Asymmetry of online political space
Results of comparative analysis of all 259 national domains

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Introduction

This poster shows how national domain name space has evolved into a new political space and in period of 25 years has reproduced architecture of world political system of states.
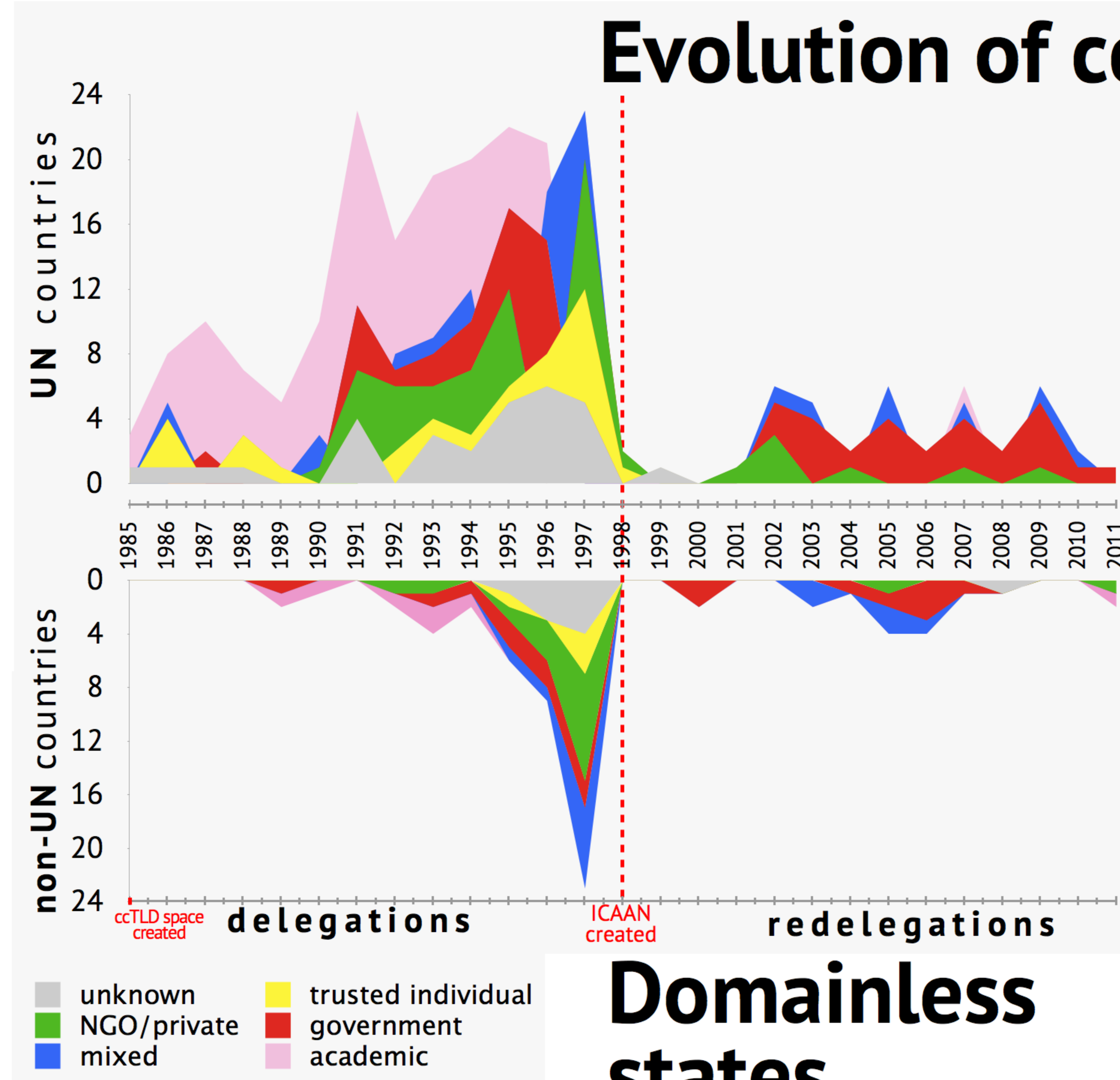
What can one learn about the state in cyberspace, analyzing country top-level domain (ccTLD) data?

We look at the problem of expansion of states into online-space.

We consider ccTLDs as territorial polities of nation-states in cyberspace. We gathered a data set of 259 ccTLDs and executed step-by-step comparative analysis, using different combinations of variables.
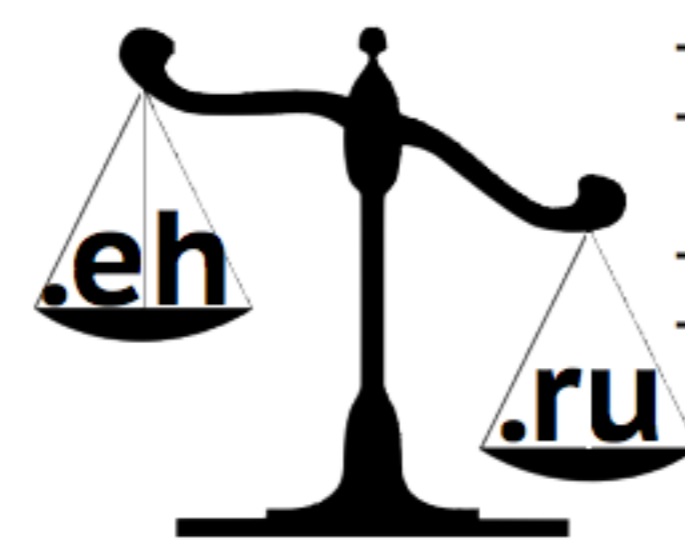
Evolution of ccTLD space

Interconnection between national domains system and the system of nation-states has established gradually, as international sovereignty system was expanding online.

This process has undergone three stages:

- **New Frontiers**: non-state "land grab" from mid 1980s to late 1990s;
- **States creep into the territory**: formalization of relations between states and their ccTLDs, late 1990s — late 2000s
- **States expand their online territories**: creation of a new space of national domains in national languages (initiated by governments) — from 2010 onward.

Asymmetry of ccTLD space

Architecture of world political system is reproduced in domain name system. Cyberspace is characterized by uneven political statuses of countries and territories, partly reconstructing asymmetry of international political system of the real world, and partly altering its configuration. Every UN member-state today has a national domain, as well as 58 territories. We found 6 unrecognized states that do not have national domains.

All domains are equal, but some domains are more equal than others

— age: 13 years
— no registrations
— no administrator
— not delegated

— age: 18 years
— 3.7 mln registrations (as of April, 2012)
— intended use
— open domain

We split domain names asymmetry into **external** (based on number of national domains per country) and **internal** (based on comparison of the stateness of "virtual countries").
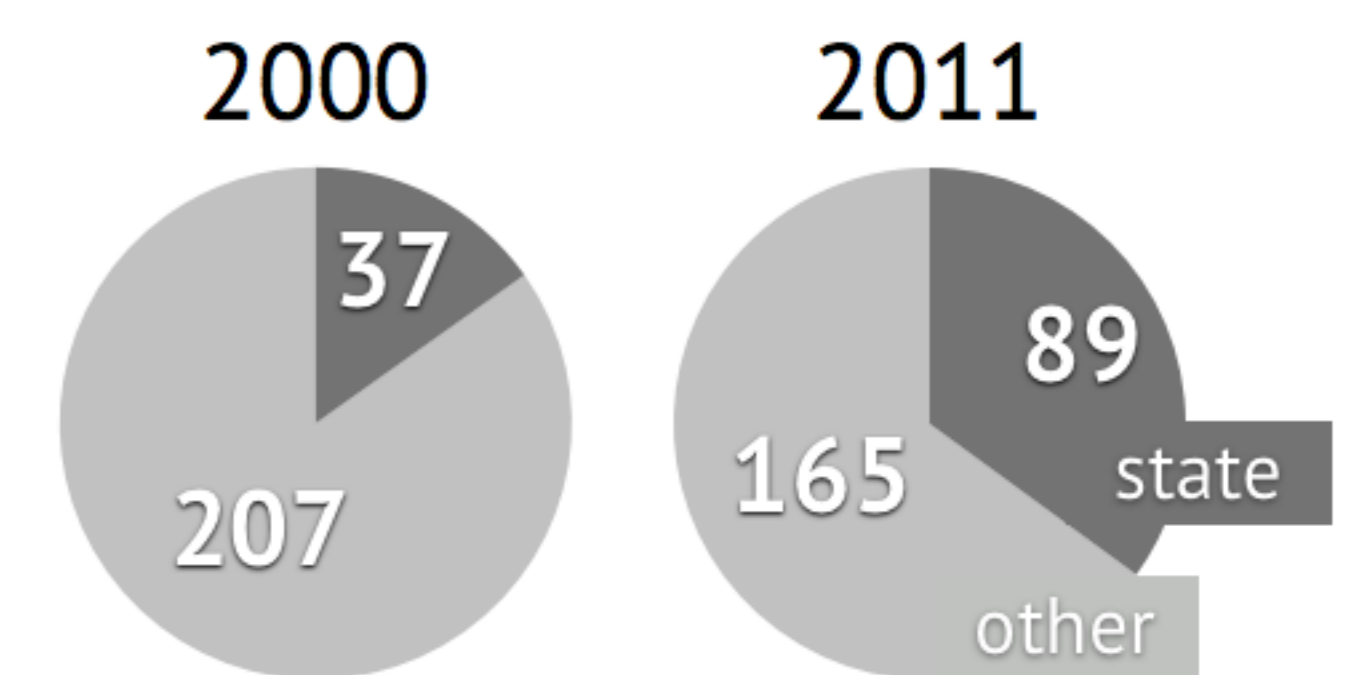
Domainless states

Some national domains develop state capacities and make claims for sovereign status. But unrecognised states out of UN have no ccTLDs of their own:

Country	Entity	Domain	Address
South Ossetia	President	.RU (Russia)	presidentrso.ru
Nagorno-Karabakh Republic	President	.AM (Armenia)	president.nkr.am
Nagorno-Karabakh Republic	Ministry of Foreign affairs	.AM (Armenia)	nkr.am
Northern Cyprus	Parliament	.TR (Turkey)	cm.gov.nc.tr
Abkhazia	President	.ORG	abkhaziagov.org
South Ossetia	Republic	.ORG	republicofsouthossetia.org
Kosovo	Government	.NET	rks-gov.net
Kosovo	Parliament	.ORG	assembly-kosova.org
Kosovo	President	.NET	president-ksgov.net
Kosovo	Prime-Minister	.NET	kryeministri-ks.net
Transdniestria	President	.ORG	pmr-gov.org
Transdniestria	Government	.ORG	vspmr.org
Nagorno-Karabakh Republic	Government	.NET	karabakh.net
Northern Cyprus	President	.ORG	kktcb.org
Northern Cyprus	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	.COM	trncinfo.com

State involvement increases

Redelegation is a process of transfer of ccTLDS administration rights from one registry to another. ccTLD redelegation is a multiactor process that requires respective government be informed. Thus, we consider the fact of redelegation as an act of formalisation of relations between a ccTLD and its state. We do not account for redelegations prior to 2000 owing to the fact that the

relevant data is not made public by the Information Sciences Institute of the University of Southern California.

Our analysis shows that the state involvement in exercising the right to administer the domain increased from 15% in 2000 to 35% in 2011.

No. of ccTDLs by role of the administrator

2000

37
207

2011

89
state
165
other