

# Mobile phones, not guns, are the best weapons: study

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After having studied the media landscape in 137 countries, NTNU professor Indra de Soysa is convinced that enabling open lines of communication, such as mobile phone capability, is the best contribution to ensuring more democracy in the world.

The establishment of Telenor, a Norwegian [telecommunications company](#), in a country where there is a dictatorship will have much more of an effect in promoting democracy, for example, than if the Minister of Development Cooperation, Erik Solheim, has repeated meetings with the dictator, says de Soysa, who is a professor of [political science](#) at the university.

As the revolutionary wave in the Middle East and North Africa continues unabated, de Soysa has published an article entitled "The Blog vs. Big Brother" in the scholarly publication the *International Journal of Human Rights*.

## Eyewitness accounts

"TV is especially bad for human rights, because the government can feed propaganda to the population," de Soysa says. "The Internet and mobile phones have the opposite effect. And social media is different because it gives people free access to a channel of communication."

"In Egypt, Google's marketing manager would have never managed to

mobilize so many demonstrations without social media," he adds. "The authorities cannot monitor what people read on the Internet, and society becomes more transparent."

De Soysa points to the many eyewitnesses who have sent pictures from mobile phones to large media organizations such as BBC and CNN. "The authorities can no longer get away with attacking their own people. In Burma the authorities can still shoot a man in the street, and get away with it. But there are beginning to be fewer and fewer countries where that is still the case," he says.

In Africa, mobile phones are spreading like a virus, which also means that Africans will be connected to the world in a completely different way than before. The world is becoming flatter because people communicate horizontally, he said.

### **Started with Saddam Hussein**

De Soysa is the director of NTNU's globalization program. While globalization as a concept has almost become a buzzword, from a historical perspective, it is actually nothing new.

He points out that the British Empire once reigned supreme, and that there were major waves of immigration to the United States, Latin America and Australia. What is new in this current period of globalization, he says, is information technology. The upshot is that today's youths perceive themselves as citizens of the world, he adds, and no longer believe that old men should dictate how they should live.

De Soysa says the start of the latest wave of revolutionary unrest in the Middle East and North Africa began with the fall of Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

"The human cost was high, and many died. But it was an important symbol that encouraged people in other repressive regimes to believe that it is possible to get rid of a dictator," he says. "I would not say that George Bush should get the Peace Prize, but in retrospect this was a very important event in initiating the change that is now rolling across the [Middle East](#)."

**More information:** The reference for de Soysa's article is: Muoza & de Soysa: The blog versus big brother: new and old information technology and political repression, 1980-2006, *The International Journal of Human Rights*, published online 08 December 2010, [doi: 10.1080/13642987.2010.518729](#)

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