

Managing Volatility with the Expanded Access to Information in Fragile States

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INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT) AND HEIGHTENED VOLATILITY IN AN EVOLVING SECURITY LANDSCAPE

In an eighteen-minute video uploaded to YouTube on May 1, 2012, the militant Nigerian Islamist group, Boko Haram, captured live footage of the bombing of the *This Day* newspaper offices in Abuja earlier that day in which eight people were killed and scores more seriously injured. In claiming responsibility, the group justified the attack for what it contended was the newspaper's favorable treatment of the government in its fight against the extremist group. Boko Haram warned of more such attacks against other media outlets unless their coverage of its movement improved. Several months later, more than thirty cellphone towers were destroyed in northeast Nigeria, Boko Haram's base, disrupting cellphone and Internet service. The targeting of the communications sector is revealing not just for the psychological impact, a common aim of terrorist attacks, but by the explicit effort to shape the group's image to the public.

In India, short message service (SMS), i.e., texting, and social media posts in August 2012 spreading rumors of imminent ethnic violence against As-

samese minorities living in southern Indian cities such as Bangalore set off a mass exodus of tens and possibly hundreds of thousands of people. Train platforms were swarmed with panic-stricken families attempting to flee, forcing authorities to add train departures to accommodate the crush. The rumors were all the more believable in that they were supported by graphic photos and video images of casualties purportedly of attacks already begun. Only later was it realized that these images were falsely identified earthquake victims. In the attempt to curb the exodus, the Indian government banned mass texting for two weeks and blocked roughly 250 websites allegedly hosting inflammatory content.

In September 2012, an incendiary amateur video denigrating to Islam was uploaded to YouTube by its U.S. provocateurs, sparking protests and attacks on U.S. diplomatic missions throughout the Muslim world. The attacks in Benghazi, Libya, resulted in the burning of the U.S. consulate and the deaths of four U.S. embassy officials, including the ambassador. While linked to extremist Islamist groups, the attacks highlighted the fragility of Libyan state institutions at the early stages of transitioning from over four decades of coercive rule by Moummar Qaddafi.

These incidents demonstrate the heightened potential for volatility made possible by the grow-

ing accessibility of information and communications technology (ICT). This risk dovetails with the increasingly prominent role played by nonstate actors in the panoply of global security threats. The network of Al Qaeda franchises, transnational organized criminal networks, narcotics traffickers, piracy syndicates, warlords, urban gangs, and extremist groups all pose ever more destabilizing threats to international security. ICT has asymmetrically enabled the capability of these relatively small outfits with otherwise limited conventional military power by facilitating these groups' ability to communicate, plan, gather information, transfer funds, organize themselves, and establish command-and-control networks from disparate and at times highly isolated locations around the world. The global positioning system (GPS) and navigational technologies allow traffickers to evade detection and safely cross borders at will across vast stretches of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, and the Mediterranean. Mexican drug cartels use mapping software that tracks the location of police from high-tech control rooms.¹

The security implications of these unconventional threats are nontrivial. As seen in Mexico, once criminal networks are well entrenched, the costs involved in uprooting them by even a relatively capable state are enormous. Mexico has suffered forty-seven thousand violent deaths in its fight against its narcotics networks since 2006, putting it far over the one thousand deaths per year threshold of an armed conflict. The global drug trade is estimated to involve at least \$322 billion each year, reflecting the stakes and potential coercive capacity of these organizations while distorting the economies where these transactions occur at the expense of productive investments. In Africa, the growing collaboration between narcotics traffickers and Islamic militants has caused large swaths of the Sahel to fall out of state control. Oil bunkering is estimated to cost Nigeria 10 percent of its total oil revenues. Mean-

while, a single attack in the oil-rich Niger Delta can cost global consumers billions in increased prices.²

The developmental costs of this instability are, likewise, substantial. No conflict-affected country has yet achieved a single Millennium Development Goal.³ Similar patterns are observed at the subnational level. Marginalized areas tend to experience more instability and continued deprivation. The instability caused by militias in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, costs thousands of lives, limits movement into or out of the area, and has forfeited countless children their access to a meaningful education. Countries affected by major conflict since 1980, over 90 percent of which are internal, are likely to have a poverty rate that is 21 percentage points higher than a country without armed violence.⁴ The "piracy premium" insurance companies are charging shipping lines for cargo passing through the Red Sea or Gulf of Guinea significantly increases the cost of trade in Africa, limiting export opportunities and access to inputs.

In short, ICT-enabled nonstate actors pose an escalating risk of volatility in poor or weak states that is increasingly capable of disrupting the global system.

INFORMATION AND VULNERABILITY TO NONSTATE THREATS

The networked nature of these emerging, transnational nonstate threats allows them to move operations and resources as required regardless of national boundaries. Nonetheless, these nonstate organizations need bases of operation outside the purview of an intrusive state with interdiction capacity. Consequently, the global system's weak link—fragile states, with their porous borders and limited capacity, are an attractive forward base and enabler for these illicit networks. Illustratively, Al Qaeda made its first inroads in Sudan and Afghanistan. Its main subsidiaries are now in Yemen and the

Sahel. Piracy in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Guinea is largely a function of the lawlessness and absence of state capacity in Somalia and parts of Nigeria and Cameroon. Latin American cocaine networks have increasingly used Africa as a transshipment point because of its relatively weaker controls. The shantytowns expanding around many urban areas in the developing world have spawned a spate of organized criminal gangs that thrive in environments with little or no police capacity. Militias like the Lord's Resistance Army have sustained themselves for years in the largely lawless border areas of northern Uganda, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic. Reducing the scope for nonstate security threats, then, is linked to strengthening the capacity of these fragile states. In a globalized environment, enhanced stability in one state contributes to greater stability overall.

As one would expect, fragile states tend to have high levels of poverty. Of the twenty-eight countries listed on the Center for Systemic Peace's State Fragility Index as facing high or extreme fragility, twenty-four are also considered low income (even though roughly half of these are natural resource rich). Low-income countries, in turn, are also more susceptible to conflict. Since 1990, low-income countries have been in conflict one year out of four, on average. Fragile states are also typically characterized by low levels of legitimacy. Twenty of these twenty-eight fragile states are autocracies of one type or another. They govern, by definition, with a narrow base of power, usually involving a combination of political party, ethnic group, or geographic affiliation, along with control of the security sector. To maintain the support of this base, state resources and privileges are typically disproportionately directed to those within the ruling coalition. Over time, this leads to ever-greater disparities within a society. Coercion can maintain a degree of stability for some time, though eventually the combination of disenfranchisement, inequities in wealth and op-

portunity, and perceptions of injustice all contribute to higher propensities for conflict.⁵

Weak governance and capacity in these states also makes them vulnerable to cooption by nonstate actors, the preferred method of operation for illicit trafficking organizations, which thrive by not drawing attention to themselves or directly confronting state actors. To the extent that corruption is perceived as a "normal" way to get ahead, government officials will be receptive to entreaties from these illicit networks. The hierarchal structure of most autocratic states, moreover, makes it easy for narcotics syndicates to gain expansive access to government support once the traffickers have coopted a senior official. This has long been seen in Latin America, where politicians, the police, judges, key bureaucrats, and oversight officials are regularly brought onto the payroll of narcotics networks. Similar patterns exist in Central Asia and have been emerging in Africa.

Fragile states, regardless of their level of legitimacy, also provide a ready opening for "spoilers." These are individuals or groups that draw on or create perceptions of relative deprivation along ethnic or religious lines by presenting a narrative that portrays the marginalized population as victims of government policies attempting to mobilize an identity group to violence in order to reclaim their rights. An illustration of such a narrative is a statement from Abu Qaqa, a spokesman for Boko Haram, who said in January 2012 "we have been motivated by the stark injustice in the land. . . . Poor people are tired of the injustice, people are crying for saviors and they know the messiahs are Boko Haram."⁶

Given its mass personal reach and low cost relative to conventional communication channels, access to ICT greatly enables spoilers' capacity to convey their narrative. Governments that have a track record of corruption and fostering disparities stoke such characterizations. Even if the charges levied are unfounded, such polarizing claims are likely to

resonate, especially if levels of trust for the government are low. And economic deprivation is a key mobilizer. According to the 2011 World Development Report, unemployment was by far the most commonly cited reason by members of gangs and insurgent groups for why they joined the movement. The widespread poverty in marginalized areas of fragile states makes these populations susceptible to recruitment by illicit or violent organizations, providing the foot soldiers and community cooperation needed for these insurgent networks to sustain themselves over time. These populations are the key target audience of this messaging campaign.

While legitimacy is in many ways a necessary condition for mitigating grievances, it is insufficient to ensure stability. If able, spoilers will use violence to destabilize a legitimate, though weak, government and intimidate a population in order to elevate the spoiler's influence. Such was the approach used by Islamic militants in northern Mali who had been eroding government authority for several years before gaining effective control of this territory (two-thirds of the country's land area) in April 2012, following a coup of the democratic government in Bamako by disgruntled, low-ranking military officers. Accordingly, legitimate governments must be capable of defending themselves and their populations from destabilization. Among other things, this means establishing a capable security sector and being able to deliver basic development benefits valued by citizens while maintaining social cohesion in the face of efforts to fragment the populace along ethnic or geographic lines.

In other words, there is a powerful psychological dimension to the struggle with nonstate actors. While genuine grievances undoubtedly exist in every society, the degree to which the public views a government as illegitimate, corrupt, and responsible for systemic inequities, the more susceptible it is to instability. Winning the battle for public support, then, is the lynchpin for the development-security

nexus in fragile states. And, for this, information is a vital tool.

ICT LINKAGES TO SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

While ICT can amplify the reach of violent non-state actors, it can also be a force for development and stability. Societies that have relatively greater access to information and independent perspectives are exposed to a more vibrant marketplace of ideas. Authorities are required to respond to alternative proposals and, in the process, justify their policy choices, leading to fewer ideologically driven and unchallenged policies. More open information environments, similarly, marginalize claims by radical groups or spoilers that can be held up to critical scrutiny and contested, something that many moderate imams in northern Nigeria have done vis-à-vis Boko Haram (sometimes generating a violent response).

Greater access to information also facilitates the sharing of development lessons learned, the adoption of best practices, and the introduction of new ideas and technologies from outside the society that improve living standards. With greater access to information, watchdog groups are better able to assess governmental budget priorities and allocations. This reduces the scope for corruption and improves the efficiency and equity of government. Greater levels of transparency and oversight, accordingly, contribute to greater stability.

ICT also contributes to greater legitimacy, one of the key stabilizing factors of fragile states. Election monitoring groups are able to conduct parallel vote counts at each local polling station and report these results back to a central headquarters, enabling real-time projections that challenge dubious official results. The growing ubiquity of mobile phones with video camera capability is also expanding the capac-

ity of citizens to document abuses in the electoral process. It was through such methods that blatant ballot-stuffing during Russia's December 2011 parliamentary elections for President Vladimir Putin's United Russia Party was captured and disseminated on the Internet. The effect was to badly discredit Mr. Putin's claims of legitimacy. ICT was also believed to have contributed to what were hailed as Nigeria's cleanest elections ever in April 2011.⁷ ICT is therefore redefining relations between governments and societies.

The ability of citizens to quickly access information from multiple sources is also fostering more accountable governance by making it harder for exclusionary powers to maintain their monopolies on information. Cellphones with the capacity for texting and access to Facebook and Twitter are providing citizens in many low-income countries with the enhanced ability to exchange information horizontally in a society, thereby reducing a key impediment to organizing ordinary citizens around their common interests.⁸ This uphill battle to organize large, disparate populations has historically been a major advantage of autocratic governments and why they have been able to sustain governance and development policies that are injurious to the majority. With the elevated ability for citizens to communicate directly in large numbers, priorities for transparency, equitable development, justice, and participation are more likely to be advanced.

Local communities are now better able to monitor whether the designated expenditures on their local schools and health clinics are being made, while ensuring that local pharmacies remain adequately stocked with needed supplies. Farmers are better able to check prices at all area and regional markets when making planting and harvesting decisions, significantly empowering them in negotiations with marketers. Villagers in remote communities that heretofore have been highly vulnerable to predatory violence by state security forces or militias can

now communicate with other local villages as part of collective security networks as well as notify government or United Nations (UN) agencies of their need for assistance, fostering more timely responses.

Greater access to information also enhances stability by contributing to more effective early warning systems in the face of humanitarian crises. More open societies have historically been much more responsive to droughts, earthquakes, hurricanes, and other disasters, because news of an emerging threat is more likely to be communicated to the capital city and disseminated on media outlets. This attention puts pressure on a central government to take urgent action to safeguard the lives of citizens in harm's way. Governments that are seen as unresponsive or incompetent lose the confidence of their populations and are subsequently unable to marshal the public support needed to govern. This feedback loop is one of the reasons democracies are better able to mitigate crises of various types. As Nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen, famously observed, "No substantial famine has ever occurred in any independent country with a democratic form of government and a relatively free press."⁹ In contrast, autocratic governments are regularly the origin of preventable humanitarian crises. With their ability to monopolize the flow of information, they have historically been able to prevent the dissemination of news of such crises and can respond to them as suits the government's interests. The response by the militant group al-Shaabab to the severe East African drought of 2011 is a contemporary case in point to this recurring phenomenon. The group, which effectively controlled large parts of southern and central Somalia at that time, denied international humanitarian assistance agencies access to these areas, resulting in the deaths of untold thousands of Somalis. Neighboring Kenya and Ethiopia, faced with the same climatic conditions, suffered relatively few drought-related deaths.

Greater access to information similarly engages the international community in the build-up to a humanitarian or human rights crisis much sooner than would otherwise be the case. Guided by real-time and more reliable information, international actors are better able to overcome the ignorance that enables collective inaction in the face of systematic human rights abuses. This was seen in the decision by the international community to intervene to stop former Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi's effort to violently repress a popular uprising in the country's second city, Benghazi, in 2011. While international intervention is not the outcome in every case of such state violence (such as in Syria in 2011–2012, largely due to deadlocks at the UN Security Council), the level of international attention and pressure is invariably greater than has been the case in the past, when these abuses took place in obscurity (consider the largely silent international reaction to the estimated twenty thousand to forty thousand deaths in Syria during the Hama massacre of 1982).

These channels by which ICT contributes to transparency and stability coincide with a global pattern of relatively greater development progress and stability observed during the past several decades in which information technologies have become more ubiquitous. For example, the frequency and magnitude of conflict have declined by 60 percent since the mid 1990s, reducing the number of countries in conflict from thirty-five to twenty-one in 2011.¹⁰ While varying from year to year, the number of refugees around the world has similarly declined from eighteen million in 1992 to 10.4 million in 2011. Likewise, infant mortality rates, a reliable barometer for development more generally, have declined by 41 percent since 1990.¹¹ Accordingly, only countries affected by conflict are not on track to meet the Millennium Development Goals of halving poverty by 50 percent from 1990 levels. Annual economic growth rates for low-income countries

have similarly been much more robust since 2005, averaging 3.3 percent (despite the global financial crisis of 2008–2009), than they were from 1990 to 1995, when average growth was effectively flat. Moreover, the variation in these immediate post-Cold War growth rates was more than three times as large, reflecting the greater volatility of that period. Cases of hyperinflation, which were not uncommon up through the early 1990s, are today relatively rare, an indication of the stronger commitment to macroeconomic stabilization and the more active role played by global financial institutions, particularly the International Monetary Fund.

To be sure, there have been other important, overarching global dynamics that have shaped the relatively more stabilizing patterns of the past two decades. These dynamics include the end of the Cold War, the greater willingness of the international community to mount peacekeeping operations in fragile states, the expansion of global trade, and the accelerated dissemination of development technologies, among others. Nonetheless, all of these other phenomena have been significantly enabled by the upsurge in communications capacity during this period.

It is similarly important to recognize that this expansion in the capacity for ordinary citizens to communicate and gain access to unprecedented amounts of information did not unfold in a contextual vacuum. Rather, the surge in ICT occurred simultaneous to the wave of democratization that swept Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa, parts of Asia, and now the Middle East starting in the 1980s. The relatively greater openness of democratic governance structures to the free flow of information has facilitated the diffusion of information technology. Accordingly, it is important to recognize that ICT is part of a broader governance process. The development of an information and communications sector requires if not an enabling environment at least not a hostile one.¹²

In short, the commonly expressed concerns raised at the outset of this essay that the expanding accessibility of ICT is contributing to greater volatility in fragile states has been accompanied by an improvement in the security and development interests of many citizens in low-income countries. That is, the expansion of ICT appears to present a trade-off of greater potential short-term volatility from destabilizing nonstate actors versus the long-term, institutionally based, stability-enhancing benefits.

THE INDISPENSIBLE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND MEDIA

While ICT may be reshaping state-society relations vis-à-vis development and security outcomes, it is important to recognize that, in the end, these are simply tools. In other words, ICT is value neutral. ICT requires reform-minded actors, generally civil society organizations (CSO) and the media, to be transferred into meaningful change for ordinary citizens. In other words, progress only occurs when these tools are anchored in organizational structures that can analyze, inform, and mobilize the majority around key reforms, maintain pressure on government officials for greater transparency and service delivery, and sustain this process over time. The issue of sustainability is particularly important, since institutional change does not happen quickly and is subject to setbacks (witness the challenges facing Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya in the initial stages of their transitions from long-established authoritarian rule). CSOs are particularly critical in sustaining momentum for reforms in these early years of a transition while governance institutions are reconstructed.¹³ In fact, the depth of civil society networks in a society has been shown to be a strong predictor of this resiliency—and the likely success of democratic transitions.¹⁴

Independent media also play an indispensable

role both in gathering and disseminating information to a mass audience, effectively empowering the broader society. Public exposure of corruption and ineffectiveness in the headlines of newspapers, radio, and television broadcasts, in turn, serves as a very powerful catalyst to spur government responsiveness. Founded in 2008, Mozambique's online (and most popular) newspaper, @Verdade (or "Truth" in Portuguese), has helped change the public dialogue by covering household issues like bread subsidies, electricity prices, and crime in the slums. Its investigation into the poor service of the state electricity provider has prompted an official inquiry and improved service.¹⁵

Media and civil society groups also play an instrumental role in generating and using information to improve governance. Research organizations and think tanks use information to contribute to the policy debate with independent analysis that may force government officials to respond to unwelcome data or alter their policy course. Watchdog groups provide the technical expertise to monitor budget expenditures and assess the degree to which these are meeting societal priorities. Human rights groups document and confront governments for abuses of citizens, highlight corruption or injustices in the court system, and advocate for reforms. Professional associations of journalists, teachers, and lawyers can set and uphold standards for their fields while accelerating the pace at which best practices and lessons are learned are disseminated. By identifying bottlenecks to accessing licenses, credit, or regulatory approvals, business associations representing mid- and medium-sized enterprises help level the economic playing field, spurring innovation, productivity, and jobs. In the process, they are strengthening the middle class, widening a potentially powerful constituency group for reform. By organizing workers, labor unions can help mobilize large numbers of workers for broader governance reforms.

The horizontal and vertical networks that these CSOs create have the potential to link societies across ethnic, geographic, and class boundaries, amplifying the effects that any one organization could realize. By doing so, these civil society groups are creating a societal “demand” for better governance and accountability. It is by linking these networks across a society that civil society can be a resilient force for reform in the face of inevitable pushback. CSOs may also have networks outside a country. This accelerates the access to best practices, technical assistance, and funding that can help advance citizen priorities.

ENHANCING ICT’S BENEFICIAL IMPACTS FOR SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

The development-security challenge in fragile states is ultimately a governance process. It often entails a battle for public support from a skeptical populace jaundiced by years of government propaganda and indifference to the concerns of ordinary citizens. This challenge is frequently exacerbated by an antagonist, also vying for popular support, in order to persuade youth in marginalized regions that they should take up arms to redress felt grievances. This struggle is joined by a third force—reformist CSOs and media—that aims to improve norms of transparency and accountability in a society so as to improve security and development. All sides of this struggle are seeking to maximize the impact of new information and communication tools that are potentially decisive to defining public perceptions. Strategies for enhancing the positive repercussions of ICT, therefore, must advance the capacity and effectiveness of reformist actors if they are to be effective.

Recognize that ICT Is Part of the Governance Process

ICT adoption has tended to flourish in more open

societies where governments are more tolerant of the free flow of information. Accordingly, efforts to expand the positive impacts of ICT cannot treat governance as a neutral factor and solely focus on building the technological components. Rather, the type of governance system in place has a major influence in shaping the information environment. Reformers, therefore, should conceive of ICT initiatives from a broader governance framework and encourage norms tolerating dissent, freedom of speech and assembly, transparency, and freedom of information regulations.

Reform-minded domestic and international partners should also recognize that the transparency, stability, and development benefits from ICT do not occur spontaneously but are the result of development and activist organizations that can take advantage of the available information to advance these goals. Since these changes are only realized over time, investment in civil society and media institutions is needed. These domestic actors can then effectively sustain and employ information and communication tools to advance a constructive public debate, educate citizens, expose corruption, and establish public service watchdogs to strengthen accountability and foster needed course corrections. A multiplicity of media and information channels can also have a moderating effect by marginalizing extremist views as outside the mainstream. A broad array of information outlets also facilitates the speed with which rumors can be fact checked and stem the panic that is more likely to emerge when the few available media sources are not trusted.

An inevitable challenge of strengthening the media in fragile states, however, is the risk that media outlets will become platforms for hate speech and incitements to violence. This typically occurs when an outlet is aligned with a particular political party or ethnic group and may be controlled by wealthy patrons or politicians seeking to advance their agenda.

Left unchecked, these media vehicles can be highly polarizing in a society, trumpeting perceived grievances of one identity group vis-à-vis the presumed exploitation by a rival group. Proactive guidelines, ideally crafted with independent journalists, curbing such destructive uses of the media are needed. These must be balanced, however, by strong checks against political actors using such guidelines to stifle criticism.

Protecting Journalists, Bloggers, and Civil Society Organizations

For ICT to have a beneficial effect in a society, those individuals and institutions that are responsible for generating and disseminating information must be protected. By facilitating the flow of information, journalists, bloggers, watchdog groups, and human rights organizations play a unique role in a society by informing the public, fostering public debate, exposing corruption and abuses of power, and encouraging accountability. Since this threatens the privileges of actors who have benefitted from controlled information environments and exclusive governance arrangements, journalists and other information agents are regularly targeted for intimidation, violence, and murder. In fact, roughly seventy-five journalists around the world are killed every year for the stories they write.¹⁶ Yet, over 90 percent of cases where journalists have been murdered go unsolved.¹⁷ Many of these crimes are never even investigated.

More aggressive action is needed. Silencing journalists, after all, is more than an ordinary crime; it denies the entire society of the access to information and analysis that can help citizens make informed judgments on the priority issues faced. All states, especially those that are transitioning or fragile, should therefore be pressed to establish laws that explicitly recognize the basic civil rights of journalists, bloggers, and human rights defenders.¹⁸ This includes decriminalizing charges of libel and

defamation, which are tools frequently used to imprison journalists or cow them into self-censorship. Such statutes should also authorize independent investigations into the suppression of society's "eyes and ears." Since local authorities cannot be counted on to conduct such investigations impartially, these inquiries should be authorized at the national level, possibly with the participation of international partners.

International actors can further undergird efforts to protect journalists by withholding development funding to governments that do not uphold these protections. Doing so is justified not only on human rights grounds but also for development effectiveness. Without journalists and watchdog groups, development assistance will lack transparency and will be much more subject to diversion. Under such conditions, aid is highly vulnerable to inadvertently propping up autocratic systems that are detrimental to both development and security.

A Communications Strategy for a New Era

The greater accessibility of ICT provides new opportunities for governments to communicate directly to and hear from citizens, building a more constructive relationship between the state and society. In some cases, this will be the first occasion citizens will have to state their preferences to those in power. Yet there are relatively few models of governments in fragile states taking advantage of ICT to communicate more effectively with citizens, building the trust and cooperation needed to counter the appeals of spoilers and advance security and development.¹⁹ The challenge is all the more difficult in these contexts because of the legacy of distrust that often exists between the state and its citizens. Still, it is imperative that reformist governments communicate to citizens the initiatives being undertaken to address the priority grievances held by communities. It should not be assumed that these undertakings are well known to the public.

Such communications efforts must be more than mere propaganda or public affairs announcements, however, as these forms of communication are familiar to many societies and will be quickly dismissed. Rather, an authentic communications strategy must be based on a sound array of policy priorities. For many communities in fragile states, this means greater attention to development, in particular, health services, schools, and agriculture, and infrastructural initiatives that can generate a large number of jobs. In this way, development is a tangible arena in which the battle for popular support takes place. That these development programs are conducted in a transparent and equitable manner is also essential in order to convince citizens that public resources are not primarily being used to advance the interests of favored identity groups or patronage networks. Perceptions of corruption are particularly debilitating, as they engender attitudes of injustice and grievance that can be more easily mobilized by spoilers. Governments can also demonstrate their commitment and responsiveness to the security of local communities by establishing ongoing channels of communication with vulnerable towns and villages.

An effective communications strategy will also involve outreach. Studies have shown that public messaging coupled with interpersonal contacts through a trusted network are most effective for generating behavior changes.²⁰ Networks of public health workers or agricultural extensionists, therefore, can be vital components of a communications strategy of development progress (and of government concern for citizens, more generally). CSOs with strong ties to local communities can be vital partners in this process, as well. Such outreach efforts also provide an opportunity to hear from citizens, making the dialogue a two-way process and creating more community ownership over the development efforts undertaken. It is here that ICT tools open more possibilities for direct citizen feed-

back and input to government officials than have previously existed.

In sum, information is and has always been central to the stability equation in fragile states. ICT amplifies this effect—both as an opportunity and as a threat. Given the legacy of distrust, ICT can indelibly reinforce negative reputations for governments. Therefore, it cannot be “business as usual” if these governments hope to gain popular support and stability. New means of communicating authentically to citizens must be learned. More fundamentally, governance standards of legitimacy and accountability will need to be raised in increasingly information-rich societies. Given the greater trust afforded CSOs and the media, these actors have ever more important roles to play in the security-development equation in the ICT era.

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