

Openness and the Internet Explosion in Iran

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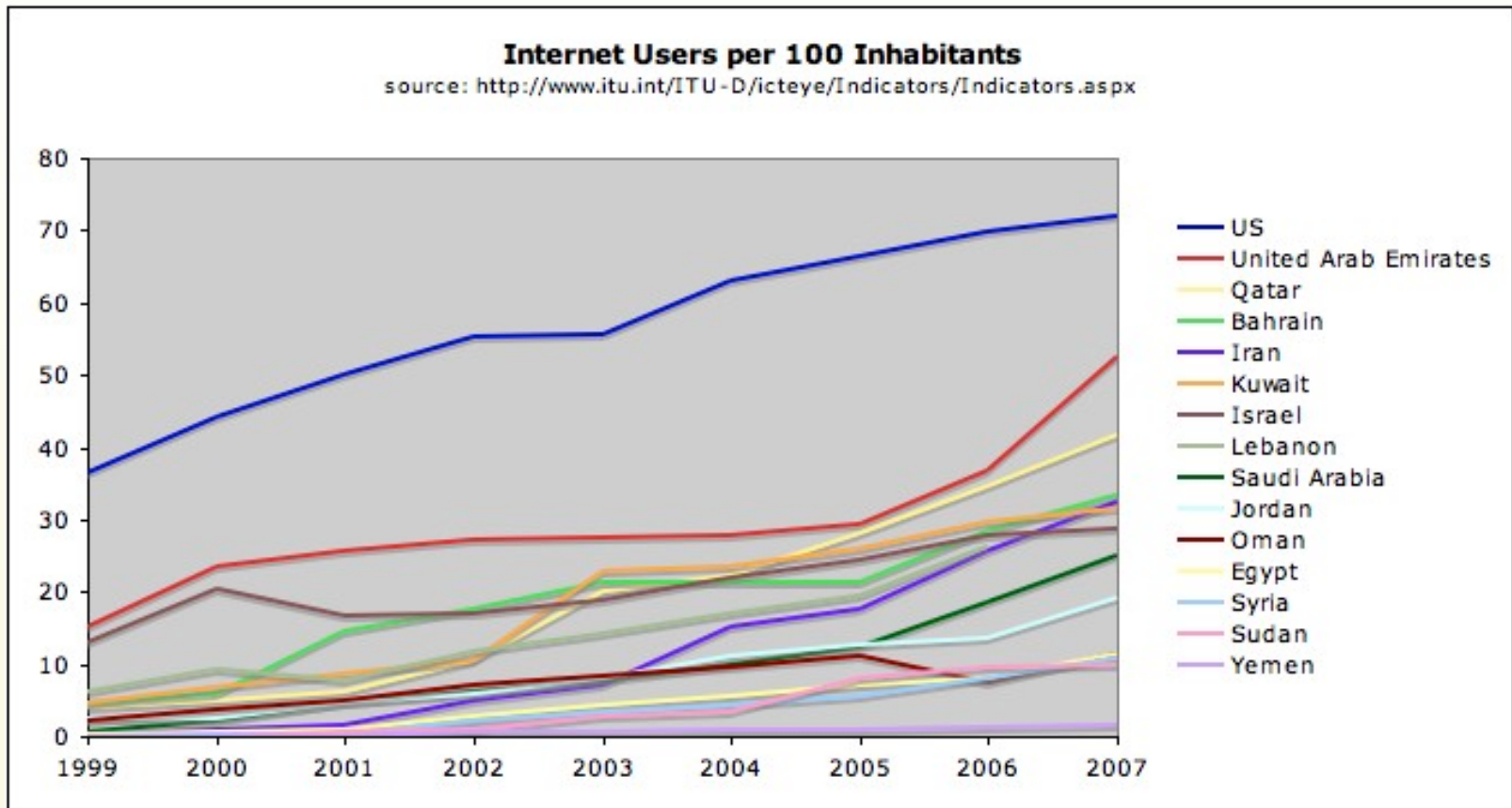
(joint with Sadia Ahsanuddin)

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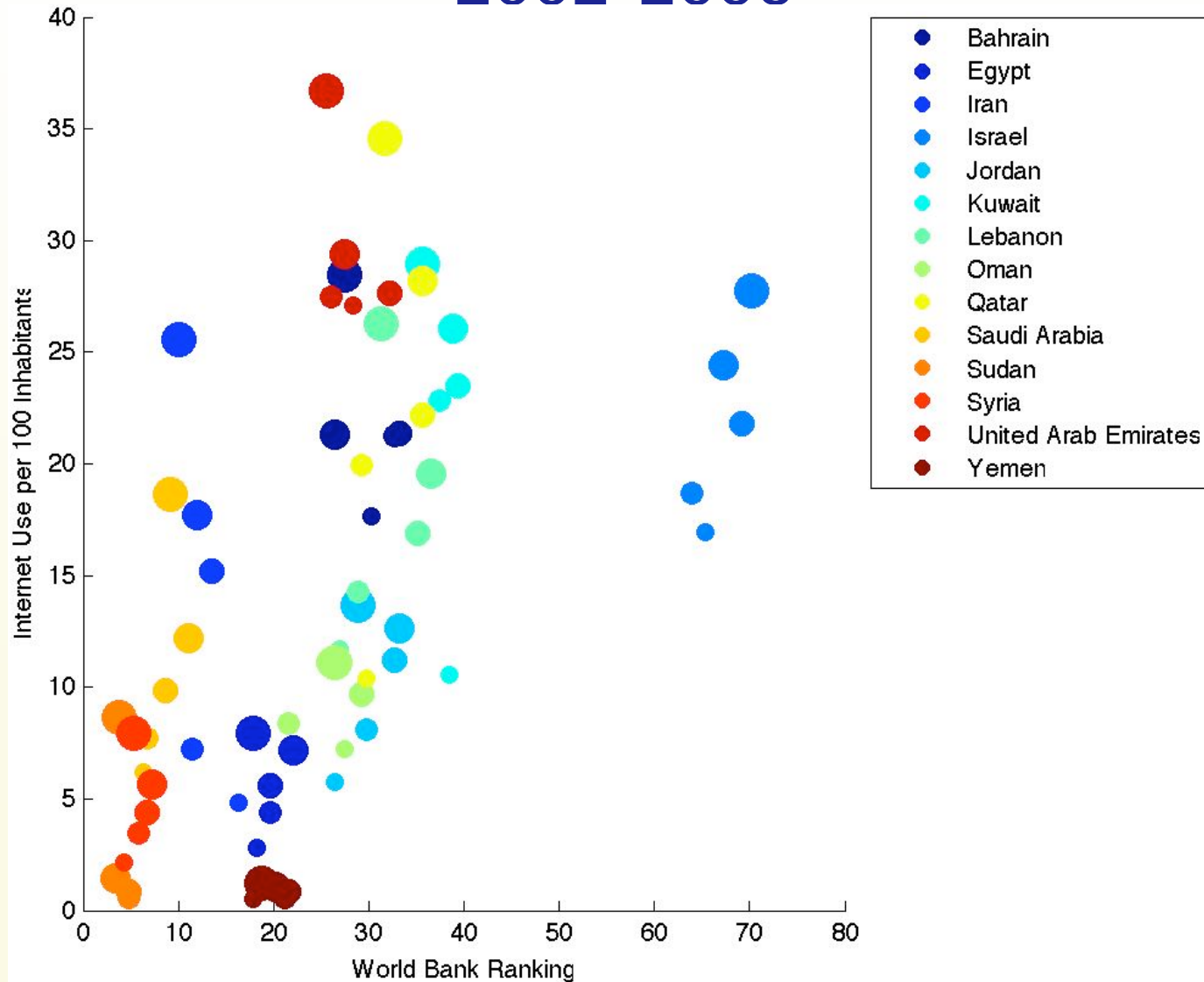
May 24, 2009

Internet Penetration in the Middle East



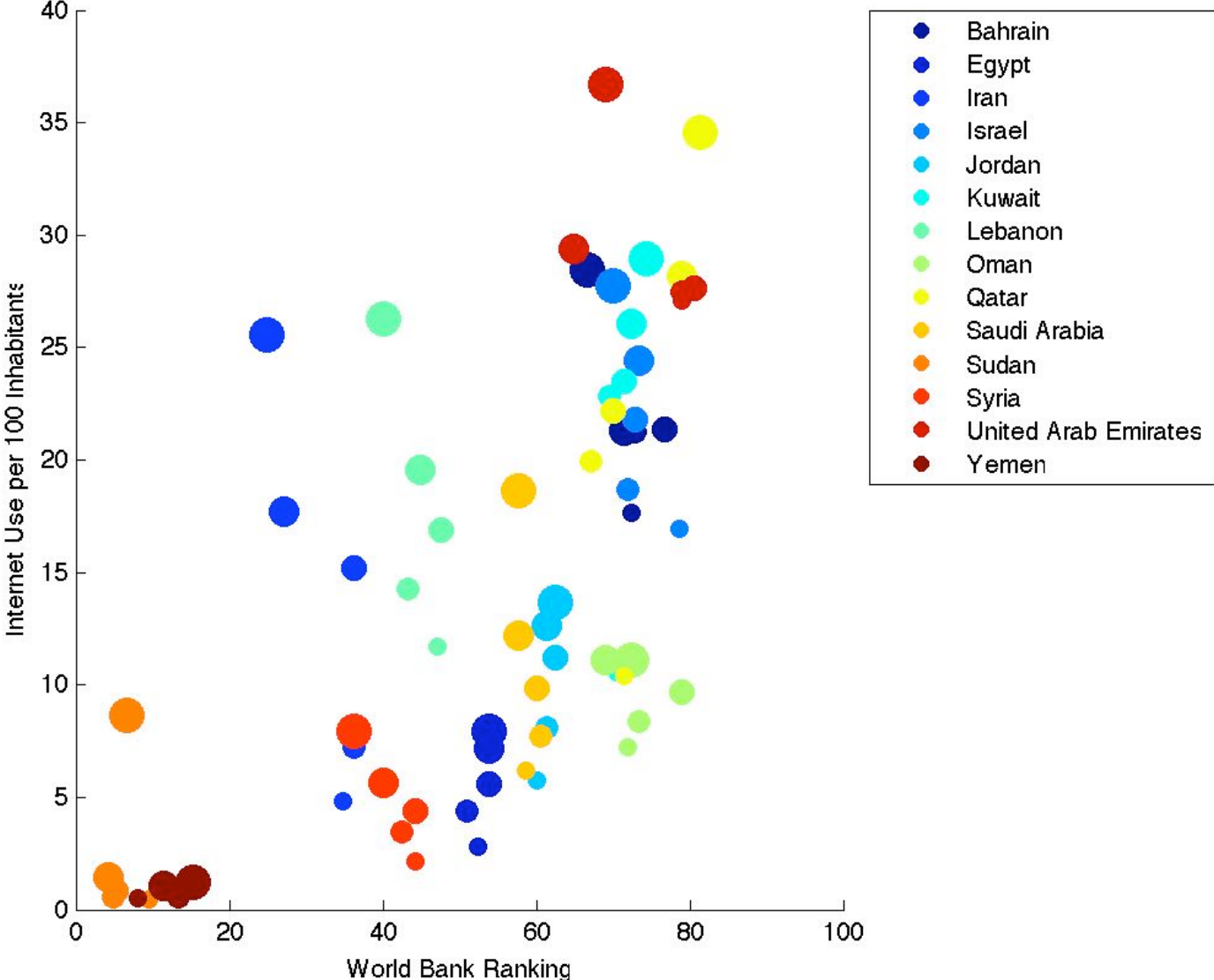
Internet Use and Free Speech

2002-2006



Internet Use and Rule of Law

2002-2006



The Iranian Blogosphere

- 4th largest
- 23 million people online, about a third of the population
- 70% of population under 30
- 77% literacy rate (large emphasis on education of youth, especially technical)
- About 25% of the blogs expat

The Bloggers and the Blogging

- Biggest topic Islam (promoting online religious authority)
- Enormous amount of poetry (political)
- 26% of bloggers female
 - Back to before revolution of 1906-11: expression of "modern" feminist views: denouncing the veil, polygamy, condition of women.
 - around revolution, women's associations, schools, journals were started (Women's Freedom and Women's Voice), health clinics.
 - women were officially banned from political process.

The Government's Role

- Internet not wholly subversive
- Why introduced by government?
 - Advancement of scientific progress
 - Transparency: high officials' blogs, information transfer, taxpaying..
 - access to to the Center for Islamic Jurisprudence at Qom

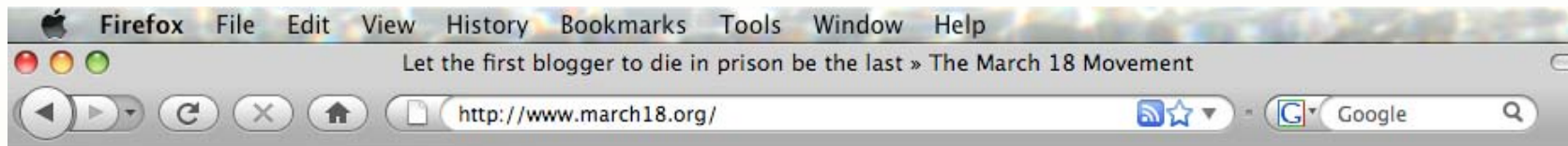
The Government's Role

- orkut, YouTube blocked
- Facebook just blocked with the advent of the upcoming presidential election (Mousavi: 5000 friends)
- 21% expat blogs blocked
- 11% political reform blogs blocked
- 2% of conservative political blogs blocked

The Government's Fear

- Crisis of religious authority: many sources
- 2003: 3 journalists arrested for online content.
 - Motabelli (held without access to lawyer, released 8 months later fled to Netherlands; was taught to blog by Derakshan)
- 2004: 25 arrested for involvement with online information transmission
- Parliamentary debate on death penalty for internet crimes

The Future of Iranian Blogging?



OR318 Remembering Omid Reza

Let the first blogger to die in prison be the last

The **March 18 Movement** was born out of a tragedy. On this day in 2009, Omid Reza Mir Sayafi, Iranian blogger and journalist, died in Evin Prison in Tehran. The December before his death, he was sentenced to two and half years in prison for allegedly insulting religious leaders, and engaging in "propaganda" against the Islamic Republic of Iran. Omid Reza was the first blogger to die in prison and his death reveals that getting censored is far from the worst thing that can happen to a blogger.

The irony is that, as more members of both the public and the media praise the ability of bloggers to inform, the more these de facto journalists around the globe become victims in fact. The March 18 Movement aims not only to make sure that Omid Reza is remembered, but also that other persecuted bloggers around the world do not disappear into interrogation rooms and prison cells. The March 18 Movement would like to become a voice for

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Get Involved!



From the Blog

Founders of March 18 on PRI's "The World"

May 23rd, 2009 [No Comments](#)

Cyrus Farivar reports on an online movement promoting free speech and supporting bloggers who've been imprisoned

Twitter



Public Radio International's "The World" radio program did a story on the Movement. Listen here.
<http://www.theworld.org/node/26502> »
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