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DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Dear Delegates,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to King County Model United Nations 2019 and the World Forum for Democracy.

My name is Ariana Haji and I am a senior at Juanita High School. On the dais, I am joined by your Chair Nicole Turtle, a senior at Inglemoor High School, and your Assistant Director Kendall Foley, a Junior at Eastlake High School.

The World Forum for Democracy (WFD) is an especially unique committee. The Forum is a gathering held each year in Strasbourg, France to debate the complex challenges that face democracies today and foster democratic innovation. Each year, the Council of Europe hosts the Forum and brings together members of civil society, political leaders, and representatives of media, business, academic, and professional groups. In this way, the WFD is a committee created by people for people. Each participant has elected themselves to be present in the Forum and debate for the greater good of improving democratic systems.

Each year, the Forum centers around a theme. The theme for this year's iteration of the WFD will be "Democracy in the Digital Age". We have chosen "Freedom of Information in the Age of Terror" and "Net Neutrality" as our topics. Both topics concern the way we interact with technology on a daily basis. Technology has made it easier for information to be shared across the world, resulting in extremist groups spreading their message to civilians in other parts of the world, thus exacerbating issues. Net neutrality is the principle that Internet service providers should treat all transmission of data over the Internet equally. With technology serving as a crucial communication medium, both topics are of urgency to the Forum.

We have written this Background Guide to provide you with a basis of understanding of the issues at hand, as well as to give you a starting place for further research. By no means should you rely entirely on this guide to provide you with all the information you may need, as each position within the committee is highly unique in its opinions and history, and therefore we encourage you to research further.

We look forward to the debate that will emerge from this committee at KINGMUN 2019, and hope that you gain a better perspective of the world around you once the conference is over.

If you have any questions, we are only an email away - reach out to us at wfd@kingmun.org.

Best,
Ariana Haji
Director | World Forum for Democracy

Committee Overview

The World Forum for Democracy is a gathering held annually in November in Strasbourg, France to debate the challenges facing democracies today and to foster democratic innovation. The Forum was launched in 2012 on the initiative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe Thorbjørn Jagland. The committee is especially unique because it is open and free for anyone who wants to share ideas and engage in discussion on how to make democracy stronger. Each participant in the forum is there by choice and because they want to actively participate in the formation of solutions, plans, and initiatives that will better their communities on a local, regional, and global level. The Forum's mission is to address key challenges facing democracy, starting with ground-break initiatives, and fostering debate between different actors to find concrete solutions. The Forum gives people a voice and allows them to participate in political decision-making, as well as works towards forming more participatory and inclusive structures and institutions. A large focus of the Forum is the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16 on building just and peaceful societies.

Key ideas that the Forum visits each year, regardless of theme, are innovation, participations vs. influence, inclusive decision-making, participatory democracy, e-democracy, competencies for democratic citizenship, democracy literacy, and freedom vs. control. At this iteration of KINGMUN, the theme of our Forum will be "Democracy in the Digital Age". Our topics: Freedom of Information in the 'Age of Terror' and Net Neutrality will require a diverse range of critical opinions and nuanced discussion in order for delegates to form relevant and effective solutions.

For the purposes of KINGMUN 2019, our committee will comprise of thirty-four delegates. Twenty-two of these delegates will be representing countries who are members of the Council of Europe. Twelve of the other delegates will be representing past members of the Forum who have been invited to speak and present. Each position, regardless of whether it be a country or a speaker, has a unique background and positions. Every viewpoint is different, and equally essential to the Forum's progress towards forming solutions.

The actual Forum functions differently than an United Nations body, and as such, the rules of procedure for the World Forum for Democracy at KINGMUN 2019 will be different.

The Forum is split over three days and throughout the day various "labs" are held that focus on different subtopics that concern the theme at hand. Delegates will decide which of the two topics to debate first and then be presented with a series of labs based on the topic. The labs will provide additional background information in the form of videos, presentations, articles, and speakers on a subtopic. Delegates will then have a chance to debate, discuss, and write. The end goal will be to write a Final Report. The Forum has no budget nor authoritative jurisdiction as it not a United Nations body. Every solution that the Forum forms is made in the form of a recommendation. The Final Report will include summaries of what was discussed, recommendations, and will be organized by "lab". Delegates can view past Final Reports on the World Forum for Democracy website. A full rules of procedure document will be published later on.

Delegates must submit position papers in order to be considered for an award. Those who recognize the value of position papers within committee will not only be most successful during debate, but will also establish a basis of information from which to form new and creative solutions to our topic of debate. Position papers for the World Forum for Democracy will differ slightly from the typical position papers. Delegates are urged to cover their country and or speaker's stance on the issue, the relevance of the issue, past action taken regarding the issue, what different aspects as well as implications of the issue they think must be considered, and potential recommendations. Citations must be included, but do not count toward the page limit; citations may be formatted in whatever manner delegates would like. The background guide is provided as a resource to gain contextual knowledge and direction over the issue, however delegates must use it as a tool from which to base further research in order to gain an in depth understanding of all facets of the issue.

Position Papers are due by April 21st at 11:59 p.m. Please submit them to hjcc@kingmun.org with your name, country, and "position paper" in the subject line.

Topic A: Freedom of Information in the "Age of Terror"

Overview of the Topic

The new 'Age of Terror' began on September 11th, 2001 as the world was thrust into an uncharted territory of warfare, one seemingly without logic and rules or means to an end. The challenges endured by human rights advocacy in the face of terrorism have evolved into a complex dilemma surrounding the balance of defending the public from terrorism while also ensuring basic human rights. Through the globalization of information technology, people can easily connect with others of similar ideological alignment

regardless of location and political climate. New media is being used by terrorist organizations to distinguish and target particular areas with similar ideological views. Within this 'Age of Terror', governments are struggling to draw the line between protecting their citizens and limiting their freedom, and in certain nations governments, limit their internet to create a restricted, but "safe" view of the world. However, such limitations can sometimes provide citizens with limited access to what's going on in the rest of the world. For example, in mainland China, numerous social media apps are banned. This results in an imbalance of access to information across the world, which can prevent parts of the global community from hearing and learning about certain current events from a multitude of perspectives Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers", but how does this hold true as the world faces this new 'Age of Terror'? Sometimes this right can be abused and used to push extremist agendas onto others. Sifting through content that was uploaded as a result of abuse of freedoms is a time consuming process, and often one that can't be done at a speed fast enough to keep up with the millions of articles and pictures posted every day. Moreover, journalists struggle to find a balance between reporting on the activity of terrorist organizations, and ensuring that they aren't giving too much attention to them. It will be up to delegates to find a balance between freedom of information in media and journalism, as well as ensuring that the media isn't abused in such a way that exacerbates conflict and increases the reach of terrorist organizations.

History

Today freedom of information is one of the many extensions to the fundamental human right to free speech and expression. It describes individuals right to speak their mind and share their ideas without fear of censorship, violence, or retaliation. However, this is a freedom with limits, with what is known as the harm principle. Even in societies where the freedom of expression is highly valued, it can be abused to incite undue panic, cause emotional and mental harm, as well as threaten the security of other individuals. Within the international community, it is heavily debated the extent to which freedom of expression should be taken.

With the rise of internet use and activity across the world, this issue has only become more contentious. The internet offers a platform by which individuals have greater access to information worldwide, whether they wish to seek, impart or simply receive it. However, the 'Age of Terror' has begun to change public sentiment towards this freedom as individuals susceptible to persuasion are being targeted by terrorist/rebel organizations over the internet. It is where "the gas meets the flame."

In March 2008 a participant on a pro-al-Qaeda online forum posted six training sessions for aspiring terrorists, the first of which was entitled "Do you want to form a terror cell?" Propaganda films and video games have arisen from terrorist groups in Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Chechnya as well as other nations, targeting internet users as young as seven.

This use of the internet for propaganda, recruitment, radicalization, and incitement have led some governments to enforce restrictive laws on their citizens' ability to freely use such information technologies to communicate. But, some argue that it is only when governments enable open and transparent conversation, that they are able to identify what matters to their citizens and how to act upon a national need. They state that while the Internet has proven effective at spreading ideology, its use as a planning tool and operational tool is minimal.

The challenge, therefore, is to find the balance between basic human rights and guaranteeing public safety in a world under siege from terrorism.

Past Action

The relationship between media and terror is complex. The media is expected to report and analyze terror as a matter of international priority, however striking the appropriate balance between informing the public and giving publicity to terrorist organizations is difficult.

The most action thus far has been taken by social media platforms. In June 2017, Google, Facebook, Twitter, and Microsoft formed the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFT) to disrupt the terrorist exploitation of its platforms. Facebook heavily relies of artificial intelligence (AI) for image matching. This technology prevents users from uploading a photo or video that matches a previously uploaded photo or video that had been identified as terrorist. YouTube also removes videos that are flagged by machine learning algorithms. However, such softwares haven't always been accurate, and some worry that the technology will start removing content that isn't harmful. Other feels like the use of such technology to remove content violates their right to free speech. Moreover, GIFT members have created a shared industry database of "hashes". Hashes are unique digital fingerprints that allow these platforms to monitor digital activity. If content is removed by one platform, its hash is shared with other GIFT members to that it can be removed from other platforms as well. In 2018, Instagram, Justpaste.it, and LinkedIn also joined the consortium.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), a specialized agency of the United Nations, has recognized the link between journalism and terrorist organizations. In 2017, the published a handbook titled "Terrorism and the Media", and since then have published several other reports and handbooks with research on the subject matter. The handbooks reads, "Through our mandate to promote freedom of expression and access to information in the media and on the Internet, we are working closely with media organizations to provide training and capacity-building - based upon the advice in this handbook - to raise awareness of these challenges and better support journalist reporting in this area."

On May 20, 2005 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe published a draft recommendation titled "Media and Terrorism". The document suggests courses of action for members of the Council. The document states that "Modern terrorism is media terrorism." Other countries, such as the United States, have also taken action. In 2008, Joe Lieberman, a former Senator of the United States, worked with the United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs to issue a report titled, "Violent Islamist Extremism, the Internet, and the Homegrown Terrorist Threat." The report cited the internet as one of the "primary drivers" of the terrorist threat to the United States. Many CEOs of large companies have begun working hand in hand with government officials to figure out ways in which they can better rid of extremist content on their platforms. While governments have been researching and bringing the issue to the table over the past few years, effective and concrete solutions that help to significantly curb extremist content have yet to been reached.

Current Situation

While there largely exists free access of information in the countries represented in the World Forum for Democracy, it is important recognize that it is not the case for many developing nations. Recently, Eritrea, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Azerbaijan, Vietnam, Iran, China, Myanmar, and Cuba were identified as the most censored nations. All of these nations have experienced political turmoil in this new "Age of Terror" resulting in restriction of information over the internet, through the news, and through the press.

Eritrea, a militarized authoritarian state that has not held a national election since its independence, was identified as the top censored nation in the world. Eritrea has been ruled by President Isasis Afwerki since 1993, with his political party of the People's Front for Democracy as the sole party. Eritrea's government shutdown all independent media in 2001, only allowing their citizens to view biased state-controlled news. In addition, only 1% of their population has access to the internet,with their activity monitored and censored. Citizens of Eritrea also face heavy backlash if they choose to speak out against the government with likelihood of arrest or arbitrary detention, causing majority of Eritreans to repress any thoughts of retaliation.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), a totalitarian state, is ranked at the bottom of the Press Freedom Index. The DPRK is one of the most extreme countries in terms of censorship and restriction of information. The North Korean government is entirely in control of their media outlets, only allowing their citizens to get their news from the Korean Central News Agency. Internet access is severely restricted in the DPRK, so much so that they created their own national intranet, Kwangmyong. With the rise of technology, North Korea invented their own highly monitored tablets that takes screenshot whenever an app is opened and saves all browser history. As the DPRK takes steps to re-enter the global community, such as competing in the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, they may begin to loosen their restrictions on the internet.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, was previously one of the most censored nations, but as time has gone on restrictions have become increasingly less harsh. Now that Saudi Arabia is under control of Prince Mohammed bin Salman, they have experienced quite a number of changes in attempt to modernize the country. In April 2016, Mohammed bin Salman introduced Vision 2030: his vision for Saudi Arabia in the next fifteen years. He can be seen meeting with influential figures such as Jeff Bezos, "The Rock", and Mark Zuckerberg, as a part of his huge PR and media campaigns. While this seems like a positive change for Saudi Arabia, much more lies beneath the surface. The reforms taking place in Saudi Arabia are with the purpose to gain economic power, ensuring that the authoritarian dynasty in Saudi Arabia lives on. While information is relatively free, there has been a focus on the assassination of Jamal Khashoggi, journalist for *The Washington Post* and former editor-in-chief of Al-Arab News Channel. First, Saudi Arabia claimed that he had he left the building he had 'disappeared" from and that they had no knowledge of his whereabouts. When the international community pressed Saudi authorities, they reported that Khashoggi had died inside the building due to strangulation following a physical fight, a premeditated murder. As investigation continued, an audio recording from Khashoggi's murder was released by the Turkish government, revealing that Khashoggi had been killed by the orders of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. It was later discovered that Khashoggi had not died from strangulation, but instead a fatal injection. Saudi officials continue to deny the Saudi Royal Family's involvement in the death of Khashoggi. The murder of Khashoggi is just an example of how a country may seem to have free access to information, but in actuality information is restricted and doctored by whatever means necessary.

These countries provide examples of the various ways information is restricted in the 'Age of Terror', ranging from the totalitarian dictatorship in the DPRK to the newly "liberal" Saudi Arabia. The access of information varies by each nation, but overall the fight is not won until all nations have free access to information.

Bloc Positions

Digital Security Proponent

France, United Kingdom, Denmark, Belgium, Germany

With the recent rise of terrorist activity in Europe and the surrounding areas, several countries have taken counter-terrorist measures to ensure the safety of their citizens. The lack of digital regulating has been the focus of such measures. In countries like the United Kingdom and France, being some of the most devastated nations by such activity, there have been several pieces of legislation passed to monitor online activity so as to limit the reach and power of terrorist organizations within their country. In the wake of several extremist-related incidents over only two years that led to fatalities, France passed legislation in 2014 focused on toughening surveillance, making it lawful to detain individuals linked to radical groups, and blocking Internet sites that incite anti-Semitism, terrorism and hatred. Europol, a body of the European Union, recently created an Internet

Referral Unit (IRU) at the urging of several member states. This Unit has been charged with taking down and flagging potentially harmful and extremist-related material as well as providing information to EU member governments. The United Kingdom has also played a large role in internet security, pioneered legislation to counter use of the Internet for terrorist purposes over the past decade. They have passed legislation regarding internet oversight, and material banning, especially after incidents such as the Manchester bombing and Westminster attack. They are currently spearheading discussion within the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) concerning online counterterrorism.

Digital Privacy Proponent

Austria, Greece, Portugal, Poland

With the rise of legislation concerning internet security, many are suspicious of increased online restriction and surveillance. In the face of this legislation influx, there is concern over the limitations this will put onto freedom of speech and expression, a fundamental human right. Though not against counter-terrorism measures, nations like Austria have not put forward policy regarding internet oversight as it can lead to restrictions on citizens' freedoms. As advocates in Austria stated, "don't let terrorists determine our freedoms." Portugal practices a non-restrictive policy regarding internet access or surveillance. There are neither government restrictions on access to the Internet nor does the government monitor e-mail or Internet chat rooms without appropriate legal authority. Similarly, Poland has been a proponent of free speech since 2011, after protests and petitions led to the end of the last internet restriction legislation. Public opinion continues to stand by the concept that "Whenever a society applies self-censorship out of fear for terrorism, freedom dissipates."

Speakers Present at the Forum

Each speaker at the forum has a varied background, hence contributing a different perspective and approach to discussion. Generally, the speakers present at this iteration of the forum hold the viewpoint that journalism is essential to the progression of democracy. They want the rights and freedoms of journalists to be protected, and are strong believers in freedom of speech. However, they do believe that social media plays a huge role in the exchange of information that can result in terrorist organizations recruiting youth and spreading their message. Steps will need to be taken by social media outlets to ensure that content is being appropriately filtered.

Case Studies

Facebook and Machine Learning

Sifting through content to remove pieces that promote terrorism is an uphill battle that has resulted in many tech companies to open war rooms and hire new specialists. War rooms are rooms were specialists sit at desks sifting through content, flagging it one by one.

It's a tedious and ineffective process. With new posts every second, its difficult to keep up and ensure that nothing is missed. Not only that, but there simply aren't enough specialists to go around. War rooms are incredibly understaffed. Facebook has a counterterrorism team of just 200 people. A lot of extremist content is posted in languages other than english, meaning that you need specialists who can read and understand different languages.

Facebook is trying a new approach towards this issue: machine learning. They are using the new technology as a way to identify content that may signal support for extremist terrorist organizations. Facebook has an developed an algorithm that gives each post a score based on the likelihood that it violates the company's counterterrorism policies. Posts that receive a certain score or higher are immediately removed without moderation from a specialists.

However, this algorithm isn't entirely accurate and there has been much criticism. Some users claim that algorithm flags too much content, even posts that are entirely appropriate and have no link to terrorism. As mentioned earlier, many posts with a connection to terrorism are posted in a different language. Critics have found flaws in Facebook's current algorithm and complained that it does a poor job of detecting dangerous material in languages other than english. Currently, Facebook's algorithm focuses on ISIS, al-Qaeda, and their other affiliates - groups that currently pose the largest global threat. Many critics also point out that Facebook often doesn't remove entire profiles, Pages, or Groups but will only remove specific content that is in breach of their standards. Some argue that it would be more effective for Facebook to remove entire profiles, Pages, and Groups.

While Facebook's current machine learning isn't perfect and there is work to be done, it is a large step towards ensuring that the propaganda of terrorist organizations stays off the internet. In the first quarter of 2019, the machine learning system was able to remove 1.9 million pieces of ISIS and al-Qaeda content. 99% of the content that Facebook removed was before a user reported it.

Hajjaj Fahd al-Ajmi and Social Media Fundraising

Hajjaj Fahd al-Ajmi was a Kuwaiti national with alleged ties to Al-Qaeda. He was a terror financier and would post broadcasting calls on both Instagram and Twitter to attract financing. He had 250,000 followers on Twitter and 1.7 million followers on Instagram. He began to use his Twitter account to plead for donations to Syrian rebels. In June of 2012, he set up a Twitter account called "Popular Commission in Support of the Syrian Rebellion". In just one year, he was able to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations through the account. The donations were allegedly used to purchase arms for groups in Yemen, Gaza, in Syria. In 2013, he set up another fundraiser campaign via twitter which was active until 2014 when he became a United States specially designated global terrorist. Following his designation, his Twitter account was suspended.

Upon suspension of his Twitter account, al-Ajmi turned to Instagram to fundraise. CNBC, an American pay television business news channel, picked up on Al-Ajmi's activity on Instagram and inquired about it. Twenty-four hours later, Instagram shut down his account. They confirmed that there were other accounts on its platform that were maintained by or on behalf of Hajjaj Fahd al-Ajmi. These accounts were shut down as well.

Following these incidents, the Al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee, which was established pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1267, added him to the Al-Qaida Sanctions List. The list serves a foundation for the implementation and enforcement of the sanctions measures imposed against those individuals and entities associated with Al-Qaeda as designated by the committee.

Guiding Questions

1. What practices that social media companies currently employ are effective in removing extremist content?

2. How can social media companies become more effective in removing extremist content? Do users need to be vetted before they are allowed to join a particular social media network?

3. Do countries need to employ any regulations to limit what kind of information can be published in the media?

4. Are we infringing on freedom of expression and speech through such regulations?

5. How can journalist accurately and safely report on terrorism?

6. How can we protect the rights and guarantee the safety of journalists, particularly those reporting on terrorist organizations?

7. How can we effectively and safely use the media to report of the 'age of terror'?

Additional Resources

https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14094918

A timeline of the history of South Africa, showing the order of events from the first settlers of the region up to today.

http://oxfordre.com/africanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-41

A very detailed overview of the decolonization of the Portuguese colonies in Africa.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/november/11/newsid_2658000/2658445.stm

A look at the Unilateral Declaration of Independence, particularly its significance and its context.

https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/nov/30/africa-fidel-castro-nelson-mandela-cuba

A look at Cuba's involvement in the African region.

https://www.atomicheritage.org/history/proxy-wars-during-cold-war-africa

An exploration of how the Cold War manifested in Africa, mainly through proxy wars.

Work Cited

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13. https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/media-terror-age-social-media/

14. https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-tech-companies-are-trying-to-disrupt-terrorist-social-media-activity/

15. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247074\

16. https://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewHTML.asp?FileID=10914&lang=EN

17. https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/04/keeping-terrorists-off-facebook/

18. https://futurism.com/blockchain-startup-stradivarius

19. https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list/summaries/individual/hajjaj-bin-fahd-al-ajmi

20. https://www.cnbc.com/2017/12/18/social-media-propaganda-terror-financiers-operate-on-internet.html

Topic B: Net Neutrality

Topic Introduction

Net neutrality, by textbook definition, is the "the principle that Internet service providers should enable access to all content and applications regardless of the source, and without favoring or blocking particular products or websites." Since the dawn of the Internet, policy makers all around the globe have struggled with if and how much the government should be regulating the world wide Web and the vast amount of information that it provides. As the Internet expanded over the years, so did the idea of Net Neutrality, causing the idea of fast and slow lanes of the internet rise as well as the debate over the merits of broadband networks as a public utility. In the United States, the Federal Communications Commission ruled in favor of net neutrality as of 2015, but opponents still continuously fight back legally. Other developed countries are faced with the same issues as the United States, and developing nations look to more developed nations around the world to guide their decision surrounding net neutrality. Vint Cerf, widely revered as the father of the internet, said "(that) the theory we had is that if we just specify what the protocols would look like and what software you needed to write, anybody who wanted to build a piece of internet would do that", meaning that at its core the internet was meant to be an accessible tool for everyone. While much has changed since the creation of the Internet in 1983, does that mean that the same principles no longer apply?

History

The concept of Freedom of speech and information has existed for centuries within many cultures around the world. However, "The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen," written by the Abbé Sieyès and the Marquis de Lafayette, during the French Revolution in 1796, was the document that gave the right to free speech the weight that it carries in today's globalized world. It outlines the innate freedom of individuals to openly express and publish their opinions and ideas without fear of retaliation, violence, or censorship. Initially, this right applied to both the written and oral word as well as artistic pieces, though now it applies to every medium.

However, given the power that this freedom allows individuals, especially when challenging the authority of a government or politically powerful group, it is one of the most conflict-prone rights. In Nazi Germany, books were burned for the ideas they held. In both 16th century Great Britain and France, unlicensed and unapproved literary works were banned from being publicized as more and more people were exposed to the "menace" of the printing press spread throughout the populace.

With the rise of the internet, the definition of freedom of information has expanded to include not only the right to express and publicize information and ideas through any medium, but also the right to seek information and ideas, receive information and ideas, as well as impart information and ideas unto others. It has proven to be "a revolution for censorship as much as for free speech." Yet, as access to information increases with the cyber-domain open to citizens across the globe, people are still looking for ways to limit the masses internet access. Some of this is caused by the rise of terrorism, where information poses a threat to public security. Some of this is caused by governments looking to consolidate their power.

The rise of authoritarian leaders, especially, has become a point of debate in the online community, where states like Poland, Hungary, Turkey, Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and China have begun to practice state-sponsored censorship, where systematic monitoring and information blocking practices have become common.

Past Action

The issue of net neutrality is recent, and every day something new on the topic breaks. The most recent course of action taken regarding net neutrality was on February, 27th, 2019. Democrats in the House of Representatives and Senate of the United States introduced a bill that would restore Obama-era net neutrality rules. The bill comes in response to a vote back in December of 2017 by the Federal Communications Commission that removed regulations that were put in place in 2015. The 2017 vote repealed the order that prohibited blocking, throttling, or otherwise discriminating against lawful content, and opened the door for internet service providers to block or throttle content at their own discretion. In January of 2018, the attorney generals of more than 20 US states filed petitions to stop the repeal of neutrality protections. In March of 2018, several tech companies, including Etsy,

Kickstarter, Foursquare, and Shutterstock, filed a petition challenging the Federal Communications Commission's rollback of net neutrality protections. While the Federal Communications Commission is based in the United States, its actions have implications for internet users all over the world. Many of the Commission's actions set a precedent for other countries. Moreover, online service may become more expensive outside the United States if they become more expensive to provide in the United States due to a rollback of net neutrality protections.

Many governments around the world have taken steps to ensure net neutrality. For example, in 2018, the Indian government unanimously approved new regulations supporting net neutrality. The regulations are considered to be the "world's strongest" net neutrality rules, and guarantee free and open internet for nearly half a billion people.

Many large Internet application companies are strong advocates for net neutrality, and have released statements in support of regulations that grant net neutrality. These companies include Yahoo!, Vonage, eBay, amazon, IAC/InterActiveCorp, Microsoft, Reddit, Twitter, Tumblr, Etsy, Daily Kos, and Greenpeace. The United Nations doesn't have jurisdiction over net neutrality. However in 2015, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye, welcomed the decision of the United States Federal Communications Commission to establish regulations to protect net neutrality in the country.

Each country has individual policies and frameworks in place regarding net neutrality that can be examined. For example, Article 3 of EU Regulations 2015/2120 sets the basic framework for ensuring net neutrality across the entirety of the European Union. However, the regulation's text has been criticized for having too many loopholes. Many other countries face similar issues with their policies and frameworks.

Current Situation

Net neutrality is an issue that currently affects approximately 50 nations around the globe. This problem is exclusively limited to nations with widespread internet access, which are largely more developed nations, but as the world develops net neutrality will begin to affect everyone around the globe. Net neutrality laws have been put in place in some developed nations such as China, South Africa, and Republic of Korea. Currently, 13 nations enforce net neutrality, the first nation being the Netherlands in 2013. The G8 countries, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States all have taken net neutrality laws under close consideration, but many struggle to make a clear cut decision on the issue.

Net Neutrality has become a massive issue in the United States, following the 2014 ruling to change the Internet to a telecommunications service, allowing the Federal Communications Commission to uphold net neutrality. In 2015, the United States Telecom Association filed a lawsuit against the Federal Communications Commission regarding the classification of broadband carriers as "common carriers", but in the end the court upheld the Federal Communications Commission's classification because as they define broadband

internet as public utility. When US President, Donald Trump assumed office, Ajit Varadaraj Pai was appointed as the commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission. Soon after, Pai proposed the reclassification of broadband internet access as a information service and lessening of legal regulations on Internet Service Providers which was met with opposition by those in favor of open Internet. Those for an open Internet insisted that Pai's suggested policy changes would limit the Internet's part in free speech, economic growth, and innovation. On November 21st, 2017, Pai revealed his plan to repeal net neutrality in the United States, immediately sparking controversy and causing twenty people at large in the world of the Internet, including the inventor of the Web, to write an open letter to the US House of Representatives and the Senate imploring them to cancel the vote to repeal net neutrality. The open letter had no effect, as the vote was held December 14th, 2017 with 3 for and 2 against repealing net neutrality. Quickly following the vote, New York and Washington State both announced their intention to sue the Federal Communications Commission over the decision. The Federal Communications Commission informed the Senate of its decision to repeal net neutrality on February 2, 2018, giving Congress 60 days to stop their decision through the Congressional Review Act. Congress did not attempt to stop the Federal Communications Commission on the repeal of net neutrality and on June 11, 2018 the repeal went into effect. Net neutrality is still hotly debated in the United States, with ongoing political and legal battles being fought over the issue.

In similarly developed nations such as the United Kingdom, net neutrality is not seen as quite as big of an issue in comparison to the view of the United States. The debate surrounding net neutrality in the United Kingdom is directed by the regulators of the Internet and is heavily influenced by the debate surrounding the issue in other European countries. The European Union has laws that set up the basic framework to ensure net neutrality across the board, but these laws have received criticism for apparent loopholes that allow Internet Service Providers to work around these laws. Though the European Union has basic laws that ensure net neutrality, some member states have put stricter regulations surrounding net neutrality to help ensure that their data is kept equal.

Net neutrality is an issue that affects almost all developed nations, yet many similarly structured countries cannot come to a decision on this problem. The Internet was created to be equal and for everyone, the same way that democracy is for and by the people, and the immense variance across the world is a reflection of the democratic nature in each country.

Bloc Positions

Stronger Enforcement
Belgium, Netherlands, Denmark, Italy

Though Article 3 of EU Regulation 2015/2120 outlines a basic framework for ensuring net neutrality across the entirety of the European Union, some countries seek to further these regulations. Critical of the regulations text for offering possible stipulations that can undermine the regulations effectiveness, these nations have built upon this framework

extensively, to further ensure net neutrality for their citizens and telecommunication companies. Nations like the Netherlands and Belgium are on the forefront of the net neutrality movement as some of the first in the international community to enact official net neutrality laws and have been consistently enforcing them. The Netherlands was actually the second in the world to pass legislation regarding net neutrality in 2012 with its Telecommunications Act, including legislation blocking of Internet services, use of deep packet inspection to track customer behaviour, and otherwise filtering or manipulating network traffic. Consistently, governments of these nations have linked the implementation of net neutrality with ensuring consumer security and fairness. As stated by Italian senator Vimercati in reference to a proposed net neutrality bill, "it is also a problem of transparency and for the mobile connections: we need the minimum bandwidth to guarantee the service. We need some principle to defend the consumers."

Flexible Net Neutrality
Germany, Portugal, Austria, Finland

Though the European Union has passed legislation regarding the assurance of net neutrality, some nations have practiced more flexible enforcement of these regulations. Critical of the benefits to consumers and companies alike, some nations have linked less regulation to an increase in transparency and competition. The Portuguese government, for example, still allows for certain kinds of pricing models which are banned under most net neutrality rules as of 2017. Others like Austria simply haven't prioritized net neutrality legislation, setting guidelines for companies and consumers alike instead of enforceable legislation. However, these practices have led to contentions within states as several instances have arisen in which telecommunications regulatory agencies have been accused of violating EU regulations. Several companies have required government oversight to ensure that the European net neutrality guidelines were being adhered to, most notably in context of the German mobile broadband Vodafone in 2017.

Speakers Present at the Forum

Each speaker at the forum has a varied background, hence unique standpoint on the issue. Generally, the speakers present at this iteration of the forum hold the viewpoint that net neutrality is essential to the progression of our democracies. Without net neutrality, it would be incredibly difficult to foster open communication and innovation across multiple platforms. However, these speakers understand that there are numerous loopholes in current policies regarding net neutrality, as well as how in the past, some tech companies have violated present policies. These speakers believe that it is essential that the forum develop recommendations that can address such loopholes and violations, as well as ensure lasting net neutrality.

Case Studies
Comcast Support of Net Neutrality

Many tech and internet companies are enthusiastic in their support of net neutrality. One such corporation is Comcast. On their website, Comcast has published the following statement, "We do not block, slow down or discriminate against lawful content. We believe in full transparency in our customer policies. We are for sustainable and legally enforceable net neutrality protections for our customers." Comcast even went as far as to release a Tweet reading, "We do not and will not block, throttle, or discriminate against lawful content. We will continue to make sure that our policies are clear and transparent for consumers, and we will not change our commitment to these principles," in response to news that the Federal Communications Commission might lift restrictions protecting net neutrality.

However, many critics question how honest corporations like Comcast are about their support of net neutrality. When looking at past records, some companies have not always acted in ways that show their support for net neutrality. In 2007, for example, Comcast was found intermittently blocking users' ability to use BitTorrent. At first, the company made several false claims about its interference. However, it finally admitted its wrongdoing and halted the disruptions. Incidents like this worry many internet users. Even though many corporations support net neutrality proudly, if net neutrality were were ever to be repealed, there is no guarantee that these companies will continue to not block, throttle, or discriminate certain content

India's Net Neutrality Rules

Many believe India to have some of the world's best net neutrality rules. The country adopted new net neutrality recommendations in November 2017 amid an ongoing global debate on net neutrality. At this time, the Federal Communications Commission had announced plans to repeal rules that governed the way net provides treated the date that travelled across their networks. While nearly two thirds of the country's population still don't have access to the internet, the country is rapidly progressing and more and more citizens are gaining access to the internet thanks to a boom in affordable mobile devices. Many Indian activists believe that net neutrality is vital to ensure that hundreds of millions of Indians aren't exploited in the process. The Indian government seems to agree. Their new net neutrality regulations read as follows, "Internet access services should be governed by a principle that restricts any form of discrimination or interference in the treatment of content, this includes practices like blocking, degrading, slowing down or granting preferential speeds or treatment to any content."

Indian began working on their new regulations back in early 2015 when activists from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of Indian (TRAI) rallied Internet users in favor of net neutrality rules. It was long and extensive process for India's Department of Telecommunications to approve the new neutrality rules.

Internet service providers who break the new regulations could lose their licenses to operate in India. The new recommendations forbid operators from throttling data speeds for any online service as well as mandates that all content be treated the same. Facebook and Google were two corporations that were largely impacted by the new regulations in India. Previously, Facebook had only allowed Indians with Free Basics service, which offered

Indians free access to a limited number of websites. Facebook's Free Basics service mainly existed in economically developing nations, which gave those in economically developed nations an unfair advantage.

Guiding Questions

1. **Should net neutrality be guaranteed? Why?**

2. **How can countries better form regulations regarding net neutrality?**

3. **What actions should tech, internet, and telecommunication companies take regarding net neutrality?**

4. **What roles do citizens, government officials, and public leaders play regarding net neutrality?**

5. **How effective are current net neutrality regulations in ensuring that people all over the world have equal access to the internet?**

6. **How do net neutrality regulations compare across different countries?**

7. **How do various positions on net neutrality compare?**

Additional Resources

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Article on Net Neutrality

1. **https://www.aclu.org/issues/free-speech/internet-speech/what-net-neutrality**

Federal Communications Commission on Net Neutrality

2. **https://www.fcc.gov/restoring-internet-freedom**

United Nations Human Rights Council Statement from The United Nations Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression

3. **https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15622&LangID=E**

Regulations from the European Union Regarding Net Neutrality

4. https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/8fdf5d08-93fc-11e5-983e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

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