Preface

Technology and particularly the Internet have caused many changes in the realm of politics. Aspects of engineering, computer science, mathematics, or natural science can be applied to politics. Recent revolutions in many countries in the Middle East and North Africa have started in large part due to social networking Websites like Facebook and Twitter. Social networking has also played a role in protests and riots in numerous countries. The whistleblower Website Wikileaks has had a tremendous impact in exposing government corruption. The mainstream media no longer has a monopoly on political commentary, as anybody can set up a blog or post a video online. Political activists can network together online.

*Handbook of Research on Political Activism in the Information Age* includes research chapters from numerous researchers around the world who have done research studies on different aspects of political activism with information technology, engineering, computer science, and math. This book strongly increases our understanding of methods for political activism in the information age, the effectiveness of these methods, and tools for analyzing these methods.

The prospective audience includes, but is not limited to, researchers, political campaign managers and staff, politicians and their staff, political operatives, political and public policy analysts, political scientists, engineers, computer scientists, journalists, professors, students, and individuals working in the fields of politics, e-politics, e-government, new media and communication studies, and Internet marketing.

Researchers and political operatives will be particularly interested in this book to gain a better understanding of methods for political activism in the information age, the effectiveness of these methods, and tools for analyzing these methods. Researchers will be interested in this book for research ideas and to build upon the research presented in their own research.

In “Political Information, Political Power, and People Power: New Media and New Social Movements in the Arab Spring,” Anas Alahmed explores how social media has allowed Arabs to establish the Arab Spring.

In “Social Media for Political Change: The Activists, Governments, and Firms Triangle of Powers during the Arab Movement,” Mohamad Alkhouja discusses the role of social media in the uprisings in the Arab world. The author explores the use of social media from the perspectives of activists, governments, and social media firms, and presents a framework to understand the impact of all three in influencing the usage of social media during the uprisings.

In “The Potential of Political Changes in the Information Age: The Political Challenges Sphere of Saudi Arabia through Citizen Activism,” Anas Alahmed examines how Saudi activists use social media to challenge political authority and the potential of political information and citizen activism to flourish in Saudi Arabia with social media and new media.
In “Identifying Hyperlink Strategies as a Tool to Discover the Connections between Offline and Online Politics,” Keren Sereno examines the hyperlink as a political tool. She does a link analysis of the Websites of 90 Israeli protest nongovernmental organizations and 29 in-depth interviews with these organizations.

In “Cleavages and Links: Mapping Linking Patterns between Israeli Political Websites,” Keren Sereno and Azi Lev-On analyze how ideological cleavage in Israeli society is manifest online. They do a link analysis of the Websites of about 200 political parties, members of parliament, and nongovernmental organizations.

In “Information and Communication Technologies, Democracy, and Human Rights in Nigeria,” Joseph Wilson and Nuhu Gapsiso examine the evolution of information and communication technologies in Nigeria, the role of information and communication technologies in promoting democracy and human rights in Nigeria, and the challenges to overcome in taking advantage of information and communication technologies in promoting democracy and human rights in Nigeria.

In “Memory, National Identity, and Freedom of Expression in the Information Age: Discussing the Taboo in the Zimbabwean Public Sphere,” Shepherd Mpofu examines how new media and information technology have enabled Zimbabweans to have freedom of expression and discuss issues not easily discussed in Zimbabwe.

In “The Virtual Parallax: Imaginations of Mthwakazi Nationalism – Online Discussions and Calls for Self-Determination,” Brilliant Mhlanga and Mandlenkosi Mpofu do a case study of a social network in Zimbabwe to show how the virtual sphere has revolutionized the Habermasian public sphere.

In “The Opportunities and Challenges of Using Email for Political Communication in Authoritarian States: A Case of Zimbabwe’s Media Monitoring Project,” Sam Takavarasha Jr. and Eldred Masunungure use Illich’s concept of conviviality in a case study on how perceived state surveillance disrupted a vibrant communications platform for political mobilization in Zimbabwe. They discuss the challenges and opportunities of using email for political mobilization and warn against uncritical praise of information and communication technologies in political mobilization.


In “Politics 2.0 with Facebook,” Chirag Shah presents a comprehensive overview of research work in social science and political science that uses Facebook as a tool for analyzing various socio-political issues. He discusses several popular approaches for collecting and analyzing data from Facebook and the application of these approaches in understanding public opinion. He introduces handy tools that can help researchers and practitioners easily and effectively gather and analyze a large amount of Facebook data.

In “The Wisconsin Spring,” Jim Jorstad, Jo Arney, Kerry Kuenzi, and Cecilia G. Manrique explore the relationship between social media, information dissemination, and collective action. Their primary example is Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker’s removal of collective bargaining rights of public employees and the protests over that.

In “The Language of Threat in Our Political Discourse,” G. R. Boynton and Glenn W. Richardson Jr. examine negotiating the boundaries of appropriate political discourse on Twitter. They do an in-depth analysis of Twitter communication on the shooting of Representative Gabrielle Giffords, the controversy over Governor Sarah Palin’s violent campaign rhetoric that was blamed for this, and Palin’s defense for this. They also examine talk radio host Rush Limbaugh’s characterization of a student, Sandra Fluke, who testified to a committee of the U.S. House of Representatives.
In “Conceptualizing Network Politics following the Arab Spring,” Ashu M. G. Solo and Jonathan Bishop define a new field called network politics. Network politics refers to politics and networks. These networks include the Internet, private networks, cellular networks, telephone networks, radio networks, television networks, etc. Network politics includes the applications of networks to enable one or more individuals or organizations to engage in political communication, political regulation of networks, and accompanying issues that arise when networks are used for political communication or when there is political regulation of networks. The definition of this field should significantly increase the pace of research and development in this important field.

In “The India against Corruption Movement,” M. V. Rajeev Gowda and Purnima Prakash discuss the India Against Corruption movement and how its leaders used mass media and social media to draw India’s urban middle class onto the streets to protest against government corruption.

In “Corruption in the Public Eye: From Transparency to Publicity,” Elitza Katzarova introduces the concepts of transparency and publicity as analytical tools that can induce social change. The chapter has two case studies that provide insight into the role of traditional media versus new social media. She analyzes the role of Western news coverage in negotiations of the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention and the threat of publicity as a negotiation strategy. In addition, she analyzes the role of social media in the success of the anti-corruption movement in India lead by activist Anna Hazare.

In “Civic Cultures and Skills in European Digital Rights Campaigning,” Yana Breindl uses Dahlgren’s concept of civic cultures to investigate cultural foundations of the European digital rights movement, which has targeted European Union legislation on copyright enforcement, software patents, and the Internet. She investigates how technically skilled actors can significantly affect policymaking.

In “Protesting in a Cultural Frame: How Social Media Was Used by Portuguese ‘Geração à Rasca’ Activists and the M12M Movement,” António Rosas focuses on how Internet technologies were used for political organization and mobilization in the Portuguese Geração à Rasca protests and March 12th Movement.

In “Two Models of Online Petitioning in the United Kingdom,” Johannes Fritz analyzes the model of petition in the legislatures of Scotland and Wales and the model of petition on the prime minister’s Website with respect to political and institutional context, functionality, use, and impact.

In “Googling Democracy: A Comparison of Democracy Promoters on the Internet,” Nelli Babayan and Stefano Braghirolia compare techniques of democracy promotion and compare techniques of publicizing their promotion of democracy by focusing on the online presence of democracy promoters. Their research focuses on the European Union and U.S. Agency for International Development.

In “A New Republic of Letters? The Promise and Potential of the Internet,” John Kane and Haig Patapan argue that e-democratic politics and its hopes of democratizing political authority have mostly not emerged, but social media and its hopes of democratizing knowledge appear to promise a new republic of letters with revolutionary potential. Their chapter examines the nature of the old republic of letters and its fate and assesses the potential of the Internet to change the nature of modern politics.

In “From Politics to E-Politics: Updating Saul Alinsky’s Community Organising Model to Meet the Challenges and Opportunities of Politics in the Information Age,” Sam Takavarasha, Jr., Jonathan Cox, and Stansilas Bigirimana present a systematic approach for renewing traditional political models for the information age by proposing how to update Alinsky’s community organizing model from aspects of President Barack Obama’s 2008 campaign. This chapter prepares strategists and scholars to update their old tested strategies to a new age like Obama’s campaign did.
In “The Internet, National Citizenship, and the ‘Sovereignty Paradox’: Asylum-Seeking Migrants’ Political Agency and ‘Technologized’ Citizenship,” Amadu Wurie Khan explores the potential of the Internet for political agency of asylum seekers and refugees and for challenging the boundaries of national citizenship and state sovereignty.

In “Interaction of Incivility and News Frames in the Political Blogosphere: Consequences and Psychological Mechanisms,” Porismita Borah examines the influence of incivility on news frames for outcomes including willingness to participate, online participation, attitude certainty, news credibility, and political trust.

In “How (Not) to Caffeinate a Political Group: Parent Post Influence on Conversational Network Structure,” Alison N. Novak and Emmanuel Koku investigate language in political forums on the Internet and investigate a connection between post sentiment and network structure. They examine Coffee Party posts on Facebook following the shooting of Representative Gabrielle Giffords in Arizona.

There were 25 chapters accepted from 39 researchers at universities and research institutions in the USA, Australia, Canada, Estonia, Germany, India, Israel, Italy, Malaysia, Nigeria, Portugal, Scotland, South Africa, Wales, and Zimbabwe.

There were many more chapter proposal submissions and chapter submissions than could be accepted. The editorial advisory board is listed in this book. Each of the people on the editorial advisory board helped in editing by reviewing chapters, publicity of the call for chapters, or other work.

Anas Malik Alahmed reviewed two extra chapters. Alison Novak reviewed an extra chapter. Joanna Kulesza reviewed an extra chapter.

The analyses presented make strong research contributions in understanding political activism in the information age, its methods, the effectiveness of these methods, and tools for analyzing these methods. The research in every chapter can be expanded upon, built upon, or used in future research by others, and hence motivates future research by others.

This book is dedicated to family, relatives, and friends. This book is also dedicated to freedom fighters and specifically to the greatest activist, Mahatma Gandhi, who liberated India from the British without war.

The reader may also be interested in reading Political Campaigning in the Information Age, another book edited by me and published by IGI Global. Political Campaigning in the Information Age involves numerous researchers from around the world doing research studies analyzing different aspects of political campaigning and political messaging with information technology and writing chapters on their results. Political Campaigning in the Information Age strongly increases our understanding of methods for political campaigning and political communications in the information age, the effectiveness of these methods, and tools for analyzing these methods.

Ashu M. G. Solo
Maverick Technologies America Inc., USA