

### **III. Effects of Widespread Internet Availability on Local-level Politics**

Any political process depends on communication, whatever the form of government. The Internet is a vehicle for interactive communication that promises to reach local levels in developing countries, to a degree without precedent or parallel. As Internet access becomes widespread, numerous effects on the political process can be postulated. Most of these effects will be favorable, leading to greater individual freedom and limitations on governmental power.

As in the case of the Internet's effect on local-level economic activity in the developing world, it is easy to focus on the anticipated positive effects while slighting the negative. Governments are universally intent on retaining power, and in developing countries the restraints on their efforts to do so by authoritarian means are weak indeed. At the same time, governments typically possess extensive resources to employ in protecting their power. The advent of Internet access at the local level in the developing world will be a positive factor politically, but it will not by itself bring about individual liberty or democratic government.

The postulated political effects of widespread Internet availability at the local level can be grouped under four categories, and are discussed at length in the following sections—

- The effects of increased access to news and information
- The effects of interactive Internet communications on local political activity
- Connectivity between local political actors and expatriates or distant domestic political groups
- Adroit use of the Internet by existing political powers.

### **A. Internet Effects: Increased Access to News and Information**

A primary means by which oppressive governments have maintained their grip on power has been their control over what information the populace has about domestic and foreign conditions and events. The widespread availability of the Internet will compromise this control, in some cases destroying it altogether. A number of politically important dynamics can be expected, such as—

- Government press controls will become less effective over time. Certainly, government-controlled news outlets will continue to publish what the authorities want. Alternative information sources will be freely available, however, especially those that do not depend on Internet servers located within the country. As long as an alternative news source chooses to cover events or conditions of local interest, the government press will no longer be able to control such information. This change is bound to have fundamental effects on public morale, public acceptance of governmental explanations of events or conditions, and indeed the public view of their government's legitimacy.
- Widespread access to foreign commercial advertising on the Internet, along with news accounts of free and fair foreign elections, is bound to create a tide of rising expectations in developing countries.
- It will become virtually impossible to clamp down on the flow of news and information from *within* each country as well. As events take place, local individuals or political groups will be able to send word to the outside world, often accompanied by pictures.
- Governments will be forced more often into reacting to the news. Faced with adverse reports of domestic events or conditions in the hands of international news organizations, oppressive governments will be increasingly hard pressed to conceal or deny negative news. Moreover, governments will never know when the next adverse revelation will appear, and will be embarrassed or blindsided much more often.
- Government actions intended for domestic attention only will increasingly be relayed to interested parties worldwide. Although oppressive governments are unlikely to become saintly overnight, once burned by international opinion they will often be more circumspect in the future.
- Although local-level news will be able to reach across borders, much of its significance will be felt on a local level as well. If a local official commits some egregious deed, in an environment of widespread local Internet access, word will

be posted on news groups, will surface in chat rooms, and will be the topic of emails. Abuse or corruption will be subject to greater public knowledge, if not necessarily public reproof or remedy. Thus, the potential will greatly increase for local unrest in the face of governmental excess.

The outlook for the effect on local politics of Internet-borne news and information in the countries or regions of interest is as follows—

**China**

- The Chinese government strives to control what news and information becomes available to the populace, including that available via the Internet. It has attempted to block access to foreign news sites, exercising its control over Internet service providers. News and information is carried on a plethora of web sites, however, as well as by postings on a constantly evolving and increasingly vast number of news groups and web sites. It is virtually impossible to block incoming emails containing news. Thus, despite the government's best efforts, the Internet will expand awareness of the outside world at the local level in China. Even the posting of inconvenient overseas news from generally approved sources can get a web site into trouble. Offenders have had their licenses suspended for several weeks.<sup>52</sup>
- The government takes even more care to limit the local and domestic news carried on the Internet, because this information generally has far greater impact on public compliance with leadership policies. In early 2000, authorities issued regulations preventing domestic web sites from posting any news information that does not come from officially recognized news services. This measure is designed to prevent investigative reporting or the reporting of events or conditions it deems unfavorable or inconvenient.<sup>53</sup> Internet operators who violate these rules are prosecuted.<sup>54</sup>
- At times the unauthorized Internet reporting of domestic Chinese news has had international implications. When a bomb was set off near Tiananmen in Beijing recently, the news traveled worldwide via the Internet within an hour, forcing

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<sup>52</sup> "China to Regulate Web News Reporting," *Muzi Lateline News*, 16 May 2000 accessed June 2000 at [dailynews.muzi.com](http://dailynews.muzi.com). Bruce Einhorn, "A Web Site Feels the Wrath of Beijing," *Businessweek Online*, 22 May 2000 accessed June 2000 at [www.businessweekonline.com](http://www.businessweekonline.com)

<sup>53</sup> Ellen Bork, "Dot-Commies: Beijing's Internet Policies Are Short on Freedom, Long on Control," *The Weekly Standard*, 15 May 2000; "China Sets Up Office to Regulate Internet News," *Muzi Lateline News*, 12 May 2000 accessed June 2000 at [dailynews.muzi.com](http://dailynews.muzi.com).

<sup>54</sup> "Chinese Web Site Operator Arrested on Subversion Charges," *The New York Times*, 8 June 2000, accessed June 2000 at [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

the government to acknowledge the incident and to publish its own account in the official press.<sup>55</sup>

- Strictly at the local political level, few of these official restraints on the dissemination of news will apply in an environment of widespread Internet availability. News pertaining to local events and conditions will be quite freely exchanged among local Internet users, via email, chat rooms, and news group postings.

### ***Russia***

- Although the press is freer now in Russia than under the Soviet regime, there is still no widespread access to uncontrolled domestic or foreign news. The central, regional, and local governments still own most of the mass media, and foreign broadcasts reach relatively few people. As local Internet access becomes more widespread, uncontrolled news and information will become available to Russians for the first time.

### ***India***

- Surprisingly widespread cable television service (India's 30 million cable hookups exceed its 20 million telephone lines) has already connected much of India to the outside world's news and information. Cable access is cheap, about \$3 per month, and is likely to form some of the basis for Internet service.<sup>56</sup> Internet access will enhance this existing connectivity through a greater diversity of sources and interactivity, facilitating the widespread dissemination of news and information, much of it political in nature.

### ***Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and El Salvador***

- Local people in the region are not presently deprived of news and information by repressive governments so much as by their own poverty. Newspapers and satellite televisions are expensive. Access to news and information for those able to pay for it is unrestricted. As Internet access becomes widespread and cheap at the local level, more domestic and international news will become available. Newspapers themselves are often in politically precarious positions, and usually do not carry incisive reporting. Thus, the quality of news is likely to increase somewhat as Internet information providers, less subject to pressure than traditional publishers, become increasingly active.

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<sup>55</sup> Kevin Platt, "Tao of the Times: With a Click, Chinese Vault Cultural Walls," op. cit.

<sup>56</sup> "The Wiring of India," *The Economist*, accessed 30 May 2000 at [www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com)

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- One of the first Internet-based news services in Latin America is Pulsar, based in Ecuador. Its staff gathers stories from regional newspapers and world wire services, rewrites them for a radio broadcast format, then emails the stories to a regional network of community radio stations.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Barbara Belejack, "Cyberculture Comes to the Americas," accessed 13 June 2000 at [www2.planeta.com](http://www2.planeta.com)

## **B. Internet Effects: Local Political Activity**

Interactive communications via the Internet—beyond the realm of news concerning events and conditions—will have a significant effect on local political activity in many developing countries. No longer will recruitment, organizing, and fundraising depend on face-to-face contact. Patterns of local political activity in an environment of widespread Internet access are likely to assume some of the following shapes—

- Although truly democratic elections are rare at the national level in the developing world, they are not nearly so uncommon at the local level. As popular access to the Internet expands, the medium will become increasingly popular as a means of publishing campaign information about candidates and opponents, soliciting contributions, and mobilizing volunteers and voters. Particularly where a governing party discourages overt opposition, low-visibility networking is likely to take place via local Internet connections. Stories of local bosses being toppled unexpectedly in elections are likely to become increasingly common.
- The Internet is likely to become an avenue for popular pressure on local officials and local representatives at the provincial and national levels. Individuals, village councils, city block committees, and local affinity groups will increasingly take advantage of the ability to send email to officials or representatives who have historically operated without input from local constituents. Criticisms can be expected to proliferate, especially in view of the sender's ability to conceal his identity. Over time, this communication channel will probably, in at least some countries, give rise to greater responsiveness and accountability in government.
- Especially in larger developing countries, there is little direct communication between the national government and the individual. Most governmental relationships are conducted at the local level. The widespread availability of Internet communications may entail the telescoping of these relationships: when it becomes possible for the individual (or lowest level political entity) to communicate with the central government, it may begin doing so. Conversely, national governments may increasingly bypass intermediate governmental levels to communicate directly to the local level. Over time, a flattening of pyramidal political hierarchies may evolve in some countries.
- Internet connectivity will arise among nonpolitical affinity groups as access becomes more widespread. Often, however, groups that began as nonpolitical take on a political character as their interests are impacted by governmental actions. This is especially true in countries with intrusive governments, as is the

case in much of the developing world. Brought to critical mass by Internet communications, affinity groups are likely to proliferate and take on political identities, representing the interests of their members. Political pluralism in some countries long run by single parties may become a reality, partly as a result of Internet communications.

- In some cases, the political outlet provided by Internet communications may assuage the radicalism of some interest groups, obviating the motivation to turn to terrorist activity.
- As systems are developed to permit reliable and tamper-resistant voting via the Internet, electoral participation may increase to some degree.

The outlook for the effect on local politics of localized interactive communication via the Internet in the countries or regions of interest is as follows—

**China**

- As widespread Internet access becomes a reality in China, it will no doubt become a tool in local political activity. Many low-level political offices are now filled by relatively free elections that feature true competition between candidates. In due course, some of these contests will turn to local Internet news groups, chat rooms, and email lists to generate support. The first sparks of such local political Internet activity have already been noted.<sup>58</sup> There have already been many instances of Chinese citizens airing grievances to local authorities in email messages.<sup>59</sup>
- The Falungong spiritualist movement is known to use email to coordinate its efforts, highlighted by the totally unexpected appearance of peaceful protesters in Tiananmen Square in 1999.<sup>60</sup> The tens of millions of Chinese Christians practicing their faith outside officially sanctioned churches will no doubt begin to coordinate their activities via email if they have not begun to do so already. Although neither Falungong nor members of the underground Christian movement consider themselves to be engaging in political activity, the government definitely *does* see any such organizing as political and potentially subversive. By their nature, religious communities are local, and their use of the Internet will be felt most at the local level.

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<sup>58</sup> Steven Mufson, "A Quiet Bureaucrat, Promoting The Vote One Village at a Time," *The Washington Post*, 14 June 1998 accessed June 2000 at [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)

<sup>59</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*, April 2000, p. 74.

<sup>60</sup> Melinda Liu, "The Great Firewall of China," op. cit.

- The first Chinese ethnic advocacy group to use the Internet actively has been the Free Tibet movement. Ranging from the simple web site of the government in exile ([www.tibet.com](http://www.tibet.com)) to sophisticated interactive sites that allow the user to email letters to such organizations as the World Bank ([www.milarepa.org](http://www.milarepa.org)), the Free Tibet movement has turned Internet advocacy into a high art.<sup>61</sup> Other repressed groups, such as the Muslims in western China, can be expected to make use of the Internet as well.
- The presence of young, highly intelligent hackers is growing in China, and they seem to share the anarchic and activist tendencies noted among their counterparts elsewhere in the world. Hackers have defaced Chinese government web sites. They can also act in a nationalistic fashion, as when they attacked U.S. government web sites following the U.S. bombing of China's embassy in Belgrade.<sup>62</sup>

### ***Russia***

- As elsewhere, the widespread availability of Internet communications is certain to be put to use by political activists of all stripes. Politically oriented email, chat rooms, news groups, and web sites can be expected to proliferate, much of it directed at local issues.
- Political advertising on the Internet has already made an appearance in Russia, although its effect has been greatly limited by the small number of subscribers.<sup>63</sup>

### ***India***

- In rural villages in the state of Madhya Pradesh, public-access Internet kiosks have been established where for 25 cents U.S., citizens can send emails to state-level officials to make inquiries, complaints, or suggestions. Officials are supposed to respond within a week. Because most village residents are illiterate, the kiosk franchisee commonly drafts their emails for them.<sup>64</sup>

### ***Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and El Salvador***

- Without question, the widespread availability of Internet communication will have a stimulative effect on local political activity. As parties and interest groups find themselves able to communicate and coordinate quickly and cheaply, the

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<sup>61</sup> One has only to type the words "Free Tibet" into a common search engine and dozens of examples of the Free Tibet movement's use of the Internet will return as hits.

<sup>62</sup> Kevin Platt, "Tao of the Times: With a Click, Chinese Vault Cultural Walls," op. cit.

<sup>63</sup> Rod Pounsett, "Russians Need the Internet," op. cit.

<sup>64</sup> Celia W. Dugger, "Connecting Rural India to the World," op. cit.



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pace and effectiveness of their activities can be expected to increase. Political advertising on the Internet will become increasingly common.

### **C. Internet Effects: Connectivity with Expatriates and Distant Domestic Groups**

Advanced or dissident political thinking in developing countries often takes place among groups living abroad, or among people living in the capital city or in a particular region of the country. The communication of their ideas and political programs to the local level has always been attenuated or even made impossible by the distances involved and the lack of rapid, economical communication. Widespread availability of the Internet will change that. The following are some of the effects that can be postulated with some confidence—

- A web site can be hosted virtually anywhere in the world, outside the control of any particular government. A dissident political group, or simply a group with an alternative political agenda, can maintain a full array of policy statements, commentaries, or exposes completely free of interference from the targeted political regime. Access to the web site from within the country can in some instances be blocked, but the site address can be changed quickly and a notification sent out to an email mailing list in short order. Instead of the risk of putting up posters or handing out brochures, dissidents can simply pass along the current web address.
- Expatriates typically maintain ties with family and friends in their home city or village, usually by infrequent letters or visits. In an environment of widespread Internet access, these ties will be far easier and cheaper to maintain. Particularly when the expat is living abroad for political reasons, these contacts will frequently have political content. Email will allow regular, private communications between exiles and supporters on the home front. Expats will be able to engage in chat rooms or put postings on news groups read regularly by political associates back home. By the same channels, they will be able to keep current on local conditions, honing their political message for maximum effect.
- When such cross-border connections do not already exist, Internet connectivity will facilitate their creation. When a local-level dissident reads foreign news or accesses a foreign-based dissident web site, it will be but a short step for him to send an email to make initial contact.
- Expatriates are typically an important source of funding for dissident political groups back home. Frequent, reliable Internet communications will facilitate requests for support and arrangements for its delivery.
- The above dynamics would be much the same in cases where the locus of dissident activity is in the domestic capital or in a particular region of the

country. Web sites can be hosted on foreign servers, but updated by Internet contact from within the country concerned. Internet contact within each country, including via encrypted email, will become a matter of ease.

The outlook for the effect on local politics of communication with expatriate or distant domestic dissidents via the Internet in the countries or regions of interest is as follows—

### ***China***

- There is already voluminous Internet communication between Chinese students and technology workers abroad and their families and friends at the local level in China. No doubt the bulk of such traffic concerns personal matters, but such channels can readily be used to carry politically significant news and information, particularly in times of crisis.
- China's first "cyber-dissident," Lin Hai, was jailed in 1998 for a year and a half for providing Chinese email addresses to an online, pro-democracy magazine based in the U.S.<sup>65</sup>
- As mentioned above, the Free Tibet movement is based outside China, and seeks to promote its agenda for that locality by means of web sites and other uses of the Internet.<sup>66</sup>
- An international connectivity that is often overlooked is that among hacking groups in various countries. For example, the Hong Kong Blondes recently gave a rare interview to the Boston-based Cult of the Dead Cow (both are hacking groups). In the interview, the Hong Kong hacker leader outlined his group's crusade to expose China's human rights abuses to the world.<sup>67</sup>

### ***Russia***

- There is active Internet communication between Russians living overseas and their families and associates in the major cities in European Russia. Because Internet access is nearly nonexistent at the local level outside these few cities, it does not now play any role in the development or maintenance of political awareness. The fact that few rural or small-town Russians have emigrated in recent times will keep this phenomenon from being a significant factor at the local level in the future.

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<sup>65</sup> Kevin Platt, "Tao of the Times: With a Click, Chinese Vault Cultural Walls," op. cit.

<sup>66</sup> Of particular note is the student-based advocacy group, Students for a Free Tibet, which has chapters around the world. Its main site can be found at [www.tibet.org/SFT](http://www.tibet.org/SFT)

<sup>67</sup> Arik Hesseldahl, "Hacking for Human Rights?," *Wired.com*, 14 July 1998 accessed June 2000 at [www.wired.com](http://www.wired.com)

- The Internet would have been valuable to dissidents in the Soviet era, as a vehicle for communication and *samizdat* literature. Should the government become increasingly authoritarian, Internet communication would probably become an important vehicle for maintaining a political opposition.

***India***

- The governing BJP already receives much of its funding from expatriate Indians.<sup>68</sup> The widespread involvement of Indians abroad in information technology will provide a ready means for political fundraising via the Internet.

***Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and El Salvador***

- Large populations from each of the countries in the region live abroad, chiefly in the United States. There is already active communication between expatriates—be they businessmen or day laborers—and their families and friends back home. As people at home gain greater access to the Internet, this communication traffic will multiply. Most messages will of course concern personal matters, but political content will find its way in as well, especially in times of political crisis in the home country. Among the reasons the Internet has developed relatively quickly in Argentina and Uruguay was the return of political exiles who had been using the Internet in their teaching and research at universities in the United States and in Europe.<sup>69</sup>
- To date, the clearest example of expatriate and foreign Internet support of a local Latin American political cause is that of the Zapatistas in Mexico's Chiapas state, beginning in 1994. Sympathizers both within Mexico and abroad reproduced and translated the rebels' various communiques and public letters, disseminating them widely via email networks and posting them on a wide variety of Internet news groups and web sites.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Carol Charles, op. cit.

<sup>69</sup> Barbara Belejack, "Cyberculture Comes to the Americas," op. cit.

<sup>70</sup> Harry Cleaver, "The Zapatistas and the Electronic Fabric of Struggle," University of Texas, accessed 13 June 2000 at [www.isoc.org](http://www.isoc.org)

#### **D. Internet Effects: Adroit Internet Use by Governing Political Powers**

Established economic interests may be slow to take coercive action against Internet use by upstart competitors, but governments that are concerned about their domestic security situation are unlikely to spare such an effort or expense. There are a number of ways in which oppressive governments could combat the freedom of expression—and political threat—posed by widespread dissident use of the Internet. The following are some patterns of activity that may arise—

- Domestically hosted web sites, news groups, and chat rooms are highly vulnerable to being shut down or closely monitored by government authorities. Indeed, government pressures on domestic ISPs—often subsidiaries of state-owned or monopoly telecommunications firms—will be the chief avenue for exploitation or suppression of dissident Internet activity.
- Monitoring and interpreting high volumes of Internet traffic is difficult and expensive. If the traffic is encrypted, it will typically be unrealistic for a government security service to perform effective cryptanalysis. Indeed, in many cases, the mere use of encryption is illegal and would itself invite government enforcement measures against users. Traffic analysis—identifying senders, recipients, message volume, and related data—is more feasible. The task is greatly complicated if users employ floating servers or false identities, however.
- A somewhat sophisticated government security service could employ hacking techniques to disrupt targeted web sites or inject viruses into selected messages to disrupt dissidents' computers.
- A government could use the Internet aggressively to promote its own views and policies. Web sites, either openly or surreptitiously supported by the government, could attract significant traffic if they had attractive content. A government could send emails with propaganda messages to Internet subscribers, a practice that could be effective if skillfully done. The Internet is a perfect vehicle for the dissemination of disinformation: a government could easily plant misleading information in a variety of ways, even to the point of creating bogus email messages ostensibly from trusted associates to sow mistrust or confusion among dissidents.
- Finally, the effectiveness of central government control over local offices will probably be enhanced by using the Internet to promulgate orders and questions to the local level, and to monitor their compliance with policy decisions.

The outlook for the effect on local politics of the adroit use of the Internet by existing political powers in the five countries or regions of interest is as follows—

**China**

- The Chinese government makes no secret that it monitors email, tracks content compliance, and enforces e-commerce tax regulations. This is accomplished by intercepting, monitoring, filtering, and blocking content that flows through the government-controlled gateways that plug China into the global Internet. Although many adept users have found ways around the monitors and filters, the government's sophistication in using the Internet's tools will improve with time. Considering the vast potential traffic volume involved, however, the government's efforts to maintain control will only be marginally effective. Encryption will further erode government control of Internet content.<sup>71</sup>
- At the local level, governments are unlikely to be able to exercise effective control of political use of the Internet. It will be beyond local capabilities to monitor traffic for adverse political content, especially if messages use encryption.
- From the government's point of view, a more promising strategy of Internet use will probably be to dominate the flow of Chinese language news and information available to the Chinese people. The emergence of CCIDNet.com, backed by the Ministry of Information Industry, is a key indicator in this regard.<sup>72</sup> Flooding the Chinese language Internet with material favorable to the government will tend to marginalize the relatively few news sources independent of government control. The government itself need not produce all of this content. Rather, through licensing, regulation, and other official pressures, it can be expected to bring about favorable behavior on the part of most Chinese language content providers.
- This proactive strategy of attempting to dominate online news channels will probably also be pursued by local political authorities. Devices such as government-sponsored web sites, widely disseminated email newsgroups, and postings on news groups can be expected to proliferate.
- Specifically targeted active measures can also be expected. In an early example, the Chinese government evidently used the Internet to launch denial of service

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<sup>71</sup> Stephen J. Anderson, "China's Widening Web," *China Business Review*, March-April 2000. Melinda Liu, "The Great Firewall of China," op. cit. "China Clamps Down on Mainland-produced Internet Content," *Muzi Lateline News*, 28 January 2000, accessed at [dailynews.muzi.com](http://dailynews.muzi.com)

<sup>72</sup> "China's Internet Regulator Launches Web Site," *Muzi Lateline News*, 3 April 2000 accessed June 2000 at [dailynews.muzi.com](http://dailynews.muzi.com)

attacks against foreign-based web sites supporting the Falungong movement.<sup>73</sup> At the local level, governments with a modicum of technical sophistication available could use surreptitious active measures such as false or deceptive email traffic to sow discord or confusion among targeted political groups.<sup>74</sup>

### **Russia**

- In January 2000, a law was enacted that effectively provides eight Russian police and security services full access to Internet traffic. ISPs are required, at their own expense, to run their trunk lines through designated government computer sites. Ostensibly, the security services will require court warrants to tap email and e-commerce traffic, but this is a nonexistent safeguard. In effect, all Internet traffic will be subject to government monitoring, limited only by the challenges of volume and encryption. In addition to the Federal Security Service (FSB), agencies participating are the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), the tax police, Interior Ministry, Border Guards, Customs Committee, Kremlin security service, presidential security service, and parliamentary security service. Veteran human rights activist Yelena Bonner was quoted saying, "This means Russia has officially become a police state."<sup>75</sup>
- In addition to providing Russia's police and security services a window into Internet communications for monitoring purposes, this unrestricted access will permit them to block traffic to and from Russian users, both broadly and selectively. They will also be in a position to engage in "active measures," such as disinformation or other information operations.
- Both the Russian government and supporters of the Chechen combatants have made significant use of the Internet to disseminate their views of the conflict in Chechnya.<sup>76</sup>

### **India**

- There is little risk of Indian authorities using the Internet in any oppressive or intrusive manner. The practical and technical challenges of doing so are nothing the state or national governments are equipped or inclined to try to overcome. Just as compelling is the widespread popular opposition to intrusive

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<sup>73</sup> Melinda Liu, "The Great Firewall of China," op. cit.

<sup>74</sup> "China's Internet Clampdown Will Lose Sting in the Long Run: Analysts," Muzi Lateline News, 28 January 2000, accessed June 2000 at [dailynews.muzi.com](http://dailynews.muzi.com)

<sup>75</sup> Jen Tracy, "Russia's Electronic Police Get Carte Blanche," *St. Petersburg Times*, 14 January 2000.

<sup>76</sup> See the Russian sites at [www.infocenter.ru](http://www.infocenter.ru), [www.chechnya.ru](http://www.chechnya.ru), and [www.antiterror.ru](http://www.antiterror.ru); the pro-Chechen sites can be accessed at [www.kavkaz.org](http://www.kavkaz.org) and [www.ichkeria.com.ge](http://www.ichkeria.com.ge)

governmental measures.<sup>77</sup> A recent example was seen in the May 2000 parliamentary debate over a major e-commerce bill. The bill's initial draft included provisions that would have forced the registration of domestically hosted web sites with the government. Cybercafe owners would also have had to record the identity of their customers, along with the sites the customers visited. These measures received little support in Parliament and were quickly dropped.<sup>78</sup> Although many structural obstacles to economic and political liberalization exist, the trend is toward increased freedom.

### ***Colombia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, El Salvador***

- The governments in the region have limited expertise and money to make active use of the Internet as a political tool. This situation is likely to persist indefinitely. In nearby Mexico, for example, supporters of the Zapatista rebels in Chiapas have accused the government of surreptitious interference with their Internet connections,<sup>79</sup> and governments of the countries under study here could probably do likewise if so motivated.

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<sup>77</sup> Interview with Carol Charles, op. cit.

<sup>78</sup> Sanjeev Miglani, "India Drops Controversial Change to IT Bill," Reuters, 15 May 2000.

<sup>79</sup> Harry Cleaver, "The Zapatistas and the Electronic Fabric of Struggle," op. cit.