

Politics

Wednesday, October 22

Government and Politics

A **government** is the system by which a community is organized

What is the purpose of government?

- Establish and enforce regulations for coordination and competition among individuals
- Pursue the common goals and fulfill the shared needs of the governed community
- Oppress some groups for the benefit of others

What is politics?

- The process by which governments are selected, empowered, and challenged

Democratizing Uses of Technology

Individuals are empowered by their ability to **access information** and **communicate**

- The Internet provides unprecedented access to both data and opinions
- Research suggests that people only seek out opinions with which they already agree
- "What information consumes is rather obvious: it consumes the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it." - Herbert Simon, *Designing Organizations for an Information-Rich World*

Groups are empowered by their ability to **coordinate** and **attract assistance**

- "Twitter revolutions" in Moldova '09, Iran '09, Tunisia '10, Egypt '11, Ukraine '13
- #Jan25th drew a crowd of 80,000 in Cairo, then Egypt shut down all Twitter access
- International attention increases the cost of suppression by exposing the consequences

Coercive Uses of Technology

Tools of Suppression

- Tracking dissidents and their communications

Targeted campaigning

- US political parties now track political affiliation, likeliness to vote, and potential for persuasion of every eligible voter
- Benefit: Increased voter registration and turn-out
- Cost: People may vote against their own interests due to partial information

Gerrymandering (manipulating district boundaries to favor a particular group)

- *Representative democracy* is a system in which individual interests are represented by elected officials
- In the 2012 national election, Democrats received 1.4 million more votes for the House of Representatives, yet Republicans won control of the House by a 234 to 201 margin

Voting

2000 presidential election increased excitement for Internet and electronic voting

System requirements: Accuracy & Anonymity

- In Fairfax County, Virginia in 2003, a programming error in the electronic-voting machines caused them to mysteriously subtract 100 votes from one candidate's totals.
- In Volusia County, Florida in 2000, an electronic voting machine gave Al Gore a final vote count of -16,022 votes.
- Electronic voting in California: [The top-to-bottom review of 2006](#)

Suggested improvements to electronic voting machines

- Voter-verifiable paper audit trails that are collected to enable a manual re-count
- Open-source software and hardware that is available for public scrutiny