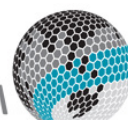


Workshop

Digital Activism in Authoritarian Contexts

May 30-31 & June 1, 2023



Digital Activism in Authoritarian Contexts

Technologies mediate power. When they are used by activists, they contribute to networking activists on a larger scale, self-representation, and empowerment. In the meantime, the intertwined political and business interests and social prejudice shape technologies and render them into surveillance tools silencing unappealing voices to the ear of authoritarian regimes, putting activists' life at risk, and further imposing threats on deliberative democracy.



Strategies and alternative technologies are thus used by political activists to navigate sorts of constraints imposed by technologies and authorities. This paradoxical impact of technologies has been felt across authoritarian regimes, with the widespread adoption and popularity of digital technologies among both people and governments over the past two decades. In this project, 'technologies' are non-specifically defined as we wanted to bring together studies focusing broadly on a variety of digital or non-digital technologies, their different roles in shaping digital activism across authoritarian contexts, and their impact on democracy. Through this we contest a technology-centered perspective while acknowledging a non-universal, historical use of technologies and activist practices.

We are organizing this workshop as part of our research project 'Emerging digital technologies and the future of democracy in the Muslim world', funded by Gerda Henkel Foundation. While our project focuses on Egypt, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey, through this workshop we wanted to bring together a group of scholars who are working on other contexts too. We received a very encouraging response to our call for papers and have selected 13 papers examining technologies, digital activism and digital authoritarianism in various contexts, such as China, India, Indonesia and Nigeria. A key purpose of purpose of this workshop is to produce an edited book on technologies and digital activism in authoritarian contexts.

Workshop Convenors

Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh

Professor Ihsan Yilmaz

Dr Zahid Shahab Ahmed

Dr Galib Bashirov

**MIDDLE EAST
STUDIES FORUM**



ADI
ALFRED DEAKIN INSTITUTE FOR
CITIZENSHIP AND GLOBALISATION



Chair: [Professor Shahram Akbarzadeh \(Deakin University\)](#)

[Anas Iqtait \(Australian National University\)](#)

Blockchain Technology in MENA: Impacts on Authoritarianism and Civil Activism.

Discussant: Zahid Ahmed

[Govand Khalid Azeez \(Macquarie University, Australia\)](#)

Technology and Power in the Middle East: From Steam Engine to the Artificial Intelligence Age.

Discussant: Anas Iqtait

[Ihsan Yilmaz and Nadeen Madkour \(Deakin University\)](#)

Vocalised resistance to authoritarianism in Egypt: A study of podcasts.

Discussant: Najimdeen Bakare

[Abdullah Faqih and Fahmi Rizki Fahroji \(The SMERU Research Institute, Indonesia\)](#)

Beyond an enjoyment: Hacker activism in reshaping Indonesia's contemporary democratic constellation.

Discussant: Ihsan Yilmaz

DAY ONE

May 30, 2023: 12:00-14:30 (AEST)

BCC Deakin University, Burwood Campus

Zoom link to be provided to registered participants

[Register Here](#)



DAY TWO

May 31, 2023

18:00-20:00 (AEST)

Zoom link to be provided to registered participants

[Register Here](#)

Chair: [Professor Ihsan Yilmaz \(Deakin University\)](#)

[Shahram Akbarzadeh and Amin Naeni \(Deakin University\)](#)

Internet in Iran: Battlefield of Ideas.

Discussant: Govand Khalid Azeez

[Saeed Ahmed Rid \(Quaid-i-Azam University, Pakistan\) and Zahid Shahab Ahmed \(Deakin University\)](#)

The rising digital authoritarianism in Pakistan.

Discussant: Saimum Parvez

[Bakare Najimdeen \(National University of Sciences and Technology, Pakistan\)](#)

Digital Platforms, Youth Activism, and Illiberal and Authoritarian Governance: The Case of Nigerian EndSARS Movement.

Discussant: Galib Bashirov

[Mettursun Beydulla \(George Washington University, USA\)](#)

China's smart digital technologies' impact on Uyghur Muslims.

Discussant: Shahram Akbarzadeh



Chair: [Dr Zahid Ahmed \(Deakin University\)](#)

[Feeza Vasudeva \(University of Helsinki, Finland\)](#)

Epistemic Contestations and Use/Misuse of OSINT in India.

Discussant: Zahid Ahmed

[Saimum Parvez \(Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium\)](#)

Political Activism 2.0: How are Bangladeshi exiled activists working against authoritarianism?

Discussant: Saeed Ahmed Rid

[Julia Ryng and Guillemette Guicherd \(London School of Economics, UK\)](#)

Circumventing Internet Shutdowns: The Case of Myanmar.

Discussant: Zahid Ahmed

[Bulent Kenes \(European Centre for Populism Studies, Belgium\) and Ihsan Yilmaz \(Deakin University\) -](#)

Digital authoritarianism in Turkey.

Discussant: Galib Bashirov

[Murat Akser \(Ulster University, UK\)](#)

Technologies Power and Contestation: Turkish Democracy and The Rise of Hacktivists and Trolls in Turkish Media Ecosystem.

Discussants: Julia Ryng and Guillemette Guicherd

DAY THREE

June 1, 2023

18:00-20:00 (AEST)

Zoom link to be provided to registered participants

[Register Here](#)



Abstracts and Bios



Blockchain Technology in MENA: Impacts on Authoritarianism and Civil Activism

Anas Iqtait (Australian National University)

This study examines the adoption and implications of blockchain technology in the Middle East and North Africa, focusing on its potential to influence authoritarian tendencies and civil activism. The analysis utilizes a wide array of sources and employs an interdisciplinary approach, providing a comprehensive exploration of BT and its diverse use cases across multiple sectors. The MENA regulatory landscape is characterized by diverse strategies, with some countries proactively embracing BT while others maintain caution. While BT has the potential to challenge traditional political systems and governance models, it can also be co-opted by authoritarian regimes to enhance control and surveillance capabilities. The study emphasizes the paradoxical potential of BT to both reinforce authoritarian control and foster civil activism. By investigating the evolving regulatory environment, use cases, and potential political consequences of BT adoption, this research contributes to our understanding of emerging technologies' impact on political dynamics in the MENA region and provides a foundation for future studies.

Dr Anas Iqtait is a Lecturer in Economics and Political Economy of the Middle East at the Australian National University Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies. He is a Co-founder and Editor in Chief of the ANU-based Near East Policy Forum, and a Non-Resident Scholar at the Middle East Institute Program on Palestine and Palestinian-Israeli Affairs. Anas is the author of *Funding and the Quest for Sovereignty in Palestine* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022). He holds a PhD in Political Economy of the Middle East from the ANU, an MA in International Development Policy from Seoul National University (South Korea), and a BS in Financial Economics from Methodist University (United States). Anas also holds an IBM professional certificate in Data Science.

Technology and Power in the Middle East: From Steam Engine to the Artificial Intelligence Age

Govand Khalid Azeez (Macquarie University, Australia)

For philosophers, technological historians and political scientists, the proposition 'technologies mediate power' is an emblematic axiom capturing the contemporary spirit of the global political-economic system. The proposition affirms two fundamental points. The first is a phenomenological inquiry that compels us to acknowledge the ubiquitous and transformational changes happening in our world. Here, technology, as an instrument of production and medium of cultural dissemination, is the vehicle of radical transformation. The second sociologico-anthropological point illustrates that the essence and consequence of technology are conflict and crisis. This way, the signifier 'mediate' directs us to position the topology and topography of this change and conflict in the social and historical formation of societies and systems. Innovation in AI algorithms, IOT, infotechnology, biotechnology, etc., is a site of conflict between those who surveil, control, and extract surplus-value apropos technology and the subjects who adopt or resist, and attempt to re-orient the system. Considering this context, this paper addresses a set of emerging questions. Namely, how does the proximity of technological innovation to the Western-controlled global state system and market shape this conflict in the Middle East? How do the geopolitics of technological advancement shape the sharp divide in social intercourse between the haves and have-nots, the exploiter and exploited? How are digital technologies mitigating, rupturing or intensifying social relations? These questions require us to understand the dialectical interaction between technology and power in the Middle East, by placing the phenomenon at the intersection of history, transnational production and modes of ownership and labor.

Dr Govand Khalid Azeez is a Lecturer in the School of Social Sciences at Macquarie University. He specializes in political philosophy (including epistemology and theories of subjectivity), political economy (focusing on Marxist/Neo-Marxist conceptualizations of class), and the politics and strategies of social transformation. In 2016, Dr. Azeez was a Visiting Fellow in the Department of History at Harvard University, Cambridge. He was subsequently nominated for the Junior Fellowship in the Society of Fellows at Harvard University by his doctoral thesis examiner A.J. Meyer Emeritus Professor of Middle East History Roger Owen. In 2014, Dr. Azeez was a visiting fellow in the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies (MESAS) at Columbia University, New York. Dr. Azeez's current research interests include an examination of how the local and global symbiotic relationship between capitalism and the state is manufacturing novel technologies and techniques of exploitation, inequality and domination, as well as different political structures, socio-economic organizations and subjectivities.

DAY ONE



Vocalised Resistance to Authoritarianism in Egypt: A Study of Podcasts

Ihsan Yilmaz and Nadeen Madkour (Deakin University)

The post-January 2011 military coup saw shrinking spaces of public protest and activism in Egypt. Traditional and online forms of media are now under increasing surveillance and censorship. Nevertheless, zero observable resistance does not equate to the absence of resistance. For instance, podcasts have emerged as a nascent medium of resistance against authoritarianism with fewer production costs and ease of access and dissemination across subscription-based apps and websites like Spotify, Anghami, Apple Podcasts, and SoundCloud. Thus, they offer a cultural and ethnographic output that has the potential to expand the scope of the literature on digital activism in authoritarian settings beyond the vantage points of social media. The literature does not address how censorship in authoritarian contexts affects the podcasting medium or whether it happens in the same way outlined in the four-tiered analysis, especially at the proxy and network-node level. This chapter addresses this gap in the literature and explores where and what technologies activists utilize in their resistance post-2011. To do so, we think through the podcast as an alternative space and examine whether it has been harnessed as a tool of resistance since the Jan 25 revolution, the synergies between public and private actors in censorship, and its possibility of driving future mobilization. Research on podcasting in Egypt is in its infancy. We analyze 30 significant podcasts publicized from 2011 – 2021 to sketch a landscape of Egyptian podcasting in terms of contents and subjects. We find evidence that the podcast is now a liminal space for digital activism harnessed to vocalize, debate, and discuss critical topics outside the contours of the state. This broadens the boundaries of resistance beyond the confines of formal and public acts of protest.

Ihsan Yilmaz is Research Professor and Chair at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalization, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. He is also a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at Oxford University's Regent College and the European Center for Populism Studies, Brussels. Previously, he worked at the Universities of Oxford and London and has a strong track record of leading multi-site international research projects funded by the Australian Research Council, Victorian and Australian Governments, and the Gerda Henkel Foundation. He has been working on authoritarianism, digital authoritarianism, populism, religion and politics with special emphasis on Turkey, Indonesia and Pakistan, and Muslim diasporas in the West.

Nadeen Madkour is a Research Associate at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia.

DAY ONE



Beyond an Enjoyment: Hacker Activism in Reshaping Indonesia's contemporary democratic constellation

Abdullah Faqih and Fahmi Rizki Fahroji (The SMERU Research Institute, Indonesia)

As Indonesia moves toward an information society, democratic practices are also influenced by the technology advancement, especially social media. Rapid interaction of people facilitated by digital space and in digital democratic settings places constraints, one of which is hackers. However, hackers tend to be positioned in a single image in the context of computer security: as a group of people with expertise in computer code and having an intention for criminal acts. These images neglect the fact that hackers, to some extent, also evolved into a movement for political ends and potentially influenced democratic practices in the information age. Using the notion of “hacktivism” (hacking for political action), this article discusses how hacking is used as a means of socio-political activism in Indonesia's contemporary democratic practices. The research question will be answered using a case study of “Bjorka”, one of Indonesia's most controversial hacking cases that leaked millions of sensitive data of Indonesian citizens in 2022. The data are gathered and analyzed using the content analysis method, where we collected 100 tweets of and towards “Bjorka” on Twitter to capture Bjorka's political motives. The “Bjorka” act provides a clue to examine the prospect of technology enhancement in reshaping democratic practices as “Bjorka” has triggered the Indonesian government to enact Indonesia's long-awaited law on the protection of personal data. Bjorka's hacktivism also offers an alternative way of seeing hackers as a form of resistance and civil disobedience and enriches the public debate related to public issues, especially during the democratic practices in the internet era.

Abdullah Faqih is a junior researcher at The SMERU Research Institute, specializing in qualitative methods. His main research interests include but are not limited to, digital economy, rural development, gender studies, and queer theory. Faqih started his career at SMERU as a research assistant for the Indonesia Digital Skills Landscape research project, which was supported by the Digital Pathways at Oxford University and UNESCAP. Prior to joining SMERU, he was a research assistant at the Jameel Abdul Latif Poverty Action Lab Southeast Asia (JPAL-SEA) in a research project on smoking prevention among children and at the Partnership for Governance Reform for research on human rights defenders' protection in the environmental sector. In 2021, he was a research fellow at Pusat Studi Pendidikan dan Kebijakan (PSPK) for research on higher education accreditation in Indonesia.

Fahmi Fahroji is an MRes student in Human Geography: Spaces, Politics, Ecologies at the University of Glasgow, UK. He has a keen interest in political ecology, climate issues, energy transition and indigenous community resilience. Fahmi's latest work with Resilience Development Initiative investigated the international energy program concerned with the consequences of energy transition among highly nature-dependent communities in North Sumatra. His undergraduate thesis lies mainly in environmental subjectivity and human-nature relations in the Schwarzwald area. He is currently working on a new project about the geography of the future of fossil fuels permeating the life of indigenous communities in Indonesia. The project traces the ideas currently unfolding for the future of underground, global investments, and contested projected energy.

DAY ONE

Internet in Iran: Battlefield of Ideas

Shahram Akbarzadeh and Amin Naeni (Deakin University)

Since the 1979 revolution, the ruling clerical regime in Iran has sought to construct and spread its own collective identity at the expense of alternative narratives. This required monopolizing the dissemination of information through an elaborate system of direct appointments as well as news vetting and censorship. However, digital technologies have opened fissures in this structure of control and have enabled the Iranian people to increasingly challenge state-constructed identity. Through an ontological security lens, this chapter examines how Iranian officials view the internet as a platform in which “strangers” to the homogenization of the official collective identity are rapidly growing. Ontological security concerns the coherence and stability of self and identity, emphasizing the subjective experience of collective identity. In this vein, the chapter pinpoints why cyberspace-driven threats against the official collective identity pushed Iranian officials to go beyond common censorship measures by investing in a National Information Network (NIN). This network aims to separate Iran from the global network and block the threats against state-constructed identity. The shift to NIN stems from the fact that Iranian internet users have challenged current restrictive measures and bypassed internet censorship. By way of illustration, the chapter traces the normalization of the hijab-less lifestyle from cyberspace to the physical world. It seeks to show how the death of Mahsa Amini galvanized Iranian women to exercise their online freedom in the real world and pose an existential threat to the Islamic Republic.

Shahram Akbarzadeh is the Research Professor in Middle East and Central Asian Politics at Deakin University. He is the Convenor of the Middle Eastern Studies Forum at the Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University, and the Deputy Director (International) of the Alfred Deakin Institute. He held a prestigious ARC Future Fellowship (2013-2016) on the Role of Islam in Iran’s Foreign Policymaking and recently completed a Qatar Foundation grant on Sectarianism in the Middle East. Shahram has an extensive publication record and has contributed to the public debate on topics such as democracy and political processes in the Middle East, regional rivalry, and Islamic militancy. He has also researched and published on Muslim integration in Australia and citizenship debates. Prof Akbarzadeh was the founding President of the Australian Association of Islamic and Muslim Studies (AAIMS) Inc. (2016-2019).



Amin Naeni is a Ph.D. candidate at Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University, working on the rise of digital technologies in Iran, with a focus on the footprint of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on political developments in Iran's society. His work also includes investigating the cooperation between the Islamic Republic with Russia and China to expand internet censorship in Iran. He completed his M.A. in Middle East and North Africa Studies at the University of Tehran in 2018. Also, he worked on two funded projects at the University of Tehran’s Center for Central Eurasia Studies between 2019 and 2021. The projects focused on developments in Iran-Russia relations and the impact of Russia-US rivalry in the Middle East on Iran’s regional interests. Since 2020, he has published several analytical pieces in some of the world’s leading think tanks, either as a single author or in co-authorship.

DAY TWO



Digital Platforms, Youth Activism, and Illiberal and Authoritarian Governance: The Case of Nigerian EndSARS Movement

Bakare Najimdeen (National University of Sciences and Technology, Pakistan)

Democracies today have demonstrated varying degrees of illiberal and authoritarian approach, one instance of this illiberal approach is police brutality, though endemic but climaxed and birthed the EndSARS social movement – a series of mass protests against police brutality in Nigeria. To place the discussion in perspective and for contextual analysis, the chapter turns to the New Social Movements (NSMs) theory, exploring the connections between the EndSARS social movement and the illiberal approach of the Nigerian government. Using the EndSARS movement, the chapter unpacks how youth activists across Nigeria devised strategies to circumvent the suppression of the public (physical) sphere from the authoritarian approach of the Nigerian government, mediated by technologies, therefore, allowing us to understand how the EndSARS movement occupied and weaponized the cyber sphere against what was considered an authoritarian proclivity of the state. It also examines the nexus between the digital platforms, the EndSARS movement, and the stimulation of a trans-spatial nationalism geared at holding the government accountable and purging it of its authoritarian governance. As a contribution to the epistemic discourse, it explores how much success the movement achieved using alternative (social/new) media and state counter-narratives that painted the struggle as appalling and anti-nationalism, which allowed external (state and NSA) to interfere in Nigerian domestic affairs.

Dr. Najimdeen Bakare is Associate Professor at the Centre for International Peace & Stability (CIPS), Department of Peace and Conflict Studies, National University of Sciences & Technology (NUST), Islamabad, Pakistan. His principal areas of interest are EU politics, Global politics, African politics, Issues of European Muslims, Regionalism, Developmental studies, Theories of IR, Minority issues, and (Islamic and Western) Philosophy. In addition to having almost two decades of teaching experience, he is also published (research papers and chapters) reasonably on many issues in different international and local journals and books, which include Journal of Asian and African Studies, Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs, Strategic Studies, Migration Studies, Journals of European Studies, IPRI Journal, Przegląd Strategiczny. Policy Perspectives, NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability, Routledge, Springer, and Rowman & Littlefield, amongst others.

China's smart digital technologies' Impact on Uyghur Muslims

Mettursun Beydulla (George Washington University, USA)

The Chinese government has come to treat almost all expressions of the Uyghur Islamic faith and Uyghur identity as signs of potential religious extremism, terrorism, and ethnic separatism. Since 2017 millions of Uyghurs, including other Turkic Muslims, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz. have moved through detention centers and internment camps. In response to actual and perceived instability, Party authorities have established a sophisticated, multi-layered network of mass surveillance in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region/XUAR/Xinjiang (aka. East Turkistan) as part of Xi Jinping's larger policy for preserving "social stability and enduring peace" in this key frontier region. Surveillance initiatives in China's "Xinjiang" party-state monitoring use automated, technologically advanced methods like GPS, iris scanners, DNA samples, 3D identification, tracking, voice and facial recognition technologies, machine learning algorithms, and other software and hardware in addition to physical monitoring and coerced kinship. Surveillance tactics in "Xinjiang" have included facial recognition cameras, DNA scans, and other technology that keeps close track of personal information and communications. This paper illustrates how the Chinese government exploits technologies to exert more effective surveillance or policing of individuals and the opposition/dissidents. This study examines how Uyghurs' use of digital technologies, at home, and in the Diaspora, manages to keep them in contact, get the news out, and stay in touch with families and other activists. This paper also demonstrates how political activists and organizations in the diaspora devise strategies to circumvent the suppression from the Chinese regime mediated by technologies and shows how digital communication technologies enable new and influence established tactics of Chinese state repression beyond borders.

Dr. Mettursun Beydulla specializes in Uyghur language, literature, culture, China's policies in the "Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region", Uyghur diasporas, and Turkish language and culture. He has presented at a variety of venues, and he authored a book, book chapters, and numerous professional journal articles on a wide range of topics in English, Turkish, and Uyghur. Dr. Beydulla is a native Uyghur. He received a BA in Chinese history from Shaanxi Normal University in Xi'an and an MA in Turkish history and a Ph.D. in Social/Cultural Anthropology from Ankara University, Turkey. For his dissertation, he produced a foundational study of village life in Khotan, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, China (aka. East Turkistan), which was later published in the Central Asian Survey. He researched and taught Uyghur at the American University in Cairo in 2006, and was a visiting scholar at Harvard in 2007 through the "Scholars at Risk" program. September 2008 – June 2013, he conducted research and taught Uyghur language, literature, and culture at Harvard and MIT. As an Assistant Professor, he taught at Fatih University, Istanbul from July 2013 to June 2016. While there, he started an Uyghur diaspora project. Since the fall of 2016, he has taught Uyghur and Turkish in the DC area. He also supported a number of projects related to Uyghur and Turkish. He was a 2020 EHLS scholar (National Security Education Follow) at Georgetown University.

DAY TWO

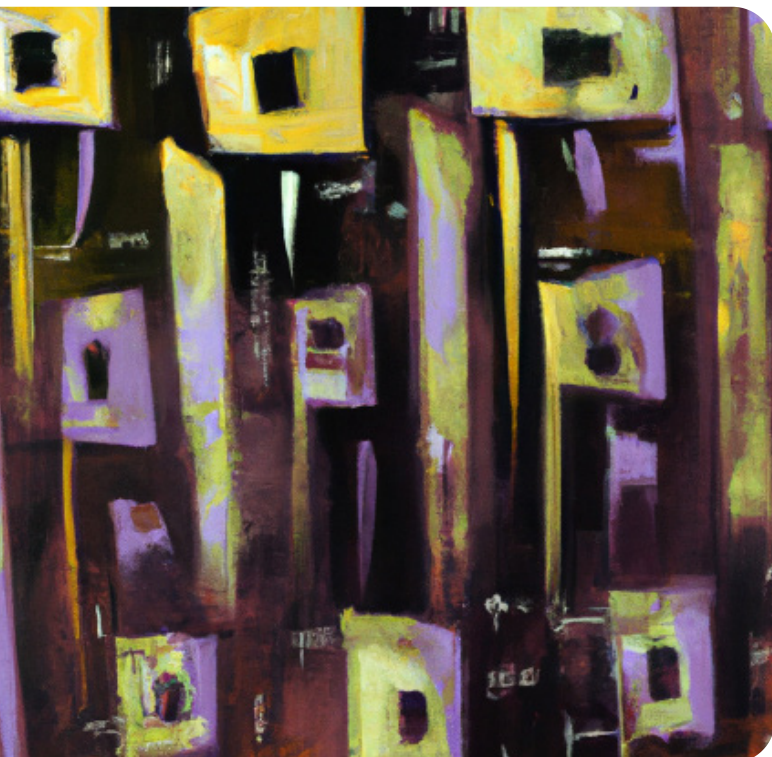
The rising digital authoritarianism in Pakistan

Saeed Ahmed Rid (Quaid-i-Azam University, Pakistan) and
Zahid Shahab Ahmed (Deakin University)

In Pakistan, the speed and scope with which ‘reality distortion’ and ‘fake news’ are spread through social media, and the dissenting voices are trolled on social media and repressed offline; muffles the genuine voices of dissent coming from the marginalized communities like women and religious and political minorities. Moreover, professional journalism is on the decline as the dissenting journalists who do not toe the line of the ‘deep state’ or party in power in Pakistan come under surveillance and are trolled and ridiculed openly in online spaces. In Pakistan, since 2010, the use of digital technologies has increased phenomenally, and professional trolling has emerged as a very important propaganda tool to further political narratives and attack political opponents. Initially, it was only the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) that had a social media wing but now almost every political party including the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has gained more prominence in online spaces and uses similar tactics previously used by PTI. Recently, ‘audio leaks’ and ‘video leaks’ of current and former government officials, for example, opposition leaders, and journalists are released through unknown sources on the dark web to malign, expose and control the dissenting voices of the political opponents. This shows even the private life of the political leadership in Pakistan is under permanent surveillance. Within this background, this research aims to make an important contribution by examining how digital technologies are used for repression by state authorities and how various actors, such as opposition parties and civil society, react to increasing digital authoritarianism in Pakistan.

Dr. Saeed Ahmed Rid is an Assistant Professor at the National Institute of Pakistan Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad. He was a Visiting Fellow at South Asian Studies, School of Interdisciplinary Area Studies, University of Oxford, UK from October 2017 to August 2018. He did his PhD in Peace Studies at the University of Bradford, UK as a Commonwealth Scholar. Dr. Rid also won Rotary World Peace Fellowship (2004-06) for his double master’s in political science and International and Area Studies at the University of California Berkeley, USA. His research work is focused on India-Pakistan relations, democracy, federalism, governance and peace, and conflict in South Asia. He has read research papers in various international and national conferences and has published five books/monographs and more than twenty research articles in reputed national and international journals on peace and conflict-related issues in Pakistan.

Dr Zahid Shahab Ahmed is a Senior Research Fellow at Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalization, Deakin University, Australia. He is also a Non-Resident Research Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore. During 2017-19, Dr Ahmed was a Non-Resident Research Fellow with the University of Southern California’s Center on Public Diplomacy. During 2013-16, he was an Assistant Professor at the Centre for International Peace and Stability, National University of Sciences and Technology in Pakistan. His work focuses on political developments and groups (e.g., democratization, authoritarianism and political Islam), foreign affairs, peace and security in South Asia and the Middle East.



DAY TWO



Epistemic Contestations and Use/Misuse of OSINT in India

Feeza Vasudeva (University of Helsinki, Finland)

The assembling of information from open internet-based sources using Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) is playing an increasingly prominent role in building narratives of 'truth.' OSINT has become a powerful arsenal for journalists, researchers, and other involved actors to counteract the wave of mis/disinformation. However, the same tool is also used by ring-wing authoritarian forces to delegitimize knowledge streams and systems that are critical of the government, as we see in the case of India under the leadership of Narendra Modi. Thus, while OSINT has the potential to subvert authoritarian forces, it can potentially be used to construct false narratives, thereby leading to epistemic contestations. This paper aims to map the underexplored landscape of OSINT in India, and to see how ring-wing and counteractive forces are building various narratives using OSINT. Finally, the article aims to highlight how OSINT can still be a powerful tool to counter post-truth narratives.

Dr. Feeza Vasudeva is a postdoctoral researcher at the Helsinki Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Helsinki, Finland. She is a part of Datafication of the Society Project which seeks to understand contested epistemic communities and authorities and aims to explore data as part of socio-political and cultural processes. Feeza has previously worked, among other things on the violence of lynching in India and America, the spread of violence vis-à-vis technological platforms as well as the role of misinformation in hybrid media platforms. She is also a part of the Religion, Media, and Social Change Hub at the University of Helsinki.

Circumventing Internet Shutdowns: The Case of Myanmar

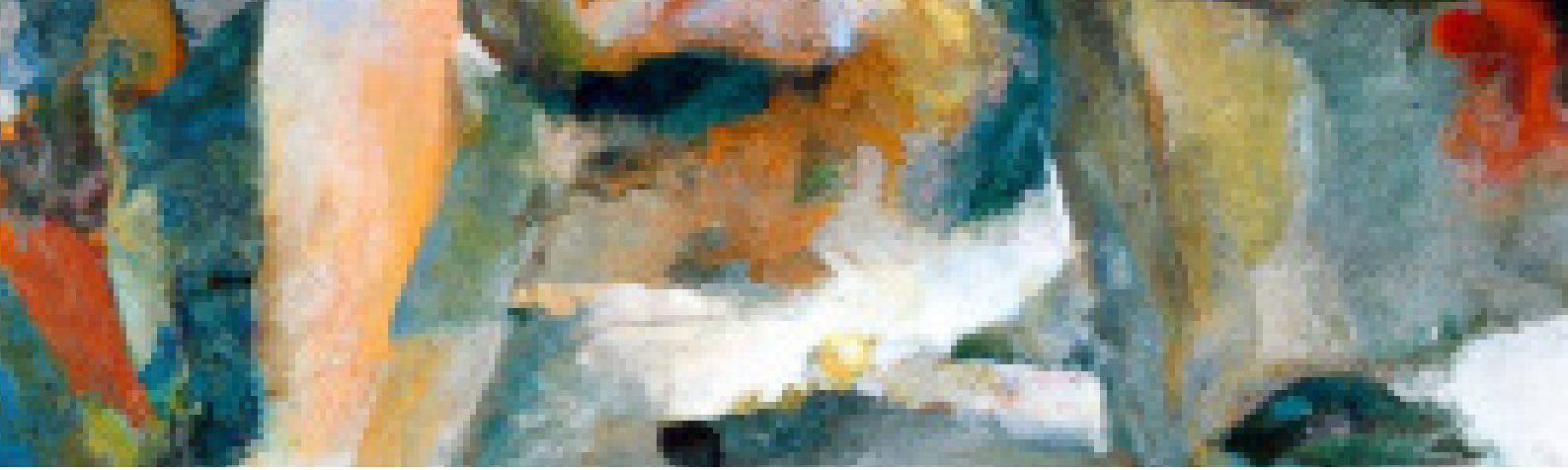
Julia Ryng and Guillemette Guicherd (London School of Economics, UK)

This chapter explores the impact of repressive internet governance on the ability to speak truth to power. In particular, it discusses the lived realities of activists operating under a digital authoritarian regime and the consequences of internet authoritarianism on human rights reporting. Literature on digital authoritarianism centers mainly on China and analyses all types of digital technologies used for the maintenance of state power, from facial recognition technology to the open-air prison in Xinjiang. Analyses focusing on internet authoritarianism alone are rare, and this chapter seeks to provide one whilst also adding to the literature on transnational activism and human rights work. The term activist will be used to refer to a range of individuals and groups engaged in social movement work. This includes journalists reporting on politically sensitive information due to the repressive treatment they receive under digital authoritarian regimes. State interference with access to or general use of the Internet has a direct impact on the ability of activists to communicate and coordinate their work, whether this is on a local or transnational level. Understanding this impact is the first step in the process of developing transnational circumvention strategies against Internet authoritarianism.

Julia Ryng is a Project Researcher at the LSE IDEAS Digital IR in the Information Age Project and Project Manager for the LSE Global Economic Governance Commission. She also co-founded and convenes the LSE IDEAS Russia-Ukraine Dialogues event series. She is a PhD candidate in Film Studies at University College London, where she researches the use of audio-visual technology as a tool of activism in the Polish context. Julia has an undergraduate degree in Law from Durham University and an MSc in Human Rights from LSE. Her expertise centers on international law, human rights, digital rights, and gender studies. She has been published in *New Eastern Europe Journal*, by LSE IDEAS and Jagiellonian University, Krakow.

Guillemette Guicherd is a Programme and Research Associate at LSE IDEAS. She is also a teaching assistant at Sciences Po Paris for the Human Rights, Economic Development, and Globalisation Law Clinic. She has an undergraduate degree in Liberal Arts (Law, Politics and Development Studies) from University College Utrecht, an MSc in Human Rights and Humanitarian Action from Sciences Po Paris and an MSc in International Relations from the LSE. Her expertise and research interests revolve around foreign policy analysis, digital rights, digital democracy and the role of private actors in furthering and protecting human rights

DAY THREE



The Methods and Instruments of digital authoritarianism in Turkey and the Role of AKtrolls in Online/offline intimidation

Bulent Kenes (European Centre for Populism Studies, Belgium) and Ihsan Yilmaz (Deakin University)

Chapter presents an investigation of the methods and instruments employed by Turkey's AKP government in the domain of digital authoritarianism. By adopting a theoretical framework that underscores the utilization of strategies from the digital authoritarian toolkit by the populist Erdogan regime, the chapter endeavors to explore the nature of digital authoritarianism as exhibited by this regime. While existing scholarship on digital authoritarianism often highlights a hybrid model characterized by the amalgamation of methods employed by China and Russia to exert control over the digital sphere and traditional media, our chapter posits that the Erdogan regime predominantly draws inspiration from or emulates the Russian model of digital authoritarianism, albeit with discernible traces of China's surveillant approach. Consequently, this chapter primarily canters its focus on the utilization of Russian-style strategies of digital authoritarianism in Turkey. These strategies encompass first-, second-, and third-generation controls in cyberspace, including but not limited to filtering and blocking, the enactment of legal restrictions, content removal requests, technical shutdowns of websites, and computer network attacks. Additionally, this chapter delves into warrantless surveillance, the efforts to establish "national cyber-zones," state-sponsored information campaigns, manipulation and dissemination of disinformation, direct physical actions aimed at silencing individuals or groups, the instrumentalization of legislation and regulatory bodies, weaponization of the legal framework, and targeted persecution against critical netizens. Last, but not least, this chapter places particular emphasis on elucidating the role of AKtrolls in perpetrating online intimidation during pivotal moments in Turkish politics.

Bulent Kenes (Ph.D.) is an academic and journalist who has over 25 years of professional experience. He has managed multiple publications, both in Turkish and English. He has held top editorial positions at various media outlets such as Zaman Daily (foreign news editor & news coordinator), Turkish Daily News (news coordinator), and Anadolu news agency (New York bureau chief). Kenes was editor-in-chief of Bugün Daily (2006) and founding editor-in-chief of Today's Zaman (2007-2016; the paper was seized on March 4, 2016, by the Erdogan regime and formally closed in July 2016). Kenes was among the founders of the Stockholm Center for Freedom. He served as a voluntary chief editor from 2017-2019. He is based in Stockholm, where he lives as an exiled Turkish journalist and academic. He is also among the founders of the European Center for Populism Studies (ECPS). Kenes is also a member of the Swedish Union of Journalists (Journalistförbundet).

Professor Ihsan Yilmaz is Research Professor and Chair at the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalization, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. He is also a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at Oxford University's Regent College and the European Center for Populism Studies, Brussels. Previously, he worked at the Universities of Oxford and London and has a strong track record of leading multi-site international research projects funded by the Australian Research Council, Victorian and Australian Governments, and the Gerda Henkel Foundation. He has been working on authoritarianism, digital authoritarianism, populism, religion and politics with special emphasis on Turkey, Indonesia and Pakistan, and Muslim diasporas in the West.

DAY THREE



Technologies Power and Contestation: Turkish Democracy and The Rise of Hacktivists and Trolls in the Turkish Media Ecosystem

Murat Akser (Ulster University, UK)

Turkish media is now a captured media with the AKP government controlling more than 90 percent of all print, broadcast, and electronic media outlets. While legacy media are losing their objectivity, relevance and audience, digital media is emerging as an area of freedom and contestation. Online platforms such as Bianet and T24 give voice to unemployed journalists, opposition parties and marginalized communities like LGBT individuals and Kurds. A secondary rouge operator is a hacktivist who hacks government websites and other government-friendly news media outlets or leaks important documents that showcase AKP's governmental incompetence. To counter the growing online presence of the oppositional parties, AKP government responded by passing laws limiting online media and supporting undercover online media troll armies. This chapter will focus on the sustainability of online democracy in the face of an increasingly authoritarian government in the new Turkish media ecosystem. Special attention will be on online political activist organizations and their strategies to fight against suppression from AKP's authoritarian regime and how these are mediated by new online media technologies.

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Political Activism: How are Bangladeshi exiled activists working against authoritarianism?

Saimum Parvez (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium)

After the widespread rigged election in 2018, independent think tanks, such as Sweden-based V-Dem Institute and Germany-based Bertelsmann Foundation, categorized Bangladesh as an autocracy. In recent years, hundreds of journalists, academics, and opposition activists were arrested for merely criticizing the government under the Digital Security Act (DSA) 2018. On 10 December 2021, the U.S. Department of the Treasury imposed sanctions on the elite force, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), Police Chief, and 5 former and current RAB officials for their connection to human rights abuse and repression in Bangladesh. Instead of the Bangladeshi authoritarian regime's suppression mediated by digital media, many dissent voices have been actively campaigning against the regime. Many of these dissenters live abroad and use communication technologies to protest and gather public support against the government. This proposed chapter explores how the Internet work as a double-edged sword by analyzing the mechanism of the Bangladeshi authoritarian government to assert political control of the Internet and how the exiled political activists devise strategies to bypass the government's control measures. This chapter will collect data through in-depth interviews of the exiled dissenters in Germany, Italy, and the UK, and document analysis.

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DAY THREE

