Social Movements, Marginalized Groups, and the Internet: Issues for Researchers and Librarians

A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Annotated by Erin Daix, Paul Kauppila, Cathy Moore-Jansen, Rhonda Neugebauer, Elizabeth Sibley, and Sara Williams

Compiled by Sara Williams

JOURNAL ARTICLES AND PAPERS


The author describes how the East Burma Coalition formed BurmaNet, an email news service, to organize opposition to the military junta ruling Myanmar.


The political uses of the Internet in Malaysia, Myanmar, East Timor, and Indonesia are discussed.

The magazine Tunnel focuses on issues central to China as well as those discussed by dissidents. This article examines the process of how articles for this electronic journal are written in China, published in the United States, and made available on the Internet.


This report describes how Internet centers in Palestinian refugee camps teach people how to use computers and set up web sites for refugee news, information, and history.


Ayres investigates how the Internet is being used for the diffusion of protest ideas and tactics efficiently and quickly around the world. He also examines how the power of the Internet can be used to turn unreliable and unverifiable information from fiction to fact.


Belejäk discusses how political activists in Brazil are using the Internet for sharing strategies, policies, and plans. She examines how the gap between “the slow” and “the connected” may be growing larger.


The authors argue that the open structure and low cost of the Internet make it a place where people can participate fully in democracy by developing grassroots political efforts.


Bimber addresses “the causal role of communication in public life” by offering a view that moderates between those who believe the Internet will democratize the political process by undermining the traditional elite power groups and those who believe the Internet will enhance community building through a restructuring of the existing social order.
Although the Internet has proven a formidable tool against authoritarian regimes in countries where NGOs and other activists can gain access, Cuba has been successful in controlling NGO and dissident access to the Internet. Boas examines United States policy regarding information flow between the United States and Cuba, and Castro’s response.


Electronic NGO networks have been increasingly used to mobilize opposition to the policies of national governments and to international agreements. A catalyst for this growth was the 1994 indigenous Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico which successfully utilized the Internet for rapid dissemination of information and organization. The pro-Zapatista mobilization has inspired and stimulated a number of grassroots political efforts in dozens of countries.


The author contends that the distribution of information is playing a more critical role than the production and distribution of goods in the social organization of society. He looks at the role and impact of the new information and communication technologies on the process of political representation.


The Internet is offering new opportunities for protest groups to challenge the establishment. The new technology has helped to reduce the imbalance between these groups and their opponents which are often large multinational corporations, and made it possible for activists around the world to form coalitions and work for social change.

Froehling examines the role the Internet played in rallying support for the Chiapas uprising of 1994. The possibilities and limitations of the Net as a tool for social movements is discussed.


The author looks at ways that the Internet will enhance opportunities for democracy in China despite limitations on freedom of speech by the Chinese government.


Green discussed the power of the Internet to threaten the political order in China. Although the Chinese Communist Party is actively encouraging its use as a means of supporting economic growth, the government has introduced institutional controls to minimize its possible threat as a tool of democracy. He argues that the Internet will probably not encourage serious alternative politics in China unless the party should fall into more widespread disfavor.


The authors address the impact of electronic networking on the lesbian and gay community and the delivery of social services. They include a list of Internet sites that provide information, referral, and resources for the lesbian and gay community.


This essay argues that Internet activists have succeeded in making government and political information available to “netizens”, but have done less well in creating significant, stable audiences and in commanding the attention of decision makers. Hurwitz argues that the Internet will prove to be most useful for activists organizing collective calls for democratic action.

This is a brief commentary on a Rutgers University study, “The State of Electronically Enhanced Democracy”. The study indicates that although genuine political discourse on the Internet may be difficult, the Internet has the potential for becoming a major tool for promoting democracy as it is relatively free from government intrusion and naturally fosters communication among citizens.


Kirchhoff describes efforts to pass a bill expanding health care for disabled workers, including a grassroots email campaign that demonstrated the power of the Internet to enable those once isolated with limited physical mobility to mount an effective response to efforts to defeat the bill.


Knudson provides a detailed description of how the Chiapas rebellion in Mexico was “fought” via the Internet. His analysis is based on results of computer searches of major United States newspapers on the rebellion between 1994 and 1996. He argues that the Internet was pivotal in bringing about the first round of peace talks and in gaining recognition of , among other things, the autonomy of Mexican Indians.


Kouyoumdjian examines recent trends in Internet usage by Japanese women. The author discusses how Internet empowerment may enable Japanese women to move beyond traditional patriarchal and ageist constraints.


Lewis discusses how the Internet might mitigate Americans’ cynicism about government through improved access, information, and opportunities for participation. Ways in which the Internet can reinforce traditional ideals include citizen access to city, state and federal agency web sites and “electronic town halls”. However, the author also cautions against
using the Internet as a tool for direct democracy, citing the possible dangers of decision-making becoming the equivalent of “instant poll-taking”.


The Internet has facilitated a dramatic upsurge in communication and networking among members of groups who have been traditionally excluded from mainstream culture. The article describes Internet resources of interest to transgendered individuals.


The Internet conflict between Scientology and its critics is presented as a case study in movement/countermovement interaction. However, the unique quality of Internet communication requires modifications to traditional mobilization theory. The author suggests specific changes to mobilization theory, including recognition of the diminished role of the state (since the Internet has no central governing body).


With this special issue, the authors have collectively coined the term “netwar” to describe information-age social conflict occurring in networked organizations. Netwar is about doctrines and organizational strategies in the non-military end of the conflict spectrum. The articles address conceptual and theoretical issues, and present case studies.


The articles in this special issue address the Internet as the dominant information and communication tool impacting the political process. The instantaneous and location-independent nature of electronic organizational communications are altering democratic opportunities and methods. The authors present models, case studies, and analyses, largely from the governmental point of view.
The Internet is touted as a “necessary but not sufficient” tool to complement or support the social goals of disenfranchised groups. The authors warn that individualistic, dissident and other factions presenting ideas outside the mainstream face obstacles in cyberspace that mimic those found in the real world, and that electronic communication is not “inherently democratic”.


Zulu coins the phrase “information apartheid” to describe the systematic attempt by powerful elites to restrict or deny access to information by marginalized, less-powerful groups. These policies and practices, racist and imperialistic in a way similar to apartheid practice in South Africa before the election of Nelson Mandela, have yet to come under international, or even national scrutiny. Thus, they continue at present with little vocal criticism.

---

**ELECTRONIC RESOURCES AND WEB SITES**

- **Indigenous Peoples**
  
  [http://www.igc.org/igc/issues/ip/or.html](http://www.igc.org/igc/issues/ip/or.html)

  This is a section of the website of the Institute for Global Communications, the U.S. member of the Association for Progressive Communications, a global network of independently operated progressive networks.

- **Native Web**
  
  [http://www.nativeweb.org](http://www.nativeweb.org)

  NativeWeb, resources for Indigenous Cultures Around the World, provides broad coverage of indigenous issues. The site, in existence since 1994, includes many unique resources compiled by specialists in order to facilitate research and communication among indigenous peoples.
• The South and Meso American Indian Rights Center
  http://saiic.nativeweb.org
  Since its founding in 1983, the Center has disseminated news and analysis and provided educational and activist resources to support indigenous rights, self-determination and organizing. It offers an array of materials on Latin American indigenous groups, and on territorial, environmental and development issues.

• Zapatistas in Cyberspace, a guide to analysis and resources
  http://www.eco.utexas.edu/homepages/faculty/cleaver/zapsincyber.html
  Written and published by Harry Cleaver, associate professor of economics at the University of Texas at Austin, this document is a guide to several dozen Zapatista related resources. In existence on the Internet since 1996, it includes links to articles, Internet lists and newsgroups, WWW sites, and archives in support of indigenous movements in Mexico.