

On the Linkages Between New Technologies and Democratic Transformations: A Critical Appraisal

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with the purported impact of new technologies on political practices, especially within democratic regimes. We know that new technologies are producing significant changes in how citizens, civil society groups, and political authorities, organize themselves, communicate and exchange information, and ultimately mobilize to take collective decisions, but does this entail a shift towards new forms of political organization? More broadly, is the internet (or the broader range of ICT's of which forms part) an inherently democratizing technology and, if so, what kind of democratic transformations could be possible? In tackling some of these questions the first part of this paper attempts to clarify some of the key concepts, namely what is meant by ICT and various conceptions of democratic engagement. In the second part the focus is on the type of evidence that would warrant claims of underlying political transformations. The paper concludes with a critical evaluation of some of the underlying assumptions behind various models of ICT induced political transformation.