

The image features a large, stylized number '2018' in a dark red color. The '2' and '0' are partially obscured by a white oval with a dark red border. Inside the oval, the text 'Philanthropy and Digital Civil Society: BLUEPRINT 2018' is written in dark red. Below this, 'The Annual Industry Forecast by Lucy Bernholz' is written in a smaller, lighter red font. The background is white with a dark red vertical bar on the left side.

Philanthropy and
Digital Civil Society:

BLUEPRINT 2018

The Annual Industry Forecast
by Lucy Bernholz

Acknowledgments

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For more information, contact bernholz@stanford.edu.

Copies available for free download at
<https://pacscenter.stanford.edu/blueprint>.

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lucybernholz.com
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Stanford SOCIAL
INNOVATION Review



Stanford PACS
Center on Philanthropy
and Civil Society
—
Digital Civil Society Lab

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WHAT IS THIS MONOGRAPH?

Philanthropy and Digital Civil Society: Blueprint 2018 is an annual industry forecast about the ways we use private resources for public benefit in the digital age. Each year, the *Blueprint* provides an overview of the current landscape, points to big ideas that will matter in the coming year, and directs your attention to horizons where you can expect some important breakthroughs in the coming year.

The Digital Civil Society Lab at the Stanford Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society and *Stanford Social Innovation Review* are key partners in bringing you the *Blueprint*.

WHY IS IT CALLED A BLUEPRINT?

A blueprint is a guide for things to come as well as a storage device for decisions already made. Good blueprints fit their environment, reflect a thoughtful regard for resources, and lead to structures that are well engineered and aesthetically pleasing. Blueprints can be adjusted as work proceeds, and they offer a starting point for future improvements. Good blueprints require a commitment to listen to those for whom they are drawn and to use a common grammar to communicate the results of countless sketches and discarded first drafts. This *Blueprint* is intended for everyone involved in using private resources for public benefit—philanthropists, social business leaders, nonprofit and association executives, individual activists, and policy makers. It can be used as a starting point for debate and as input for your own planning. Please **join the discussion** on Twitter at [#blueprint2018](https://twitter.com/blueprint2018).

WHO WROTE THIS DOCUMENT?

I'm Lucy Bernholz and I'm a philanthropy wonk. I've been working in and researching philanthropy and the social economy since 1990. *The Huffington Post* calls me a "philanthropy game changer," *Fast Company* magazine named my blog *Philanthropy2173* "Best in Class," and I've been named to *The Nonprofit Times'* annual list of 50 most influential people. I work at the **Digital Civil Society Lab**, which is part of **Stanford University's Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society (PACS)**. I studied history and earned a BA from Yale University and an MA and PhD from Stanford University. On Twitter I'm known as [@p2173](https://twitter.com/p2173), and I post most of my articles, speeches, and presentations online at www.lucybernholz.com. The Lab supports the **Digital Impact community** at www.digitalimpact.org and curates, creates, and shares free resources related to data governance at <https://digitalimpact.io>.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

The best way to keep up with my thinking is via a free subscription to *Philanthropy2173*. Information about Stanford's Digital Civil Society Lab is available on the websites of the Lab and PACS. Previous years' *Blueprints* can be downloaded at www.lucybernholz.com/books or <https://pacscenter.stanford.edu/blueprint>.

A NOTE TO THE READER ON TIMING

As I write this, both houses of the US Congress have passed extensive tax bills. These bills are not (yet) law, but may be by the time you read this. They contain provisions that, if passed into law, will quickly and dramatically change philanthropy and digital civil society in the United States. It is worth calling out some of these provisions. If they are law by the time you read this, big change will be afoot. If they've not been enacted, the sector must acknowledge the degree to which the proposals challenged previously sacrosanct assumptions about nonprofits. The changes to the estate tax, standard deduction, and university endowments may significantly alter the contours of the philanthropic landscape in the United States. However, there are also several trends well under way that complicate simple calculations about the effects of these rules on giving. At the top end of the wealth spectrum, we see more and more donors setting up LLCs and not foundations, forgoing certain tax benefits. The long tail of smaller donors has not typically taken advantage of tax benefits, and they've moved a lot of giving onto crowdfunding platforms. It's hard to know how all the factors will interact.

Unlike these unknowns, however, is the status of the Brady Amendment (section 5201) to HR1¹, the House of Representatives tax bill. The amendment allows all charitable nonprofits in the United States to take funds for partisan political activities for the election cycles 2018, 2020, and 2022. If it is law by the time you read this, I predict an immediate and meaningful change in the contours of the US charitable sector and its political system along with a flood of funding through charitable nonprofits to launder donors' names of political contributions².

In addition, the Federal Communications Commission is considering a proposal to end net neutrality in the United States. If passed into law, this proposal will make every nonprofit, foundation, association, and other civil society organization into second-class digital citizens.

INTRODUCTION

This is the ninth annual *Blueprint*. To better reflect all that I've learned since I began writing these monographs, I'm changing the title. I'm replacing the phrase "social economy" with "digital civil society." We define digital civil society as "all the ways we voluntarily use private resources for public benefit in the digital age." This includes the institutional forms that constitute a social economy—nonprofits, social businesses, informal associations, cooperatives, philanthropic funders, social impact investors, political actors and donors, and individual activists. They are all part of digital civil society. I'm expanding the frame of the *Blueprint* so that it encompasses these components as well as the actors and influences brought in as a result of our digital dependence. We can't hope to improve the system until we're sure we've got all the factors identified.

Readers of the *Blueprint* series know that the social economy itself includes not only a range of enterprise forms (doers) but also a range of funding sources (donors), including impact investors, political donors, and those who provide funds directly. We need to keep our eyes on this "contribution" side of digital civil society—it's as dynamic and interesting as the enterprise side. However, I will continue to use the perspective of philanthropy as the center from which I examine these broader circles. This is because "philanthropy" continues to be a meaningful word that captures the idea of private contribution flow. It draws our attention to voluntary contributions (of money, time, and data) toward some "public benefit." In other words, I'm using the term "philanthropy" to center my attention on what each of us can contribute to make things better for others. Eventually, I think we'll need new vocabulary

that encompasses all of the ways we contribute resources—financial, time-based, and digital. Until then, I'll use "philanthropy."

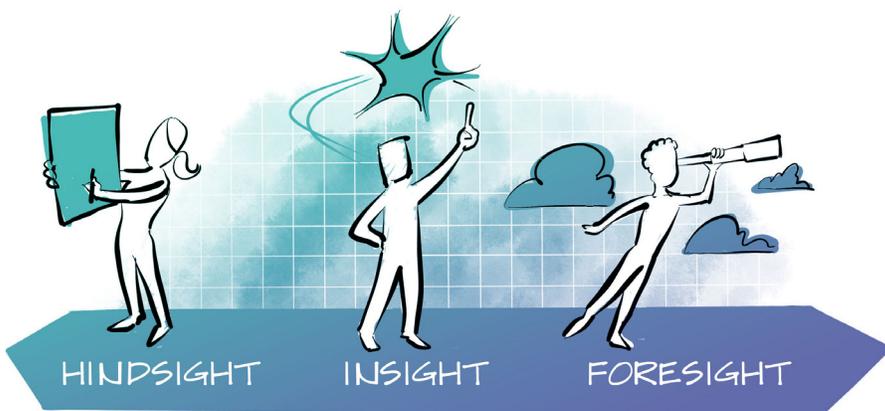
Another change in the *Blueprint* is the effort I'm making to conceptualize this work across communities. This is more than just thinking globally. I've learned with people who describe themselves as "BBD" (born before digital) and from those who've always known this dual analog/digital world. I've listened to people who take for granted that they have the power to change things and those for whom power is more often taken away than taken for granted. I've spent the year learning with colleagues in Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, India, South Africa, and the U.K. I've worked with dozens of undergraduate and graduate students and tried a year of conference conversations in eight countries via the **Digital Impact initiative**.

The *Blueprint* series assumes that civil society is dependent on digital technology, data, norms, and regulations. In places where broadband is not available, where data plans are expensive, and where computer literacy is low, people and organizations aspire to get connected; they want to be able to depend on digital. My research looks at the intersections of the digital world—its technologies, policies, and governance—with civil society’s expectations and institutions. These vary significantly from one place to another and within places, across generations and within generations. I’m making deliberate ongoing efforts to learn from and with people in other parts of the world, and I actively follow the work of scholars studying digital activism, civil society, and media ecosystems in autocracies and dictatorships. I don’t have a lot of answers, but my questions keep getting more interesting.

Finally, I want to point out that this edition of the *Blueprint* is being produced by the Stanford University Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society (where I now work) with the help of the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. When I started the *Blueprint* series in 2010, I produced it as part of the company I ran at the time. After selling that company, I partnered with the Foundation Center to keep the series going (thanks, GrantCraft!). Now that the Digital Civil Society Lab is up and running at Stanford PACS, it made sense to bring it in under these auspices. I’m grateful for the opportunity.

The structure of this year’s *Blueprint* hews pretty closely to the past format of *Insight*, *Hindsight*, and *Foresight*, with buzzwords, wild cards, and glimpses of the future rounding out the material. The 2018 **Insight** section looks at several dynamics between civil society, digital technologies, and democracy. It is (past) time we considered an interconnected approach to the ethics, principles, and values of the structures we build within our social systems and the way we design the technologies on which they depend. For nonprofits and foundations, both new and existing, this means examining how the default norms and structural design of the technology you use aligns with (or compromises) the values your organization stands for and the mission it pursues. Instead of a new worksheet this year, I’m providing [links to a full “workbook” of resources](#) for you to use in developing a data governance strategy for your organization.

In the **Foresight** section, I try to bring the big ideas down to ground level and make some predictions about what we’ll see in 2018. I hold myself accountable for what I got wrong (and right) in the **Hindsight** section. Writing the **Glimpses of the Future** section was particularly challenging this year because we seem to be at major inflection points on so many issues—climate change, nuclear war, race relations, economic inequality, and the balance of global superpowers. The future will be shaped not by any individual trend or any one of these issues but by the dynamics between all of them. What role will philanthropy and digital civil society play in such an uncertain future? That’s a question more difficult than ever to answer.



INSIGHT

Big Ideas that Matter for 2018

A DIGITAL CIVIL SOCIETY FRAMEWORK

The language of the social economy helps us describe a diverse system of institutions and financial flows. The language of civil society helps us articulate the purpose of the social economy and its role in democratic systems. Digital civil society encompasses all the ways we voluntarily use private resources for public benefit in the digital age.



The hallmark feature of civil society in a democracy is its (at least, theoretical) independence from governments and markets. Civil society is meant to be a “third space” where we voluntarily come together on the proverbial (or literal) park bench to take action as private citizens for the public good.



Our use of digital data and infrastructure blurs these distinctions and complicates these relationships for a simple reason: Most of “digital space” is owned or monitored by commercial firms and governments.

The conditions that support civil society’s independence have been weakening for a long time and for many reasons. Support for research from conflicted interests has tainted universities and nominally

independent research centers for years. News organizations sustaining themselves via ad and subscription revenue are mostly a thing of the past. A small number of big donors have been shown to shape political campaigns, legislative and legal strategies, and the charitable nonprofit landscape.³ While crowdfunding and crowdsourcing get a lot of press attention, the other end of the scale is shaped by large concentrations of money from a few interests.⁴

Today we must attempt to understand both the analog and digital relationships between these actors. We must examine how these relationships shift when organizations and individuals become dependent on digital tools, data, and infrastructure. These dependencies do much more than accelerate and expand the reach of individuals and organizations. They introduce new forms of activism such as hacking and raise new questions about authority and control between individuals and the companies that run the digital platforms.⁵

The relationships among organizations and individuals shift when they become dependent on digital tools, data, and infrastructure.

Most important, these dependencies bind traditionally independent civil society organizations and activities closely to marketplaces and governments in complex and problematic ways.

Our daily use of the most basic tools of the digital age, such as cellular phones, email, and networked printers, means that our activities are bounded by and reliant on the rules and tools of the companies that make the gadgets and wire the world. As we use these tools, our activities are also monitored by the governments that surveil the digital spaces in which our tools operate. Our actions in this space are shaped by the values of the companies that make the tools (even as the companies seek to deny this) and by the way we respond to being watched by both corporations and governments.⁶

These digital dependencies *significantly* challenge civil society's independence. This matters to how individuals and organizations work within the sector. And it matters to democracies that have long relied on the "immune response" provided

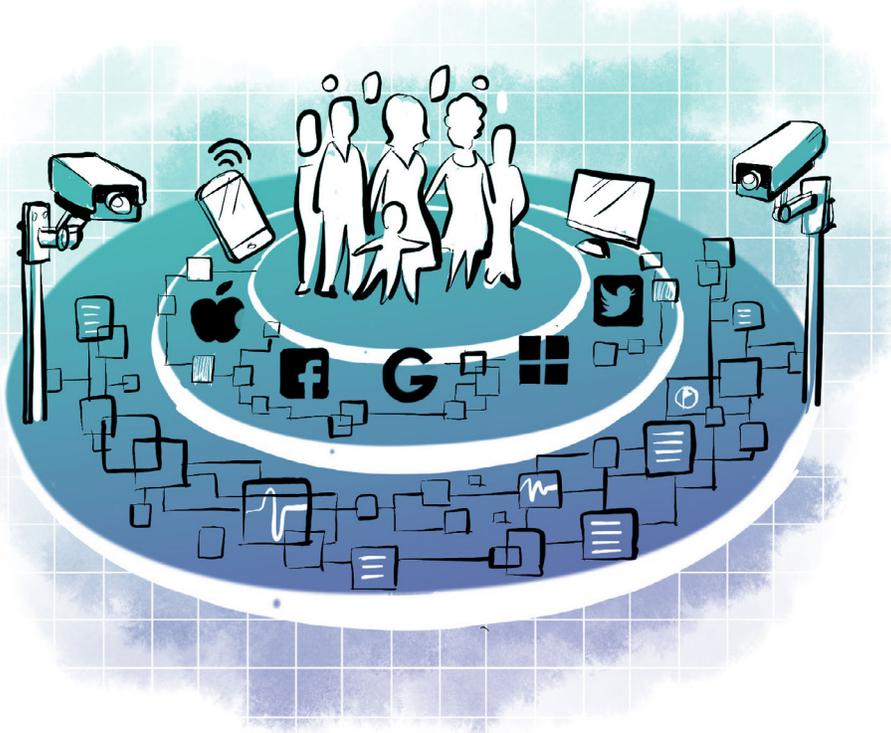
by a diverse and fractious space where minority demands, rights, and ideas could thrive with some degree of independence.

These digital dependencies significantly challenge civil society's independence.

It is no coincidence that experts see signs that the space for civil society is closing, that those monitoring Internet freedom see rising threats, and that those monitoring the health of democracies fear for the future. We can't decouple these pieces. Efforts to "save democracy" will depend on understanding how digital technologies have changed the relationships between sectors. I discuss this in more depth in the section on digital dependencies.

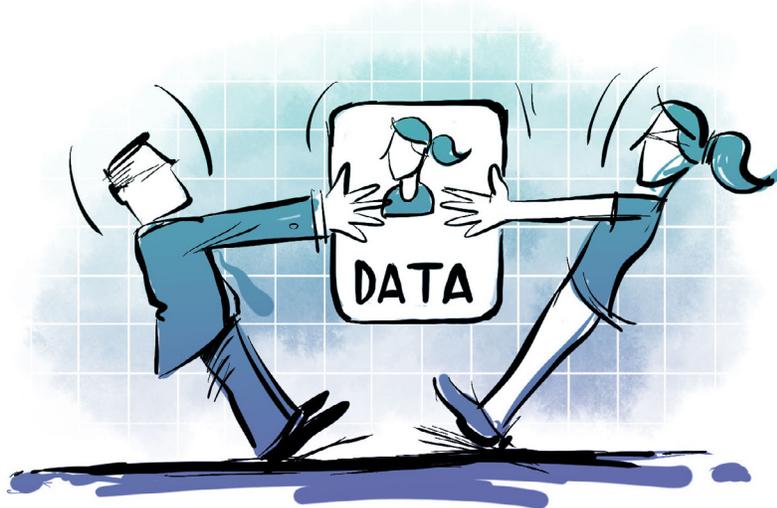
DIGITAL CIVIL SOCIETY AROUND THE WORLD

Over the course of the year, I met with people in eight countries about the shape and meaning of digital civil society. I spoke with nonprofit leaders and philanthropy infrastructure providers, data scientists and free speech experts, people who use blogs and social media to organize at the community level, lawyers, researchers, and engineers from the companies that the EU refers to as GAFAM (Google, Amazon, Facebook, and Apple), as well as Microsoft, Atlassian, Salesforce, Twitter, **Tencent**, and several others. I met with scholars studying encryption; engineers building open source tools for national security; foundation presidents, board members, and professional staff; individual donors; crowdfunding platform analysts; and national and state regulators of nonprofits. I talked to nonprofit leaders from the arts, venture capitalists, and



people who volunteer their time; to security experts for communities of color, Muslims, and transgender communities; and to as many people who voted for Donald Trump as I could reach.⁷ This is not a scientific sample, and these weren't research interviews, they were conversations. Here's what I learned.

- Personal control over our digital data is becoming a more widespread concern. The attitude "I don't care what they do with my info" still dominates, but more and more people are aware of and concerned about the ways in which governments and corporations collect and use their personal information.
- Mechanisms to establish personal control over one's data are necessary preconditions to developing meaningful ways to donate data (what is being called data philanthropy).
- Personal and/or community ownership of our data is an equity issue. Many people know this. Civil society organizations need to catch up.



- Nonprofits, funders, and civil society organizations are increasingly aware that the data they collect on people is a sensitive resource, which if not well

managed can quickly become a toxic asset. That said, they don't have the resources they need to handle it well. These resources include expertise, time, flexibility, and money.

- Digital platforms that focus on nonprofits, foundations, and associations are not monolithic in their approaches to civil society's values. Some software developers are deeply committed to building values-specific (e.g., privacy-enhancing) tools. Others see cost-competitiveness as their primary offering to the sector. And many software providers refuse to distinguish civil society organizations—and their values—from the rest of their customer base.
- With a few exceptions, companies that run "[name of company] for Good" initiatives have developed these programs with a minimum of imagination. They mostly provide free or low-cost access to software/hardware. This is a missed opportunity to create solutions that offer values-driven sector-specific data defaults and protections.
- Misunderstanding or ignoring the political economy of digital software inhibits civil society's influence on relevant policy matters.
- Civil society advocates remain largely isolated from digital rights expertise.
- Nonprofits and civil society organizations outside of the United States are aware of, and concerned about, the dominance of products and services from US companies.
- The European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), scheduled to take effect in May 2018, will set a global default for corporate data practices.



- Even as some organizations' understanding of "data" improves, the sector as a whole lacks a recognition of the way the political economy of digital systems influences civil society.

CIVIL SOCIETY AS THE IMMUNE SYSTEM FOR DEMOCRACY

The logic, theory, and experiences that connect an open civil society with a stable majority-run democracy are well known. Civil society is meant to be a third space where we voluntarily come together to take action as private citizens for the public good. Majority-run democracies need to, at the very least, prevent those who disagree with them (minorities) from revolting against the system. Civil society provides, at the very least, the pressure-release valve for majority-run governments. Positioned more positively, civil society is where those without power or critical mass can build both and influence the majority. It serves as a conduit to the majority system and a counterbalance to extreme positions. It also serves as an outlet for those actions, rights, and views that may never be the priority of a majority, but that are still valid, just, or beautiful. When it exists, civil society offers an immune system for democracy—it is a critical factor in a healthy system, and it requires its own maintenance. Immune

systems exist to protect and define—they are lines of defense that “allow organism[s] to persist over time.”⁸

Civil society always struggles to define its independence from governments and markets. Civil society is shaped by laws and revenue streams, but has different accountability mechanisms and relies on voluntary participation. It is distinct from compulsory government rights and obligations, and can often operate in ways that aren't about financial profit. But to describe the resulting space as truly independent is aspirational at best. While universal human rights such as free expression, peaceable assembly, and privacy provide its moral and philosophical underpinnings, civil society is shaped by the laws of the country in question. These include regulations about allowable sources of financing, public reporting, governance structures, and defined spheres of activity. At the very least, the boundaries of civil society in modern democracies are set by government action.

We are surrounded by big, fragile institutions. Global companies, established political structures, and big nonprofits have purchased, suppressed, or ignored the fluid and small alternatives surrounding them. Fluid, networked alternatives exist and will continue to spawn. For some time now, the fate of these alternatives was absorption by the top or diffusion with limited impact. In each sector, there appears to be a notable change of attitude in the way the small views the big. While corporate near-monopolies and dominant political parties are still viewed by some as the natural and best order of things (see, for example, tech executives and incumbent politicians), the big players in each sector are rigidifying. I sense that this is matched by a new attitude from the emergent,

smaller, and more fluid groups who aspire to challenge rather than to buttress.

This is where reminding ourselves of the dynamism of a social economy within civil society is so important. It helps us to keep our eyes simultaneously on emerging forms and on the relationships between them (the nodes and the networks). It's where we see tech-driven alternatives to party politics, nonprofit or research-driven alternatives to corporate data monopolies, and the crowdfunding of public services. What's changed is *not* the level of dynamism among these small, fluid, and cross-sector strategies. What's new is the confrontational nature they now bring. These alternatives don't see themselves as mere fleas on an elephant; rather, they challenge themselves to be the termites that topple the houses.

Closing civil society often precedes a democracy's shift into autocracy or chaos; defending civil society is not just an act of self-preservation.

The sense of failed systems can be seen in the rise of autocrats where democracy once ruled, in the lived experience of a changed climate even as a few powerful holdouts cling to their self-interested denials, and in the return to prominence of racist or nationalist factions where they'd been marginalized before. Threats about nuclear warheads catch people's attention. There is a pervasive sense of uncertainty.

Democracies depend on civil society. Closing civil society often precedes a democracy's shift into autocracy or chaos. Defending civil society is not just an act of self-preservation. Protecting the rights and interests of minority groups, and allowing space for collective action and diverse

beliefs, a cacophony of independent voices, and activities that yield neither financial profit nor direct political power, are in the best interest of elected political leaders and businesspeople.

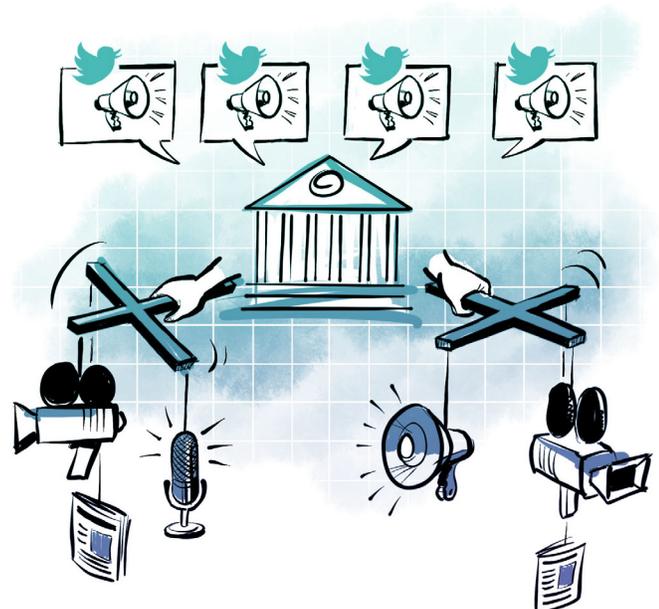
CLOSING SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

The 2017 *Blueprint* pointed to the closing of space for civil society in its "Glimpses of the Future" section. That future has arrived.

Every place I traveled I heard concerns both local and international—people's concern for their home structures as well as intense interest in the state of the US government.⁹

In many ways, deep concern for the rule of law, self-governance, and structural integrity brings out precisely the kind of individual and collective engagement that democracy requires. In places that haven't already turned a corner, people want to know how to take action before it is too late. How can citizens prevent leaders from power-consolidating moves such as those that have defined Hungary, Poland, and Turkey over the last year?

Experts who study autocracies know the warning signs. Consolidating, taking control of, or ridiculing the media; narrowing the legal space for association and protest; claiming emergency powers; and stacking the courts are all classic steps in a



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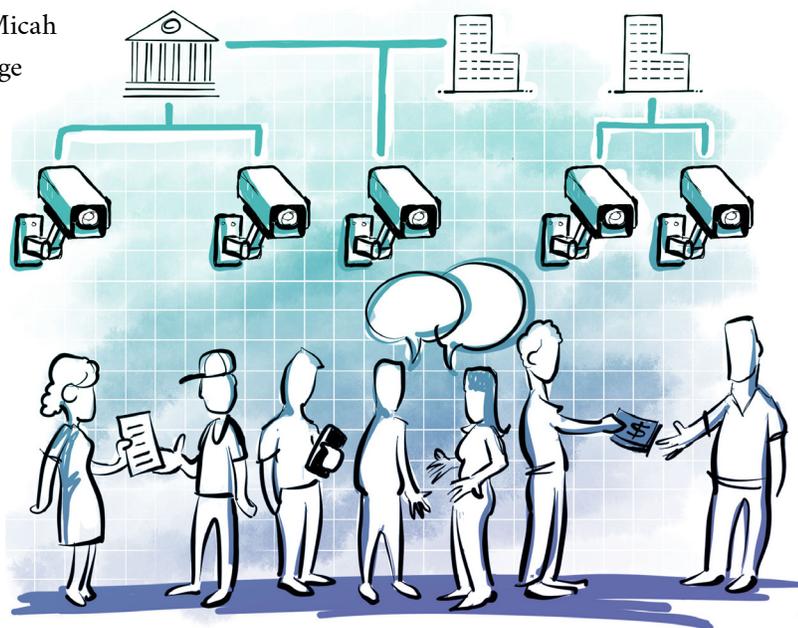
move from distributed to autocratic control.¹⁰ As we've seen this year, sowing distrust in previously trusted systems and creating doubt and confusion—what Micah Sifry calls “flooding the outrage zone”—also works well.¹¹

I want to focus on the narrowing of legal space for civil society. Global watchdog groups—such as **Civicus** and the **International Center for Not-for-Profit Law**—have been documenting the closing space for civil society for almost a decade. Simultaneously, organizations that monitor Internet freedom—**Global Voices**, **Access Now**, and **Freedom House**—have been tracking how governments (and corporations) are increasingly shutting off parts of the Internet, limiting access to the open Internet, and just unplugging servers as a means of asserting control.

A weaker, more highly leveraged civil society is more vulnerable to deliberate efforts to destabilize it. How do governments close civic space? Generally, by passing laws and/or using force to limit free expression, free assembly, and private spaces for planning collective action. Practically, this can happen in many ways:

- Regulatory changes—onerous registration requirements of nonprofits, requirements on who can be on their boards/staff, requiring more data on activities.

- Financial pressure—either by raising fees that organizations can't afford or by limiting the sources of funds that organizations can accept.
- Police monitoring of public assembly—laws limiting protests,¹² use of state force to break up public gatherings, sanctioning violence against protesters.



- Limiting speech—putting pressure on the media, sowing distrust in independent news organizations, state or corporate media monopolies, or direct censorship.¹³

In the United States it's worth also factoring in the ways that laws about campaign finance, free speech, donor anonymity, and political activity/advocacy have changed in recent years. The result has been a deliberate blurring of lines between electoral politics and civil society advocacy. This has opened financial floodgates for political contributions and, at the very least, coincided with a decrease in trust in both political and charitable actors.

DEMOCRACY'S DIGITAL DEPENDENCIES AND THE CLOSING OF CIVIL SOCIETY

So where and how do digital practices relate to closing civil society? Look again at that list of bullet points above. Digital connections make all of those actions easier to undertake.

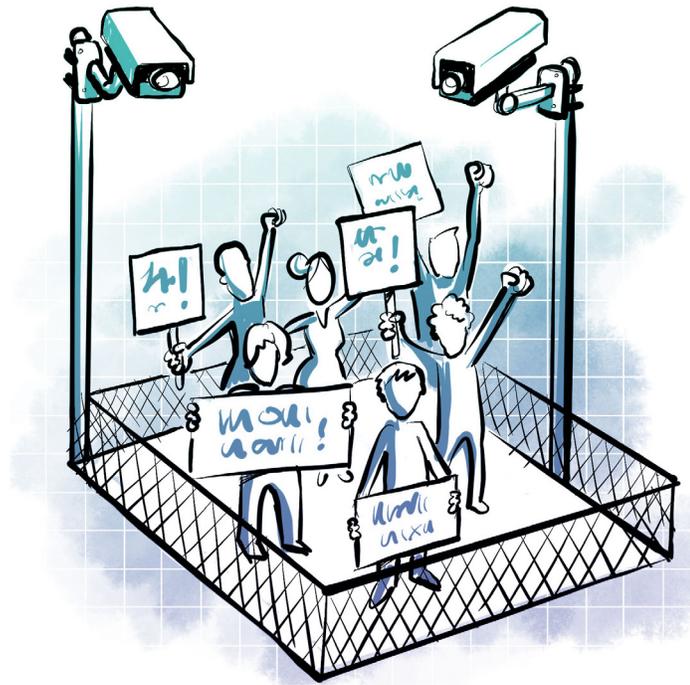
- ✓ Regulatory changes? Reporting requirements are easier to impose and enforce with digital data.
- ✓ Financial pressure? Since most money is now digitally transferred, monitoring financial transactions is easier than ever.
- ✓ Police monitoring of assembly? Easier than ever, thanks to digital surveillance, social media monitoring, cellphone tracking, etc.
- ✓ Limiting speech? Digital systems and business models exert all kinds of pressure to consolidate big media and use social media to censor or confuse.

The examples above are only second-order changes, meaning that our use of digital infrastructure just makes it easier to clamp down in the old-fashioned ways. But our digital dependencies provide new ways to shut down assembly, expression, and privacy, making it easier than ever for both governments and corporations to constrain civil society.

For example:

- Shut down the Internet. Just turn it off. In 2016 there were more than 50 documented cases of governments around the world “shutting off the Internet,” usually during elections. In 2015 there had been “only” 15 such cases.¹⁴

- Manipulate digital records and foment disinformation. Propagandists and chatbots make this easier than ever at unprecedented scale. This includes manipulation of text, news feeds, photos, videos, and **voices**. Corporate control of these systems makes it harder to demand visibility into how the systems work.
- Limit access to the Internet. Starve out small or unwanted voices by allowing systems to charge more for faster service. This helps governments and established companies, and is known colloquially as the fight over net neutrality.



- Allow corporate policies on speech to take precedence over national law.¹⁵
- Shut down virtual private networks (VPNs) or outlaw the use of encryption technologies (which are now built into commercial products such as WhatsApp, iMessage, and some email programs).
- Sweep all Internet traffic into government databases, hold on to it forever, and constantly surveil all activity on all networks.¹⁶

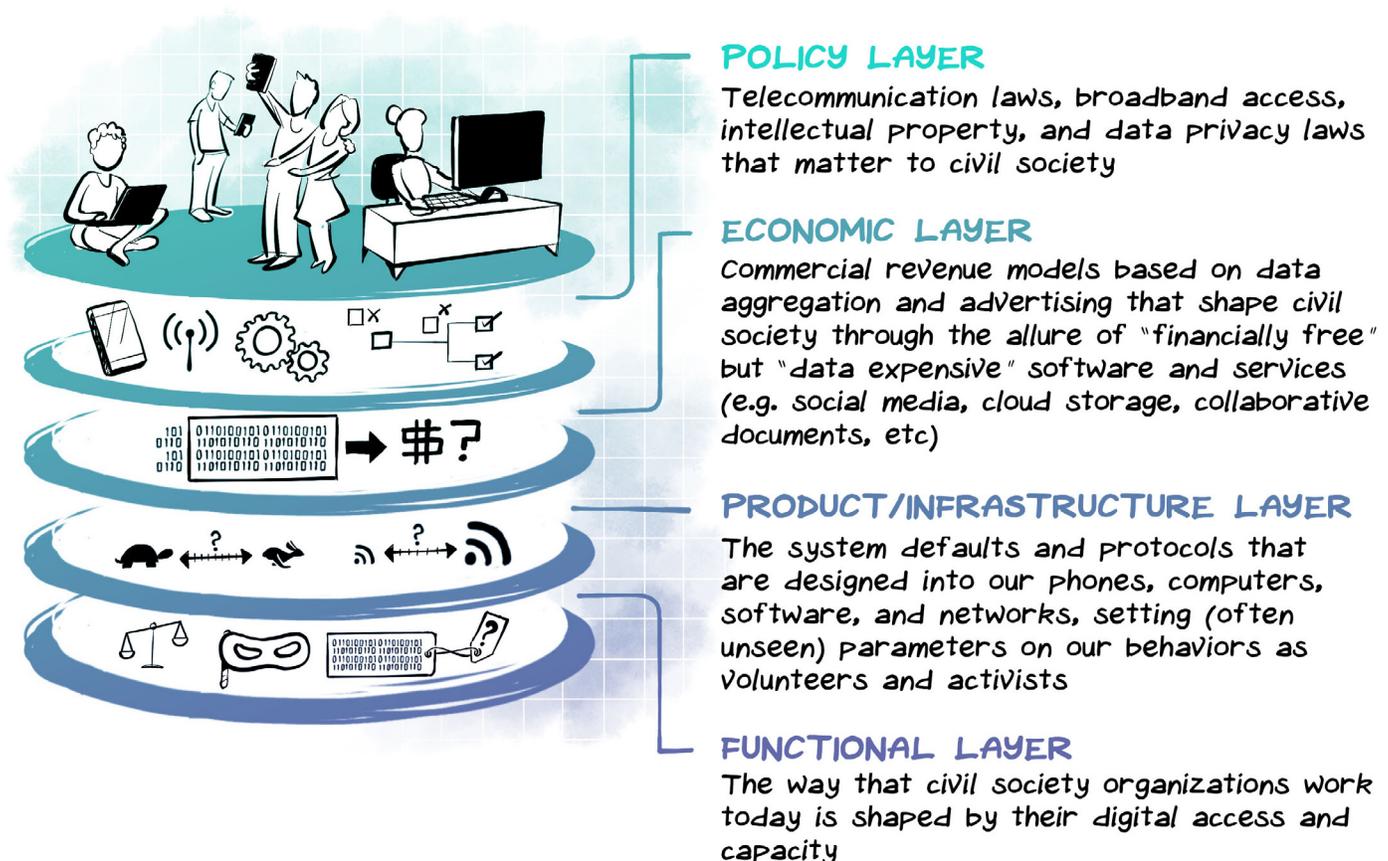
Digital tools give governments—and corporations—many more ways to shut down or limit citizen actions than they had before. Digital infrastructure and data not only *amplify* old mechanisms for shutting down civil society; they also provide *new mechanisms* for closure.

Simply put, our increasing digital dependence makes it easier for controlling forces to use these tools to close analog civic space (monitoring social media to limit protests, for example). It also provides them with an increasing array of options for closing digital civic space (such as shutting down or censoring the Web).

Efforts to maintain an open civil society now require a much deeper understanding of **how dependent we are on digital data and infrastructure** and how much the digital world changes civil society’s relationships to state and corporate actors. Maintaining an open civil society requires action in the legal and policy

realms that shape digital communications and infrastructure. It also involves closer attention to the ways in which corporations design products and services that default to their values and may impede the values of civil society. This is new territory for the vast majority of civil society organizations and advocates.

It’s a very short line between disconnecting routers and closing civic space. Early in 2017, Turkey’s government imprisoned two digital security consultants who were leading workshops on safety practices for nonprofits. The government called their work insurrectionary.¹⁷ There’s not even a short line between the two in that situation—it directly equated civil society and digital freedom. More than 200 protesters in Washington, D.C., took to the streets on January 20 to protest the presidential inauguration. They were in and out of jail



in a matter of days, but their Web-browsing behaviors were of interest to the US Justice Department for far longer. Immediately following the arrests, the Justice Department demanded that the Web hosting company for a site called DisruptJ20 (Disrupt January 20) maintain user logs on every visitor to the site. Eventually, the government demanded that the company turn over that information. More than one million browsers had visited the site at some point, and the Web hosting company fought the government's request on the basis that it was overreaching.¹⁸ Both cases, in the United States and Turkey, demonstrate how deeply dependent nonprofit action and political protest is on digital infrastructure and data. Both also illustrate the ways in which those dependencies can be used to limit people's rights and the available space for civil action.

Our dependence on digital data and infrastructure expands both the options for civil action and the levers and forces by which it can be restricted.

Electronic fund transfers and international banking regulations make it ever easier for governments to limit or control civil society by setting new financial reporting requirements (not just on the organizations, but also on the payment processors and financial institutions). Cryptocurrencies (such as bitcoin or Ethereum) that got their start as a means of working outside of national laws are increasingly becoming the products of country governments. Laws on data retention or that allow companies to charge different rates to different Internet users directly influence the ability of small, poorly resourced groups to operate or communicate. These laws directly shape the digital space within which nonprofits and foundations operate.

The rhetoric that “digital technology is inherently democratizing” has given way to

serious questions about whether democracy can survive the Internet.¹⁹ Even people in the United States, where many are slow to worry about the power of our mostly homegrown technology giants, are beginning to question the size and influence of these companies. Toxic company cultures, their seemingly unchecked power and influence over public policy, the manipulative power of their products, and their ability to be manipulated as news sources are common news stories across even the polarized media of the United States. Although they may not have achieved the rhetorical villain status of “big pharma,” “big oil,” “big tobacco,” or “Wall Street,” it may not be long until they do.²⁰ What happens when this comes to pass is partly predictable and partly unpredictable. If history is any guide, public pressure on these companies will induce more positive public relations-focused philanthropy from them. What makes real change in their status less predictable is that so many people use their products every day and still believe these services come without costs. Most people probably can't imagine a different set of digital norms.

Digital data and infrastructure have changed the assumed relationships between sectors. Governments that wish to limit or control civil society have a bigger toolbox than before. Now, with a digital infrastructure in place, elected administrations can extend their political agendas into the nonprofit space not only by shifting financial resources but also by cutting off access to key data sets and sources. Nonprofits that depend on government-collected data—from environmental information to housing demographics—have recently experienced the digital version of major budget cuts. Civil society's response has been to create “data refuges”—copies of government data sets that are copied, checked, and backed up by volunteers—often crossing national borders (and thus legal jurisdictions).²¹

Public administrations can also set telecommunications policy that privileges big payers over small organizations, enable media consolidation that silences voices, or direct broadband subsidies to places where their supporters benefit and not others.

Nonprofits, governments, and businesses are now entangled by their data exchanges. Rules about board independence and financial reporting allow us to monitor these kinds of entanglements when they take the form of personal conflicts or financial contracts. We now need rules and norms to monitor the digital equivalents of self-dealing, conflict of interest, and contractual capture.

Governmental policies covering intellectual property, telecommunications access, data privacy and retention, and national security define the digital space in which civil society operates. Corporations respond to and enact their own policies on these issues, which most people experience as default product features. Civil society's policy agenda now includes tax, corporate, and charitable law; human rights and civil liberties; and all things digital.

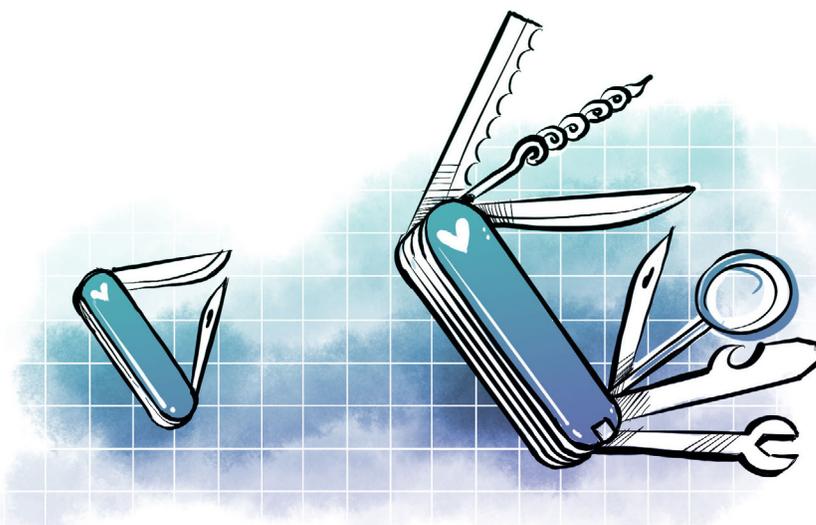
A "SWISS ARMY KNIFE" APPROACH TO STRUCTURES AND STRATEGIES

The first *Blueprint* in this series, written in 2009 and published in 2010, laid out a picture of the social economy. It argued that

benefit corporations and impact investing, cooperatives and crowdfunding, political action and online advocacy, needed to be considered "inside the sandbox" of private action for public good. All are tools with different shapes and different uses, like the little knife, big knife, corkscrew, and bottle opener on a Swiss Army knife. A focus only on foundations or charitable contributions and tax-exempt nonprofits was too narrow. Meaningful approaches to change and emerging threats to the ecosystem would both be missed through such myopia.

Nine years later, this is truer than ever. Organizational forms that were once rare in this sector, such as limited liability corporations, are growing more popular, especially among the very wealthy. Donor-advised funds continue to outpace other giving vehicles in their rate of growth.²² Crowdfunding sites that facilitate person-to-person giving, obviating any institutional middleman (besides the digital platform itself), move billions of dollars each year. An entire ecosystem of watchdog organizations and new journalistic beats has been catalyzed by efforts to track financial transfers that knit together political platforms and advocacy organizations and take advantage of differing rules on anonymous action. Thoughtful, strategic donors would be remiss not to consider all the options for using their financial resources to support the changes they want to see. Portfolios combining charitable vehicles, investing arms, political giving, and pooling funds with others are ever more available. The overall set of choices continues to expand.

But what have we learned about which tool is best for which purpose? From within the sector it's time to ask, which structures best support which strategies? From the



citizenry writ large it's time to ask, what rights of disclosure or anonymity and what expectations of outcome reports and fraud prevention do we want to accompany each of these multitool approaches?

We don't (yet) have useful empirical data on which strategy or structure is most effective in which circumstance. The Omidyar Network and the F.B. Heron Foundation, two mission-based organizations committed to using financial resources in all sectors, have begun to share some of their insights.²³ But external analyses that compare impact investing, charitable giving, political support, and philanthropic support—within an issue and over time—are hampered by several factors, including a lack of data and a siloed, rather than systemic, approach to thinking about civil society and its funding sources.

We don't (yet) have useful empirical data on which social economy strategy or structure is most effective in which circumstance.

Differences between structures run deeper than their corporate form. When Mark Zuckerberg and Priscilla Chan announced the creation of the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative (CZI) in November 2015, most public attention focused on how the enterprise could use its resources for charitable giving, political activities, and investing. Some observers commented on the governance, company ownership, and tax implications of choosing an LLC form over a tax-exempt foundation. Now, two years later, a quick review of the **organization's job openings** shows that the couple is building an enterprise that bears little resemblance to a "typical" foundation or nonprofit. In August 2017, for example, the CZI was hiring for more than 10 software engineers, a biological data

scientist, an applied scientist in machine learning and natural language processing, and a director of teachers and leaders. Another dozen operational positions were also open, as the organization has grown to almost 200 people since its founding.²⁴ Hiring the almost 100 engineers on staff didn't cause nearly as much of a public sensation as did contracting with major political strategists and pollsters, which CZI has also done.²⁵

Reviewing job openings is one way to gain insight into organizations that don't necessarily report their activities publicly. Others could include reviewing contributions to open source code repositories (GitHub commits), gaining insights into their technology from those who post on **StackShare**, and scanning research declarations on "funders" or "conflicts of interest." As LLCs with a "social good" strand increase in number and size, reporting skills to track their work are going to have to keep pace.

While many LLCs have been eager to publicize their work and share what they're learning, there is no requirement that they do so. The desire for privacy and anonymity has to be fueling some of the growth in donor-advised funds and in LLCs—both of which require significantly less public reporting than do private foundations. It would be folly to assume that the voluntary public reporting behavior of a few of these LLCs will set the norm for all of them. Tracking the movement of such funding—in the form of investments, political contributions, or "charitable" donations—will require clever reporting tactics and new kinds of oversight.

RE-DECENTRALIZING THE WEB (AND CIVIL SOCIETY)

Just as scholars and activists are re-engaging with the core principles of democracy, civil society and philanthropy, so are technologists and engineers re-engaging with some of the original principles of “digital.” The earliest iterations of the Internet were designed for decentralization—there were no central decision makers, no designated gatekeepers (though cost, expertise, and access were then—and continue to be—real barriers). Trusted behavior was assumed. Privacy, security, and trusted identities were not early considerations. One of the first engineers to raise questions about protecting ARPANET (predecessor of the Internet) joked in 1980 that the U.S military “always left a port open” to its main computers because some officers “wanted to work from home on the weekend.”²⁶ As the Internet became more commercial, the norms shifted away from its creators’ openness and turned to the defaults and standards that better serve dominant business and government interests. In response, many of the engineers who built the World Wide Web the first time are vowing to build it again and take it forward to its past.

There’s (at least one) coordinated effort to do this. Led by early Web stalwarts Sir Tim Berners-Lee, Vint Cerf, and Brewster Kahle, it’s called “decentralize the Web.” “**Locking the Web Open**” is the provocative title of a speech by Kahle explaining the ways in which the Internet has shifted from its earliest goals and why it is important to return to them.²⁷ Since then, **Mozilla has come forward with a multimillion-dollar challenge grant** to engineers building tools that meet these goals of decentralization,²⁸ and they’ve launched the **Internet Health Report**, a crowdsourced scorecard project designed to engage the public in the (admittedly obtuse) issues of an open Web.²⁹

There’s also a more organic flourishing of tools, sites, currencies, and approaches embodying decentralization that may be nearing a point at which they can come together as a decentralized alternative. The MIT Center for Civic Media and Digital Currency Initiative published a paper on this approach in August 2017.³⁰ The paper is focused on several examples, from cloud storage to social media, user-owned platforms, and distributed currencies that could, potentially, add up to alternative systems to the major commercial platforms. The MIT authors argue that these experiments offer viable options for personal control of information, mobility, and choice. They are less optimistic about the potential to address problems such as “curation bias” that the big platforms, with their algorithmic control, depend on for market share.³¹ The strongest indication of the allure of re-decentralizing the Web may be the appearance of the idea as a subplot on the television show *Silicon Valley*.



Decentralization is also a core feature of civil society. As the space for minority opinions, groups, and activities, it is a counterbalance to majoritarian democratic systems. Civil society is designed to be divisive, fragmented, and contentious. It is full of small, dispersed groups that sometimes work together and sometimes don't. Outside of formal nonprofits and foundations, it is fluid. As volunteers, people come and go as they please, they support and engage with multiple causes, and they carry their networks and alliances with them. It is the logic of the marketplace that prioritizes efficiency and scale, not the logic of democracy. The various efforts to decentralize the Web share commitments to individual control, openness to new ideas, and distributed decision making. At its best, civil society manifests these same principles.

At least, that's how it used to work. Today, people are all using the same social media platforms, not only because they're easy and ubiquitous but because the companies behind the platforms have made it cumbersome to leave, and they promise their users ever more scale. This allows the companies to own and aggregate all the data about participants and their contacts, interests, and activities. The old-style "analog" decentralization on which civil society thrives has been appropriated by a stealthy consolidation of data, owned and kept out of sight by a few commercial platforms. Corporate ownership of your

We need to bring together the communities focused on protecting our rights in democratic systems with the communities working to build technological tools that can protect these rights in digital space.

"social graph" means they effectively control your relationships, transactions, and interests. Don't believe this? Go ahead, try and take your online records back from any of the social media, search, or commerce platforms you regularly use.

We need to bring together the communities focused on protecting speech, assembly, participation, and privacy rights in democratic systems with the communities working to build technological tools that can protect these (and other rights) in digital space. We need to see the design of digital systems and the design of democratic practice as braided activities. Those of us with affordable and accessible broadband can move from digital spaces to in-person gatherings in ways that collectively structure our experiences as citizens. The two systems—the analog and the digital—needn't be designed as one, but the rights, permissions, processes, and obligations that define democratic participation need to be more continuous as we move seamlessly from one to the other and back again.

Understanding digital civil society requires starting from a picture of what is, not what used to be. Civil society and philanthropy today involve a dynamic mix of forms and activities working in almost every sector.

- Platforms such as MiVote and Win the Future are both philanthropically supported. Crowdpac is venture capital-funded.³²
- Civic Hall in New York City is a nonprofit, Leiden University has launched HumanityX as a partnership between global humanitarian groups and the university, and OPEN (a nonprofit network) connects civic and political membership platforms in more than a dozen countries.

- Crowdfunding systems (many commercially owned) move money to anyone and have at least partially powered many of these efforts.
- **Color of Change** (and many other such networks) brings organizing skills, advocacy expertise, coalition building, and social media to bear to change public policy and corporate behavior.
- Consulting firms dedicated to getting social justice-oriented political candidates elected develop podcasting strategies to circumvent media and political party gatekeepers.³³
- Nonprofit researchers and journalists study controversial topics such as AI's short-term effects, "bot-infested media systems and their effects on democracy,"³⁴ and commercial platforms' responsibilities for hate speech.
- Governments demand that companies take responsibility for enforcing national law within the jurisdiction of their corporate systems.
- Companies are turning to nonprofits to help patrol these systems and enforce their rules.

Any attempt to draw a diagram of these relationships would instantly be overcome by multidirectional arrows. Digital civil society requires us to assume new alliances.

There are two large unknowns as civil society organizations come to terms with our digital reality:

- How will digital dependence change analog practices? How will we change our organizations now that we can contribute not only financial and human resources but digital resources as well?

- How will we define the boundaries of digital civil society? Civil society depends on global networked platforms that cross national jurisdictions and are governed by corporate policies as well as public law. How will we proscribe civil society in this space?

We are only beginning the search to answer these questions.

PUTTING THESE IDEAS TO WORK

The "Insight" section presents what I see as the big ideas of the moment. I also want to help you apply these ideas in your daily work.

Toward that end, the Digital Impact initiative is a set of resources built by and for civil society and philanthropists. The online Digital Impact community at www.digitalimpact.org is where you can join in conversations, events, blogs, virtual roundtables, grant programs, and other activities of the Digital Civil Society Lab. Practical tools and resources, including sample policies, tools, case studies, and a workbook of activities designed to fit into your organization's strategic planning efforts, can be found in the Digital Impact Toolkit at <https://digitalimpact.io>.

FORESIGHT

Predictions for 2018

The most depressing prediction I made in 2016 (that a major national election would be hacked and those directly affected wouldn't realize it until too late) came true. It would be really easy to put together a list of even more depressing predictions for next year. If you want that, go read the World Economic Forum's "Global Risks Report." I'm going to stay away from famine, plagues, war, hate, environmental catastrophe, and political corruption. Rather than make a prediction about them, we should just assume, prepare for, and work to prevent more of all of them.

What's in store for the year ahead? How will the big ideas discussed in the "Insight" section affect your work next year? Here are my predictions for 2018.

GLOBAL

- FinTech (financial technology) will be a shiny new interest area for philanthropy in 2018.
- There will be more big-ticket philanthropic partnerships between foundations and individual donors to aggregate capital, similar to Blue Meridian Partners, the partnership between Warren Buffett and the Gates Foundation, and Co-Impact.
- Now that it's been used to store a copy of the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights, hype about DNA as the storage unit of choice will reach the social sector. Even before the practice becomes familiar, it has already been hacked.
- The giving split between "big and recognized" nonprofits and "DIY help" will get ever more interesting. Think of it as the Red Cross versus GoFundMe.³⁵
- Voice-activated giving ("Alexa, donate \$10 to the Community Disaster Fund") will make headlines.
- The European Union will become the global standard bearer for digital privacy policy. Nonprofits everywhere will examine their privacy practices to abide by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

UNITED STATES

- A nonprofit organization based outside of the European Union will violate the GDPR and be fined for its activities.
- Transparency advocates will demand regulation of political advertising on the Web and social media networks. They won't get it.
- A new giving index that includes crowdfunding platforms will emerge.
- Tech companies will increase their philanthropy and political giving as their reputations suffer. (see [page 14](#).)
- Team communications tools that are slowly replacing internal corporate email will be hacked, drawing as much attention as email dumps did in 2016.
- Donor advised funds will outpace all other vehicles for charitable giving in rate of growth.



2018 Wildcards

(surprising, unlikely things that just might happen)

Last year seemed so uncertain that I skipped this section altogether. Things don't seem much more settled now, but here are some wild cards to consider. The "Note to the Reader on Timing" at the beginning of this *Blueprint* counts as a *meta*-wild card.

- Britain won't Brexit.
- Uber will go bust, taking the gig economy's investment bubble down with it.
- The rate of growth in global carbon production will slow significantly.
- All nations with digitized registries of citizens (India's Aadhaar, the US social security system, etc.) will invest appropriate financial resources in both legal and technological privacy protections.
- New US regulations will drive significant improvement in consumer data protection, and the reach and severity of corporate data breaches will drop.
- Open source standards for election technologies will be universally adopted, and digital election monitoring will become a new form of civic engagement.
- Countries will begin competing to take in and take care of millions of refugees.

HINDSIGHT

Renovations to Previous Forecasts

Predicting the future is a fool’s errand. Yet I continue to try. Here’s how I did for the year that just ended.

SCORECARD FOR 2017 PREDICTIONS

Prediction	Right	Wrong	Notes
Stand-alone organizations that build open software for civil society will continue to struggle, even as more parts of civil society come to realize the importance of open source. At the same time, lessons will be learned from libraries, archives, and museums that have brought these coding skills (and communities) in house.	✓		See the 2017 report <i>Road and Bridges: The Unseen Labor Behind Our Digital Infrastructure</i> .
The winner of the MacArthur Foundation 100&Change challenge with its \$100 million award will be based outside the U.S.			The winner won’t be named until after December 11, 2017 (post publication of this <i>Blueprint</i>). All four semifinalists are working outside the United States, although three of the four have US-based partners.
Nonprofit approaches to artificial intelligence—understanding it, using it, and advocating for regulation of it—will increase.	✓		Universities and independent research centers in areas as diverse as health, media, and scholarly research increased.
An election somewhere in the world will be disrupted digitally, but the evidence of it won’t be revealed until the falsely elected officials are installed in office.	✓		This prediction was made in October 2016, so the 2016 US presidential election counts. The 2017 presidential election in Kenya counts as another.
Experiments with the policies and practices of universal basic income will spread.	✓		Several new research initiatives and pilot projects launched.
Sports teams, which in many countries are core structures within civil society, will become ever more visible and active on social issues.	✓		Professional athletes took up the mantle.
Citizen oversight of government agencies will be a big area for technological innovation—for example, methods to monitor and report on police (e.g., TextMy90) and nonprofit “alert” systems built around streams of government data.	✓		Data refuge efforts to save US government data from removal are just one such example.

Prediction	Right	Wrong	Notes
Foundations will increasingly want evaluations and sector studies that analyze social media—see, for example, the Engines of Change report (Omidyar Network) and Visões de Futuro (Fundaçao Telefonica, Brazil).		✓	I have found no way to check this.
Actions sanctioned by the federal government against journalists, nonprofit organizations, and nonviolent activists inside the US will profoundly test our rights to peaceable assembly, a free press, and free expression.	✓		The rhetoric of fake news, verbal attacks on journalists at presidential events, and proposed state legislation limiting people’s rights to protest marked a long year for civil liberties and human rights in the United States.
Digital data storage and security costs will begin to exceed office space/rent costs in nonprofit budgets.	✓		Already true for some health organizations.
Open 990 data will be used to create new indices of nonprofit and foundation investment holdings.		✓	The data were indeed opened in 2017, but users spent much of the year wrangling and cleaning. This may come true in 2018.
Media attention to the digital practices of technology companies and government agencies will grow.	✓		The floodgates opened on articles about tech company practices after the US Congress called for testimony from Facebook, Twitter, and Google with regard to the 2016 presidential election.
More philanthropic dollars will flow to programs and services focused on disability rights.		✓	Disability rights activists were front and center (and background and consistent) in the fight against changes in US health-care law. There is not yet data on whether financial resources flowed to this work, though the ACLU did raise significant funds in early 2017. It has a disability rights program, but funds raised were not necessarily earmarked for the program.
State attorneys general will investigate at least one crowdfunding platform for charitable fraud.		✓	I am unaware of any such investigations.
More social program evaluations will rely on access to and use of publicly collected data through forms such as Data Labs.	✓		The best way to see this is through evaluations that use government “administrative data.”
Social movement innovation hubs built around data, such as Fair Care Labs , will become more common, and we will create new enterprises (trusted data intermediaries) to manage the data used to drive change.		✓	I have not found additional examples.
New federal limits on corporate regulations, weakened labor protections, and a continued rise in the gig economy will have dire consequences for unskilled workers.		✓	We’re only at the beginning of a federal government strategy focused on weakening corporate regulations. The consequences for worker safety, health, and security are building.
The United States will experience devastating natural disasters fueled by global warming, and the federal government will fail miserably in its response. The immediate reaction will be further denial of climate change from Washington, D.C.	✓		Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria caused billions of dollars in damage to Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico. The administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency said it was “misplaced” to discuss climate change during these events. ³⁶



Buzzword Watch

Some of the 2017 buzzwords, such as **ransomware**, wound up making quite the splash. Libraries, universities, and the U.K.'s national health system were all held ransom by malicious software.

Algorithmic bias and **ecosystem** also got a lot of attention—the former in everything from stories on predictive policing to how newsfeeds get fed, and the latter as a term to describe the mix of social media, websites, apps, television, and radio that used to be called “news” and are now an information ecosystem.

Here are the top 10 words, phrases, or ideas that philanthropists and civil society will be using, misusing, and probably abusing in 2018.³⁷ There are a few extra-credit buzzwords (and predictions) on my blog, philanthropy2173.com.

BIOMETRICS—THE NUMBER ONE BUZZWORD FOR 2018

“Biometrics” refers to digital data collected from your body and used to provide access or verification to a system, including fingerprints, iris scans, and facial recognition software. The use of biometric data is exploding (the 2017 iPhone introduces facial recognition software as a means of opening the device). Biometrics—especially facial recognition software—raise important questions about consent and privacy, and thus for civil society. First, your face can be identified from afar, and those gathering that data won't be asking your permission to do so. Second, the databases being built of this information are being created by governments and hosted by corporations, often with the aid of nonprofit or nongovernmental partners. Biometric data collection is an example of a massive collapse of meaningful borders between sector roles and responsibilities.

BIG BETS

Given the amount of money now being held for purposes loosely described as “doing good,” the scale of challenges from climate change, the evil robot overlords, and the demise of democracy, the betting money is on big money, dedicated to big issues, to make big change (or at least try to).

DATA REFUGE

A data refuge is an effort, usually led by volunteers, to make backup copies of threatened digital data sets. Governments that oppose certain kinds of advocacy (such as countering global warming and resisting actions by the U.S. president) throw a monkey wrench into the work, for example, of environmental groups by removing previously public data from government websites. Anticipating this, volunteers come together to create duplicate copies of the data sets—a **data refuge**—often located in other nations, to **preserve access**. I expect data protection will become a core strategy of advocacy organizations.

DATA WEAPONIZATION

The term covers the deliberate manipulation of data, politicized analysis and selective use of data, and the creation of bots and other algorithmic techniques that drive propaganda and misinformation on the Internet.

EXPLICABILITY GAP

This is the distance between the power of **machine learning algorithms to process data and our ability to understand them and hold them accountable**. This is particularly problematic when these tools are used to steer cars on public roads, implicate people for sentencing, track kids in school, differentiate groups for public services, or recommend certain medical procedures.

IMPACT-WASHING

Efforts to measure impact have been steadily increasing, and the impact investing movement³⁸ continues to drive this forward. Efforts to ensure accurate and credible measurement are on the rise, including a new **President's Council on Impact Investing** and a blockchain-based effort focused on the Sustainable Development Goals (see ixo. foundation). Others will just take the easy way out and “claim impact” or seek to wash themselves in the language of social good without really doing anything.

MONOPOLY

The tech world's veneration of “scale” almost succeeded in making monopolistic behavior acceptable.³⁹ The global dominance of a handful of (American-based) companies will come under increasing scrutiny not just outside of the United States but inside. This will matter to civil society for three reasons: First, expect more civil society protests against corporate power; second, there will be more scrutiny of company/executives' philanthropic influence, and third, there will be more high-profile tech philanthropy.⁴⁰

RED TEAMING

The term comes from software development and the security industry. It refers to a practice of staging efforts to breach your organization's digital systems in order to test your defenses. The language of digital security will become familiar to us all. Even if practices like penetration testing and **red teaming** remain beyond the reach of resource-constrained organizations, we'll all be familiar with the idea (if not the practice) of “threat modeling” (just what it sounds like).

RESIST

People have been rallying around this term since November 2016, new associations have emerged on- and offline, and coalitions of longtime activists and freshly minted “alt-[insert US government agency]” Twitter handles carry the banner. The spirit of resistance has changed the composition of civil society, informed the creation of countless new associations, and mobilized financial resources from big and small donors. The word travels beyond the United States and English, as we see in marches and protests around the globe. Just on the basis of its current rate of use, this would be an easy winner for the number one buzzword spot.

UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME

An old idea that is experiencing a moment in the philanthropic sun. Experiments are under way in several countries, several high-profile donors are involved, and policy makers are interested in experiments to address wage stagnation even when there's economic growth.

GLIMPSES OF THE FUTURE

In the 2017 *Blueprint*, I focused on two “future glimpses.” The first was the closing space for civil society that I’ve discussed at length in this volume’s “Insight” section. It is ongoing and accelerating and requires action from civil society, government, and the commercial sector. I also highlighted the Movement for Black Lives as an example of how change happens now. Indeed, the Movement remains a central piece of US civil society, even as post-election groups like **Indivisible** and the **Women’s March** also rise. Fluid networks, often in tension; distributed leadership; online and offline coordination—these are everywhere in action. Of course, the tactics are available to all. The return to national and global visibility of white supremacists and the Ku Klux Klan was made possible by strategic use of these same tools, coupled with support of political figures.

As we seek a glimpse beyond 2018, I see two sets of trends coming together. The first, which I (somewhat tongue-in-cheek) call robot nonprofits and algorithmic philanthropy, is the natural outcome of the technological and organizational innovation of the last few years. Philanthropists are creating new types of organizations (LLCs, for example), big data are everywhere, nonprofits have done a lot of experimentation with algorithmic analysis. As the sector innovates, so do the sector “watchers.” Our broad capacities for data-driven analysis are going to be

used by the sector and “on” the sector, as means of trying to hold the new approaches accountable.

The second change, a revitalization of concern for civil society, is derived from the broader societal anxiety about the state of democracy.

ROBOT NONPROFITS AND ALGORITHMIC PHILANTHROPY

Big data, open websites, and algorithms make certain kinds of research much easier. Scanning job postings as a way to understand what organizations are doing, as we did with the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative,

is an old investigative reporting technique but is a kind of research that is facilitated by today's tools. We will undoubtedly see more of it in the future. Small teams, such as the three people at **Transparency Toolkit**, build open source code and distribute algorithmic tools for reporters to use to follow developments across entire industries.⁴¹ I haven't seen such a tool applied to nonprofits or philanthropy. Yet.

Anecdotes abound about nonprofits, social enterprises, impact investors, and philanthropists using more evolved digital tools than just websites and social media. Certain subsectors, such as the arts, humanitarian aid, and journalism, often seem to lead the way. Sure enough, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has examined the use of “**chatbots for good**,”⁴² and the World Food Programme has experimented with Facebook chatbots in delivering services.⁴³ The expansion of predictive policing software—built from data sets and proprietary algorithmic analysis—and the use of **Google's Deep Dream** neural network software to make art provokes us to ask, “**Who owns the output?**” and “Who is responsible for the decisions informed by the software?”

Advocates of artificial intelligence (large-scale data sets plus algorithms designed to learn assigned tasks and improve exponentially based on programmed analysis) abound in the business world. In the social sector, groups such as **NESTA** in the U.K. and **Charities Aid Foundation** have

both published reports on the possibilities of AI for philanthropic practice. In 2017, the Miami-based Astrient Foundation, a scholarship funder supporting disadvantaged students, rebranded itself as **Philanthropy.ai**, claiming to use artificial intelligence to power its scholarship program. The city of Turin, Italy, launched a Data Science for Philanthropy center late in 2017 that will be important to watch.⁴⁴

Civil society and philanthropy, however, have bigger roles to play than merely using these tools. Efforts to understand and think about the regulatory demands of artificial intelligence are growing. The **World Economic Forum Network on AI, IoT, and the Future of Trust** worked with the **AI Now Institute**, a research effort led by humanists and engineers, to look at the immediate societal changes caused by machine learning and big data approaches to criminal justice, health care, and employment. Research on the social and political implications of AI attracted philanthropic support from a group of foundations (Knight, Omidyar, Hewlett) and individuals (Reid Hoffman, Jim Pallotta) that joined together to create a \$27 million Ethics and Governance of Artificial Intelligence Fund.⁴⁵ Elon Musk has invested in a different \$10 million effort to promote public interest in AI, the **Open Philanthropy Project** published a review of some of the risks of AI, and Stanford University has undertaken a **100-year study of AI**.

Foundations are supporting researchers to examine other technologies, including the blockchain. At this point the goal is to produce guidelines or principles that can guide the use of this and other technologies for “social good.” There are many such guidelines—including the Signal Code from Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, Responsible Data's principles, the principles

Civil society and philanthropy, however, have bigger roles to play than merely using the tools of artificial intelligence.

and codes in the Digital Impact Toolkit, the Data for Development principles, and others. *Consumer Reports* has even added digital security into the ratings it now offers on consumer electronics. What we haven't yet figured out is how to mesh these codes and make them default norms that are easy to integrate into software.

Another important opportunity for civil society is as a place where communities take control of their data to advance their social, political, and economic well-being. We can see this in apps such as **Streetwyze** and associations such as **18 Million Rising** that build “digital hygiene” and tech independence directly into their advocacy. **International Indigenous data charters**, **data principles for health equity**, and even **ethical principles for government experimentation** are all indicators that people, and communities, recognize the value of their digital data.

Anni Rowland-Campbell, a board member of the Web Science Trust, argues that philanthropy has a bigger role to play than simply conducting or supporting the research about the governance and ethics of science and technology. In a recent provocation, she argues that philanthropy must stand up for humans in the digital age. “[Philanthropy] must work to shape the value system that will determine how government and business operates both now and as the digital world evolves.”⁴⁶

In our rapidly changing socio-technological systems, values matter – not only the values of the market or those of governments, but those of people and civil society.

This is a lot to ask of philanthropy, but it does point to three critical understandings: first, that we are all affected by the rapid changes in technology; second, the ubiquity of mobile and remote sensors means that we now live in “cyber-physical systems”; third, that we can't leave the development of these systems to governments and businesses; and fourth, that values matter—not only the values of the market (efficiency, profit, ownership) or those of governments, but those of people and civil society.

STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY AS AN IMMUNE SYSTEM FOR DEMOCRACY

The concerns about democratic systems include concern about the state of civil society. As we move into the future, there are several changes we need to pursue for digital civil society to function as democracy's immune system.

1. Shared purpose

The first step is for us to recognize our collective challenge. Digital civil society needs to see itself as having a collective purpose. Its diversity, fragmentation, and networked, distributed potential will remain just that—potential—unless the pieces see the whole. Individual movements, protests, nonprofits, and foundations should continue their own work, while recognizing their interconnectedness to each other and to democracy. A deeper understanding of digital dependence—the responsibilities of governing data, digital technologies, and the networks on which we now depend—is only a starting place.

2. Better data

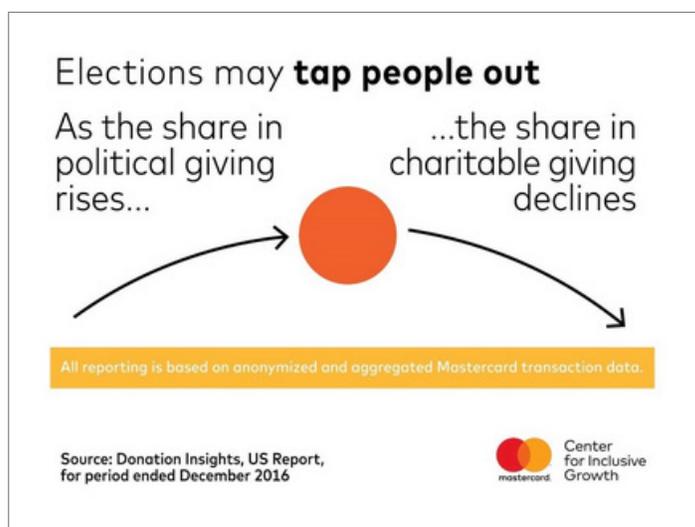
As a second step, we need better data. We need to be able to count and track the funding and enterprises that operate in impact

investing and social enterprise, political action and financing, social movements, and crowd-funded activities at the same time we count and track charitable funding and nonprofit enterprises. Progress toward digital civil society depends on a better understanding of its component pieces.

In 2017, the MasterCard Center for Inclusive Growth released its first “Insights” report, drawing on internal analysis of the credit card company’s transaction data.⁴⁷ Because the analysis was done internally, its analysis can’t be rerun, nor can the data be independently analyzed. These methodological limitations are important, but so is what the study found.

The report finds a clear relationship between increased political giving and decreased charitable giving.

The MasterCard study includes (at least) one correlation—between political giving and charitable giving—that I’ve been writing about for years and that raises real questions for the social economy. Based only on MasterCard data and admittedly run during a year with an unusual presidential election, the report finds a clear relationship between increased political giving and decreased



charitable giving. We need to keep track of this, verify it from other sources, and look for other funding relationships and dynamics within the social economy.⁴⁸

3. Civil society cannot save itself, by itself

Third, engaging with adjacent political and economic structures is akin to recognizing that immune systems don’t work on their own. We boost our immune systems not for their own good but for our overall health. Vaccinations exist to strengthen our immunity, and we can prevent its weakening by attending to nutrition, sleep, and other factors. We must invest in civil society directly, but civil society cannot save itself, by itself. Political leadership that protects the space for protest, expression, and privacy must be seen (and supported) as critical to civil society’s sustenance. Corporate policies and products that enable these same rights are similarly important. At a practical, immediate level this means broad engagement in digital policy debates and collective demand for values-based software and hardware.

4. A new look for civil society

Fourth, the independent space for voluntary action and expression in the digital age may not look like the nonprofit or philanthropic sector of yesterday. We need—and are inventing—new civil society enterprises. New organizational forms are neither an immediate threat nor a presumptive ally. In fact, “organizational status” may no longer be the most important differentiator for civil society action. Open source software networks, data refuges that rely on cross-national volunteer cohorts, and trusted data intermediaries are some of the new “enterprises” of digital civil society.

Tax-exempt nonprofits that funnel money to political campaigns while “washing off” donors’ names are probably not.

The enterprise mix in digital civil society is going to be diverse and different from that of “analog-only” civil society. We need to determine new ways to define what’s “in” civil society and what’s “out.” We’ve experienced a decade or more of “blurring lines.” It’s time to redraw the map.

5. Global networked systems

Finally, digital civil society needs to manifest the same democratic purposes as its predecessor within the parameters of global networked systems. It must defend its value in relation to both governments and companies. Global norms, practices, networks, and processes for redress will be necessary because the digital context within which civil society now operates is global.

This is all in line with what a working immune system does. In biological systems, a mix of enzymes, hormones, cell types, proteins, and other biological forms manage to determine what belongs and what doesn’t. A working immune system can be compromised and come back stronger, it learns from the past, and it can mostly self-regulate. Which is all to say that civil society in the digital age needs to determine its shared purpose (#1 above), engage a variety of partners, allow old forms to die and new ones to emerge, and still protect itself and its host body—democracy.

REVITALIZING FIRST PRINCIPLES AND DRAWING NEW BLUEPRINTS

In 2017, the Ford Foundation published a report on the “hidden” digital infrastructure that supports so much of our daily activity by powering the Web servers and encryption tools that make online banking,

transportation systems, electric grids, and email programs work.⁴⁹ The focus was on the open source software code that powers a great number of the tools we use every day and that is primarily sustained by the voluntary, episodic labor of a remarkably few people. The analogy to how civil society props up democracy is too evocative to ignore, but it is also too simple. The volunteers who are building open source infrastructure are part of civil society. Civil society both enables them to do this work and depends (as do governments and businesses) on the work they do, but the system itself is too fragile, underfunded, and invisible to be sustainable.

This work exemplifies the challenges and opportunities of digital civil society in democracies. We need to recognize our digital dependency (in this case, on open source software), expand our understanding of what supports civil society, and build new partnerships that crisscross all the old lines (markets, governments, nonprofits) without tossing purpose to the wind. An effort in the U.K. called **Civil Society Futures** aims to reimagine English civil society and is worth watching.⁵⁰ Its remit is national, but its processes, insights, and topics are relevant elsewhere.

We’re going to have to do ever more of this kind of map redrawing. Globally monitored digital networks recraft our old expectations about privacy. They upend our existing practices for “political transparency” coupled with “charitable anonymity” and require us to revisit the first principles upon which our practices are based.

The lines between civil society, the market, and government have not just blurred; in many places they’ve frayed. The US media is filled with stories of politicians using nonprofits to funnel money to pet projects⁵¹

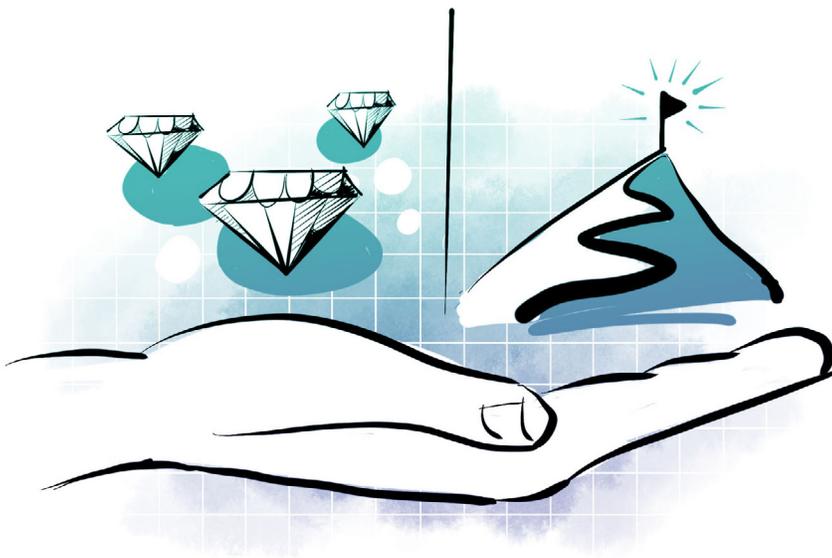
and of nonprofit media sites that serve as political mouthpieces.⁵² An \$18 billion “gift to charity” from a Hong Kong firm was first noted for its size. Within days came the revelation that the donor didn’t necessarily have the right to make the donation and that the “gift” was triggered by the professional shifts of a White House staffer.⁵³ Obfuscating the money trail from companies to governments to nonprofits seems to have become a legal specialty.

public budget? Does commercial ownership of our personal data and government surveillance of our digital platforms threaten private action? Do we care?

If we do, then we need to consider how to balance the sometimes competing values of the three sectors in ways that “assume digital” and align with democratic practice. We will need engineers, artists, and lawyers, policy makers and advocates, writers and designers, philosophers and mathematicians to determine how to do this. We need to ask about both the right of people to advocate and their right to examine whether they can do so given the nature of data ownership and proprietary source code.⁵⁴

Immune systems rebuild and protect first by breaking down. This is why people with healthy immune systems build resilience after first getting sick. We can look at the resurgent interest in decentralizing the Web and the enthusiasm for building distributed technologies like blockchain as a sign of the Internet’s immune system kicking in. And we should expect this decentralized tech world to become more relevant to civil society.⁵⁵ It’s audacious to think that civil society, globally, can reboot and reframe itself. I think it must. And it can.

VALUES MISSION



The question we need to ask is not simply whether we should draw new lines. To develop a blueprint for digital civil society, we need clarity on the purposes served by the old lines and whether we still value those purposes. Do we still hope for transparency in political giving while protecting anonymous charitable activity? Do we care if public servants line their personal pockets off the

We need to consider how to balance the sometimes competing values of civil society, the market, and government in ways that “assume digital” and align with democratic practice.

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