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"The Two Faces of Twitter: Revolution in a  
Digital Age" by Darrell West*

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## August Roundtable: Introduction

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## August Roundtable: Introduction

### Abstract

An annotation of:

The Two Faces of Twitter: Revolution in a Digital Age. By Darrell West. The Huffington Post. July 30, 2009.

### Keywords

Human rights, Social media, Dissemination of information, Propaganda

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[The Two Faces of Twitter: Revolution in a Digital Age. By Darrell West. \*The Huffington Post\*. July 30, 2009.](#)

An Annotation

New technologies are gaining a more significant role in aiding the understanding of human rights by making people more aware of local struggles and by benefiting social movements through the rapid dissemination of information to better respond to human rights violations, organize political resistance, and gain international support for their cause.

The positive impact of technology on human rights, as presented by Darrell West's article, was evident in the Iranian protests after the presidential election in June. **“The role of Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter in recent Iranian street demonstrations shows the power of digital technologies. Because of their decentralized nature, these tools empower grass-roots activists and help them bypass government authorities.”**

New technologies, however, are not a magic wand to prevent human rights abuses. In some cases, they can even become a powerful source to help abusive governments to continue with their repressive strategies. **“What authoritarian governments need more than anything else in a crackdown is lists of people sympathetic to opposition leaders...New technologies create the option for governments to engage in digital propaganda of their own. There have been news reports of government officials hijacking Moussavi's Facebook page and sending inaccurate information to his followers in an attempt to confuse the opposition.”**

In sum, the use of technologies in political struggles can have two and often contradictory impacts: to foster freedom and political resistance to human rights violations and simultaneously facilitate political repression. Furthermore, as this month's centerpiece and our panelists have underscored in this Roundtable, it is fundamental to keep in mind that technologies on their own are not going to bring about a world free of authoritarianism and where human rights are fully protected. **“To generate fundamental change, it still takes strong leadership, powerful ideas, and people willing to risk arrest and imprisonment.”**

**These issues and others are considered in this month's Roundtable.**