

From Liberation to Turmoil: Social Media and Democracy | Journal of Democracy

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Abstract: How can one technology—social media—simultaneously give rise to hopes for liberation in authoritarian regimes, be used for repression by these same regimes, and be harnessed by antisystem actors in democracy? We present a simple framework for reconciling these contradictory developments based on two propositions: 1) that social media give voice to those previously excluded from political discussion by traditional media, and 2) that although social media democratize access to information, the platforms themselves are neither inherently democratic nor nondemocratic, but represent a tool political actors can use for a variety of goals, including, paradoxically, illiberal goals.

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