables for each square mile, such as approximate levels of income, ethnic composition, population, temporal and spatial trends, and a lagged version of the dependent variable (the rates of violent conflict in each mile by mile cell per day) I find that unlike the civil conflict outside urban areas,\(^8\) altitude adversely influenced the rates of rebellion in urban areas, and as expected, the rates of violence increased with the population and total sum of street length in each square mile window. The most instructive finding is that contagion, defined as “conflict in [the] spatiotemporal neighborhood of previous conflict”, was effectively activated during the blackout. The spatiotemporal profile of the conflict depicts a process that is clustered locally and dispersed globally, particularly during the blackout. Interestingly enough, this topology is the main characteristic of small world networks, a network structure, in which I argue, a disruption of public signal encourages more contention, not less.

Finally, to further our understanding of the dynamics of collective risk-taking in regimes of limited information, I designed and implemented synchronous experiments of collective risk taking online, in which the risk takers were first identified through their decisions over lotteries of different risk levels, and then assigned to network positions based on the level of their risk aversion. I observed that assigning risk takers to peripheral network positions generated cascades of collective risk taking that were on par with a central assignment of instigators. Furthermore, and as important, compared to a baseline of random assignment in experimental networks, when the cascades of collective action or collective apathy happened, they were reached more quickly than central and random assignments on average. These results are significant, because social organizations, as well as campaigns of opinion reversal and political promotion are fixated on central and visible actors: they are easier to identify.


However, the dynamics of contention in the field and the laboratory I outlined above, show that mobilization from the margins possesses dynamics that are different than coordination from the center. Those who lead are not always the leaders.9


To return to the question that motivated the inquiry: the presence or absence of information influences rates of collective action in ways that are contingent on the underlying structure of interpersonal connections. For example, removing the public signal in a global games model, increases the rates of collective action in small world networks, but not in fully connected ones. The distinction between coordinated organization from the center, and contagious contention from the margins helps to explain the extant contradicting reports on the relation between communication technology and conflict.10

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10. See Jacob N. Shapiro and Nils B. Weidmann, “Is the Phone Mightier than the Sword? Cell Phones and Insurgent Violence in Iraq” International Organization 69(March 2015): 247–274, and Jan H. Pierskalla and Florian M. Hollenbach, “Technology and Collective Action: The Effect of Cell Phone Coverage on Political Violence in Africa” American Political Science Review 107(May 2013): 207–224, the former argues that cellphone coverage decreased insurgent violence, while the latter finds the introduction of wireless communication to have increased rates of violent conflict. The underlying structure of rebellion network, and the levels of cooperation needed in each case are obviously different, hence the disparate influence of communication technology in the two cases.
Lynch, continued
(continued from page 2)

as al-Jazeera, which had served as a virtual Arab public sphere as recently as early 2011, increasingly morphed into transparently partisan actors supporting the interests of their state patrons and local proxies.

Second, the media magnified the fear and uncertainty which inevitably accompany transitions, particularly when those transitions involve profound institutional disarray and potentially incipient anarchy. Where the media tended to support revolutionary enthusiasm by demonstrating success in the early Arab Spring, by the middle of 2011 it frightened viewers with terrifying accounts of violence and mayhem from Libya, Syria, Iraq and Yemen. The types of media which characterized the period of the uprisings (i.e., unreformed state media, weakly institutionalized private media, and intense social media) were particularly prone to exacerbating the fear of violence or political subjugation by publicizing worrisome information, ideas, and rumors, and by encouraging the self-segregation of sectors of the public into echo chambers where only such polarizing information tended to circulate. This media ecosystem tended to amplify and exacerbate the uncertainty associated with institutional change into existential fears.

Finally, where social media allowed the bridging of traditional political divides during mobilizational moments, after that moment of enthusiasm it offered the ideal conditions for intense polarization. Media outlets typically sought out a distinctive political niche and catered to that constituency to the exclusion of others. Islamists watched one set of television stations and Twitter feeds, while anti-Islamists consumed an entirely different set. Transnationally, al-Jazeera went from ideological or sectarian clusters drove politics towards the extremes, undermined the common ground of politics, and intensified and accelerated conflicts and divisions.

The Arab Media Ecosystem
Transnational, national, and social media interact with each other in intimate, intense ways, with a distinctive combination of media characterizing each national media ecosystem. These three types of media cannot be understood as discrete sources of information or opinion. Broadcast media relied heavily upon videos and images from social media, especially from war zones such as Syria and Libya, while social media users frequently retweeted and discussed the stories disseminated by broadcast and print media.

The Arab information environment differed from most other regions experiencing democratic transitions in three ways. By the late 2000s, most Arabs had hundreds of free-to-view satellite channels from which to choose, while internet access spread widely from initially low levels to near ubiquity in key urban centers. First, each individual Arab country was embedded within a transnational Arabic language media ecosystem of satellite television, pan-Arab newspapers and websites, and social media. Few of the transitions outside the Arab world have a comparable level of regular, intense transnational media involvement in national political spheres.

Second, Arab national media sectors had a comparatively high degree of direct and indirect state control. Finally, the rapidly evolving social media introduced very new dynamics into the familiar democratic transitions of decades past.

These different media platforms formed a media ecology through which information and ideas circulated through Arab politics, in a hyper-mediated environment in which states retained considerable structural power and in which all political actors saw the media as a potential weapon. During the period of relatively stable autocracy, this media ecosystem offered important opportunities to challenge state monopolies over information, expand the realm of political contention, and develop the foundations of a new public sphere. The potential for deeper change offered by the Arab uprisings dramatically raised the stakes for such public discourse at all levels: transnational, domestic, and social media.

Transnational Broadcast Media
Transnational broadcast media, which had for a decade offered a platform for a region-wide public sphere, rapidly degenerated into an arena for regional power struggles and proxy wars, with al-Jazeera serving the interests of the Qatari regime and Saudi-owned media closely aligned with Riyadh’s regional policies. Bahrain was one turning point, as Arab stations either did not cover or slanted their coverage of its popular uprising in sectarian terms to justify the Saudi-led intervention. Pan-Arab stations openly campaigned for chosen groups. Al-Jazeera came to be viewed as a publicity machine for Islamists such as Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood and Tunisia’s Ennahda, while other Gulf-based stations peddled wild, sensational stories which fed anti-Islamist anger and suspicion. This partisan turn, along with the images of horrific violence and state collapse in Libya and Syria, likely contributed to the diminishing enthusiasm for popular uprisings. It also removed the possibility that transnational media could provide a neutral forum to help bridge the political divides between intensely contested national media.

Domestic Media in Transitional States
A democratic transition from authoritarian rule should, in principle, entail the emergence of a more open national public sphere able to monitor domestic
politics, hold politicians to account, devote sustained attention to local issues, and become the site for national opinion formation. The early post-uprisings period in some Arab states did see the flourishing of a wide variety of new national media, from television to radio and newspapers. It did not last, however, due to the limited extent of institutional and legal reforms, the rapid polarization of politics, and resource constraints on new media initiatives.

It is worth briefly explaining why reforms to the media sector proved so difficult. In the absence of settled rules of the game and intense polarization, all sides feared that these institutions could quickly come to be dominated by their political rivals. Where there is a broad political consensus, there may be the chance to establish independent, non-partisan institutional reforms. But where politics quickly becomes zero-sum and highly polarized, then every move towards institutional reform will be interpreted as a political purge aimed at institutional capture. Egypt’s newly elected President Morsi, for instance, had every reason to seek fundamental change in the institutions at the heart of the old regime, from the Interior Ministry to state broadcasting, and most revolutionaries would agree that such change was essential. Every effort to actually do so, however, frightened political opponents who feared that Muslim Brothers would simply take over those institutions to impose their rule. A similar dynamic played out in Tunisia, where the attempt at reforming the media and the state led civil society and journalists to rally against what they viewed as an attempt by Ennahda to subordinate those institutions to an Islamist agenda.

The key transitional cases of Egypt and Tunisia had remarkably similar experiences with the media. Most of Egypt’s independent media rallied to the side of the revolution in early 2011. The sight of top generals being grilled on live TV by a revolution-sympathizing talk show host seemed like an early sign of the emergence of a public sphere in the classical sense. So did the robust, critical debate in the opinion pages of leading independent newspapers, which opened the debate to a wide range of new voices and relaxed the red lines constraining political criticism. Egyptian media outlets soon found themselves facing regulatory pressure, capture by powerful social groups, state intimidation, and attachment to local political trends. The state media sector remained largely intact. Activists and protests were soon targeted by the military-controlled media, demonized as foreign-backed agents of destabilization and blamed for the country’s ills. Though activists continued to find ways to creatively use new media, they were shouting into the abyss or preaching to a dwindling choir.

The Muslim Brotherhood’s victory in the June 2012 Presidential shifted dynamics. Efforts to reform state institutions, including the media, now triggered intense constraints on new media initiatives.


Domestic Media in Non-Transitional and Failed States

Arab regimes that did not experience transitions mostly proved able to use familiar media methods, from censorship to undermining opposition to mobilizing nationalist passions. In Morocco and Jordan, the regimes used both official and private outlets to mobilize support for the political order, market limited constitutional reforms, and raise fears of the bloody potential consequences of civic unrest. Regimes in the Gulf adopted especially draconian control against both the formal media sector and against individual online activists. Kuwait, which had long enjoyed one of the most open and contentious media spaces in the region, witnessed severe crackdowns after 2011, imprisoning multiple citizens for tweets criticizing the Emir and pressuring newspapers. Bahrain fiercely attacked independent media and oppositional online networks. These regimes typically found ways to manage the media to their benefit. These mechanisms were exacerbated in countries where state institutions failed more dramatically and violent anarchy had become a reality rather than a concern.

In Libya, for example, the proliferation of national and local television stations aligned with particular political factions contributed to polarization, fear, and insecurity. The lack of a pre-existing media ecosystem, after decades of Qaddafi’s autocratic rule, opened the door to highly partisan transnational media and social media to define the information space. Collapsing political institutions, the absence of reliable non-partisan media, and the very real violence magnified the impact of the information circulating through these media platforms.

Social Media

Social media, which many had hoped would provide an antidote to the toxic legacy of official Arab media, could not escape – and often exacerbated – its pathologies during the transitions. There is no doubt about the rapid growth of social media usage across the region, or of its broad political and cultural impact. As described above, however, social media should be understood as part of a broader media ecosystem rather than in isolation. Media and social media formed symbiotic relationships, with newspapers reporting on stories and publishing images appearing on blogs. In Saudi Arabia and much of the Gulf, Twitter is the most important location of the public sphere, while Facebook plays a greater role in Egypt and much of North Africa. The importance of these social media platforms can in part be seen in the extreme efforts taken by regimes to control them, particularly with a wave of disproportionate punishments by Gulf states of satirical or critical tweets. Social media is good at mobilizing transient coalitions around immediate, urgent protest issues, whether the demand to overthrow Hosni Mubarak or fury over police abuse in Ferguson, Missouri. It is less useful for the consolidation of long-term, strategic coalitions or the institutionalization of political movements. The allure of street battles and purist politics can prove far more attractive to mobilized youth, especially given the inevitable frustrations and inefficiencies of institutional democratic politics.

Debates within like-minded clusters tend to favor the more extreme voices over the voices of caution or moderation. This has very disturbing implications for socially, ethnically or politically divided countries, where social media homophily may tend to exacerbate such cleavages and fuel the potential for violent conflict. Social media is very good at cultivating a sense of aggrieved identity among an in-group and mobilizing resentment and fury against out-groups. The enthusiastic online embrace of Egypt’s military coup in the summer of 2013, the sectarianism which ran rampant through Gulf social media, and regional online support for violent jihadist factions in Syria show very powerfully how social media can empower illiberal forces.

Second, the accelerant and intensification effects of the extremely rapid spread of information and dissemination of visceral imagery can drive destructive, self-fulfilling prophecies of conflict. The Arab transitions were replete with the spread of such highly destructive rumors and falsehoods over social media, which undermined confidence in transitional orders. The mass media, both transnational and domestic, also generated enormous amounts of misinformation, partisan spin, and mobilizational content, which fed the social media mill.

The Media in Context

The role of the media should of course not be viewed in isolation from the underlying political challenges. The pernicious effects of the Arab media took root in transitional environments characterized by institutional uncertainty, personal insecurity, and ideological or sectarian divisions. Such uncertainty, fear and anger created a fertile environment and eager audience for sensationalist media, which fanned rumors targeted at political adversaries, and fueled divisive and demonizing narratives. In particular, transitional moments in most Arab cases revealed profound disagreements about national identity and deep fears about the future.
delays and highly contested processes in the drafting of constitutions contributed to the intensity of these identity conflicts. Initial moments of unity consistently gave way to growing polarization around regional, ethnic, sectarian or ideological identities, and between Islamists and anti-Islamists. Populist, mobilizational media interacted with partisan, polarized social networks to drive discourse to the extremes and intensify divisions between groups.

The past two years have proven profoundly dispiriting to those who put faith in the emergence of a new Arab public sphere. Regimes and old elites proved quite capable of adapting to the challenge and turning the new media environment to their advantage. The same media that helped to drive the diffusion of protest during the early Arab uprisings proved equally effective at driving resentment, fear, division and demobilization of exhausted publics. But despair is premature. The underlying transformations in the media environment that originally empowered the Arab uprisings have not disappeared. Nor have the deep grievances that originally sparked the protest wave. When political conditions change, the media will likely once again accelerate and intensify episodic protests and political challenges to the brittle new authoritarian regimes in the region. If no lessons are learned from the previous few years, however, then the same destructive post-uprising path is likely to be repeated.

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(photo courtesy of Essam Sharaf/Flickr/Creative Commons)
Baldasty (2002) suggests that the growth of advertising – or “commercialization of the news” – was one of the drivers of the development of independent press in the United States. Petrova (2011) empirically tests the claim that an increase in advertising helped newspapers in 19th century U.S. to become independent. More specifically, the paper shows that newspapers were more likely to enter the market as independents or more likely to switch their political affiliation to an independent affiliation in places with higher growth of advertising revenues. The effect holds if after instrumenting for advertising revenues using restrictions for outdoor advertising and handbill distribution. These results confirm that growth of advertising was an important driving force in the development of an independent press in 19th century United States. Similarly, Qin et al. (2014) suggest that commercialization of the news is an important factor affecting the content of newspapers in modern China. They find that newspapers, which are less directly controlled by the Communist Party and partially depend on commercial revenues, have a lower probability of reporting about low-level corruption. At the same time, more commercial newspapers are more likely to produce entertaining content such as articles about sports or celebrities. 5

Several papers look at the determinants of media capture and media freedom in cross-country perspective. Egorov et al. (2009) show that higher oil revenues are associated with lower media freedom, and this effect is especially strong in nondemocratic countries. Their argument is that free media monitor bureaucratic behavior, but this monitoring is beneficial for autocrats only if oil rents are not too high, and bureaucrats are still important for economic growth. Petrova (2008) shows that income inequality leads to lower media freedom, as rich elites have incentives to manipulate public opinion to prevent redistribution. VonDoepp and Young (2013) show that media capture also depends on regime stability, since governments that are uncertain about staying in power have stronger incentives to control the media. 6

What Is the Effect of Media Capture? Recent empirical work demonstrates that even controlled media can have a significant causal effect on people’s behavior. Yanagizawa-Drott (2014), for example, shows how media availability can promote violence. Specifically, he uses geographical variation in accessibility of the RTLM radio in Rwanda, which openly called for violence against the Tutsi minority population at that time, and he finds that the radio was responsible for 10 percent of anti-Tutsi violence during 1994 genocide events. The paper also suggests that the impact of radio is multiplied by social interactions, which can explain geographic spillovers in violence. 7

Adena et al. (2015) look at the impact of radio in Weimar Republic and in Nazi Germany, using variation in area topography and in radio content for identification. They find that radio had an important effect on Nazi party support. Specifically, before 1933, when Nazis had almost no access to radio, radio availability decreased vote shares of NSDAP. After Hitler became the Chancellor in January 1933, the availability of radio had a positive effect on different


indicators of Nazi support, such as voting for NSDAP, joining the party in spring 1933, discrimination against Jews in 1933-1934, and more violent expressions of anti-Semitism in the late 1930s.

Can an Independent Media Mitigate Media Capture? A separate but related question is whether independent media can become important when other media are controlled. Enikolopov, Petrova, and Zhuravskaya (2011) examine the effect of an independent TV channel (NTV) on support for the pro-governmental Unity party in the 1999 Russian Parliamentary elections. In this election, there was one independent TV channel critical of Unity to which only a portion of the population had access, whereas the entire population had access to government-controlled TV channels that supported Unity. Using idiosyncratic geographical variation that exogenously determined access to NTV, the authors find that exposure to NTV increased combined vote share of the opposition parties by 6.3 percentage points, while decreasing the vote share of Unity by 8.9 percentage points.

There is also evidence on the effect of cross-border exposure to independent television from Western Germany on the behavior of people in Eastern Germany, where the pro-Communist government controlled all the media inside the country. They find that Eastern Germans with exposure to Western TV were more likely to support communism and less likely to apply for asylum, probably because they knew more about Western Germany and were less likely to idealize it. These results also suggest independent media is important when most other media outlets are controlled by the governments.

Can Social Media Mitigate Media Capture? Finally, in environments in which traditional media is controlled, social media can play a role. For example, Enikolopov, Petrova, and Sonin (2015) provide evidence that publications in a Russian blog about corruption in state-controlled companies significantly affected the stock market performance of the targeted companies and their corporate practices. Enikolopov, Makarin, and Petrova (2015) show that higher penetration of the leading online social network in Russia had a positive effect on the incidence and the size of political protests in 2011-2012, possibly because of the reduced costs of collective action. To identify this effect, they exploit over-time variation in the origins of students who studied at St. Petersburg State University as an instrument for network penetration. Similarly, Acemoglu, Hassan, and Tahoun (2015) demonstrate that in the aftermath of Arab Spring in Egypt, the content of social media predicted the size of next-day political protests.9

What Are the Limits on the Powers of Media Capture? Although the existing research suggests that media capture can have an important effect, the effects may be limited by several mechanisms. If readers or viewers know that media is captured, they can discount information coming from the biased sources. Bai et al. (2015) test this directly in a lab experiment by looking at how people update their beliefs about air pollution in China after receiving information from either government-controlled or independent sources. They found that people do not fully discount information coming from government media, and overall have problems with interpreting information from conflicting sources. On the other hand, Knight and Tribin (2015) use high-frequency ratings of different programs in Venezuela to show that viewers are likely to turn off propaganda messages in the form of cadenas, unexpected interruptions of TV programming by Hugo Chavez speeches. This response was stronger for viewers of opposition-leaning channels. Viewers were also more likely to switch to cable opposition channels, which were not required to show cadenas.10

Finally, there is evidence that propaganda may backfire if a propaganda message is too different from prior beliefs of the audience. Adena et al. (2015) show that impact of radio in Nazi Germany depended on citizens’ predispositions. Although, on average, radio exposure increased denunciation of Jews and anti-Semitic violence, they find that in places in which population was historically tolerant to Jews, exposure to radio actually decreased denunciation of Jews and anti-Semitic violence, consistent with idea that propaganda can backfire.

Conclusion Empirical evidence shows that politicians are often able to control the media. There are several implications from the recent literature to understand the role of mass media in such environments. First, controlled media outlets have different content from independent media outlets, and governments in different countries use various methods for controlling the media. Second, even controlled media might still affect people’s behavior. Third, independent and social media are especially important in environments where other media outlets are captured. Finally, there are limits to the propaganda power of controlled media.

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2015 Section Award Winners

Juan Linz Prize for Best Dissertation in the Comparative Study of Democracy

Henry Thomson (University of Oxford) for his dissertation on “Food and Power: Authoritarian Regime Durability and Agricultural Policy.” Thomson completed his PhD in Political Science at the University of Minnesota.

Committee Members: Leonid Peisakhin (New York University); Paula Valeria Munoz Chirinos (Universidad del Pacífico); and Arturas Rozenas (New York University).

Committee’s Remarks on the Award Winner: Henry Thomson’s dissertation is an especially insightful and in-depth study of the dynamics of authoritarian survival. Thomson sets out to explain how authoritarian rulers manipulate agricultural policies and resultant food prices under the pressure of demands from urban residents and rural agricultural producers. Thomson demonstrates that dictators who are especially dependent on elite support are likely to tolerate higher food prices in order to appease large-scale agricultural producers. This argument challenges the common wisdom that dictators are especially beholden to urban interests. Forced to pander to wealthy rural interests by the nature of elite politics, some authoritarians are pushed onto a particular developmental trajectory, which eventually comes to shape democratic transition via feedback loops. In laying out his argument and supporting it with empirics, Thomson brings to bear an impressive knowledge of the theories of political development and masterfully deploys cross-national data as well as a fascinating case study of Imperial Germany under Bismarck. All in all, the author tackles an important and overlooked question with theoretical rigor, meticulous attention to detail, and stellar use of empirical methods, all along remaining keenly aware of the argument’s limitations and pitfalls. These qualities make this dissertation especially worthy of the legacy of Juan Linz.

Best Book Award

Kurt Weyland (University of Texas at Austin) for Making Waves: Democratic Contention in Europe and Latin America since 1848 (Cambridge University Press).

Honorable Mentions: Rachel Beatty Ridel (Northwestern University) for Authoritarian Origins of Democratic Party Systems in Africa (Cambridge University Press) and Ben Ansell (University of Oxford) and David Samuels (University of Minnesota) for Inequality and Democratization: An Elite-Competition Approach (Cambridge University Press).

Committee Members: Scott Mainwaring (University of Notre Dame); Aníbal Pérez-Liñán (University of Pittsburgh); and Anna Grzymala-Busse (University of Michigan).

Committee’s Remarks on the Award Winner: The committee selected Kurt Weyland’s book, Making Waves: Democratic Contention in Europe and Latin America since the Revolutions of 1848, as the winner of the 2015 prize for the best book in comparative democratization among the 35 books submitted. Making Waves covers a grand sweep of time and geography with an interesting original research question and argument. Weyland notes that early waves of regime contention in Europe (1848 and 1917-19) occurred more rapidly but with lower rates of success of achieving democracy than a later wave in South America (1979-90).

To explain this puzzle, he develops an organizational argument grounded in theories of bounded rationality. The earlier waves of contention occurred before political parties, labor unions, and other organizations that characterize modern mass democracy became well-entrenched. As a result, popular contention spread rapidly, but without leadership that took more informed decisions. In contrast, organizational leaders with more information and more seasoned judgments had the capacity to spur or moderate popular contention in the third wave of democratization. Protest against authoritarian regimes spread more slowly, but it was more likely to succeed.


Best Article Award

Jordan Gans-Morse (Northwestern University), Sebastian Mazzuca (Universidad Nacional de San Martín and CIAS), and Simeon Nichter (University of California, San Diego) for their article “Varieties of Clientelism: Machine Politics During Elections” American Journal of Political Science 58 (April 2014): 415–432.

Committee Members: Lisa Blaydes (Stanford University); Nahomi Ichino (University of Michigan); and Joseph Wright (Pennsylvania State University).

Committee’s Remarks on the Award Winner: This article presents a unified theoretical framework to explain the mix of clientelistic strategies that political parties may employ in an election with the distribution of voters in two dimensions: how inclined they are to vote and whether they favor the party. The model generates predictions on who is bought in an election, and therefore, predictions on the optimal mix of four strategies in an election: vote buying, turnout buying, rewarding loyal voters, and double persuasion. It further explores how several factors in the political environment shapes the optimal mix of strategies. The article uses examples from around the world to illustrate the impact of institutional changes such as the introduction of compulsory voting, the secret ballot and characteristics of the electorate and party system such as political polarization. This study recasts our
understanding of vote-buying and related strategies in a broader context and generates a set of novel hypotheses that can be applied and tested in diverse settings around the world and across time.

**Best Field Work Award**

Barry Driscoll (University of Wisconsin - Madison) for his work on “The Perverse Effects of Political Competition: Building Capacity for Patronage in Ghana” and Colm Fox (Singapore Management University) for his work on “Appealing to the Masses.”

**Honorable Mention:** Michael Broache (Columbia University) for his work on “Assessing the Impact of International Criminal Court Prosecutions During Ongoing Conflict.”

**Committee Members:** Milli Lake (Arizona State University); Michael Weintraub (Binghamton) and Calvert Jones (University of Maryland).

**Committee’s Remarks on the Award Winners:** The selection committee for the Comparative Democratization Section’s Best Fieldwork Award has enthusiastically selected Barry Driscoll and Colm Fox as co-recipients of the 2015 award.

Both recipients explored questions related to electoral mobilization at the subnational level: Driscoll in Ghana and Fox in Indonesia. Driscoll’s dissertation, “The Perverse Effects of Political Competition: Building Capacity for Patronage in Ghana” found that Ghanaian party leaders offered club rewards to local activists for ensuring that constituents turned out to vote. Contrary to the findings of much of the recent scholarship on political competition, districts with greater electoral competition fostered patronage networks, whereas districts with less competition facilitated the more equitable distribution of public resources. Colm Fox’s dissertation, “Appealing to the Masses” similarly examined the conditions under which electoral candidates mobilized support in diverse subnational settings, interrogating the role of ethnic visual cues in Indonesian campaign materials. Among other fascinating insights, in analyzing over 15,000 election posters across rural Indonesia, Fox identified two categories of visual appeals on the basis of ethnicity: bonding and bridging cues. Candidates tended to display “bonding” cues when their own ethnic group comprised a majority in any district, while displaying “bridging” cues to appeal across ethnic lines when the support of other groups was needed to secure electoral victory.

Both Fox and Driscoll demonstrated incredible skill, creativity and methodological innovation in the research practices they employed in the field. Both spent years immersing themselves in their respective fieldsites, becoming proficient in local languages and dialects, and intimately acquainted with regional political culture. Both employed an impressive combination of methodological approaches in order to develop, substantiate, test and refine their arguments.

Over the course of his research in Ghana, Driscoll implemented a comprehensive survey of tax collection and public goods provision in 88% of Ghana’s 170 local governments. He supplemented this work with exciting ethnographic and interview-based research with civil servants and market traders across the country, offering crucial new insights into the realities of tax collection and public goods provision in areas of weak state capacity. Fox, on the other hand, spent nearly two years collecting and photographing campaign materials in a convenience sample of nine district elections to create the largest dataset of election posters ever gathered. Additionally, he employed a rigorous analysis of election-related news coverage from 1997 to 2011 and months of immersive observational research in selected districts in order to deepen his understanding of the types of ethic appeals made by candidates.

The committee is also delighted to extend an honorable mention to Michael Broache for his dissertation: “Assessing the Impact of International Criminal Court Prosecutions During Ongoing Conflict.” Broache’s research into combatant responses to ICC prosecutions in the Democratic Republic of Congo presented powerful military and rebel elites with hypothetical scenarios in order to assess their knowledge, behavior and decision-making processes on the battlefield. Broache conducted in-depth interviews in a highly volatile research environment, at times placing himself at considerable personal risk, in order to shed light on an important topic in comparative politics and international relations for which existing data is notoriously thin.

The committee extends heartfelt congratulations to each of the recipients of this year’s award.

**Best Paper Award**

Kenneth Greene (University of Texas at Austin) for his paper on “Ousting Autocrats: The Political Economy of Hybrid Autocracy.”

**Committee Members:** Christian Houle (Michigan State University); Michael Albertus (University of Chicago); and Ryan Kennedy (University of Houston).

**Committee’s Remarks on the Award Winner:** We are pleased to award the best paper prize in comparative democratization to Kenneth Greene’s paper ‘Ousting Autocrats: The Political Economy of Hybrid Autocracy.’ Kenneth Greene develops an innovative argument according to which the capacity of incumbents in competitive authoritarian regimes to retain power depends primarily on their ability to politicize public resources. He supports his argument using both quantitative and qualitative evidence. This paper has the potential to make a very valuable contribution to diverse subfields, such as the study of comparative...
Section News

authoritarian regimes, of the incumbency advantage and of regime transitions.

Call for Nominations: Section Awards at APSA Annual Meeting:
The Comparative Democratization Section will present five awards for scholarly work at the 2016 APSA annual meeting in Philadelphia: the Linz Prize for Best Dissertation, and the Best Book, Best Article, Best Field Work, and Best Paper prizes. Members are strongly encouraged to submit nominations (including, for several awards, self-nominations) to the appropriate committees listed below. Please also forward this information to colleagues and graduate students. We ask you to note the eligibility criteria, deadlines for submissions, and materials that must accompany nominations; direct any queries to the committee chairs.

Juan Linz Prize for Best Dissertation in the Comparative Study of Democracy
Given for the best dissertation in the Comparative Study of Democracy completed and accepted in the two calendar years immediately prior to the APSA Annual Meeting where the award will be presented (2014 or 2015 for the 2016 Annual Meeting). The prize can be awarded to analyses of individual country cases as long as they are clearly cast in a comparative perspective. A hard copy of the dissertation, accompanied by a letter of support from a member of the dissertation committee, should be sent to each member of the prize selection committee.

Deadline: March 15, 2016

Committee Chair:
Henry Thomson
Nuffield College
New Road
Oxford, OX11NF, UK
henry.thomson@nuffield.ox.ac.uk

Committee Members:
Mai Hassan
Department of Political Science
University of Michigan

Best Article Award
Single-authored or co-authored articles focusing directly on the subject of democratization and published in 2015 are eligible. Nominations and self-nominations are encouraged. Copies of the article should be sent by email to each of the committee members.

Deadline: March 15, 2016

Committee Chairs:
Jordan Gans-Morse
Department of Political Science
Northwestern University
Scott Hall #203
601 University Place
Evanston, IL 60208
jordan.gans-morse@u.northwestern.edu

Sebastian Mazzuca
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smazzuca@jhu.edu

Simeon Nichter
Department of Political Science
UC San Diego
9500 Gilman Dr.
La Jolla, CA 92093
nichter@ucsd.edu

Best Book Award
Given for the best book in the field of Comparative Democratization published in 2015 (authored, co-authored or edited). Copies of the nominated book should be sent to each committee member in time to arrive by March 15, 2016. Books received after this deadline cannot be considered.

Deadline: March 15, 2016

Committee Chair:
Kurt Weyland
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Committee Members:
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Rachel Beatty Riedl
Sciences Po bordeaux
Les afriques dans le monde
Institut d’Etudes politiques
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France
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Best Field Work Award
This prize rewards dissertation students who conduct especially innovative and difficult fieldwork. Scholars who are currently writing their dissertations or who complete their dissertations in 2015 are eligible. Candidates must submit two chapters of their dissertation and a letter of nomination from the chair of their dissertation committee describing the field work. The material submitted must describe the field work in detail and should provide one or two key insights from the evidence collected in the field. The chapters may be sent electronically or in hard copy directly to each committee member.
Deadline: March 15, 2016
Committee Chair:
Barry Driscoll
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Carnegie Hall, Room 302
Grinnell, IA 50112
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Committee Members:
Michael Broache
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Tampa, FL 33606
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Colm Fox
Singapore Management University
90 Stamford Road, Level 4, #04-052
Singapore 178903
colmfox@smu.edu.sg

Best Paper Award
Given to the best paper on Comparative Democratization presented at the previous year’s APSA Convention. Papers can be nominated by panel chairs or discussants. Self-submissions are also encouraged.
Deadline: March 15, 2016

Committee Chair:
Kenneth F. Greene
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NEWS FROM MEMBERS

Albertus also published “Explaining Patterns of Redistribution under Autocracy: The Case of Peru’s Revolution from Above” in Latin American Research Review (Vol. 50, No. 2); “The Role of Subnational Politicians in Distributive Politics: Political Bias in Venezuela’s Land Reform under Chavez” in the September 2015 Comparative Political Studies, and will publish “Authoritarian Survival and Poverty Traps: Land Reform in Mexico” in the forthcoming World Development.


Archie Brown, Emeritus Professor of Politics, Oxford University, and Emeritus Fellow, St. Anthony’s College, was given the Distinguished Contributions to Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies Award for 2015 by the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies. He also published “Questioning the Mythology of the Strong Leader” in the August 2015 Leadership, in which he argues that contemporary political commentary attributes too much power to individual leaders, ignoring the impact of deliberative policy-making and enabling the myth of the “strong” leader in both autocracies and democracies.

Lenka Bustikova, assistant professor of politics and global studies, Arizona State University, published “Voting, Identity and Security Threats in Ukraine: Who Supports the Ukrainian ‘Svoboda’ Party?” available online July 26, 2015, in Communist and Post-Communist Studies. The article uses 2010 survey data to show that support for Svoboda was rooted not in ethnic hostility but in anxiety over perceived threats to the identity of the Ukrainian state.

Melani Cammett, professor of government, Harvard University, published A Political Economy of the Middle East, fourth edition (Westview Press, 2015) with Ishac Diwan, Alan Richards, and John Waterbury. This edition includes two new introductory chapters as well as new discussion of oil economies, private sector growth, crony capitalism, and civil society.

Cammett also received awards for two books published in 2014: Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon (Cornell University Press, 2014) received the 2015 Giovanni Sartori Book Award from the APSA Section on Qualitative and Multi-Method Research and was an honorable mention for the 2015 Gregory Luebbert Book Award from the APSA Section on Comparative Politics, and The Politics of Non-State Social Welfare (Cornell University Press, 2014) received an honorable mention for the 2015 Outstanding Book Award of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action.

Michael Coppedge, professor of political science, University of Notre Dame, and
Section News

co-principal investigator, Varieties of Democracies (V-Dem) Institute, has issued a call for papers for a fall 2106 conference at the University of Notre Dame to mark the release of the latest V-Dem data, which will be released on December 31, 2015. Topics can include anything that employs V-Dem data and is related to the nature, causes, or consequences of democracy or its components; or research on measurement methods. If you would like to be considered for an invitation to this conference, send an abstract and CV to Michael Coppedge at coppedge.1@nd.edu by November 20, 2015. More information regarding the V-Dem project may be found at http://www.v-dem.net.

Arolda Elbasani, Visiting Fellow, European University Institute, published “Islam and Democracy at the Fringes of Europe: The Role of Useful Historical Legacies” in the June 2015 Politics and Religion. The article examines how Albanian Muslims contributed to democratization and European integration in post-Communist Albania. She also edited The Revival of Islam in the Balkans: From Identity to Religiosity (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) with Olivier Roy. This edited volume uses a cross-country approach to examine the complex relationships between the post-communist Balkan states and Islam.


Maia Jaskowski, assistant professor of politics and international affairs, coauthored and coedited American Crossings: Border Politics in the Western Hemisphere with Arturo C. Sotomayor and Harold A. Trinkunas (Johns Hopkins University Press, forthcoming). The book examines the complicated modern history of borders in the Western Hemisphere and their impact as geopolitical boundaries, key locations for internal security, spaces for international trade, and areas where national and community identities are defined.


Jeremy Kleidosty is now a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland, where he will work on a research project entitled “Political Power in the Early Modern European and Islamic Worlds.” He recently published a book entitled The Concert of Civilizations: The Common Roots of Western and Islamic Constitutionalism (Ashgate, 2015), in which he develops a definition of constitutionalism through which cross-cultural comparisons are possible.

Maria Koinova, reader in international relations, Warwick University, published “Sustained vs. Episodic Mobilization Among Conflict-Generated Diasporas,” available July 8, 2015, in International Political Science Review. The article explores differing mobilization patterns among conflict diaspora groups from the same region living in the same host country, suggesting that issues binding the diaspora, the host-state, and the home-state are crucial to the creation of sustained diaspora movements.

David Kuehn, research fellow, Heidelberg University, and Aurel Croissant, professor of political science, University of Heidelberg, have obtained funding from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft to conduct a three-year research project entitled “Dictator’s Endgame: Theory and Empirical Analysis of Military Behavior in Authoritarian Regime Crises, 1946–2014.” The project will begin October 2015 and will explore the conditions under which militaries defend, or defect from, authoritarian regimes under threat from popular mobilization and how different forms of defection can be explained.

Carl LeVan, assistant professor of international service, American University, published “When Talk Trumps Text: the Democratizing Effects of Deliberation During Constitution-Making, 1974-2011” with Todd A. Eisenstadt, professor of government, American University, and Tofigh Maboudi in the August 2015 American Political Science Review. The authors use data from 138 constitutions in 118 countries to explore the effects of constitution-making on democratization.

chapters on Kenya, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and South Africa, with a strong focus on state-level legislative politics. Receive 30% off the list price by emailing levan@american.edu for a coupon from the publisher.

**Staffan I. Lindberg**, professor of political science, University of Gothenburg, was selected to the editorial board of the *American Journal of Political Science* and was recently appointed director of the V-Dem Institute at University of Gothenburg, Sweden. The institute has been recognized as a university-wide research infrastructure by the Vice Chancellor of the University, making it a candidate for 7-year institutional grants by the Swedish Research Council. He is also co-author on a series of nine articles in the V-Dem Working Paper Series/SSRN V-Dem Journal. Lindberg published “From Sticks to Carrots: Electoral Manipulation in Africa, 1986–2012” with Carolien van Ham in *Comparative Politics*. The article highlights differences in party institutionalization and patterns of social incorporation as key aspects that help explain the competitiveness of elections.

**Alina Mungiu-Pippidi**, professor of democracy studies, Hertie School of Governance, published *The Quest for Good Governance: How Societies Develop Control of Corruption* (Cambridge University Press, 2015). The book examines the governance structures used to maintain integrity in the allocation of public resources while diminishing systemic corruption and explores how to influence governance to protect the rights of policy-makers and civil societies to defend those resources.

**Pippa Norris**, McGuire Lecturer in Comparative Government, Harvard University, and director, Electoral Integrity Project, published the second installment in her trilogy on electoral integrity, *Why Elections Fail* (Cambridge University Press, 2015). Using structural, international, and institutional accounts of elections which fail to meet international standards, Norris argues for the need to prevent political actors from manipulating electoral integrity while allocating sufficient resources and capacities for officials to manage elections effectively. She also co-edited the 2015 executive report, *Checkbook Elections: Political Finance in Comparative Perspective* with Andrea Abel van Es and Lisa Fennis, project coordinator, Electoral Integrity Project. The report, copublished by Global Integrity, the Sunlight Foundation, and the Electoral Integrity Project, can be found at [www.moneypoliticstransparency.org/](http://www.moneypoliticstransparency.org/).

**Olukunle Owolabi**, assistant professor of political science, Villanova University, published “Literacy and Democracy despite Slavery: Forced Settlement and Postcolonial Outcomes in the Developing World” in the October 2015 *Comparative Politics*. The article examines the impact of forced settlement on the developmental legacy of countries decolonized after 1945 finding that forced settlement colonialism resulted in significantly higher literacy rates and higher mean levels of postcolonial democracy than domination over indigenous populations.

**Ani Sarkissian** was recently promoted to associate professor of political science at Michigan State University. Her recently published book, *The Varieties of Religious Repression: Why Governments Restrict Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2015), explores the various forms of religious repression and their challenges to democratization, pluralism, and civil society development.

**Carsten Q. Schneider**, associate professor of political science, Central European University, and Kristin Makszin won the 2014 Socio-Economic Review Annual Prize for their article, “Forms of Welfare Capitalism and Education-Based Participatory Inequality,” published in the March 2014 *Socio-Economic Review*. The article analyzes how institutional conditions shape the impact of differences in education on political participation in capitalist democracies.

**Mariela Szwarcberg**, assistant professor of political science, Reed College, published *Mobilizing Poor Voters: Machine Politics, Clientelism, and Social Networks in Argentina* (Cambridge University Press, 2015). Observing the consolidation of clientelism alongside democratic development, this book explains the perverse incentives for utilizing clientelistic strategies to mobilize voters in poor neighborhoods and the consolidation of political machines at the local level.
**Section News/New Research**

Jan Teorell, professor of political science, Lund University, is currently a Fernand Braudel Fellow at the European University Institute in Italy for the 2015-2016 academic year. He recently published “Demography and Democracy: A Global, District-Level Analysis of Electoral Contestation” with John Gerring, professor of political science, Boston University, and Maxwell Palmer in the August 2015 *American Political Science Review* and “A Quality of Government Peace? Explaining the Onset of Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1985-2001” in the October 2015 *International Interactions*.

Gunes Murat Tezcur is now the Jalal Talabany Chair of Kurdish Political Studies at the University of Central Florida.

Michael Wahman is now an assistant professor of political science at the University of Missouri. He published “Are Democratic Sanctions Really Counterproductive?” with Christian von Soest in the October 2015 *Democratization*. The article explains that although sanctions do not generally increase the level of democracy, they increase the instability of authoritarian rule which is associated with a higher probability of regime and leadership change. Wahman’s article “Nationalized Incumbents and Regional Challengers: Opposition- and Incumbent-Party Nationalization in Africa” also became available online on July 23, 2015, in *Party Politics*.

Brian Wampler, professor of political science, Boise State University, published *Activating Democracy in Brazil: Popular Participation, Social Justice, and Interlocking Institutions* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2015). The book examines the proliferation of democratic institutions within Belo Horizonte, Brazil and how those institutions have transformed the manner in which citizens, civil society organizations, and political parties work together to generate political and social change.

Christian Welzel, professor of political culture research, University Lueneburg, was awarded the 2014 Stein Rokkan Prize for his book *Freedom Rising: Human Empowerment and the Quest for Emancipation* (Cambridge University Press, 2013). The book explores reasons for the recent expansion of universal freedoms and democracy while providing a well-reasoned theory of emancipation.

Matthew Winters is now an associate professor of political science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Jong-Sung You, senior lecturer of political and social change, Australian National University, published “The Cheonan Incident and the Declining Freedom of Expression in South Korea” in the April 2015 *Asian Perspective*. Examining the controversy surrounding North Korean culpability for the 2010 sinking of the Cheonan warship, this article discusses South Korea’s reliance on national security rhetoric and criminal defamation to suppress free speech. His earlier article with Stephan Haggard, Lawrence and Sallye Krause Professor of Korea-Pacific Studies, University of California-San Diego, “Freedom of Expression in South Korea,” was published in the January 2015 *Journal of Contemporary Asia* and discusses the country’s declining freedom of speech more broadly.

## NEW RESEARCH

### SELECTED JOURNAL ARTICLES ON DEMOCRACY

**Journal of Democracy**

The October 2015 (Vol. 26, no. 4) *Journal of Democracy* features clusters of articles on “Authoritarianism Goes Global” and “After the Arab Spring,” as well as individual articles on militarism in Latin America and non-Western democracies.

“The Rise of the World’s Poorest Countries” by Steven Radelet

**Widely believed to be hopelessly mired in poverty, stagnation, and dictatorship, the developing world has in fact been making steady progress for over two decades in health, education, income, and conflict reduction, along with democracy.**

**Authoritarianism Goes Global (II)**

I. “The Leninist Roots of Civil Society Repression” by Anne Applebaum

East European communists inherited the Bolshevik obsession with repressing any genuinely independent civil society groups.

II. “Civil Society Under Assault” by Douglas Rutzen

Once widely celebrated, civil society today is regarded as a threat by many governments, leading them to restrict its funding and activities.

III. “The Kremlin's Information War” by Peter Pomerantsev

The Kremlin is now bringing to the rest of the world the kind of propaganda and conspiracy theories it has been churning out at home.

IV. “China’s Foreign Propaganda Machine” by Anne-Marie Brady

China is aggressively working to reshape its image, touting the “Chinese Dream” and its desire for a peaceful rise to power on the international stage.

“Decentralizing for a Deeper, More Supple Democracy” by Jean-Paul Faguet, Ashley M. Fox, and Caroline Pöschl

Can decentralization deepen democracy or is it doomed to weaken the state? If well designed, decentralization can have a positive impact on national unity, conflict mitigation, policy autonomy, service delivery, and social learning.

**After the Arab Spring**

I. “Caught in History’s Crosswinds” by Michele Dunne

We are still struggling to understand the mostly bitter harvest of the Arab Spring, but there are a few lessons that can be drawn.
II. “People Still Want Democracy” by Michael Robbins

Data from the Arab Barometer suggest that Arabs have not rejected democracy. In fact, they still by and large believe in it and want it.

III. “How the Media Trashed the Transitions” by Marc Lynch

The Arab experience shows that the same media that facilitate the toppling of dictators can make it harder to build democracy.

IV. “Do Muslims Vote Islamic Now?” by Charles Kurzman and Didem Türköglü

Islamic political parties were not especially popular with voters in Muslim-majority countries before the Arab Spring. Has that changed?

V. “The Islamist Compromise in Tunisia” by Kasper Ly Netterstrøm

How did a potent Islamist movement come to accept a non-Islamist constitution? The answer lies in that movement’s self-protective reflexes.

VI. “Are Secular Parties the Answer?” by Mieczystaw P. Boduszyñski, Kristin Fabbe, and Christopher Lamont

A close look at secular parties in the Middle East today raises doubts about whether they are ready for prime time.

“Exploring ‘Non-Western Democracy’” by Richard Youngs

Often called for but seldom defined with any precision, “non-Western democracy” could end up giving cover to authoritarianism, but also could allow potentially useful democratic innovations to be tried and tested.

“A New Militarism in Latin America” by Rut Diamant

Latin American countries are burdened with domestic security problems and institutional weaknesses that have led to a rising political role for the military forces. Are there serious dangers in this “turn toward the barracks”?

“Authoritarianism Goes Global”

I. “Countering Democratic Norms” by Alexander Cooley

Favored by global conditions that lean their way, authoritarians have been busy over the last decade coming up with new and inventive ways to thwart the global advance of democracy and human rights.

II. “Cyberspace Under Siege” by Ron Deibert

Rosy assumptions once held that the Internet would inevitably undermine unfree regimes. A look around the world today, however, indicates that something very different and far more disturbing is going on.

III. “Election Monitoring vs. Disinformation” by Patrick Merloe

Nonpartisan election monitoring has helped to foster democratization over the last thirty years, but now dictators are trying to sabotage it, often by spreading lies and confusion.

“Nigeria’s Hopeful Election” by Peter Lewis and Darren Kew

In a surprising turn of events, opposition candidate Muhammadu Buhari was able to oust incumbent Goodluck Jonathan—and the latter peacefully acknowledged his defeat.

“The Medieval Roots of Democracy” by Jørgen Møller

Europe in the Middle Ages was hardly democratic, but it did have law-based institutions that could and did stay the hands of kings, laying a crucial basis for future state-building and democracy-building alike.

“Comment on Møller: The Importance of Equality” by Francis Fukuyama

It is fine to acknowledge the importance of law-based rule to the eventual rise of modern democracy, but we must not overlook the even greater contribution of the idea of equality.

“Structural Conditions and Democratization” by Grigore Pop-Eleches and Graeme B. Robertson

How are trends in global democratization likely to be shaped by the distribution of such key structural factors as income, ethnic or religious diversity, and the quality of the state?

“Authoritarian Successor Parties” by James Loxton

Why do significant numbers of people, after gaining the right to choose their leaders via free and fair elections, vote for political parties with deep roots in dictatorship, and how do such parties affect the consolidation of democracy?

Democratization

The Volume 22, no. 6 (2015) issue of Democratization includes articles on democratic sanctions, cultural values, Belarus, Palestine, and subverting autocracy.
New Research

“Are Democratic Sanctions Really Counterproductive?” by Christian von Soest and Michael Wahman

“The Relation between Cultural Values and Models of Democracy: A Cross-National Study” by Ammar Maleki and Frank Hendriks


“The Election Trap: The Cycle of Post-Electoral Repression and Opposition Fragmentation in Lukashenko’s Belarus” by Konstantin Ash

“Strategic Silence as a Third Way: Political Parties and Transitional Justice” by Filipa Raimundo

“Rethinking Pathways to Democracy: Civil Society in Portugal and Spain, 1960s–2000s” by Tiago Fernandes

“Subverting Autocracy: Emancipative Mass Values in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes” by Margarita Zavadskaya and Christian Welzel

“Beyond the Arab Revolts: Conceptualizing Civil Society in the Middle East and North Africa” by Anders C. Härdig

The Volume 22, no. 5 (2015) issue of Democratization is a special issue on “Voting Rights in the Age of Globalization.”

“Beyond Citizenship and Residence? Exploring the Extension of Voting Rights in the Age of Globalization” by Daniele Caramani and Florian Grotz

“Morphing the Demos into the Right Shape. Normative Principles for Enfranchising Resident Aliens and Expatriate Citizens” by Rainer Bauböck

“The Enfranchisement of Citizens Abroad: Variations and Explanations” by Jean-Michel Lafleur

“The Enfranchisement of Resident Aliens: Variations and Explanations” by David C. Earnest

“Keeping Pandora’s (Ballot) Box Half-Shut: A Comparative Inquiry into the Institutional Limits of External Voting in EU Member States” by Derek S. Hutcheson and Jean-Thomas Arrighi

“Expatriates as Voters? The New Dynamics of External Voting in Sub-Saharan Africa” by Christof Hartmann

“Immigrant Enfranchisement in Latin America: From Strongmen to Universal Citizenship” by Cristina Escobar

SELECTED JOURNAL ARTICLES ON DEMOCRACY


“Rejecting Rights: Vigilantism and Violence in Post-Apartheid South Africa” by Nicholas Rush Smith

“Ethnicity, Intra-Elite Differentiation and Political Stability in Kenya” by Biniam E. Bedasso

“The Political Economy of Grand Corruption in Tanzania” by Hazel S. Gray

“The Political Economy of Property Tax in Africa: Explaining Reform Outcomes in Sierra Leone” by Samuel S. Jibao and Wilson Prichard

“After Restitution: Community, Litigation and Governance in South African Land Reform” by Christiaan Beyers and Derick Fay

“Briefing: Why Goodluck Jonathan Lost the Nigerian Presidential Election of 2015” by Olly Owen and Zainab Usman

American Political Science Review, Vol. 109, no. 3, August 2015

“International Interventions to Build Social Capital: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Sudan” by Alexandra Avdeenko and Michael J. Gilligan

“How Does Development Assistance Affect Collective Action Capacity? Results from a Field Experiment in Post-Conflict Liberia” by James D. Fearon, Macartan Humphreys, and Jeremy M. Weinstein

“Women’s Participation in Violent Political Organizations” by Jakana L. Thomas and Kanisha D. Bond

“Clan Governance and State Stability: The Relationship between Female Subordination and Political Order” by Valerie M. Hudson, Donna Lee Bowen, and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen

“War and Revenge: Explaining Conflict Initiation by Democracies” by Rachel M. Stein

“Demography and Democracy: A Global, District-level Analysis of Electoral Contestation” by John Gerring, Maxwell Palmer, Jan Teorell, and Dominick Zarecki


“International Knowledge and Domestic Evaluations in a Changing Society: The Case of China” by Haifeng Huang

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**APSA-CD** is the official newsletter of the American Political Science Association's Comparative Democratization section. Formerly known as CompDem, it has been published three times a year (October, January, and May) by the National Endowment for Democracy's International Forum for Democratic Studies since 2003. In October 2010, the newsletter was renamed APSA-CD and expanded to include substantive articles on democracy, as well as news and notes on the latest developments in the field. The newsletter is now jointly produced and edited by faculty members of the V-Dem Institute and the International Forum.

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