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Freedom of Communication is helping communities defend themselves. Don't curb it [1]

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The blame laid on social media for the looting is both misguided and dangerous. It is like blaming print media for the French Revolution, and neglects the fact that social media is part of the solution too. If communities are to reclaim the streets from disorder and fear, then people need to be able to organise themselves in opposition to the looters, and in order to clean up after them.

The best example of this is this collection of heart-warming tweets [3] that should hopefully restore some of your faith in humanity, and the majority of law-abiding people. The proposal to shut down mobile communications would therefore do more harm than good: people need to be able to organise their communities, to check up on their friends and family, to stay informed about the location of violence in order to stay safe, and to use instant images and videos of the protests to identify looters and bring them to justice. Furthermore, it is now possible to track the violence and culprits due to the open and transparent nature of the BlackBerry broadcasts being used by looters.

We need to recognise that the rules of the game have changed, just as with every leap forward in communication technology. Organisation is faster than it was before - this means violence can be organised quickly, but means that counter-violence and defence can be organised just as quickly too. Any curbs on this freedom of communication and speech would not only harm everyone's liberty and the ability to defend against violence, but would misunderstand the socio-cultural nature of the problem. People do not incite violence because they have twitter; they incite violence because they are themselves violent.

These thugs are socially atomised, growing up in a system where they can receive 'rights' and privileges from a faceless, centralised and impersonal entity, never having to justify their taking from the communities and societies around them. This centralised welfare state means they effectively indirectly loot the rest of the community already - is it really any surprise that they are willing to take matters into their own hands for mindless fun? We've essentially been telling them for decades that they can.

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Links:
[1] http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/justice-and-civil-liberties/freedom-of-communication-is-helping-communities-defend-themselves
[2] http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5795
[3] http://storify.com/mjrobbins/twitter-and-the-riots
[4] http://uklibertyleague.org/
[5] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript
[6] http://disqus.com