Internet Democracy: Does the internet support democracy?

The following pros and cons are from a debate on http://www.economist.com/debate/days/view/662

Pro:

- The internet is a force for democracy.
- Uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia and across the Middle East and North Africa show the power of the use of internet. A lot of protesters say that without Facebook and Twitter their revolution would never have happened.
- People who want to express themselves and discuss their political ideas can use the internet and other digital media.
- People can easily find information about any political or social issues.
- People can watch and check their elected representatives / politicians.

Con:

- The access to the internet can easily be shut down by non-democratic governments (→ China, Egypt...)
- The internet can be used for propaganda and surveillance (=the act of carefully watching a person).
- Democracy is not just about granting freedoms; it is also about accepting responsibilities and erecting barriers. Very often, however, these responsibilities and barriers are ignored and the internet is used to promote terrorism or child pornography, to publish hate speeches, libel (=statements which are not true), extremist ideas, ...
- Sensitive personal information is stolen and sold.
- No one starts a struggle for democracy only because the internet exists.
- The internet is open to all and its role within the democratic process is only as effective as the intention of the users behind.

Tasks:

1. Discuss these pro and con statements.
2. WikiLeaks
   - Find out what wikileaks is/does.
   - Do you think wikileaks supports democracy?
   - If you open the wikileaks website you will find this appeal: “join friends of wikileaks”.
     Write a letter to a friend to encourage him to join or to convince him not to join.
3. How do politicians use the internet for communication? Do some research (via internet and questionnaire/interview) and present two examples: One well-known politician from your country and one of your local politicians.
4. The “Pirates” are a political party in several European countries. Do some research on them in your country and present your findings in Copenhagen.