

Cyber Challenges to International Human Rights

Title: Internet Access as an Auxiliary Human Right

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Abstract:

Could our increasing reliance on Internet access to fulfill basic civil tasks render it a human right? This paper argues that Internet access has obtained the status of an auxiliary human right in support of three primary rights - freedom of expression, association and information. Past studies have identified multiple competing theories of how Internet access could attain human rights status. This research builds on this normative foundation by adding a new empirical design that quantitatively measures the relationship between Internet access, human rights and civic engagement. Our dual methodology combines a) a normative-legal analysis that examines the conceptual basis for Internet access as an auxiliary human right, together with b) a randomized controlled experiment that looks at the ability of participants to complete functional tasks associated with specific rights under simulated conditions of internet access and deprivation. The combined analysis reveals that the absence of Internet access significantly reduces task completion for functional activities associated with freedom of expression, freedom of association and conditionally for freedom of information. These findings bear significant implications for public policy, cyber regulation and the inherent tensions between national security considerations and civil liberties.