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What are the most important rights of a digital citizen? The answer to this question depends both on what is necessary for someone to enjoy the advantages of information technology, as well as the ways in which people are most likely to be harmed by the most powerful institutions on the Internet.

The most important right to consider is the right of access to the Internet and other information technology that modern life relies on. Whether or not these essentials are always available, electricity, clean running water, and other basics of life in contemporary society are human rights. Access to the Internet should be increasingly thought of this way. That means that governments should subsidize—or even provide for free—high speed Internet access for all.

Institutions that capture massive amounts of data on ordinary people about every aspect of their lives are capable of coercing and manipulating them. Leveling the playing field between Internet institutions like Google and the individuals who use it seems impossible. Laws also seem ineffective, since large corporations can to some extent choose the jurisdictions in which they do business based on the favorability of the legal environment. They are also always developing new strategies for complying with the specific requirements of a law while possibly defying its intention. To protect the right of ordinary people to not be coerced or manipulated by powerful tech institutions, I believe that the government should actively intervene in the tech environment on behalf of citizens. They should produce new technological challenges to the more nefarious aspects of data collection and the way that data could be used to harm people.

The image cloaking software produced by SAND Lab is an example of a product that a government could create to advocate on behalf of its citizens against Big Tech. This software thwarts facial recognition AI by subtly transforming photos of faces that are uploaded to the internet, effectively "poisoning" the database that the AI will later rely on to identify a new face. Rather than wielding only legal power on behalf of its citizens, government should also introduce new tech tools that create a fairer balance of power between tech users and institutions.

For my middle school students, the most important thing to understand about privacy on the Internet is that privacy exists in varying degrees. Some aspects of one's behavior on the internet should be considered completely public for all time: for example, a tweet. Other data is less public, but still easily made public: for example, an email that has been sent. Information like files stored on a cloud service like Google Drive is, for all intents and purposes for an average person, private. Understanding how private some data is, and why this matters, would be important for them to understand.