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THE RIGHT OF REBELLION IN THE DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AGE

ABSTRACT
In the seventeenth century, John Locke, while laying the foundations of the liberal system, was the first to theorise the right of rebellion. Within his framework, revolt against an oppressive regime was considered a collective right. However, as recent attempts at revolution under authoritarian regimes have demonstrated, the exercise of this right can prove challenging in the context of digital technologies. Compared to Locke's era, there are notable developments concerning the motivations, principal actors, and methods of citizen uprisings. Digital technologies have played a significant role not only in facilitating revolts but also in enabling authoritarian restorations. This has underscored the urgency of safeguarding the right to rebellion by updating counterpowers against authoritarian tendencies to address the challenges of the digital age.

KEYWORDS
Locke, liberalism, authoritarianism, digital technologies, right of rebellion

Introduction

Numerous scholars, particularly in the first decade of the century, were convinced that the Internet would bring significant benefits to grassroots movements. They argued that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) would reduce the costs of participation for citizens, enhance individual autonomy, and increase users' political awareness. This, in turn, would not only stimulate public discourse on politically relevant issues but also give rise to innovative forms of activism and engagement (Dahlgren 2000; Girard and Siochrù 2003; Haerpfer et al. 2009).

All this may be feasible within a liberal context, where access to the Internet is universally guaranteed, where website content is not censored (with certain exceptions, such as child pornography), and where citizens are neither prosecuted for publishing anti-government messages nor arrested and tortured for organising street protests via chat rooms. It is worth considering, however,

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what becomes of the use of digital technologies and media in an illiberal and authoritarian context. The analysis of failed revolutions (or those victorious only in their initial phases) in the digital age, in countries such as Iran, Egypt, Hong Kong, and Belarus, raises doubts about the libertarian potential of digital technologies within a hostile political system. What instead emerges are the extensive and often successful efforts of authoritarian regimes to utilise digital media for surveillance and the suppression of individuals' fundamental rights. The use of digital media by police forces, intelligence agencies, and government bodies in tyrannical states poses repressive risks.

Yet, among the most important liberal principles, at least since John Locke (1690), is the right of rebellion. According to Locke, if the state abuses its powers, seriously threatening the liberty, life, and essential well-being of its citizens, the pact between rulers and the people is dissolved, and the latter may "appeal to heaven," taking justice into their own hands. Three centuries later, we recognise that rebellion against a power deemed abusive can, of course, take various forms: from street demonstrations with chants and banners to outright insurrection, from non-violent protest to armed resistance, from sit-ins and hunger strikes to the symbolic occupation of public buildings.

Whether such efforts can succeed in the digital age is central to the freedom of peoples and the protection of fundamental rights. Viewed from another perspective, the issue lies in whether and how an authoritarian and illiberal drift might today find an ally in digital technologies. Considering the vast amounts of personal data available on the Internet, and the historical reality that humanity has, in the past, identified, arrested, tortured, and barbarically murdered millions of individuals, the concern becomes even more pressing. The ever-present risk of a return to authoritarian rule – a threat from which even long-standing democracies are not inherently immune – highlights the urgency of theorising principles, procedures, and institutions capable of counteracting authoritarian tendencies when they arise, while supporting individuals in their legitimate claims for freedom and justice. The challenge is to innovate liberalism both by implementing institutional architectures and procedures that, drawing on the principle of the separation of powers, prevent the establishment of authoritarian regimes and the suppression of popular expression (including online), and by promoting digital literacy and critical thinking among citizens, particularly within younger generations.

The Right of Rebellion from Locke to the Present Day

In the modern era, the right of resistance is intrinsically linked to the struggle against absolutist tendencies. This issue was first addressed by the liberal philosopher John Locke at the end of the seventeenth century. He developed his doctrine of the people's right to rebellion within the framework of the social contract, as articulated in *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) and *Two Treatises of Government* (1690). It is particularly in the *Second Treatise* that the

problem of obedience, resistance, and their conditions of legitimacy is systematically examined (Pasquino 1984).

According to Locke, the state is an institution created by mutual agreement among citizens, with its essential purpose being the preservation of liberty, life, and property (Schochet 1971). The achievement of these objectives ensures the legitimacy of the state. When the state fails to uphold the pact that gave rise to its existence, a crisis ensues: in the most extreme cases, this crisis can only be resolved through what Locke, recalling a biblical episode, refers to as an "appeal to heaven," that is, an appeal to God as the ultimate judge (Seliger 1963). This formula embodies the concept of the right of rebellion, which Locke recognises as belonging to citizens under extreme conditions – specifically, when rulers have fundamentally subverted the core objectives of the political body, and the protection of citizens' lives and liberties is no longer assured. In other words, from Locke's perspective, rebellion constitutes the sole possible remedy when there exists no earthly authority to which one can appeal for the restoration of justice (Hasebe 2001).

More than three centuries on, Locke's theory remains an essential point of reference; however, it must be interpreted in a contemporary context. Firstly, while Lockean rebellion was grounded in theological-Christian ethical principles, today it is more commonly framed in secular terms, notably through the lens of human rights. Secondly, whereas Locke's "appeal to heaven" appeared to concern primarily the affluent social classes, history – from the French Revolution to the Arab Spring – has demonstrated that the active role of the masses is central to popular uprisings. Finally, compared to the past, modern forms of rebellion have become more layered, encompassing not only armed resistance but also peaceful methods. Let us explore these points in turn.

a) *Why people rebel*. In Locke's view, the motivations for revolution were rooted in theological foundations and natural law. As society evolved, the motivations behind revolutions became increasingly secularised. The *Declaration of Independence* of the United States (1776) proclaims fundamental rights as "self-evident truths," recognising life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as inalienable rights (Tsesis 2011). Similarly, the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (1789) abandons references to God, basing rights on rationalist and universal principles such as liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression (Hunt 1996). In contemporary times, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) represents a further secularisation of rights, presenting them as universal and inalienable for all human beings, without any religious reference (Cmiel 2004; Normand and Zaidi 2008). Scholars have debated the foundations of these charters and rights, proposing various explanations. Rorty (1993), for instance, suggests that fundamental rights derive from the evolution of human sentiments and the capacity for empathy. Other approaches, such as Sen's (1999), ground rights in the values they promote, such as freedom from poverty and personal fulfilment. Cultural relativism presents another challenge: some argue that human rights reflect Western values and that other cultures may prioritise collective well-being over individual rights

(Tharoor 1999; Peetush 2003). Nonetheless, the broad international consensus on human rights as moral ideals, even if not always legally binding, lends them significant political weight.

b) *Who rebels*. The "people" to whom Locke referred were limited to affluent citizens with acquired rights, such as the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. Although he acknowledged the possibility of uprisings by the working masses, Locke considered these rare, as labourers, preoccupied with mere subsistence, lacked the time to develop class consciousness. Over the centuries, however, the concept of citizenship has extended far beyond the confines of the wealthy classes. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the popular masses secured citizenship rights, achieved political revolutions, and organised parties that facilitated their political integration (Bendix 1964). Today, the protagonists of revolutions are no longer solely property owners and affluent professionals, but encompass a broad array of wage labourers, factory workers, artisans, farmers, small business owners, teachers, and public officials. Given the popular nature of uprisings, economic inequalities and social injustice are often the spark. Moore (1978) highlights how the deprivation of property rights, stripping the masses of a "dignified" existence, can generate a profound sense of moral injustice among the lower classes. The perception of unjust inequality – where the enrichment of a few fails to benefit the collective – fuels moral outrage. Lastly, note that a revolution has greater chances of success when it involves a broad and diverse coalition of social groups. Huntington (1968) underscores the importance of alliances between intellectuals and the popular masses, while Dix (1984) illustrates how the support of urban middle classes and significant segments of the elite can prove decisive.

c) *How people rebel*. Contemporary mobilisations can take three primary forms. The first centres around civil society organisations – trade unions, professional associations, religious communities, and similar bodies. These structures, embedded in society and relatively stable, can be fundamental in organising resistance against authoritarian power when necessary (Putnam 1995; Diamond 2008). However, their structural rigidity may render them vulnerable to control or repression by oppressive authorities. By contrast, social movements represent more flexible and dynamic responses to perceived injustices. They emerge in reaction to intolerable conditions and aim to profoundly transform political and economic structures (Tilly 1978; Skocpol et al. 2000). Leadership in these movements is often charismatic, and their organisational structures are lightweight, with ambitious, long-term goals (Ganz 2010). Finally, "smart mobs" and episodic protests constitute rapid and spontaneous forms of mobilisation, facilitated by digital technologies. These collective gatherings, organised via the Internet and social media, aim to achieve immediate results and dissolve quickly once their objectives are met (Rheingold 2003). There is also ongoing debate as to whether Locke endorsed a natural right to bear arms for self-defence (Tunik 2014). Certainly, contemporary revolutions oscillate between non-violence and the use of armed force. Peaceful protests, such as those of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, achieved significant

milestones with the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964 and the *Voting Rights Act* of 1965, albeit not without internal tensions between proponents of non-violence like Martin Luther King Jr. and advocates of more radical methods such as Malcolm X (Nimtz 2016). Similarly, in South Africa, Nelson Mandela, initially a supporter of non-violence, endorsed armed struggle against apartheid following the Sharpeville massacre (Lodge 2007).

The ICTs and the Failure of the Revolts against Authoritarian Regimes

We have explored the idea that when a state fails to fulfil its duty to preserve and promote the fundamental rights of its citizens, the people possess the right to exercise their right of rebellion. Furthermore, we have examined some of the contemporary developments in motivations, actors, and methods of uprisings. One of the most significant innovations in the modern era is the role of digital technologies in revolutionary processes. ICTs have transformed the ways in which people organise, communicate, and mobilise against repressive regimes. In today's world, an intriguing question is what digital tools and resources rebels might utilise within a repressive regime to exercise this right (Etling et al. 2010).

However, these tools are not solely available to the rebels: authoritarian governments have also developed sophisticated strategies to monitor, censor, and manipulate digital communications (Dragu and Lupu 2021). Thus, ICTs can function both as catalysts for change and as instruments of repression. The cases of Iran, Egypt, Hong Kong, and Belarus illustrate how digital technologies can, in the initial stages, facilitate the organisation and dissemination of protests, but also highlight how regimes are subsequently able to harness these same technologies to maintain control and suppress dissent. As authoritarian regimes have worked diligently to extend their offline grip on the population into the online sphere, the theoretical revolutionary potential of ICTs has, thus far, not consistently proven to be a reliable means of restoring or preserving democratic structures in repressive contexts. To fully understand the potential and fragility of ICT use for revolutionary purposes, we must, therefore, examine what has happened – and what is currently unfolding – in illiberal countries.

The dynamics of the 2009 Green Revolution in Iran follow a familiar pattern: an initial surge of protest followed by a severe government counter-reaction, with both sides leveraging digital media to further their objectives (Palfrey et al. 2009). The protests erupted in response to the re-election of incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, which demonstrators alleged had been heavily rigged by the government. The ensuing revolutionary attempt was termed "Green" in reference to the colour of Mir-Hossein Mousavi's campaign, who emerged as the protest leader, calling for Ahmadinejad's resignation. However, bolstered by military support and the loyalty of the paramilitary organisation known as the Basij, Ahmadinejad violently suppressed the uprising. In the initial stages of the protest, Twitter and other social media platforms proved

invaluable in disseminating news about political developments. Citizens acted as reporters, documenting the brutal repression by security forces with their mobile phones and sharing these images globally, thereby fuelling international support for the movement (Etling et al. 2010). Shortly after the outbreak of protests, many scholars highlighted the role of digital media in expanding the revolt. However, as Golkar (2011) pointed out, the regime swiftly responded by deploying ICTs to its own advantage: specifically, the government exploited the Internet to extend its political control over society and suppress dissent.

The technological policies adopted by the Iranian regime were both reactive, aiming to intercept and neutralise activists, and proactive, focusing on disseminating pro-government content online. The first strategy heavily relied on reducing bandwidth and Internet connection speeds to prevent mass access to the Web and to make uploading photos and videos extremely difficult. Additionally, the regime engaged in extensive website filtering, employing specialised personnel to monitor and restrict online content. Furthermore, the Iranian Cyber Army conducted digital intelligence operations, including hacking reformist websites, spreading computer viruses, and surveilling citizens to identify and arrest bloggers and activists, dismantle their organisations, and intimidate sympathisers (Rezvaniyeh 2010). The proactive strategy, on the other hand, involved the dissemination of propaganda and fake news to undermine popular support for the rebels, while instilling fear and suspicion within society, thereby fostering a culture of self-censorship among Internet users. It is noteworthy that the regime's efforts to control the virtual world were bolstered by recruiting women and young students from the Basij, who were trained in managing blogs and social networking sites, conducting psychological operations and espionage, and monitoring mobile phones (Esfandiari 2010).

Thus, the Iranian experience raises the question of whether ICTs can play a genuinely positive role in revolutionary attempts, or whether they are merely tools that oppressive regimes can wield to maintain power. While acknowledging that digital technologies possess revolutionary potential, it is evident that they perform best within an open society, whereas they risk proving ineffective – or even counterproductive – in authoritarian contexts. Reflecting once again on the Iranian case, Rahaghi (2012) questions why the popular movement of 1979 succeeded without the Internet, while the Green Revolution failed. Several factors may explain this discrepancy. The Green Revolution may have been more fragile in terms of leadership, organisational foundations, and broad-based participation in a shared programme. As we have seen, in contemporary times – unlike in Locke's era – the contribution of large segments of the population is crucial, without which protests risk implosion. It is also clear that digital technologies alone are insufficient, and under certain conditions may even hinder the success of an anti-authoritarian rebellion.

Another compelling case is the Egyptian uprising, part of the so-called Arab Spring. In this instance, the Internet initially fuelled popular mobilisation, but once the regime gained control over digital technologies, these tools became formidable instruments for maintaining the status quo. Today, it is undeniable

that the Arab Spring in Egypt has devolved into a rigid winter. The protests erupted in January 2011 when citizens began demanding modest measures of social justice, the repeal of the state of emergency, and the introduction of a two-term presidential limit – President Hosni Mubarak had been in power for nearly thirty years. The revolutionary movement effectively utilised the Internet: digital connections, at least in the early stages, helped transform a general strike organised by youth and workers into one of the most significant protests in Egypt's history (Al-Kandari and Hasanen 2012). However, this synergy between online and offline activism lasted only a few days, as the government soon retaliated.

On 28 January 2011, the Egyptian regime disconnected the country from the Internet to suppress the large-scale anti-government demonstrations planned for that day. Major Internet service providers were targeted, and mobile phone services were suspended by operators. This was possible because the government controlled the physical connections to the outside world, such as the fibre-optic cables housed in a Cairo building, and had enacted specific legal provisions to compel foreign providers to shut down their networks (Glanz and Makoff 2011). While the digital blackout compromised the online dimension of the protest within Egypt, many Egyptians and their allies abroad sought to keep the movement alive on Twitter and other platforms by posting information obtained through landline communications – the only remaining mode of contact. However, these efforts reached Egyptian citizens only sporadically, if at all. Furthermore, street activists began discouraging the use of social media and the Internet due to regime surveillance (Madrigal 2011). Ultimately, Mubarak's government was so compromised, and the protest so widespread across society, that digital suppression and repression could not save the regime.

However, post-Mubarak Egypt found itself in a state of turmoil. After deposing Mubarak, the military also ousted the newly elected president, Mohamed Morsi, following his attempts to secure immunity from judicial oversight and other prerogatives, which triggered a new wave of protests. Leadership then passed to Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, the former Minister of Defence, who, with military support, progressively institutionalised a military dictatorship, maintaining tight control over digital communications. What role did ICTs play in this process? As Del Panta (2019) notes, they connected a multitude of anti-hierarchical movements but also fostered a fluid organisation lacking structure and leadership. As previously discussed, the contribution of stable civil society organisations can be decisive. On the other hand, the Egyptian regime continued to strengthen its online repressive apparatus. Specifically, while al-Sisi enacted new cybercrime laws to intensify Internet controls, technical filters and other measures – including restrictions imposed on Egyptian servers – were implemented to block the circulation of alternative narratives and photos or videos documenting government and military actions (Dragoni 2019).

The case of Hong Kong concerns a highly digitalised city struggling against the repressive practices of the government. The protests were triggered in March 2019 by a proposed bill that would have exposed Hong Kong residents

and visitors to the legal system of mainland China. Although the bill was withdrawn in the autumn, tensions reignited in May 2020 following Beijing's decision to enact a national security law for Hong Kong. During the uprising against this law, both peaceful and radical movements operated in parallel, echoing the patterns seen in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa during the 20th century. The peaceful movement engaged in non-violent protest, while the radical faction adopted black bloc tactics, encouraging protesters to maintain anonymity to avoid prosecution or future retaliation from authorities and employers aligned with the government (Smith, 2019).

Protesters from both sides utilised platforms such as LIHKG, Telegram (an encrypted messaging service), and the Bridgefy app, which allows users to exchange messages offline via Bluetooth on their smartphones (Wakefield 2019). One of the most controversial aspects of this protest was the practice of doxing – the online dissemination of sensitive personal data. Activists used doxing as a form of hacktivism directed against individuals responsible for crimes and injustices, such as police officers and institutional figures, who could not be held accountable by other means. This strategy exerted significant pressure, essentially through intimidation, on their adversaries. However, this tactic soon led to an escalation between the two conflicting sides: 200 citizens perceived as sympathetic to the protests were doxed by a pro-Chinese anonymous website and received death threats (Chan and Bludy 2019). Moreover, Telegram and LIHKG were subjected to multiple Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks and other cyberattacks during critical moments of the protests, while Facebook and Twitter identified large-scale pro-government disinformation campaigns (Kelly 2019). As of now, it cannot be said that the revolution has succeeded.

In Belarus, protests erupted in Minsk in August 2020 in response to the sixth election of President Alexander Lukashenko, who has been in power since 1994. The Belarusian case is noteworthy because, as Asmolov (2020) highlights, the country's IT industry has developed significantly in recent years, providing citizens not only with tools but also with the skills to utilise them effectively. This digital literacy enabled a significant number of people to partially circumvent the Internet blackout imposed by the government, which has full control over the national telecommunications company. Many Belarusian protesters used VPNs, anonymisers, Mesh networks, and apps like Bridgefy to communicate directly and avoid Internet disruptions and surveillance. Additionally, forms of doxing were employed via Telegram channels to de-anonymise agents responsible for acts of brutality. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that the Belarusian uprising achieved its goals: Lukashenko remains in power. The reason may lie in the fact that, in the Belarusian context, the Internet initially created conditions for rapid citizen engagement but over time failed to become a key mechanism for the sustained mobilisation and coordination of protests. Once again, the use of ICTs alone has proven insufficient to transform a political crisis into a successful revolution.

Digital Technologies, but not Only. Defending the Right of Rebellion Today

Achieving a successful revolution under illiberal regimes in the digital age may prove exceedingly difficult. While ICTs provide rebels with tools to gather and articulate their demands in the early stages, they simultaneously equip oppressors with formidable instruments of repression. For this reason, the contemporary right of rebellion must be preserved by updating political systems to be prepared for the challenges posed by new digital technologies. Naturally, finding a viable solution to this problem is extremely challenging, particularly in authoritarian regimes where freedom is already compromised. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify certain conditions that could support the defence of the right to rebel in a digital world.

First and foremost, it is essential to outline a set of fundamental rights within the digital domain (Klang and Murray 2005; Mathiesen 2014). Among these, the right to access the Internet stands out as an increasingly indispensable freedom in democratic contexts. In liberal systems, this right enjoys growing protection, whereas in authoritarian regimes, it is often perceived as a threat to the stability of power and, consequently, is obstructed in various ways. Another cornerstone of digital rights is the right to personal data protection, which aims to safeguard users' sensitive information, preventing it from being misused or accessed without consent. This right is crucial in ensuring that individuals maintain control over their digital footprints and are protected from surveillance and exploitation. Finally, an equally fundamental – yet frequently debated – right is the right to anonymity. This allows users to navigate online without disclosing their identities, facilitated by encryption technologies that shield personal information and digital activities from prying eyes. Though controversial, anonymity represents an invaluable resource for political dissidents, especially in contexts where freedom of expression is suppressed by illiberal or authoritarian regimes. If these rights were robustly recognised by international bodies, they could provide external support to anti-authoritarian movements. By establishing and promoting digital rights on a global scale, international organisations could exert pressure on repressive regimes and create protective frameworks.

Another fundamental element is the separation of powers, one of the most important principles of liberal thought. From the earliest theorisation of liberalism, power was to be divided into distinct principal functions within state sovereignty to prevent abuses. Building on Locke's theorisation, Montesquieu (1748) identified three functions – legislation, administration, and jurisdiction – with each branch exercising oversight over the others through its specific authority and autonomous state bodies. This principle has always played a valuable role as a protective factor against authoritarian shifts: as Walzer (1983) points out, a system constructed on the art of separation supports the defence of liberty because it deeply embeds the value of pluralism within the social system. At this level, moreover, separation defines the boundaries between

spheres in which different social goods and interests are pursued: beyond the power of government, legislation, judges, and courts, we also find the influence of the media, religious charisma, scientific merit, economic power, financial authority, military strength, and so forth. However, the principle of separation must be reinforced in the digital age to prevent authoritarian tendencies facilitated by governments' use of ICTs. Consequently, certain counterpowers should be implemented.

Rodotà (2021) identified three counterpowers in addition to the executive: the traditional legislative and judicial powers, and a technocratic model. With regard to the legislative power, being the only body directly emanating from popular sovereignty, it must undertake the task of establishing a framework of general principles to be observed by all actors involved in processes generated by technological innovation. The judiciary, on the other hand, is tasked with providing reassurance to society: indeed, the courts can prosecute abuses of surveillance committed by the government; furthermore, judicial decisions leave open the possibility for other judges, at different times, to decide otherwise. By adapting decisions to the situation and technological context, judicial intervention helps to dissipate the fear of being caught in the grip of technological innovation. The technocratic power, finally, has a significant limitation in its weak adherence to popular will. However, it is relatively autonomous from political authority, which can render it a protective factor against authoritarian shifts, and it can promote the role of experts and specialists. The work of these experts, in particular, materialises in independent regulatory authorities, tasked with safeguarding public interests in specific areas of social relevance. Each authority is endowed with more or less incisive powers within its area of competence: it may not only issue recommendations but also enforce orders or impose sanctions. Independent authorities, therefore, may have the power to hear complaints from individuals who believe they have been illegally monitored and to conduct investigations in this regard; furthermore, they can prevent the storage of personal data for purposes related to the aggressive surveillance of citizens by the government.

In a liberal system, as Walzer (1983) suggests, power is diffused not only within institutions but also across civil society. Beyond formal responses, the potential for collective action expressed through non-governmental entities such as civil society organisations and social movements is invaluable. These bodies, in particular, can act as "watchdogs" on behalf of citizens: they can engage in the generation of politically relevant information – often through studies and research – and communicate this information using the most effective means, in order to promote reflection on the implications of surveillance. They can also hold institutions and organisations accountable, demanding sanctions for the failure to uphold principles of fairness and formulating policy recommendations. Typically, most members of these organisations are engaged in other activities, such as research and teaching, hardware and software development, journalism, or various forms of artistic expression. Furthermore, they are embedded within transnational activist networks.

Another form of power diffused within civil society is held by corporations. Increasingly, surveillance activities are conducted through private platforms, which is why various governments are attempting to "co-opt" the private sector more effectively. This poses a significant risk. An excessive concentration of media and economic power in a small number of companies can become problematic, especially when these companies maintain close ties with political authorities (for instance, when the head of government owns or controls major telecommunications firms). In such cases, the fate of the public sphere could depend on the will of a few powerful actors. For this reason, some suggest that antitrust regulation – the application of the liberal principle of separation within the private sector – should not be considered merely an economic issue but rather as a safeguard for citizens' freedoms (Wu, 2020).

Liberal innovation must also be implemented at the individual level. In other words, citizens must become as capable as possible of defending their personal sphere in everyday life. As Foucault (1975) emphasizes, power is not only concentrated within institutions but is also diffused through social, linguistic, and technological practices: this implies that resistance must penetrate the everyday mechanisms of surveillance and control. Numerous tactics are available to individuals, particularly those aware of being under surveillance by power structures, to resist abuses committed in the virtual context by governments. Citizens can browse the Internet, send emails, and write blogs using anonymous browsing software and ad-blockers capable of preventing trojan execution and user profiling; they can also favour applications that encrypt communications, encrypt their hard drives, and use removable devices rather than cloud services, while paying attention to creating strong passwords and employing multi-factor authentication (Van Dijkhuizen and Van Ham 2018). These practices are within the reach of many users, who, by adopting certain precautions, can limit the encroachment of power and contribute to a digital environment that better respects individual freedom. While they may not always succeed in evading the surveillance system, their efforts can reduce its effectiveness. This could also represent the last resort to "appeal to heaven" when civil society organisations are stifled, movements are ostracised, and dissent is banned: individual, quotidian and widespread resistance that makes surveillance more time-consuming and costly, thereby loosening the regime's grip.

However, the effectiveness of individual resistance is directly proportional to the level of knowledge of the tools and their potential. In an increasingly technology-permeated world, the citizen-user must attain sufficient knowledge to opt out of the system when necessary. Otherwise, the population risks living under constant surveillance and being deprived of the full enjoyment of fundamental rights. Consequently, for citizens in liberal systems, it is advisable, as a precautionary measure, to pursue updated computer literacy and appropriate media education. A valuable approach, for example, would be the integration of digital literacy programmes into school curricula, equating digital literacy and the ability to use digital tools with reading, writing, and arithmetic. Students should become familiar with the basics of programming, the primary

threats and most common types of cyberattacks, the use of hacking tools, and various cybersecurity best practices – all skills that could prove useful in confronting authoritarian power in the digital age.

Moreover, broader competencies should not be underestimated, such as the critical evaluation of sources when using the Internet or the use of ICTs for collaboration. For a society to respond effectively to any drift in political power, education in critical thinking is also essential, fostering intellectually autonomous individuals capable of recognising both the risks and potential of technical tools in social and political terms. Furthermore, for more conscious use of technology, it is necessary to cultivate individuals' ability to make informed choices, analyse contexts, understand complexity, and reflect without prejudice (Wellman et al. 2003). In summary, an approach aimed at developing personalities capable of facing challenges rationally and autonomously is required.

Today, the potential leaders of a revolution are no longer, as in Locke's time, solely members of the ruling class and owners of the means of production; the leaders of a rebellion often emerge from less privileged social classes. As contemporary history has demonstrated, large numbers of ordinary citizens can unite to achieve political goals. However, without widespread competence in digital tools, it becomes difficult to protect oneself adequately in the modern world, access information regarding government actions, and communicate effectively. Citizens may lose the ability to ensure that the government acts in a non-dominant manner (Haggarty and Ericson 2006). Adequate cognitive tools enable citizens to demand transparency and access to governmental information, actively safeguarding their fundamental freedoms both online and offline. Institutions and social movements will be truly effective when supported by a broad cultural foundation and a conscious citizenry that actively endorses their efforts.

As we have seen, large-scale mobilisation against abuses of power can take various forms: civil society organisations, social movements, smart mobs, and episodic protests. All these organisational forms can be invaluable in supporting resistance against authoritarian tendencies or tyrannical regimes. In a digital world, however, these forms must be implemented in a conducive environment. This environment will be more favourable to the extent that digital power is decentralised and that citizens are capable of asserting their rights through widespread and proficient use of digital technologies.

Nonetheless, it must be emphasised that the use of digital technologies is valuable but not the only important factor. For instance, Gramsci (1948) speaks of a "revolutionary ruling class," capable of formulating new moral standards and condemning oppressive power. Indeed, the anger of a society cannot be transformed into concrete actions without the contribution of an organised political group that promotes new criteria for condemning unjust power, thus constituting the internal identity of the rebellion. This organised minority works to discredit the ideology of the dominant class, facilitating the transfer of power to the new coalition (Tilly, 1978). This group often has a charismatic leader – an individual endowed with moral courage, intellectual prowess, and

moral inventiveness, essential for creating criteria to critique existing cultural traditions. Finally, it is necessary to consider that moral innovators thrive in social spaces where discontent can be channelled, particularly when power fails to be entirely repressive. Therefore, for popular demands to gain traction, a fracture within the ruling classes is necessary. The military and police forces play a particular role in this context: through these actors, the regime holds the means of coercion and can obstruct revolutionary efforts. For this reason, mass revolutionary movements genuinely emerge when at least a partial defection of coercive apparatuses occurs (Skocpol 1979).

Concluding Remarks

Once the right of rebellion, as theorised by Locke, is established, it becomes necessary to consider the conditions for its exercise. The recent histories of Egypt, Iran, Hong Kong, and Belarus suggest that citizens are facilitated in taking to the streets by using digital media to express their dissent, even when they are ignored by traditional media, which are under the control of the regime.

Specific socio-political conditions must occur for a regime to collapse: a large portion of the population must be involved in the uprising, or the ruling class – particularly the military – must fracture, with at least part of it siding with the demonstrators. However, when these conditions do not materialise swiftly, or if the organisations of the protesters are not sufficiently structured and prepared for systemic change, authoritarian power, in its old or new forms, reacts by fostering a climate of surveillance and control, making extensive use of digital technologies. Digital media themselves can quickly become the tools through which authoritarian powers retaliate, by filtering or blocking communications and identifying activists. Citizens then attempt to escape government pressure, but state apparatuses invest even more in technological resources, making repression increasingly sophisticated, sometimes to the extent of creating a national network disconnected from the global Internet, in order to achieve near-total control. In such circumstances, Locke's "appeal to heaven" appears destined to fail.

The failure of revolutionary attempts under authoritarian regimes highlights the urgent need to preserve the possibility of dissent within political systems, as a means to prevent or hinder the authoritarian use of digital technologies. This outcome can be achieved by establishing certain checks and balances to block the initiatives of malicious political actors, thereby preventing them from establishing a permanent illiberal power through the shrewd use of digital media. In other words, there is a need to update the liberal tradition, drawing particularly on the principle of the separation of powers. Furthermore, the promotion of widespread technological capabilities among the population is highly advisable, so that tyrannical regimes can be obstructed as much as possible in their efforts to consolidate their grip on the people.

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Gabrijele Džakomini

Pravo na pobunu u doba digitalne komunikacije

Apstrakt

U sedamnaestom veku, Džon Lok je, postavljajući temelje liberalnog sistema, prvi teoretisao pravo na pobunu. U okviru njegove misli, ustanak protiv represivnog režima smatran je kolektivnim pravom. Međutim, kao što su pokazali nedavni pokušaji revolucije pod autoritarnim režimima, ostvarivanje ovog prava može biti izazovno u kontekstu digitalnih tehnologija. U poređenju sa Lokovim dobom, postoje značajne promene u pogledu motiva, glavnih aktera i metoda građanskih ustanaka. Digitalne tehnologije odigrale su važnu ulogu ne samo u olakšavanju pobuna već i u omogućavanju autoritarnih restauracija. To je istaklo hitnost zaštite prava na pobunu putem ažuriranja kontramoći protiv autoritarnih tendencija kako bi se odgovorilo na izazove digitalnog doba.

Ključne reči: Lok, liberalizam, autoritarizam, digitalne tehnologije, pravo na pobunu