

rebooting america

Ideas for Redesigning American
Democracy for the Internet Age

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PREFACE

This project began as so many good things do, over a cup of coffee. Our conversation wandered to talking about new social media tools like blogs and social networking sites and their important role in fostering an explosion of public participation in and around the national political campaigns. We started wondering when we might see the rise of similar public energies and optimism about government and governing. For it's clear we're living in a new age, where millions of people can participate directly in governance and policy making, not just in ratifying the results on Election Day.

The Internet is putting individual voters, and networks of activists, in positions that used to be the sole reserve of professionals. Today anyone can be a reporter, a fundraiser or a community organizer; all it takes is an Internet connection and a compelling message. And so we wondered: as the Internet revolution hits the institutions of American democracy, how might it change things for the better?

Dana Perino, the White House Press Secretary, summed up the typical response of government officials accustomed to shutting citizens out of governance when she responded to a question from a

reporter earlier this year about the Iraq war by saying, “You had input. The American people have input every four years, and that’s the way our system is set up.” In other words, the people had their say at the election booth (a vote that may or may not have been recorded and counted accurately, by the way) and now it’s our turn to run the country as we see fit, away from the watchful, interfering eye of citizens. As we have seen, this kind of thinking and behavior is dangerous for Americans and for American democracy.

On January 21, 2009, a new tenant will occupy the Oval Office, and that person will be wise to continue to build on the public input and participation that helped to put them there. Returning to business as usual will be an enormous missed opportunity for both the new president and the American public.

America’s wonderful, messy experiment with a republican form of democracy is a work in progress, an unfolding story of astonishing possibilities and periodic disappointment. The storyline of this new century is the yawning chasm between the passion that Americans, particularly young people, have for a fair and just society, with the reality of near permanent incumbency for elected officials and a gridlocked political system.

Voting is our most visible political activity; it’s easy to see and measure, but it’s only a small part of the spectrum of political activities that form the backbone of our democracy. Political campaigns have begun to use an array of social media tools to connect with potential voters, but there are far greater uses for these tools beyond campaigns and elections. Social media and broad, enthusiastic participation together can profoundly affect governance and policy development, who runs for office and how, the communications between elected officials and citizens beyond elections, and the loosening of the death grip of moneyed, interests on politics and policies.

This jarring juxtaposition of our political reality against the poten-

tial for great political change is vividly revealed in the awful uses of technology (e.g., touch-screen voting machines or microtargeting of voters by what beer they buy) versus wonderful uses of technology (e.g., cell phones used to mobilize voters or live-blogging of political events that engage thousands of people in direct conversation with candidates). *Rebooting America* is dedicated to understanding these differences and providing a vision of how we can realize our collective hope for a better future.

We invited a variety of interesting, creative thinkers spanning the political spectrum and the generational divide, and from a variety of different professional perspectives, to write essays for this anthology. We also posted a general call for essays at the Personal Democracy Forum website, and three of those submissions are included in this volume.

The essays are naturally as varied as the participants. They range from revisiting the need for checks and balances within government and between the government and its citizenry, to a radical reinterpretation of the public's "right to know," to the exponential power of many-to-many deliberation to shape public policy. These essays confirmed our optimistic sense that the political system is due for substantive changes. Undoubtedly there are many more voices and thinkers whom we failed to engage, and we apologize for those oversights. It is our hope that *Rebooting America* will continue as a living document online, and to that end we are publishing all of the essays at rebooting.personaldemocracy.com and inviting public comment on (and off) the site.

We hope that, you, our readers and participants, will help to jumpstart conversations about increasing citizen participation in governance, opening the doors of government wider and making the walls see-through, and unleashing our collective creativity to help solve technical problems and break through long-standing entrenchments.

Our future does not *have* to be a continuation of the past or the present. We can create a new and better course—we just need to imagine it first.

—Allison Fine
—Micah L. Sifry
—Andrew Rasiej
—Josh Levy

FOREWORD

Esther Dyson

In 1816, Thomas Jefferson wrote, “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.” Those words have never been more salient or important than they are today. We have pressing public policy problems, adults who should be leaders yet instead lead willfully sheltered lives of comfort and ignorance, a citizenry increasingly active in elections yet alienated from governance, an amazing array of new digital tools and platforms that have the potential to inform and empower us and let us self-organize in astonishing and effective ways. The stage is ready and the sunlight of the Internet is shining on us: It can provide light and energy for a fertile, thousand-flowers-blooming garden, or it can ignite the whole thing into flames and burn it out.

This anthology of essays is intended to shine light, to spark conversations among citizens, and between voters and elected officials, about how we can engage more people in public problem solving and community building. Just as the Net created new business models, so can it foster new governance models.

The essayists, an array of creative, innovative thinkers, were invited to contribute short essays on the following topic:

When the Framers met in Philadelphia in 1787, they bravely conjured a new form of self-government. But they couldn't have imagined a mass society with instantaneous, many-to-many communications or many of the other innovations of modernity. So, replacing that quill pen with a mouse, imagine that you have to power to redesign American democracy for the Internet Age. What would you do?

Each of the essays has a unique central idea. There are common themes of citizen participation and empowerment, but within those broad brushstrokes are interesting areas of convergence and divergence. David Weinberger discusses the critical importance of echo chambers to the conversation among citizens that powers our democracy. danah boyd points out the need to break through these silos to broaden the conversation about community life, but also cautions about the potential of today's social networking sites to produce big changes in political behavior. Glenn Harlan Reynolds discusses the fallacy of trying to protect people's privacy in the Internet Age, arguing that we should instead focus on fostering greater transparency around (and through) government institutions. Martin Kearns argues the opposite, that more protections of individual privacy and data are needed to provide people with a sense of personal security in order to engage civically either online or offline.

Some essayists focused on lessons from the past (Julie Barko Germany, Harry Boyte), others zeroed in on improving the present (Steven Clift, Newt Gingrich), and a few gave us a view from the future (Ellen Miller, Zack Exley). Several essayists proposed a radical restructuring of our entire system of government (Aaron Swartz, Nicco Mele and Jan Frel, and Douglas Rushkoff) and others dwelt on the need for individuals to act outside government to propel change (Scott Heiferman, Susan Crawford). And, of course, the radical libertarians call for the radical restraint of government (Avery Knapp and Tennyson McCalla)!

Our society is relentlessly focused on short-term news and results: On Wall Street you have intraday stock movements and an obsession with quarterly earnings and weekly sales figures; in government, politicians pander to the polls using sound bites rather than engaging in reasoned debates (e.g., the gas-tax tomfoolery of the recent presidential campaign). And in private life, you have daily weigh-ins and snack bars full of foodiness in place of plain old healthy living.

Rebooting America is a look at the long term—the past that could have been and the future that still could be. It's ironic that it's a book, but consider it a mere seed containing DNA seeking complementary strands of life in an online conversation with other Americans about how to “reboot” our country.

Please take a moment to explore the ideas and approaches in this anthology. Share them with others and argue—constructively and deeply—about them. Make them into something more than just a book by extending them and giving them life.

—Esther Dyson
New York City
April 30, 2008

About the Author

Esther Dyson does business as EDventure Holdings. She spends most of her time fostering new companies, new technologies and new markets. In the Nineties she wrote a book about the impact of the Internet on individuals' lives (“Release 2.0”) and a seminal article for WIRED Magazine about the impact of the Net on intellectual property. This decade, she is focused not just on the Internet, but also on the privatization of space exploration and the use of information technology in health care, including the mapping of individuals' genomes. She sits on a variety of boards, most notably (in this context) that of the Sunlight Foundation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It's one thing to have an idea, and quite another to have the wherewithal to bring it to fruition. We are enormously grateful to the Schumann Center for Media & Democracy for their financial support for this project.

Of course, without our essayists, our volume wouldn't be very voluminous. Their enthusiastic willingness to share their creative ideas without remuneration and on an impossible deadline was enormously gratifying. And this gratitude extends to our online essay entrants who courageously shared their ideas with the world; we wish we could have selected more of them for inclusion in this first volume of essays. We hope we have done justice to all of the contributors and their ideas and are delighted that we will have the opportunity to share them widely.

We birthed this entire project in just a few months' time, a gestation period that usually spans several years. This was only possible with team members who were extraordinarily flexible, enthusiastic, and talented. We feel so fortunate to have been introduced to Julie Trelstad and her team at Plain White Publishing. Julie is pioneering the iTunes paradigm for publishing and we're delighted to be along for the ride. Her colleague Russ McIntosh of Studio McIntosh showed

great patience and creativity in his designs. Mira Lieman-Sifry jumped on board and became our excellent and adept lexicographer. Finally, our good fortune extended to working with two outstanding editors, Christina Baker Kline and Melissa Seeley, who worked very quickly and with great aplomb. Our thanks and appreciation to all!

INTRODUCTION

Our greatest risk, we felt, when we began this project was that all our essayists might somehow respond to our challenge with exactly the same answer. Much to our relief, and hopefully your enjoyment, the answers are enormously and uniquely diverse and interesting. The essays in *Rebooting America* reflect an array of experiences and political perspectives; they also reflect the themes, concerns and hopes of our Founding Fathers. We decided, therefore, to organize the essays around these themes.

We begin with a quote from Tom Paine, “When we are planning for posterity, we ought to remember that virtue is not hereditary.” Zack Exley embraces this idea in his very entertaining essay, a memo written to Personal Democracy Forum editor Micah L. Sifry from the future that suggests that what we need most to reinvent America is selfless leadership.

We then move to our desperate need for an informed and educated citizenry, or as put so elegantly by John Adams, “Let us tenderly and kindly cherish, therefore, the means of knowledge. Let us dare to read, think, speak, and write.” Julie Barko Germany gracefully retraces the roots of our democracy from the philosophical underpinnings of

the Enlightenment thinkers of the 18th century. David Weinberger follows with a thoughtful and surprising essay on the importance of echo chambers to support the conversations between like-minded people that are the backbone of democracy. Michael Turk closes out this section by lamenting that too much information and not enough curiosity is depressing participation, but that the Internet makes an informed citizenry and direct democracy possible.

Benjamin Franklin, prescient as always, recognized our current dilemma of citizens shut out of government decision-making when he wrote, “Those who govern, having much business on their hands, do not generally like to take the trouble of considering and carrying into execution new projects. The best public measures are therefore seldom adopted from previous wisdom, but forced by the occasion.” However, even Franklin could not have imagined the new digital tools that enable large groups to co-create magnificent new resources like Wikipedia. But our essayists could and do imagine such great things. Yochai Benkler, Newt Gingrich, and Andrew Rasiej strenuously, surely and convincingly imagine our government remade by, in Gingrich’s words, the “vast collective creativity of the American people” that supersedes the narrow expertise and interests of government bureaucrats.

As previously mentioned, citizens need to be knowledgeable and curious about their government. However, our government also needs to easily, openly and energetically share information with us. Thomas Jefferson wrote, “Whenever the people are well-informed, they can be trusted with their own government.” Ellen Miller writes to us from the year 2015 after the Freedom of Information Act has mercifully passed away and a new era of complete government transparency has emerged. Richard Harwood and Howard Rheingold describe the need and opportunity to engage our citizenry in local efforts through virtual commons that will force our government to open up and inform the public. Brad Templeton closes this section with a forceful argument

for the need to wean the political system from the teat of big money and big media, with an intriguing proposal to expand the use of free e-mail communications from candidates to voters to better inform and engage the public.

In their own time, the Founders pressed for the equality of man with a passion and commitment never before seen (although their vision was largely limited to land-owning men). Our essayists Marie Wilson and Josh Levy expand this dream of equality and write compelling essays on the opportunity to involve more Americans across gender, race and income divides in government and policy making in the Internet Age.

The power of individual people to catalyze and lead great societal improvements was never far from the thoughts of the Founders. Thomas Jefferson's words echo many of his compatriots, "When the people fear their government, there is tyranny; when the government fears the people, there is liberty." Nicco Mele and Jan Frel argue that the American system of government needs to be radically altered to become more distributed and democratic, noting that we are long way from the days of face-to-face democracy and relatively small numbers of constituents per representative. Conversely, Susan Crawford argues, "We should not discount the power of minor, visible, short-lived action to have a great impact." Aaron Swartz writes a fascinating piece on the need to completely revamp our structure of government with the introduction of a cascade of councils that would reach from the neighborhood level all the way to the top of the federal government. Finally, Steven Clift, a pioneer of e-democracy, provides a blueprint for myriad ways to engage and activate citizens in local government using new digital tools.

The Founders constantly feared the seeping intrusion of government on the lives of the people. "I believe there are more instances of the abridgement of freedom of the people by gradual and silent

encroachments by those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations,” wrote James Madison. In four very different approaches to this topic, Glenn Reynolds argues for the need for government transparency rather than waging the quixotic fight for privacy in the Internet Age. danah boyd writes that, “Rather than fantasizing about how social network sites will be a cultural and democratic panacea, perhaps we need to focus on the causes of alienation and disillusionment that stop people from participating in communal and civic life.” In a unique challenge to conventional wisdom, Martin Kearns argues for more, not fewer, politicians, more “churn,” as he puts it, or turnover, in leadership positions, more participation that will only happen when we ensure greater preservation of our privacy, rather than more rules or government agencies. Finally, Morra Aarons declares that there is no more “off season” for citizenship. We need to transport the grassroots communities that are powering political campaigns to the capital after Election Day, she argues, to help develop policy and govern the nation.

“The essence of Government is power; and power, lodged as it must be in human hands, will ever be liable to abuse.” This statement holds as true today as it did when James Madison said it in 1829. Zephyr Teachout details the long history of corruption in government, aided by technological developments like gerrymandering and centralized media. She also provides specific suggestions of the ways that our Founders would have altered the Constitution to avert these threats. John Bonifaz shares the concern about corruption eating away at the foundations of our government by systematically detailing the threat to our election system from private ownership of the machinery of elections. On a more hopeful note, Craig Newmark describes the boon to our system of checks and balances of new databases and citizen journalism tools like blogs that hold government and government officials more accountable for their actions.

In a full circle of thought and commitment, the Internet revolution

has enabled us to rediscover our passion for broad public participation in government and governance. Mark Murphy, one of the winners of our online essay contest, forecasts the next “killer app” that will engage millions of Americans, probably through their existing online social networks, in conversations about their government. Joe Trippi, in his trademark candid and forward-thinking way, bears witness to the death of top-down political campaigns. Micah L. Sifry shares a creative series of ideas to make our vote more meaningful and communicative than an “X” in a box. Finally, the people who know best about citizenship, Nancy Tate and Mary Wilson of the League of Women Voters, describe the opportunity for greater and more significant citizen involvement in the Internet Age. These essayists have taken to heart Thomas Jefferson’s warning, “Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves are its only safe depositories.”

We often despair of our inability to shape government to meet our needs. It is helpful to be reminded that this isn’t a new lament. Over two hundred years ago, John Adams wrote, “While all other sciences have advanced, that of government is at a standstill—little better understood, little better practiced now than three or four thousand years ago.” Matt Stoller has his own personal “Obviousmeter” that tells us when government rules, like no YouTube postings on government websites, reach critical levels of absurdity. Matthew Burton, another of our essay contest winners, proposes a “Delegation for the Future” as an addition to the House of Representatives that will solely focus on future concerns that our federal government routinely ignores. Douglas Rushkoff is an enthusiastic proponent of using new gaming techniques to rethink the structure and approach of government. Finally, Allison Fine challenges us to recognize that the obvious answer to remedy the awful 8-track tape voting machinery and greatly expand voting participation, particularly by young people, is voting online.

Back to the power of the people to control, instruct, and guide

government. George Mason wrote, “In all our associations; in all our agreements let us never lose sight of this fundamental maxim—that all power was originally lodged in, and consequently is derived from, the people.” Tara Hunt takes this maxim to heart and questions why we need elected officials at all. The radical libertarians Avery Knapp and Tennyson McCalla go even further and question the fundamental value of government to society. Kaliya Hamlin brings us back to earth with a thoughtful examination of the different ways that citizens can deliberately examine public issues in person aided by new media tools.

We are left to explore the many ways that citizens can participate in governance and policy development without becoming a professional member of the governing class. Thomas Jefferson weighs in, “I have no fear that the result of our experiment will be that men may be trusted to govern themselves without a master.” Beth Noveck describes the specific ways that citizens, particularly those with technical expertise, can successfully add value to policy and procedure development using wiki-style processes, for example the very successful Peer-to-Patent open review process. Scott Heiferman, the founder of Meetup.com, passionately defends the need for civic associations that advocate for better or different government policies. Pablo del Real, the third of our contest winners, imagines a civil society where citizens can weigh in on every bill and resolution on the floor of the House of Representatives. Clay Shirky longs for a new mechanism that will enable citizens to more easily form groups with long-term political goals. And finally, Harry Boyte, the dean of democracy observers and writers, elegantly discusses the possibility of recapturing the transformative public spirit of the 1960s civil rights movement by reimagining the public commons using Internet technology.

We are, of course, not just a nation of citizens but also a nation of laws. However, what happens when laws are created with the express

purpose of shutting citizens out of our own government? Jeff Jarvis demands a new ethic of openness in government; transparency ought to be our governmental default setting, he writes. Gene Koo provides a compelling illustration of the Orwellian dangers of code law, “software that assumes a particular *interpretation* of an ambiguous law, and in so doing, essentially *makes* law.” In the words of Madison, ““It will be of little avail to the people that the laws are made by men of their own choice if the laws be so voluminous that they cannot be read, or so incoherent that they cannot be understood.”

We end our anthology on a hopeful note about the opportunity that every successive generation has to improve upon our model of government. Again, Thomas Jefferson: “We may consider each generation as a distinct nation, with a right, by the will of its majority, to bind themselves, but none to bind the succeeding generation, more than the inhabitants of another country.” Lance Bennett affirms this view with a description of a new style of citizenship practiced by young people, the so-called Millennials, that he calls self-actualizing. We close our volume with an essay by a Millennial, David B. Smith, and his hopeful message of the ways that young people of his generation are using Internet tools to reshape our country into Democracy 2.0.

The reader should feel free to sample the essays by particular authors or themes, or to read the book from cover to cover. Any way this anthology is sampled, the reader will quickly come to see that our essays call for the people of this country to slice open our government, turn it upside down and inside out, and reimagine it and us in new ways.

TO: MICAH L. SIFRY, PERSONAL DEMOCRACY FORUM 2008

Zack Exley

“Therefore, more than anything we will try to build the ethic of true leadership not only into the American political system, but into the American spirit.”

TO: Micah L. Sifry, Personal Democracy Forum 2008
FROM: Micah L. Sifry, Personal Democracy Forum 2058
SUBJECT: Leadership

Dear Micah,

This e-mail has been delivered to your inbox via Google Time Machine from the year 2058. I'm writing to share the results of an incredible experiment, inspired by your Rebooting Democracy project and carried out on its 50th anniversary. It is extremely important that you recover from the shock of receiving this e-mail and act on my recommendations as quickly as you can. As it turns out, you and your Personal Democracy Forum buddies are better positioned to save American democracy than even the Founding Fathers.

So, I have some good news for you and some bad news. First the

good news: In the biotech revolution of the 2020s, you and your Personal Democracy Forum (PDF) business partner Andrew Rasiej invent the “Bionet,” a network of wireless brain implants that connects all of humanity in one continuous, decentralized and unmediated conversation.

The Bionet began as a gimmick at the Personal Democracy Forum of 2022. You were only trying to give people an enhanced way of making snarky comments behind panelists’ backs instead of the on-screen back channel chats that had become too linear and uninteresting. But conference goers refused to give up their Bionet headsets, and found infinite uses for this new “mental telepathy” in the wider world. You and Andrew became fantastically wealthy. But I’m pleased to report that before anyone even had the chance to grumble about a proprietary network of human consciousness, you made the Bionet protocol an open standard—from the data abstraction layer all the way down to the headset specs.

Today, most people around the world have their Bionets implanted at birth, along with other biological enhancements. Market penetration is effectively 100% because the benefits to businesses of providing implants to workers and farmers to monitor their brain activities and thoughts far outweigh the cost of subsidies for the poor.

I wish I had time to explain all the political upheaval, wars and economic chaos of the past five decades. But I’ll have to stick to the changes brought by the Bionet. Basically, it’s turned the whole world into one giant “Personal Democracy Forum,” in the truest sense of that phrase.

As you and many of our friends predicted, in a hyper-networked world, the state has become less and less necessary. The Bionet made instant secret ballot voting as easy as daydreaming. In 2032, the Bionet re-vote resolved the surreal election debacle between Karenna Gore and George P. Bush. It was only a matter of time before “mind voting” was used for every social decision great and small. A mind vote cost nothing, and took only a few seconds to conduct. Rudimentary artificial

intelligence even made it possible to enable the Bionet to vote for you automatically on most issues. Any time politicians were making unpopular decisions, pressure would build for mind votes. And because mind voting was so easy, it was difficult to argue against conducting one.

Naturally, there were problems. In fact, our nascent system of instant, continuous mind voting in the United States helped to cause World War III. Just a matter of growing pains, we thought. And so, Lawrence Lessig's first action as prime minister of the post-war World Parliament (long story!) was passing the "Personal Democracy Act of 2042." The law abolished politicians and delegated all policy making to direct, instant "Personal Democracy."

In that same year, Thomas Friedman published his bestselling book "The World is a Point," arguing that the Bionet had effectively eliminated distance, personal space, and any useful personal boundaries. He argued that the problem was not that there was too much instantaneous, decentralized decision-making, but not enough. He urged the have-nots of the world to metaphorically wear what he called "the cellophane business suit" (a follow up to his concept from the old Globalization Debate of the "Golden Straight Jacket" wherein, according to Friedman, all nations had to accept the new rules of a global economy including fair trade and transparency).

The Personal Democracy Act did not have the intended results. In the press, a lot of the problems were blamed on the fact that such a high proportion of us in government were long past our "expiration date." But trust me, we're all sharper now than we ever were with our old biological brains. Though it's true, some of us did give them reason to wonder. Press Secretary Joe Trippi's immortal words, "Don't worry, this will fix everything!" became the slogan for just how out of touch we Americans were with reality. Minister of Industry Yochai Benkler, with his slogan, "All Power to the Network!" became more and more dogmatic against any sort of industrial or agricultural planning. The

results were immediate, dramatic and disastrous. First, there were the mass famines and ecological catastrophe of the “Great Leap Inward.” Benkler’s unfortunate televised comment, “Let them figure it out for themselves!” joined “Let them eat cake!” on the short list of historic phrases that sparked full-blown revolutions.

However, because government had virtually withered away, the revolutionary mobs in the street found that they had no one to rebel against but themselves. Mind vote followed mind vote on thousands of different economic policies and schemes to no end. We found it was very easy to vote against pollution, but impossible to vote a replacement non-polluting industry into being. We found it was easy to vote against exploitative trade, but much more difficult to vote for a means of making a living for poor countries when we stopped trading with them.

I can’t even bring myself to write down the figures associated with the economic, agricultural and ecological failures of the past 15 years. I’ll just say that it made the carnage of Mao’s Great Leap Forward look like a minor hiccup.

In reaction, an overly authoritarian camp rose up in politics (or rather, what was left of politics). David Weinberger, after a transformation reminiscent of Mussolini’s turn from socialism to fascism, became its intellectual leader. Zack Exley served as iron-fisted party leader. But we kept our faith that “too much democracy” could not be the problem.

Facing the failure of our efforts at Personal Democracy, we laid blame on the doorstep of history. The ability to “figure it out for themselves,” we decided, had been stolen from humanity by the centuries during which people were forced to live without the liberating effects of Personal Democracy.

And so we hatched an idea. We would bring the Framers of the 1787 Constitution to the present day and show them the disastrous results of their old-fashioned, “top-down” democracy. We would then send them

back with millions of Bionet headsets so that they could “reboot democracy” and jump start progress toward a Personal Democracy utopia.

We knew that changing the past would erase our present, but with billions of people starving and war waging all around the world, we believed it was worth the sacrifice.

With the whole world watching through their Bionet mind’s eye, Constitution Hall was teleported to the present with all of the Founders inside. If you think you were shocked by the arrival of this e-mail, just imagine how those guys felt at their arrival in a fantastic world of the future.

It took a while, but they finally got over their shock and accepted the new reality that had been presented to them. After caucusing alone, their appointed leader George Washington told us that the group wanted a chance to read up on the events of our history (and their future). We told them that they could take as long as they liked and we would transport them back to the very same instant from which we plucked them when we were done.

During their study, they kept their deliberations secret from our world in the same way that they had kept their constitutional deliberations secret from their world. We were impatient, but no one was going to argue when George Washington told us, “Remove yourselves from our premises!”

Two months passed. Then America’s Founding Fathers presented the world, via the Bionet, with their findings. The group chose Alexander Hamilton as their spokesperson, because he had mastered the terminology and the ways of the modern world better and faster than anyone else in the group. More brains, in more languages, tuned in to Hamilton’s speech than to any other event in the history of the Bionet (save for the unveiling of Madonna’s new body in 2051).

“Dear Sirs,” he said (showing he hadn’t mastered every aspect of 21st century culture), “On behalf of my colleagues of the 1787 Con-

stitutional Convention, I thank you for giving us this opportunity to study our future—your past—toward the aim of improving it.

“We now understand that the stakes of our enterprise were higher than any of us imagined: Our United States of America will go on to have a greater impact on the world than any other nation during these three centuries. And yet, in our time it does not even call itself one nation. We do see that we made many errors as we laid down the foundation for this new country.

“But we do not accept your conclusion that this ‘personal democracy’ is any solution for our age...or yours. First of all, we do not hold democracy to be a panacea or an end in itself. We set out to create a republic based on the non-negotiable principles of ‘Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.’ We believed that democracy was the best means to that end.

“We knew it was a gamble. We knew that private interests would descend upon our president and Congress as they had upon the Crown and Parliament. That is why we attempted to base our democracy on the hope that a democratically elected aristocracy of merit could replace the old aristocracy of birthright.

“We now see that was folly. We were naïve to think that our complicated system of ‘electors’ could replace the necessity of every generation to find its own leaders, and empower them—’from the bottom up’ as you love to say—to do what must be done. We were looking for a way to make good leadership automatic. But we were wrong to believe we could relieve future generations from that responsibility. We were treating our political system as if it were a mousetrap that merely needed fine-tuning. You have brought us here in the hopes that we would go back and commit that very same folly, but this time with your own ingenious new system instead of ours.

“Today, you have reduced the concept of democracy to the ‘personal’ quest for happiness of twenty billion people, all rushing in

different and often opposing directions. But democracy can never be ‘personal’—it is communal. Democracy is not a way to take care of oneself, but a way to take care of others.

“We risked our lives for that kind of ‘democracy for others.’ But too many of you are not even willing to risk your next promotion or grant.

“In our study of history, we have seen how our children and grandchildren immediately swept away our hopes for disinterested, selfless leadership. Almost instantly they organized into petty political parties that pandered to short-term private interests rather than the long-term common good.

“We have not come up with any answers about what a different system would have done better. After you send us back to Philadelphia, we will consider that issue. But we have drawn one conclusion: We took for granted that our example of selfless leadership would speak for itself and be emulated by future generations. It didn’t. Therefore, more than anything we will try to build the ethic of true leadership not only into the American political system, but into the American spirit. Please wish us luck, just as we will wish you great good fortune and fortitude.”

As we look back through history, we see a precipitous decline in the quality of leadership right at the moment when mass media and the Internet created the greatest opportunities for good leadership.

So, my dear younger self, and all others who are reading this, it is up to us in every generation not just to build a better system in which leadership can function better; it is up to us, above all, to be better leaders. Therefore, you who are living at the dawn of the Networked Age have the greatest responsibility not to abdicate humanity’s right to conscious action to an abstract notion of ‘network,’ but instead to use the powerful networks available to you as good leaders.

Good luck!

Yours in great hope,

Micah

About the Author

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21ST CENTURY NEO-ENLIGHTENMENT

Julie Barko Germany

“ Digital citizens should not be afraid to know or to act, but we need a leadership willing to listen and participate—not on platforms or pedestals, but on egalitarian footing with their constituents. ”

four years ago, in the middle of the 2004 primaries, the online political community heralded the rise of the political blogosphere as an evolution in—and improvement upon—the printing press. Political bloggers became the new pamphleteers, and more than one journalist compared online political discussion groups, blogging communities, and listservs to coffee houses, where people go to get their daily fix of information.

It is not a coincidence that we embraced the metaphors of the printing press, which once led Western Europe to question the traditions established by religious and political authorities, and coffeehouse, where so many connections were made, business transactions were conducted, and ideas were debated during the Enlightenment—the

era that birthed many of the ideas upon which our Declaration of Independence and Constitution are based.

Thus, I cannot divorce a discussion about democracy in the Internet Age without reference to the ideals and innovations of the past. During the first century BC, the Latin poet Horace wrote, “To have begun is to be half done; dare to know; start!” Immanuel Kant adopted the later part of this line, the phrase *sapere aude*, as the motto of the Enlightenment in an essay titled “What is Enlightenment?” He translated it to mean “have courage to learn” or “dare to be wise.”

When I read this translation, I feel a sense of movement, a belief that through humanity’s reasoning faculties, we can envision new forms of government, build new societies and—to quote (rather anachronistically) Lord Alfred Tennyson’s poem *Ulysses*—“to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.” Or, to use a phrase popularized by presidential candidate and Senator Barack Obama, Enlightenment-era thinkers (including many of the Founders of our country) possessed the audacity to hope that through knowledge, reason, and wisdom, men—and indeed, they meant men—could govern themselves without an intercession of a king, ruler, or tyrant. With reason, wisdom, and knowledge, humanity and government could achieve perfection.

Another Enlightenment thinker, and contemporary of our nation’s Founders, French political scientist and philosopher Antoine-Nicholas de Condorcet, outlined this belief in his *Sketch for an Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795). Educated citizens, he said,

will be able to govern themselves according to their own knowledge; they will no longer be limited to a mechanical knowledge of the procedures of the arts or of professional routine; they will no longer depend for every trivial piece

of business, every insignificant matter of instruction on clever men who rule over them in virtue of their necessary superiority; and so they will attain a real equality, since differences in enlightenment or talent can no longer raise a barrier between men who understand each other's feelings, ideas and language, some of whom may wish to be taught by others but, to do so, will have no need to be controlled by them, or who may wish to confide the care of government to the ablest of their number but will not be compelled to yield them absolute power in a spirit of blind confidence.

This concept remains fresh in 2008, during the early years of our new era—an era in which citizen journalism challenges mainstream media gatekeepers, regular voters track the fundraising and spending of political candidates, and elected officials use blogs and wikis to ask for public input about pending legislation. The wisdom of the (informed) many may, in fact, govern as well as an elite few. This was the spirit of the age and ideals that swirled throughout the early years of our nation, and that echo in our founding documents. It is this ideological tradition that makes 21st-century democracy so vital.

Though technology, we are able to access information at rates that would have seemed impossible to Condorcet, not to mention Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and the rest. This same technology enables us to harness the wisdom of many to accomplish everything from tracking congressional spending, to writing an encyclopedia, to the process of translation. And yet neither access to infinite information, nor the ability to collaborate with fellow citizens instantly, regardless of physical location, produce wisdom.

In order to progress towards this lofty and rather Utopian ideal, democracy in the 21st century requires a few adjustments.

1. A system of education that enables the population to possess more than just a functional literacy. We need an education that teaches technological literacy and fosters innovation system.
2. Increased, affordable access to the Internet, including civic Wi-Fi, cybercafés and Internet stations in economically disadvantages areas, and broadband networks in rural communities.
3. A spirit of public leadership that understands and values technology, and a belief that some buzzwords of the Digital age—such as “increased openness,” “collaboration,” and “transparency”—are imperatives for public office, not clichés.
4. Additional guarantees of free speech and privacy, despite the temptations that ubiquitous computing will pose to more closely monitor citizens and restrict speech.
5. Finally, a lack of fear about and exploration of the potential of technology to make voting more accessible and more direct.

I agree with Lee Siegel, who wrote, in *Against the Machine: Being Human in the Age of the Electronic Mob* (you can ascertain from the title that Siegel is criticizing the Internet), that “Web culture is the final stage in the long, slow assimilation of subversive values to conventional society.” But only if one believes, as I do, that those “subversive values” include the belief that technology, knowledge, innovation, and civic engagement can produce a nation of leaders and thinkers able to work collectively and create a new era of enlightenment in American democracy, governance, and civil society.

Dare to think for yourself!

About the Author

Julie Barko Germany serves as the director of the Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet at The George Washington University's Graduate School of Political Management. Julie is the principal author and editor of several publications, including *Constituent Relationship Management: The New Little Black Book of Politics*; *Person-to-Person-to-Person: Harnessing the Political Power of Online Social Networks and User-Generated Content*; and *The Politics-to-Go-Handbook: A Guide to Using Mobile Technology in Politics*.

ECHO CHAMBERS = DEMOCRACY

David Weinberger

“ A democracy needs such “echo chambers,” even though their discussions inevitably appear like nothing but a bunch of homogenous supporters rah-rah-ing each other. ”

Talking together is the fundamental political act. While the Internet is certainly providing new features and new forums for talk, it is not transforming the near-genetic basics of how human conversation works. In this case (despite the overall premise of this anthology), the technology isn't changing the nature of democracy so much as clarifying our understanding of democracy. And that may be no less important.

Our confusion about the role of conversation in democracy is manifested in the persistence of the question whether the Net is enhancing or dismantling the political conversations we think essential to democracy. Rather than opening us up to a wider range of opinion, is the Internet barricading the doors of belief? Will we use the fact that we have more control online to hang out exclusively with people like ourselves, or will

we use the frictionlessness of web connectivity to engage with people from different walks of life? Will the Internet become an enhanced public forum or a set of “echo chambers?”

We’ve been unable to resolve these questions for three reasons.

First, the Net is too young and is not yet what it will be. We don’t know what effect it will have once its first generation of users has grown up with it as a ubiquitous part of civic life.

Second, the empirical research that exists is extraordinarily hard to interpret. Do we look at the patterns of links between websites? That doesn’t necessarily tell us how the information flows. Do results vary based on topic? Over time? By demographic? Perhaps we form echo chambers around political candidates but not cultural topics. Around TV shows but not movies. Around reality TV shows but not sitcoms? When we link to people with whom we disagree, are we cursing insensibly at them or engaging in a rational back-and-forth?

Third, even if we knew which vectors to follow, we would still have the enormously difficult task of comparing the results to the state of openness in the real world. As Yochai Benkler, the author of *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*, says, the question is not whether the Net will make our political discourse perfect, but will it make it better. The law professor Cass Sunstein reports that only low double digit percentages of links point to opposing viewpoints, and Benkler is right in responding that he doesn’t know whether that’s a cause for rejoicing or despair. To what could we compare such statistics? To the percentage of space newspapers give over to views that oppose their editorial positions? Typically, that’s a few Op-Ed columns and some percentage of the half-page of Letters-to-the-Editor that papers run. How often do people read the columnists they disagree with? How much time in the day do you spend talking rationally and calmly about matters of state with people

with whom you disagree? How deep does the disagreement have to go before you are too angry to talk, or simply see no point in pursuing the discussion? Have you ever actually sat down for a long, respectful conversation with a neo-Nazi or an out-of-the-closet racist, a conversation in which you're open to having your ideas changed?

Me neither.

The question, therefore, is not whether the Internet is closing us down or opening us up, but rather what assumptions make the persistence of online echo chambers—the same kinds of cliquish gatherings that have always existed on land—seem simultaneously so urgent and so hard to resolve.

This urgency is undergirded by our belief that democracy is a conversational form of governance. It's not enough (we believe) that everyone gets to vote. Everyone also has to be able to talk about her beliefs in public so that those beliefs can be well informed and well reasoned. Yet when we look out across the Net, rather than seeing people engaged in deep conversation, we see clusters of people saying the most godawful things and, in so doing, giving permission to others to say even godawfuller things. There's no denying the despair we all feel when turning over certain rocks on the Net. Hearing sentiments that are forbidden from the real world public sphere uttered in the perceived privacy of the Internet legitimates those sentiments. This is worse than an echo chamber: It is a room full of people egging each other on to the most extreme and vile opinions. "You think you hate her? Here's how much I hate her..." is not a helpful trope in a democracy.

It would be foolish to argue that this never happens. But how much does it happen? How important are such echo chambers? What influence do they have on our democracy? And why have so many people focused on them as the example of the Net's effect on democracy? After all, we could look at hateful real-world groups and despair for our democracy, but we recognize that such groups are the evil we

have to live with in order to get the benefits of our freedom to assemble and to speak.

Echo chambers loom large in our thinking about the Web, not just in our thinking about democracy. In part it's because some of the echo chambers appear on highly popular sites. Thus, they are not equivalent to marginalized extremist groups such as the KKK or the Stormfront White Nationalist Community. Yet not all echo chambers are born equal. Shouldn't supporters of a candidate have a spot on the Web where they can be supporters together? Is a site an echo chamber if it fails to rigorously challenge its participants' every view, including a supporter's most basic commitment to his or her candidate?

Further, the most prominent political sites—other than candidates' sites—are not all the hatefests they're often portrayed as by the media. Yes, participants encourage one another in their beliefs, but not all of them are devoted to ever-tightening spirals of hatred. At the progressive site HuffingtonPost.com, reasonable disagreements are common. Present a calm argument against the progressive viewpoint of an article, and you're likely to find just the sort of vigorous debate we want for a healthy democracy, although it may be more rough and tumble than we'd imagined. Trolls and hand-grenade throwers are ignored, flamed, or moderated out, because, by definition, they're not looking for a genuine discussion. Likewise, at the conservative Redstate.com, reasonable discussion is the norm. (You can find plenty of examples of awful interchanges, but you can find plenty examples of everything on the Net.)

Our picture of the Net as a set of hateful echo chambers is encouraged, too, by the premise that the only sites that matter are those with hundreds of thousands of readers. That's how the mainstream media works. But the Web is characterized by a "long tail" of sites with relatively few readers. The echo chamber dynamic is facilitated by sites so large that the commenters are functionally unknown to one another,

and the way to get attention is to be more outrageous than the previous person. That dynamic is missing on the smaller sites that, in aggregate, constitute the bulk of web traffic.

Nevertheless, our focus on echo chambers, our notion that they typify Net dialogue, and our taking them at their worst, tell us something: Our image of what a democracy should sound like is misconceived.

For example, while we can map the links going into and out of a site, and we can analyze the political positions of people who write posts or comment on them, there is little actual data about the readers of these sites. Perhaps the readers are diverse, even though the writers and linkers are fairly homogeneous. Perhaps data would show that in fact we've achieved the democratic ideal on the Web after all: People of all persuasions are reading sites of every persuasion.

Pretty lame, eh? Sounds like I'm grasping at straws to defend the Net? I agree. In fact, that's my point. The previous paragraph is unconvincing because we all agree that people generally don't spend a lot of time reading that with which they disagree. We know that, on- or offline conversation simply doesn't work that way. Never did. Never will. Conversation finds an area of agreement and then explores the differences. It hardly ever in our lives is an isolated exercise of pure, unfettered rationality in which we suspend core beliefs in order to think again about what those beliefs ought to be. Even taking that as an ideal requires a picture of rationality that is unrealistic. Pure reason is a better corrective than architect.

So, what good does conversation really do in a democracy? It helps us work out differences based upon shared ground. Conversations shape our existing ideas and occasionally generate new ideas that are in line with our existing beliefs. We can probably count the times on one hand that conversation changes our minds about anything important.

That doesn't mean conversation is irrelevant or trivial. Even when

conversation doesn't change minds, it serves other social roles, including binding people together so they can engage in effective political action building trust, community and political commitment. From the outside that may look like an echo chamber, but that is how people come to make common cause. A democracy needs such "echo chambers," even though their discussions inevitably appear like nothing but a bunch of homogenous supporters rah-rah-ing each other. Conversation among people who are in basic agreement builds relationships and foments political movement. It also makes possible the rare conversion of beliefs, and, when done in the public forum of the Net, it leaves traces by which opposing views can understand—and thus tolerate—one another better.

The persistence of "echo chambers" on the Net is not a failure of democracy. Rather, their continued existence is evidence not only of the fractures in our society, but of the gap between our ideals of democracy and the mechanics of human social intercourse. We are never able to stand fully apart from our commitments in order to evaluate them in the cool light of rationality. If the Net does nothing but help us accept the primacy of standpoint over reason—while leaving reason some footholds in the wall of belief—it will have done our democracy the valuable service of making it more realistic.

About the Author

David Weinberger is a fellow at the Harvard Berkman Center for Internet & Society. He was an adviser on Net policy to the Dean and Edwards campaigns. He is a co-author of *The Cluetrain Manifesto* and author of *Everything Is Miscellaneous*.

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY DEMANDS PARTICIPATION

Michael Turk

“ An electorate so easily swayed by simple arguments and disinclined to look for more information with easy access to voting on policy decisions or elections is more destructive than an apathetic electorate that chooses not to vote. ”

It's 8 o'clock on Wednesday night. Millions of American homes are tuned in to the most popular TV show on the air. For 16 weeks, the contestants have been jockeying for position and it is finally down to two. Trying to break into this business used to be a grueling ordeal characterized by endless hours spent honing your craft. Now an audition process vets contestants and determines who is most qualified for the top position. Tonight's finale will determine the winner. Fingers are poised to speed dial all across America.

The program's website is noticeably slower tonight than it was this afternoon. The traffic has spiked as millions of people across the nation express their opinions. The competition has been grueling, but it has also been more immediate and arguably fairer than in the past. When

all the votes are tallied, the winner will be announced—and someone will be elected the next American president.

In this scenario, our political process has been reduced to merely another offering in the crowded world of celebutainment, with our top leaders chosen from afar by telephone calls and Internet voting. Let's call it politainment.

It is a vision with a certain appeal. Trading in the quadrennial display of ego and fundraising prowess in favor of a sixteen-week debate series weeding out one competitor at a time would certainly have its supporters. Imagine the possibilities of having weekly political debates on proposed legislation, followed by 24 hours of Internet voting. True direct democracy would be at our fingertips. But would that be a good thing?

When the Framers of our Constitution built our representative democracy, they understood one thing: most people are not informed on issues. In 1776, it was lack of access to education. Today it is due to a combination of too much information and not enough curiosity.

In June of 2007, the Bureau of Labor Statistics released its American Time Use Survey. It found that Americans between the ages of 15 and 55 spend only 6 to 20 minutes a day reading.¹ They spent less than half an hour a day on educational activities, but 2.5 hours watching TV.² In an age of always-on communications and our insatiable need for entertainment, we, as a society, are not greatly concerned with studying the issues.

As practitioners of Internet campaigns march toward a Utopian vision of direct democracy and virtual town halls, there must be a corresponding effort to educate Americans beyond our current ninth-grade civics class level. Without an informed electorate participating

1 American Time Use Survey, US Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics. July 19, 2007, Accessed 3/18/2008 at Statistics <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/atus.t11.htm>

2 American Time Use Survey, US Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics. July 19, 2007, Accessed 3/18/2008 at Statistics <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/atus.t01.htm>

directly, our politics of the future will never live up to their promise.

In January 2007, Gallup questioned Americans on their attitudes toward Iraq. Under a “four alternatives” question, respondents were asked if the US should a) withdraw immediately, b) set a timeline for withdrawal, c) stay as long as needed or d) increase troop strength. Only 12% favored an increase in troop strength. In the same survey, asked of the same people, the surge option was described, and 36% supported it.³

Within the same survey, almost a quarter of respondents shifted position based on variations in descriptions of policy ideas. Applying that sort of variation to instant voting on policy decisions or elections would subject the American political system to swings in opinion more extreme than even our current partisan structure. An electorate so easily swayed by simple arguments and disinclined to look for more information, with easy access to voting on policy decisions or elections, is more destructive than an apathetic electorate that chooses not to vote.

As another example, on February 27, 2003, the Associated Press reported that 59% of the American people favored the invasion of Iraq.⁴ War detractors would argue this was due to the Administration’s “misleading” of the American people. One week later, however, the Gallup News Service reported that number had remained largely unchanged from ten years prior⁵:

“Our basic numbers on public support for invading Iraq have stayed roughly the same for month after month ... The level of sup-

3 *Public Opposes Troop Surge by 61% to 36% Margin*, Gallup News Service, January 9, 2007. Accessed 3/21/08 at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/26080/Public-Opposes-Troop-Surge-61-36-Margin.aspx>

4 *Poll suggests public support for invasion of Iraq would drop if Saddam destroys missiles*. Associated Press, February 27, 2003. Accessed 3/30/08 at <http://www.signonsandiego.com/news/world/iraq/20030227-2009-iraq-poll.html>

5 *Iraq, Bush Approval, Celebrity Opinions on Iraq, The Economy, Religion and Politics*, Gallup News Service, January 9, 2007. Accessed 3/21/08 at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/7927/Iraq-Bush-Approval-Celebrity-Opinions-Iraq-Economy-Religion.aspx>

port has changed a little here and there, but when all is said and done, we are consistently finding that between 55% to 60% of Americans favor U.S. military action against Iraq to bring about a change in that country's leadership. That's not far from what we found 10 years ago."

The narrative on Iraq that was cemented following the 1991 invasion of Kuwait held sway over the electorate for more than a decade—creating an environment where making a case to go to war against them was relatively easy. More informed and rigorous public debate was not possible within the existing paradigm of politainment.

As a final example, the following text message from Twitter was received as this was being written, "[J]ust voted in a run-off election that I only became aware of when the ballot showed up in my mailbox." The sender is politically engaged and active. Yet the message demonstrates the difficulty of staying informed of every political discussion, debate and election.

None of this is to say that direct democracy is not a desirable goal. But its implementation must be in tandem with a more informed electorate. We must challenge ourselves to create a renewed personal attention to matters of public concern.

Fortunately, while the Internet is reshaping the way we participate in campaigns and interact with our government, it is also opening doors to new educational opportunities. A Pew Internet and American Life Project study following the 2004 election found dramatic increases in the use of the Web to research candidates and issues—with more than 75 million Americans using the Web for information and news about politics.⁶ Nearly a quarter of Americans (24%) say they regularly learn something about the presidential campaign from the Internet, almost double the percentage from a comparable point in the 2004 campaign (13%). Compared with the 2000 campaign, far fewer Americans now

6 *The Internet and Campaign 2004*. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. March 6, 2005. Accessed 4/3/2008 at http://www.pewInternet.org/pdfs/PIP_2004_Campaign.pdf

say they regularly learn about the campaign from local TV news (down eight points), nightly network news (down 13 points) and daily newspapers (down nine points).⁷

With more Americans turning to the Internet for information, the potential for a new era of citizen involvement exists. The wealth of information available, together with a diverse variety of opinion to interpret and frame that information, creates a rich and fertile learning environment. The power of social networks to bring people together, paired with the Internet, can create a modern political state that invites civic participation. If the Internet is able to bring “We the People” back to our political process, the concept of direct democracy may become a reality.

About the Author

Michael Turk is Vice President of Industry Grassroots for the National Cable & Telecommunications Association, where he is working to build a robust grassroots activist base for the cable industry. Before joining NCTA, Turk served as the eCampaign Director for the Republican National Committee. Prior to his position at the Committee, Turk was the eCampaign Director for Bush-Cheney '04.

7 *Social Networking and Online Videos Take Off: Internet's Broader Role in Campaign 2008*. The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press. January 11, 2008. Accessed 4/3/2008 at http://pewInternet.org/pdfs/Pew_MediaSources_jan08.pdf

WINNING THE FUTURE IN THE PERSONAL DEMOCRACY AGE

Newt Gingrich

“ Governments today still metaphorically operate with the quill pen, and in some instances, do so almost literally. ”

The challenge posed by the editors of this anthology relates directly to the focus of much of my efforts over the past several years: How to migrate government from what I call “the world that fails” (one of paper-based bureaucracies of process, checklists, regulations, self-preservation and punishment) to “the world that works” (where entrepreneurs rapidly create adaptable new technologies, incentivize productivity and innovation with rewards and encourages risk-taking).

The challenge is to replace the Founder’s “quill pen with a mouse” and to imagine a government for the Information Age. It’s a useful exercise because, in fact, governments today still metaphorically operate with the quill pen, and in some instances, do so almost literally. Take for instance the recent admission by the Department of Commerce that after spending \$1.3 billion they are going to drop the effort

to develop hand-held computers for canvassers in the 2010 census. Instead, they plan to revert to paper-and-pencil and hire over 600,000 temporary workers at a cost of approximately \$13-15 billion (\$37 per person counted). This means that by 2010 the cost of the census will have almost doubled since 2000, having already doubled since 1990.

This sort of cost explosion without any improvement in capacity and capability (the antithesis of Moore's Law) is a systemic challenge that permeates all of our government bureaucracies. In nearly every economic sector, we see products and services with increasing quality, more choices, greater convenience, and decreased cost. Yet, in nearly every part of government, at all levels, we see precisely the opposite: lower quality, fewer choices, greater inconvenience and spiraling costs. Clearly, this pattern is unsustainable if America is to continue to be the leading power on the planet in the 21st century. So, indeed, imagining how we would "reboot government" for the Information Age is not just an exercise in speculative fiction, it is the beginning of a plan of action.

I want to suggest three principles that should guide us in using the innovations of the Internet Age to migrate government from the world that fails to the world that works.

First, our system has to harness the power of collective intelligence, best described in James Surowiecki's *The Wisdom of the Crowds*. At American Solutions we have developed a "Solutions Lab"—an Internet-based, grassroots exchange and collaboration platform that allows people to share ideas and then to work together to improve them in a team-building environment using wiki technology. Our vision for the Solutions Lab is to tap into the vast collective creativity of the American people to provide innovative solutions to the challenges facing America, solutions government bureaucrats cannot deliver. Furthermore, we see the Solutions Lab as a valuable resource for elected officials, who will not only have the ability to acquire ideas, but also to gain instant

feedback on their ideas outside of the scope of the 24/7 news cycle.

We are also launching “Rate Your Government,” which will bring the groundbreaking system of user ratings and feedback that made eBay so successful to citizens and their government agencies. Obviously this project will allow citizens to voice frustrations with government services, but more importantly it can surface government systems that are working so they can be emulated nationwide.

Second, for our government to truly harness the wisdom of the crowds, it must be as transparent as possible. As Peter Drucker warned thirty years ago in *The Age of Discontinuities*, government is different from the private sector. Because it is in the government’s nature to encroach on freedom and because it has the ability to coerce, higher standards of transparency and accountability are called for in government than in the private sector. The public really does have a right to know about actions that, in a totally private company, would be legitimately shielded from outside scrutiny.

In 1995, when I was sworn in as Speaker of the House, we set up the Thomas system to publish all legislation online. We named the new system of transparency after Thomas Jefferson because we knew this innovation was one which the author of the Declaration of Independence would approve.

In recent years, Congress has taken some decisive steps backward from this commitment to transparency and accountability. Campaign finance, the rise of earmarks and secret holds on nominations are just a few examples. Before the Information Age, it would have been nearly impossible to track down who introduced which earmark, who was funding which candidate and who was holding up the executive branch from filling its positions. Yet today it is just as difficult, though we proved with the Thomas system that it is possible for the public to have access to all of this information. The fact that they don’t should, and will, become less and less acceptable.

Moreover, at American Solutions, we are launching a new project called “513Connect.” 513Connect will be a collaborative, Internet-based effort to identify all 513,000 elected officials currently serving in the United States so that citizens can easily engage elected leaders.

Third, in an age of such an explosion of new science and technology, there needs to be a commitment on the part of elected officials to learn continually. At American Solutions, we want to network all 513,000 elected officials into a common learning environment. To do so, we are developing “Solutions Island,” a private, 3D Internet metaverse for elected officials to share ideas and best practices. Solutions Island will feature regular learning opportunities for elected officials to learn from each other, as well as from leading innovators and entrepreneurs of the private sector.

Imagine walking into a government office today and seeing a gaslight, a quill pen, a bottle of ink for dipping the pen, a tall clerk’s desk, and a stool. The very image of the office would communicate how out-of-date the office was. Sadly, that is the reality of today’s government, minus the outward evidence of obsolescence. To fully realize the Founders’ vision of a republic that respects the creator-endowed rights of all its citizens, this has to change. By focusing on using information technology to harness the collective intelligence of the American people to solve problems, maximizing this opportunity for Americans by committing to as transparent a government as possible, and insisting on a commitment from our elected officials to continually learn from the world that works, we will achieve a more modern government that delivers more choices of greater quality at greater convenience at lower cost. While we can’t be sure of what the Founders would have thought of our 21st-century democracy, we know that their vision for a democratic republic has survived. Today, we should harness existing technologies to further strengthen our democracy and ensure that it will endure.

About the Author

Newt Gingrich served as the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1995 to 1999 and was a member of Congress for 20 years, representing the state of Georgia. During his tenure, Gingrich was known as the chief architect of the Republican Contract with America and a key player in the Republican Party's regaining control of Congress after 40 years. Gingrich is the CEO of The Gingrich Group, an Atlanta-based communications and management-consulting firm, a distinguished visiting fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, General Chairman of American Solutions for Winning the Future (www.americansolutions.com), and a Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, DC.

PARTICIPATION AS SUSTAINABLE COOPERATION IN PURSUIT OF PUBLIC GOALS

Yochai Benkler

“ Large-scale collaboration, among widely-dispersed populations, is manageable, sustainable, and effective. ”

The networked information economy changes a set of physical facts and enables a cultural trend, which could make an appreciable difference in the basic architecture of participation in contemporary democracies. The physical capital necessary for effective production and communication of information, knowledge, and culture is widely distributed in the population. Processors, storage, communications capacity, as well as audio and video sensors, are now in the hands of everyone with a computer or mobile phone. This means that the practical limitations on large-scale collaboration among geographically and socially dispersed people have been dramatically reduced.

Domains of action that require the acquisition of information; its organization and analysis; its production into knowledge structures

and structures of meaning; and the capacity to tell stories about how things are and how they might become no longer depend on access to significant material capital resources. Individuals can act socially in ways that traditionally had local effects with little economic or political salience, but now can have significant effects in both social and economic-political domains. These technical and social facts have given rise to a cultural trend of greater engagement in individual and collective social action aimed to achieve results in the world without going through the traditional structures of effective action, power, and authority that typified industrial society. This is how we got free or open-source software, which practically anyone who uses e-mail, browses websites, writes blogs or edits wikis uses without even knowing it, because it is what runs major portions of these services. This is how we got Wikipedia. This is how we got YouTube, MySpace and Facebook.

Two critical points emerge out of the experience of the networked information economy. First, people can, with relatively moderate and manageable levels of effort, come together to act effectively on problems that they could not tackle in the past. Second, people can and do work cooperatively together, needing neither markets nor hierarchies, governmental or otherwise, to organize them. Large-scale collaboration, among widely-dispersed populations, is manageable, sustainable, and effective.

This is a new and important realization. It can be, and in many instances already is being, applied to problems of democratic governance: from the construction of the public sphere, through the harnessing of cooperative models for implementing government oversight on an ongoing basis, to harnessing peer production to define problems and solutions for public action.

The networked public sphere. The mass-mediated public sphere used to concentrate the production of stories about who we are, what

challenges face us, and how we might overcome them. The public at large was reduced to passivity in this model of production; we were no more than “eyeballs.” The networked public sphere is comprised of e-mails and e-mail lists, blogs ranging from individual thoughts to professional and semi-professional new voices like Instapundit or Talking Points Memo, to vast collaboration platforms like DailyKos with thousands of contributors, or flash campaigns that re-purpose other platforms, like the Burma campaign on Facebook. A dozen or more years of experience with the networked public sphere has taught us a lot about how it can operate. It is not, it turns out, the republic of yeoman authors that some hoped it would be. But neither is it the trackless cacophony of antagonistic echo chambers that others predicted. Instead, we have seen a public sphere where millions, rather than hundreds or thousands, can participate in setting the agenda, filtering what is important, and telling our common stories. Not everyone; but a large and significant change from where we were a mere decade ago.

The most visible successes of the networked public sphere have been in the domain of playing watchdog. Older stories from the past half decade are well known: the critique of Diebold voting machines; the CBS/Dan Rather report on George Bush’s military record; the debates that led to Trent Lott’s resignation. More recently, Josh Marshall at Talking Points Memo uncovered the U.S. Attorney purge that resulted in Alberto Gonzales’s resignation. A collaboration initiated by Porkbusters, and ultimately encompassing blogs on both sides of the American political blogosphere, mobilized readers to investigate the identity of a senator who secretly blocked legislation that required more transparency in government spending, an investigation which successfully identified the culprit and forced removal of the block. Recently, we have begun to see organizations like the Sunlight Foundation provide better tools for collaborative production of the watchdog function. This foundation funds projects that take govern-

ment data and collate and render it in platforms that allow citizens to collaborate on investigating and identifying problems about which they particularly care.

Both the rise of networked debate and the rise of a peer-produced watchdog function characterize a vastly different role and level of mobilization for citizens than was typical as recently as a decade ago. The social distance between any citizen and someone who can speak and be heard by a substantial community has shrunk. Instead of six degrees of separation, it is now no more than one or two. As we walk around with video cameras in our pockets (our mobile phones), we can capture images and sounds and expect to be seen and heard, as we never could before. As these capabilities increase, we are already seeing, and will likely continue to see, a shift in attitude—from passive acceptance of forces greater than ourselves, to a sense that what we see, care about, and say could become the subject of a broader community of concern and action. And this attitudinal change is the linchpin to the possibility of a change in practice.

New forms of engaged collaboration. The next phase in the integration of large-scale cooperation into democracy will come when we begin to use platforms for collecting, filtering, and refining proposals for action and active contributions. It is simplest to imagine this occurring at the level of local government. People living their day-to-day lives encounter a multitude of obstacles and overcome them using diverse solutions. Some problems cannot be solved systematically. Some can, but require attention and effort unavailable to local governments. Developing systems that allow people to report problems, offer solutions, vet them, compare solutions across municipalities, and propose action could overcome the limited resources at the local level. On the free-software model, everyone is a beta tester of their own physical environment, and all bugs can be fixed in that environment if enough people look at the problem. Taking this approach to the national level,

there is no reason that federal agencies cannot implement similar systems. We now have the Patent and Trademark Office experimenting with the Peer-to-Patent system, which gives patent applicants fast-track treatment if they submit their patent application to community peer review, which in turn advises the patent examiners on whether the patent is indeed novel and nonobvious. (Please see Beth Simone Noveck's essay beginning on page 192 to learn more about the Peer-to-Patent system.) There is no reason the Federal Communications Commission could not implement a similar platform for its decisions, such as in the area of wireless communications regulation, or why states and the federal government cannot create effective platforms for teachers to participate in the development of teaching materials, or to connect schools to volunteers to help with reading, math, and history.

Implementing such systems is complicated. There are risks of cacophony, strategic gaming, and incompetence. And yet these were once objections to the plausibility of Wikipedia or free software. We have found ways to avoid both malevolence and incompetence in large-scale collaborations, without re-introducing a hierarchy that disempowers most citizens. And that is what we must do in designing systems for citizen participation in the ongoing process of managing our collective lives.

While the implementation may be far from simple, the basic principle is. The widespread distribution of physical capital necessary to produce our information environment has triggered a set of new cultural practices oriented around effective, active social cooperation on a wide range of activities, including the provision of important public goods. This new culture is not yet universal, but is growing rapidly as the number of people who have edited a Wikipedia article, uploaded a video to YouTube, or commented or tagged a post increases. This cultural shift in self-perception, from passive couch potato to active

participant in collaborative practices for making one's own information universe, opens the opportunity for a more robust, sustainable level of involvement by citizens in the governance of their society. It allows us to move from the minimal implementation of universal participation as the formal right of suffrage, to constructing platforms that will actually engage people in effective, sustainable efforts aimed toward identifying our differences and commonalities, and acting together to further our common good.

About the Author

Yochai Benkler is the Berkman Professor of Entrepreneurial Legal Studies at Harvard, and faculty co-director of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society. Before joining the faculty at Harvard Law School, he was Joseph M. Field '55 Professor of Law at Yale. He is the author of *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (Yale Press 2006).

BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE

Andrew Rasiej

“ Our corrupt system of distant, unaccountable representative democracy is going to get an overhaul, whether the representatives like it or not. ”

ever since the creation of our imperfect union, it has suffered under conditions that our forefathers had hoped would never occur in the democratic system they devised. Instead of a government that would serve the people and empower them, more often than not our government has become a bureaucratic maze, with institutional deafness, and laziness coupled with corruption and deference to special interests to the point where people feel so disempowered that only half of eligible citizens even bother to vote. Where our country's founders idealistically thought all citizens would welcome and take advantage of the right to vote, they would be shocked to learn most voters view participation in civic life as abstract and irrelevant to their lives, livelihoods, or future prospects. Well, because the Internet empowers communication between people and information in powerful new ways the ideal of full participation may still be realized.

Forgive this oversimplification, but as they saw it, our forefathers believed that “the people” were too busy plowing the fields, raising families, and settling the country in the “pursuit of happiness” to be burdened with the worries of running the state and protecting it from its enemies.

So in keeping with this view, they designed a “representative” government “for and by the people,” whereby representatives would be elected to do all the necessary worrying and business of governing. They believed that by giving “the people” the right to vote and elect these representative leaders they were creating a democratic society. A society such as this would by definition hold elected officials accountable for their performance and throw them out of office if they failed to perform the people’s will.

At the time, the assumption regarding the preoccupations of citizens wasn’t so far off the mark. Not only was it true that most citizens were busy plowing fields in an effort to survive, these same citizens had very little time to educate themselves regarding the processes of governing or the issues facing society and the country, such as land distribution, international trade, war, displaced and violent Indians, and disputes among the states. Even though “citizens” were given a right to vote, they had little idea of how to exercise this right in an organized way. Let’s face it: “the people” had little experience and knowledge so they participated in this new democracy on the fly.

As time went on, elected representatives learned how to use the system they were elected to run to largely keep themselves in power. They used their positions to enrich themselves and their friends, fight off challengers (think gerrymandering of districts), and pass laws that allowed them to preserve and consolidate their control over this bastardized form of democracy. Pretty soon, people with real problems learned that they couldn’t get their problems solved by voting in new people to replace the old, failed ones. So they began to form organized

groups such as political parties, labor unions, trade associations, and not-for-profits to force their representatives to listen to them, in large part because of the size of their memberships. These groups raised money for their elected officials, denounced their leaders' enemies, and attacked anyone who had opposing views until they got their way.

Ultimately, over time, these various groups' efforts created even more imbalance within the system. Those with the time and money won out over the masses, and their success has created many of the afflictions facing our democracy today. To wit: Organized minorities are more powerful than disorganized majorities. As an example, one need look no further than Florida where Cubans have been making sure with great success that the embargo on their former homeland remains intact until their economic interests (mostly property they own in Miami) are not lost when the embargo is lifted and a great sucking sound is heard across the Caribbean as capitalism floods their former island, leaving Miami to play second fiddle to a rejuvenated Havana. As further proof, did you know that the Dade county election commission that suspended the vote counting during the Bush vs. Gore 2000 election was dominated by Cubans intent on restoring an anti-Castro Republican administration?

Now the Internet is marching its way through society, creating a new economy of abundance and an exponential explosion in the amount of information available to the human race. The ability to aggregate and share knowledge has become democratized and commonplace, and the "wisdom of crowds" isn't a fanciful notion but an opportunity for the "will of the people" to be put into effect either by surviving institutions and leaders or by the people acting in their place.

This doesn't mean that we are all going to become one assembled mass in some new virtual Coliseum, thumbing up or down ideas and feeding losers to the lions. Rather, it means that we'll have new and expansive ways to share the best information about anything that's

important and involve citizen experts in deliberations and decision-making. An early example is Politicopia.com where citizens can participate in an open wiki that crafts legislation for the State of Utah.

So what happens to our forefathers' idea of representative democracy in this brave new world? Do we really need representatives if we have morphed from panoply of organized minorities to one big organized majority? One need look no farther than Wikipedia.com or Congresspedia.com to see examples of how collected organized knowledge can produce a resource that improves people's lives that also continues to evolve as an ongoing human asset. Every day there are new self-organizing groups producing and sharing their knowledge, skills, and time, building better and better information systems which will solve problems and improve the world.

The author Clay Shirky uses the phrase "cognitive surplus" to mean the free brain time the industrialized world has generated for people. For instance, he estimates that Wikipedia has leveraged about 100 million total human hours. Furthering his point, he estimates that Americans spend 200 billion total hours a year passively watching TV and never engaging in a productive activity; in other words our untapped surplus brainpower is sitting on the couch watching American Idol. All that TV watching equals the time it would take to create 2000 Wikipedias. Imagine if just one percent of that cognitive time was harnessed, humans could have an additional 20 resources equal to the value of Wikipedia. Well, a small but discernible percentage of the population is deciding to shut off the television and take advantage of the Internet Age to embrace the read/write Web and participate.

Our corrupt system of distant, unaccountable representative democracy is going to get an overhaul, whether the representatives like it or not. Indeed, organizations like the Sunlight Foundation are publishing government information and data in easily searchable and open databases, creating more transparency and illuminating the inner workings

of government in ways never imagined possible. Other sites like *outside.in* offer citizens the ability to contribute local neighborhood information often with real-time news, opinions, and conversations about everything happening around them faster than any government agency, city council, or community board could ever hope. And this is just the beginning. Wait till the next generation of citizens—those for whom sharing information collectively is a natural pursuit—start worrying about why government doesn't work for them. They will not wait for government to act like our parents did and our forefathers hoped; they'll just go do whatever needs to get done, themselves.

Abraham Lincoln was more prescient than he realized when he wrote in the Gettysburg Address, “government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

About the Author

Andrew Rasiej is the Founder of Personal Democracy Forum , an annual conference and community website about the intersection of politics and technology. He is also the co-founder of *techPresident*, an award-winning group blog that covers how the 2008 presidential candidates are using the web, and how content generated by voters is affecting the campaign. Rasiej is the founder of MOUSE (Making Opportunities for Upgrading Schools and Education), an educational non-profit organization started in 1997 focused on providing technology support to public schools. Rasiej also maintains the position of senior technology adviser for the Sunlight Foundation, a Washington D.C. based organization that focuses on using technology to expose corruption in Congress and facilitates citizen engagement and oversight.

THE MERCIFUL DEATH OF THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT AND THE BIRTH OF TRUE GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY: A SHORT HISTORY

Ellen Miller

“ In its fourth decade FOIA faced off and lost to the secrecy obsessed administration of President George W. Bush. ”

Looking back, maybe it was inevitable. Perhaps the well-intentioned yet fatally compromised Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was doomed from the start, well before it died this year, in 2015. And yet, while FOIA was dying, true government openness was emerging to take its place.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, the passage of a Freedom of Information law requiring government to provide information to citizens upon request was championed by newspaper editors and other journalists, and by a California congressman by the name of John Moss. (Brief historic and ironic aside: A young Republican congressman from Illinois named Donald Rumsfeld was a champion of government openness,

and signed on as a leading co-sponsor of Moss' bill. Less than 10 years later, as President Gerald Ford's chief of staff, Rumsfeld convinced his boss to veto FOIA amendments meant to strengthen the law.) In 1966, with trepidation on the part of the press-wary Lyndon Johnson but great fanfare from others, FOIA was born.⁸

FOIA was meant to be "democracy's X-ray," as Anthony D. Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, wrote in 2007, allowing journalists and other citizens to ferret out waste, fraud, abuse and corruption. As early as 1991, FOIA was being criticized as an oxymoron and was fading into obsolescence.⁹ FOIA had some victories. NASA was found to have covered up damning details of the 1986 Challenger disaster; historian David Garrow used FOIA to uncover records of the FBI's surveillance of Martin Luther King, Jr.; the Associated Press discovered that researchers at the National Institutes of Health were collecting royalties from drug companies for tests they conducted on unwitting patients; and the world learned of the torture of detainees at Guantanamo Bay and other detention facilities after 9/11—all as a result of FOIA.

Despite these and other high-profile successes, government information was never easily or willingly released. Federal agencies failed to answer most requests, and took years to answer others. An executive order issued by the Reagan-Bush Administration in 1982 instructed the federal government to classify documents whenever in doubt, and to reclassify already released material. FOIA was doomed. The *FOIA Advocate*¹⁰, a publication of the National Freedom of Information Coalition, reported in 2007 that:

8 <http://www.gwu.edu/%7EEnsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB194/index.html>

9 "FOIA IS AN OXYMORON," Downloaded at Project Censored: The News That Did Not Make the News, <http://www.projectcensored.org/static/1991/1991-story7.htm>, downloaded on April 4, 2008.

10 http://www.nfoic.org/advocate/advocate_090707.html

- Two of every five FOIA requests filed in 2006 were not processed
- The number of exemptions cited to support the withholding of information had increased 83% since 1998
- The number of FOIA denials increased 10% in 2006
- The cost of processing FOIA requests had gone up 40% since 1998, even though agencies were processing 20% fewer requests
- Most people were waiting much longer for FOIA information

In its fourth decade FOIA faced off and lost to the secrecy obsessed administration of President George W. Bush.¹¹ Bush used executive privilege, hyper classification under the aegis of national security, and stonewalling to further secrecy. The administration tightened the government's grasp on information like a boa constrictor suffocating a rabbit. For instance, the 2007 study found that the Bush Administration's Justice Department granted only 4% of the FOIA requests it received in 2006, a 70% drop from the previous administration. Vice President Dick Cheney even argued that he was not part of the executive branch, and thus was not covered by the act.

Bush signed the Open Government Act of 2007, the first reform of FOIA in over a decade.¹² It included the significant provision of establishing a FOI ombudsman to provide independent oversight and settle disputes over FOIA requests. However, Bush "neutered" the provision by shifting the funding for the office from the National Archives to the Department of Justice, where it died.

While FOIA was dying, other efforts within the Congress and elsewhere were laying the groundwork for true government transparency. In 2008, Jeff Jarvis, a blogger, journalist and journalism school

11 <http://www.bushsecrecy.org/>

12 http://www.sunlightfoundation.com/so_much_for_the_new_foia_laws

professor, wrote that the act be turned inside-out. “Why should we be asking for information about and from our government?” he wrote. “The government should have to ask to keep things from us... Government information—every act of government on our behalf—should be free by default.”¹³ Digital technology and web-based tools allow business transactions to be digitally captured, stored, and opened to search and analysis, he argued. This was not possible when the information was stored on paper in file cabinets.

Congress began to see the potential of these new online tools. The Coburn-Obama Act of 2006 was the first of a handful of laws passed over the next five years, exposing the workings of Congress to the light of day. This law established USA Spending.gov, a website that allows citizens to research federal government spending.¹⁴ The success of the website led to the formation of the Transparency Caucus Advisory Committee in 2009 that pushed more reforms on Capitol Hill and into law. This era later became known as the “Government Transparency Revolution.”

In 2009, Congress passed the Government Transparency Act requiring lobbyists to register and disclose all legislative contacts, all legislation and regulation discussed within 24 hours. The Act also required lobbyists to disclose any relationship to a current member of Congress, staff member, or executive branch employee.

Later that year, Congress passed the Government for All Act that became the gold standard for government transparency of personal and financial relationships. The law required that all public reports be filed electronically and shared within 24 hours of their filing. It forced the Senate to follow the House’s lead and make Personal Financial Disclosure reports available online. It also required Senators to file, and make public within 24 hours, campaign finance reports. It increased the filing frequency, requiring monthly reports. Personal Financial Dis-

13 <http://www.davosconversation.org/?p=3422>

14 <http://www.usaspending.gov/>

closure reports were amended to require disclosure of the affiliations of Members (and their spouses and their adult children) with political action committees, “Leadership” PACs, and any 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4) organizations. Other mandated disclosures included the employment of immediate family members and their economic relationships with for profit and not-for-profit entities.

In 2010, Congress passed the Information for Everyone Act that ended the practice of secret legislation once and for all. Specifically, the act required that all non-emergency legislation be posted online, in its final form, at least 72 hours before a vote. The act also required disclosure of the purpose and identification of the beneficiaries of legislative earmarks 72 hours before a vote on them.

The Information for Everyone Act opened up all congressional information to the public in free, easy-to-use online formats. This included Congressional Research Service reports, Legislative Information System documents, and all other non-classified research and information available to members of Congress and their staff.

These cascading reforms whetted the appetite of the public for open and transparent government. Suddenly, citizens were participating directly in the writing of legislation and regulations. The federal government stopped fearing transparency and embraced openness. Ultimately, FOIA’s demise was necessary to allow transparency and information to flow freely.

About the Author

Ellen Miller is the co-founder and executive director of the Sunlight Foundation. She previously served as deputy director of Campaign for America’s Future. She is the founder of two prominent Washington-based organizations in the field of money and politics—the Center for Responsive Politics and Public Campaign.

THE VOID WE MUST FILL

Richard C. Harwood

“...we must make a fundamental shift from simply finding new ways of aggregating information to generating true public knowledge rooted in a fundamentally different notion of what it means ‘to know’ a community.”

I am writing this essay at a time when our society continues to fragment and re-configure itself, and when people feel more and more disconnected from one another and their leaders. The very groups that once connected us to one another, such as newspapers, broadcast news and robust civic and religious institutions, hold little relevance nowadays. We are drifting away from one another with too few opportunities to pull us together. The void is great and I fear it is expanding.

In most communities across the nation the right conditions and capacity necessary to support widespread change simply do not exist. Go to any community and people will talk about this lack of civic foundation. They will tell you about their community’s fragmented efforts, its negative norms for public discourse, the lack of trust they

have in leaders, and the dearth of catalytic organizations working for the common good, not just for their own good.

Some believe that the Internet can be a panacea, enabling us to re-knit our communities. Many people with noble intentions have launched new and ever more sophisticated social networking sites, such as Facebook and Change.org. I believe these sites will emerge as new seedbeds of democracy, where people can forge new relationships and trust. But the Internet has also proven to be the perfect tool for enabling society's relentless push to create consumers out of citizens, helping build a world where individuals are free agents, able to create their own communities, aggregate their own news, amplify their own voices—and go their own ways.

How can public life and politics work if there is not an expressed intent to see and hear one another, especially those who are different from us? How can we create shared realities and discover ways to act together? Indeed, how will we collectively address the pressing issues of our times?

I believe the Internet may yet be one of our best bets for rebuilding the civic foundation of our communities. It can enable us to build new “community knowledge hubs” that will help re-engage people and allow them to forge pathways into public life. But to seize this opportunity will require that we embed in our sites and spaces an intentional and decidedly public orientation.

First, our efforts must focus on creating “public knowledge.” When people talk about new online community hubs, they often start by reciting exhaustive lists of information they want to gather and post. The result sounds like a description of your junk drawer, a stuffed catchall for everything and representing essentially nothing. In still other areas we see single-issue groups serve up highly specific, expert-driven information on particular issues, and countless advocacy groups whose sole purpose is to advance their own cause and to

rally supporters and donors. Further, while Facebook and other social networks connect us to friends and colleagues, the content usually revolves around the personal, and still encourages us to see and hear from only those we choose.

Replicating or aggregating these ideas, tools, or approaches alone will not produce new and useful knowledge for communities. The problem has never been a shortage of information online. Instead, we must make a fundamental shift from simply finding new ways of aggregating information to generating true public knowledge rooted in a fundamentally different notion of what it means “to know” a community.

Based on over 20 years of research, The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation created a framework called the “7 Public Knowledge Keys” to encompass seven factors that, when taken together, help people see a broader and deeper picture of their communities and the people who live there. These knowledge keys include:

- Issues of Concern—the issues, tensions and values people are wrestling with
- Aspirations—the aspirations people hold for their community and future
- Sense of Place—including its history and evolution
- Sources—the sources of knowledge and engagement people trust most
- People—the things people hold valuable to themselves and the community, and the language and norms that shape their lives and interactions
- Civic Places—the places where people get together and engage (offline and online)
- Stereotypes—the stereotypes or preconceived notions one must watch out for

Of course, wikis hold much promise for generating content, even knowledge. But to generate public knowledge is something else, requir-

ing us to actively engage people from across a community, because that is the only way to bring the “7 Public Knowledge Keys” alive. What’s more, such engagement must be an ongoing effort, since communities, issues, and people will forever change. The very process required to create this knowledge breaks us out of the relentless segmentation that drives so much of society. The essence of public knowledge is its currency and credibility.

Second, in many communities, scores of good groups do good work in small niches; but very few groups actually span boundaries. Online hubs must intentionally span these boundaries. We desperately need groups that bring people together across dividing lines, incubate new ideas, and spin them off. We need a mirror held up to our efforts so we can see and hear one another and our shared realities. This boundary spanning function sits at the heart of my notion of community knowledge hubs. Without these boundary spanners, the void in communities will grow and our connections will fray even further.

Some may argue that many online sites already span boundaries with blogrolls, RSS feeds, recommendation filters, rating tools, and so on. Such functions make the web what it is—robust, vibrant, alive, teeming with activity. And yet I believe that community knowledge hubs must serve a different purpose. They must turn from simply aggregating, recommending, and sharing content, and focus on the relationships between and among different facets and sources of public knowledge. By spanning traditional boundaries, people can see and make connections on issues and ideas that are often intentionally kept separate. On an issue like public schools, we find many groups advocating for their own “solution” based on their specific frame of the problem (charter schools, parental involvement, teacher performance and pay), when individuals in their daily lives actually experience the issue in a way that connects and cuts across these artificial boundaries.

We must swiftly move away from hyper-segmentation, which,

while valuable in connecting and accelerating like-mindedness, creates needless and harmful divisions in public life. Bringing disparate pieces of public knowledge together gives people the chance to see and understand the rich diversity within public life and politics. And it is from this understanding that people gain a sense of their own capacity to step forward and engage.

Third, it is important to understand how change occurs in communities. In the 1990s, when I worked with newspapers to help them better connect with their communities it was clear that they saw their role as the destination site for all things community. But people in communities told us they viewed newspapers as only one of many sources for learning about the community and forming their own judgments about key concerns and issues. What newspapers often missed was that people were piecing together their lives over time, and that community awareness and change emanated from a host of factors, of which newspapers were only one component. What they lacked was a sense of humility about their place in the community and how they could best fulfill their role.

It is essential that those creating community knowledge hubs avoid this mistake. At a recent meeting with a community foundation and thought leaders on these issues, I was struck by the extent to which, like newspapers, they believed that change was to begin and end with them. Creating a community knowledge hub, they assumed, meant they had full responsibility for driving out all change associated with it. When they talked about pursuing community knowledge hubs, they often envisioned some single, large civic effort that they would identify, direct, own and manage! Faced with such a daunting prospect, many of the leaders were fearful of undertaking any such effort.

Most change in communities occurs through small pockets of activity that emerge and take root over time. These pockets result from

individuals, small groups, or an organization seeing an opportunity for change. Seldom are such pockets orchestrated through a top-down strategic plan; instead, they happen when people and groups in communities start to engage and interact, and when they create a sense of what I call authentic hope. In this way, community knowledge hubs can play a crucial catalytic role—helping to foster the conditions for people to tap their own potential to join together to forge a common future.

The Internet holds enormous potential to help rebuild the civic foundation of communities. My hope is that people will band together and build these new community knowledge hubs, enabling them to help re-knit their communities. It is a vitally important task. But these community knowledge hubs will only spark the change we need if they have a decidedly public orientation that says that we must be able to see and hear one another. This is the void we must fill.

About the Author

Richard C. Harwood is founder and president of The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, a non-profit catalytic organization dedicated to helping people imagine and act for the public good. For nearly two decades, Harwood has led the charge to redeem hope in our politics and public life, discovering how to create change in the face of negative conditions.

SMARTMOBBING DEMOCRACY

Howard Rheingold

“ In the next few years, peer-to-peer, self-organized, citizen-centric movements enabled by smart mob media will either demonstrate real political influence, be successfully contained by those whose power they threaten, or recede as a Utopian myth of days gone by. ”

It has taken over 10 years of talk about “new media” for a critical mass to understand that every computer desktop, and now every pocket, is a worldwide printing press, broadcasting station, place of assembly, and organizing tool—and to learn how to use that infrastructure to affect change.

Previous technologies allowed users only to communicate one-to-one (telephones) or few-to-many (broadcast and print media). Mobile and deskbound media such as blogs, listserves and social networking sites allow for many-to-many communication. This provides opportunities and problems for political activists in three key areas: the gathering and disseminating of alternative and more democratic news; the creation of virtual public spheres where citizens debate the

issues that concern democratic societies; and the organizing of collective political action.

The New News

Blogs and moblogs, such as the international network of Independent Media Centers, South Korea's influential OhMyNews and MoveOn.org's Misleader.org are signs of what San Jose Mercury-News columnist Dan Gillmor calls an emerging "we journalism." Each of these sites offers up-to-the-minute news alerts, provided by a combination of citizen-reporters and trained staff. While the owners and administrators of such sites range widely—from passionate individuals to collectives to upstart non-profits—these blogs are markedly more democratic than their corporate-run, top-down brethren.

Internal and external forces, however, threaten to undermine "we journalism" before its impact is fully realized.

Misinformation, disinformation, incredulity and magical thinking are problems on the supply side of these new reporting modes. Aggregators of blog postings—which rank blog listings by popularity, similar to Google's page rank technology—already serve as a filter for this flood of amateur journalism. And reputation systems, filters and syndication services also could develop into useful tools for assessing the veracity of information sites. But political activists and those who sponsor progressive projects also have a role: For "we journalism" to acquire long-term credibility and lasting impact, we must fund, staff and promote media literacy—teaching users to create and consume this new journalism.

Activists also have a role in turning back the corporate attacks that seek to privatize the Internet by regulating content and limiting the ability of amateurs to produce cultural works that compete with those of media conglomerates.

Today, a small number of broadband Internet providers, such as

Comcast and Viacom, are pushing for regulations that would enable them to pick and choose the content that travels over their part of the network. The courts also are coming to bear in this fight, as companies work to extend copyright far beyond its original intent and establish digital rights schemes that make it difficult to produce or distribute digital content not authorized by the entertainment industry.

The consolidation of media ownership into the hands of a small number of individuals or cartels—who exchange political funding for legislative and regulatory favors—is being fought by organizations such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation. But activists who have not been involved in technology or media issues need to join in this battle, because communication media under dispute are profoundly political tools. In coming decades, Internet-based media will exert more and more influence over what people know and believe, and over how they can organize and assemble for collective action.

The Electronic Town Square

Network TV news and talk radio are hardly examples of the reasoned debate that philosopher Jürgen Habermas had in mind when he described the public sphere as central to the life of a democracy. Indeed, these examples substantiate the manipulation of public opinion via popular media that Habermas warned about.

Online and many-to-many technologies can shift the locus of the public sphere from a small number of powerful media owners to entire populations. However, the value of Internet discourse in this effort has not been proven, perhaps because the literacy around this use of media has not had sufficient time to mature—the World Wide Web is just over 10 years old, and has been gaining uninitiated users each year.

Now, for better and worse, citizens are arguing with each other—

with varying degrees of civility—and sometimes marshaling evidence to buttress logic in countless blogs, listservs, chat rooms and message boards. The quality and level of know-how and the willingness of a significant portion of the population to adopt and self-enforce online etiquette will determine whether reasoned online debate will flourish or be drowned out by surlier forms of argument. Activists and journalists must take a leading role in determining the success of this outcome by wielding these technologies skillfully and purposively.

Organizing Collective Action

Only recently have political activists successfully used many-to-many media to mobilize large-scale collective action such as street demonstrations and protests, electoral fundraising, get-out-the-vote campaigns and legislative lobbying. Technologies and methodologies are developing very rapidly at this point, as are the political moves that seek to neutralize them.

In the United States, Barack Obama's presidential campaign has built upon the success of Howard Dean's 2004 presidential run, and mobilized the self-organizing capabilities of supporters using social networking tools to propel this underdog to front-runner status. If Obama wins, 2008 will be the watershed political event for the Internet that the Kennedy-Nixon debates were for television in 1960. In a few years, MoveOn.org also has grown from a website protesting the Clinton impeachment to an effective lobbying movement that influences legislation and elections.

Innovations are not confined to the United States. In South Korea, the cyber-generation, seeing their favored candidate losing in exit polls, used a website to organize a get-out-the-vote campaign involving 800,000 personal e-mails and uncounted SMS messages, all of which ultimately turned the tide in the election's final hours in favor of

President Roh. In the Philippines, a million citizens used SMS to organize street demonstrations that helped topple the Estrada regime.

Activists should concentrate their efforts on technology and its capabilities for amplifying collective action. The above examples are only the beginning. Media capabilities are multiplying, the number of people who use their mobile phones as Internet connections and text-messaging media is growing explosively. And activists are only beginning to experiment with ways to multiply their ability to organize collective action.

Influencing elections and legislation is the sine qua non of effectiveness. In the next few years, peer-to-peer, self-organized, citizen-centric movements enabled by smart mob media will either demonstrate real political influence, be successfully contained by those whose power they threaten, or recede as a Utopian myth of days gone by. What we know now, and what we do soon, will decide which of those scenarios unfolds.

Note: This essay first appeared in *In These Times* in October 2003 and has been updated for inclusion in this anthology.

About the Author

Howard Rheingold is a prolific author (*Tools for Thought*, *The Virtual Community*, *Smart Mobs*). He is the founding editor of Hotwire, and has taught about participatory media and community at the University of California at Berkley and Stanford University.

WEANING CAMPAIGNS FROM OLD MEDIA'S TEAT

Brad Templeton

“ If the cost of media drives corruption, and the cost media has been driven down, is a different result possible? ”

Congressmen tell me that as soon as they are elected to office they immediately set to work on their first order of business, raising money to get re-elected. They raise money mostly from large donors and special interests, and become beholden to them whether they like it or not. This is the primary source of corruption in government.

Most of this money will be spent on TV ads. These ads will effectively push their way unasked into voters' homes. Every candidate has a website, but that website only influences the people who sought out information on the candidate.

In the last decade we've had a true revolution in media. In particular, many new media are vastly less expensive to use than broadcast media. If the cost of media drives corruption, and the cost of media has been driven down, is a different result possible?

I propose that we collect e-mail addresses from people when they register to vote, just as we do street addresses. This release of information could be voluntary, perhaps promoted as a voter's civic duty. E-mail addresses would not be made public the way other categories of registration data are and voters would have the choice to opt in or out of political mailings. Any registered candidate could request that election officials do an e-mailing to all the voters in their district. You might think of this option as political spam, but it will be conducted with the consent of registered citizens, and managed by election officials. Every candidate would get one free hit before voters can opt out, but after that the candidates must carefully choose how much mail they send so as to not annoy voters. Each e-mailing would also include appropriate opt-out links and instructions.

Some candidates would send out a modest quantity to keep the voter's ear. Others might be less sparing. Some might reserve their messages for the weeks preceding the election. That's up to the candidate, and the voter. We might also consider some opt-out variations, such as allowing each candidate one more shot two days before the election. It can be assumed that most of the e-mail messages would try to be pithy and to direct the voter to websites or web-videos for more information. Some e-mail messages might be longer and wordier—it's up to the candidates to see what works.

Voters could even be given a range of e-mail options that would allow them to control how much they want from each candidate. "Show me all your ads," one voter might say, while another might say, "You get five e-mails. Use them wisely." Candidates could then send out an e-mailing only to voters who have set their criteria at a certain threshold.

The most important point here is that e-mail is super, super cheap. A Secretary of State could run such a program with a tiny expenditure. If this option reduces the candidates' dependence on expensive advertising even a little, it's worth doing. Also, it is important to note

that as voters opt-out because they have made up their minds or don't want to participate in an election, the e-mails would correspondingly end up largely in the inboxes of the undecided voters, just the folks the candidates would love to reach.

It would not be unreasonable to assure some control over the content of the e-mails, if for no other reason than to ensure that impostors don't register as candidates simply to advertise used-car lots and the like. And as there are so many elections at so many levels of government (e.g., county legislators and sheriffs, etc.), e-mail efforts may need to be limited to the major races, say congressional and larger, that generally rely upon costly television advertising.

If old media is going to continue to be used, it doesn't just have to be for partisan purposes. Rather, every so often one of the TV ads could announce, "You see candidates saying many things about themselves and their opponents here on TV. Before you vote, be sure to visit the official election site and see all sides. You owe it to yourself. You owe it to democracy."

We could also draw voters into the use of new media by reminding them of different modes of learning about candidates and issues on the ballot. A checkbox on the ballot might say, "Yes, I gave serious consideration to the booklets or websites of several candidates." This would not be binding—as it would appear on a secret ballot but it would make you feel embarrassed if you weren't able to check the box.

E-mail is certainly more "in your face" than a website, and it is less intrusive than a robodialed phone call. However, there are more new media capacities with which to experiment. For example, most websites and search engines have a large amount of "spare inventory." This means that they have pages they display for which there are not enough paid ads. Similar to the way that old broadcast media space was often reserved for public service announcements, we could consider encouraging major websites to donate such space for use by political

campaigns. We could encourage these donations through tax deductions, or through a campaign of civic duty. This ad space is largely free to provide; the only cost would be to broadcast media, which would lose the previous windfalls from campaign advertising.

The nation's TV broadcasters are addicted to the teat of political ad spending. They want that revenue and will lobby hard to protect it. Perhaps we can recruit the websites to donate excess capacity before they too are lost to the addiction of campaign dollars. Imagine if one out of 50 election season YouTube videos started with a randomly selected short political video ad? It might be annoying, but it might also convince the electorate that the new method is much better than the corruption-driving system it replaces.

In competitive elections, most voters focus on just two or three candidates. Open, inexpensive systems of communications like those outlined above might make people more aware of minority views. Some voters might even think that it is making them disproportionately aware of these views, as, in the current set-up, they usually don't see them at all.

The future holds the promise of an array of new media we have yet to imagine. If we begin early, we may be able to shape these media to encourage inexpensive, open and broad political discourse without allowing them to become captive to and of political campaigns and candidates.

About the Author

Brad Templeton founded ClariNet Communications Corp (the world's first "dot-com"). He also created and publishes rec.humor.funny, and its website, www.netfunny.com, the world's longest running blog. He is currently chairman of the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), the leading cyberspace civil rights foundation, and involved with the Foresight Institute and BitTorrent, Inc.

THE POWER OF INCLUSION

Marie Wilson

“ True political participation is only achieved when a person’s voice counts as much as his or her vote. ”

For the last 10 years, The White House Project has looked closely at how adding women to our nation’s leadership could transform our democracy. The Internet Age gives us a rich opportunity not only to bring more women into leadership positions across this country, but also to enhance and extend what they bring when they serve. Here are a few examples of ways the Internet is broadening participation for traditionally marginalized groups.

Instant Runoff Voting

Instant runoff voting on the Internet is one way that women and other outsider groups have a greater chance of winning elections. By allowing voters to cast their vote for a number of candidates in priority order, their preferred candidates have a better chance of winning when a majority win is not attained for any one candidate. This would be

particularly effective in local and county-wide races, which are the typical entry points into politics for outsiders, including women.

Opportunity to Comment on Proposed Legislation

One of the most important attributes women bring, as measured by research institutions such as American University and the Center for American Women and Politics, is engaging more people in the process of formulating legislation and testing to see that proposed bills and resolutions actually benefit those they are supposed to serve. The Internet offers new ways of bringing that kind of inclusion about. For example, if all voters in a district were given the opportunity, via the Internet, to comment on proposed legislation, the product would be more likely to improve. This has the dual benefit of connecting more citizens to democracy and makes for a richer civil society by ensuring that bills are more like to be constitutionally sound.

The inclusiveness of the Internet offers the possibility of fostering a stronger, more equitable democracy that could benefit both women and men on many fronts. For example, there is the urgent matter of ensuring that judges are able to weigh in on the constitutionality of bills—which the Internet age now allows for, but which, in the past, has been difficult to guarantee. In a session the White House Project held at Ohio State University with several former and current judges, I was told that an extraordinary amount of legislation had been passed by the legislature and put in place that actually contradicted the state constitution.

The same could be said when it comes to economic initiatives. Legislation is often passed that actually ends up costing more money than it saves, despite its being passed precisely because it was purported to save state or district money. Transparency, and increased engagement

of a wide swath of citizens on these matters, will be the key to change. And both are greatly facilitated by the spread of technology.

Public Debates Online via Blogging

Holding public hearings and debates on important issues via a form of Internet blogging could also sharpen the debates on legislative proposals, and, again, bring women into the process. Women are less likely to see themselves as experts on policy because they have too few examples of women serving as leaders in their state and local governments. But increasingly, women are finding their voice by blogging and commenting online about how our democracy functions. A lively online blogging debate will include the voices of more women (especially young women, who are high Internet users) and refine their thinking—as well as public policy—through their input. Women are known to be “outside the box” thinkers—so having their ideas at the forefront of political and legislative debate might bring the online community the quality of innovation that women bring to every other table at which they serve.

True political participation is only achieved when a person’s voice counts as much as his or her vote. The Internet has proven to be an immense avenue for inspiring a more robust, diverse, and spirited political landscape, encouraging previous “outsiders” to lay claim to the political process. As the connections between technology and politics continue to unfold, it is important that women take the lead in the process of exploration. America’s political system may have been forged by a small, elite group of men, but the Internet offers an expansive and fresh opportunity to create new entry points and forums towards the creation of an entirely new type of politics.

“Multi multa sciunt et seipsos nesciunt.” (Many men know many things, but know themselves not at all.)

About the Author

Marie C. Wilson is founder and President of The White House Project, co-creator of Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work® Day and author of *Closing the Leadership Gap: Why Women Can and Must Help Run the World* (Viking 2004).

IN THE BEGINNING THERE WERE WIKIS

Joshua Levy

“While I was lecturing about *communities and social issues*, my students were worrying about how to pay for expensive calls to the Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Pakistan.”

Two years ago I showed up in an English as a Second Language class in the Bronx to teach the students, most of whom were from the Dominican Republic, how to blog. In my first lesson I handed out printouts describing how to set up an account on a website called Blogger.com. I then launched into an idealistic rant that began: “Social technology is a new, powerful way to organize and be involved in your community. You can form groups at the click of a mouse; you can write about social and political issues and connect to other bloggers.”

I asked for questions.

“It is very expensive to call my family back home,” said Ivelisse, a woman in her mid-40s. “Can this make it cheaper?”

“I call my mother every day,” said Andy, a man in his early 20s who would soon become the savviest of the group. “Maybe this is easier?”

While I was lecturing about *communities* and *social issues*, my students were worrying about how to pay for expensive calls to the Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Pakistan. They wanted results, not high-minded optimism.

We had wildly different notions of what constitutes “communications technology.” While I had been indoctrinated in the marvels of a wiki world—Utopian ideas about technology-assisted self-organizing and activism—my students understood social technology on a much more personal level.

My students were not newcomers to new media. Several of my students used the Spanish-language networking site MiGente.com, and others used MySpace and Flickr. They all e-mailed religiously (it was the cheapest way to stay in touch with their families), and many of them were in danger of developing carpal tunnel syndrome from their constant text messaging. While some students accessed the Internet online at school or at a library, perhaps half the class had a desktop computer with Internet access at home. The tools for broader civic engagement were there, but not necessarily the interest.

Ontogeny Recapitulates Phylogeny

After going through the process of setting up blogging accounts, I explained hyperlinks. “Hyperlinks are the bread and butter of writing online,” I said. “They connect you to the world, and the world to you.” I asked the students to write blog posts about particular issues like music, food, history, and immigration, and instructed them to link to other bloggers who also wrote about these things. Linking turned out to be an empowering act. Because the students immediately searched for terms they knew—*merengue* being the first hot topic—they discovered that buried in the Web’s overwhelming morass of text, images, and video were real people blogging every day about issues and topics they were also interested in, like children and *platanos*.

That same spring, beginning in March 2006, hundreds of thousands of immigrants and their supporters protested rising anti-immigrant sentiment across the country. My students suddenly found themselves in a position to comment on those events in the semi-public space of their blogs. We were experiencing, on a microcosmic level, the birth of the Web itself. They were discovering kindred spirits and linking to them, and in the process creating something new: an online community. These networked, connective acts comprised a small-scale model of the actions and feelings that fueled the birth of the Web in the first place. Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny.

The Dream of Web-Induced Political Consciousness.

One day Andy complained that while he understood why it was important that we learn about the Web, he didn't see how this would make it any easier to keep in touch with his family. Others agreed with him.

It was a profound moment for me. While I had been talking about the significance of connecting to new people all over the world, many of these students wanted to connect to specific people in specific places. I could see that this and other anxieties were getting in the way of the web-induced political consciousness I was trying so hard to impress upon my students.

After that class, many students simply went through the motions.

On one of the last days of the semester I set up a camera outside the leafy campus and interviewed about half the students, asking for their response to the project. Most gave me bland responses like "It was a fun project," "You get to write about things that you find interesting," "It's fun to connect to other people using the Web," etc. I felt that very few, if any, of them had been touched by the Web in the way I had been hoping. I walked away that day depressed about the ability of the web to help people outside of the elite world of the well-connected to self-organize, to gain political consciousness, to do something.

Joining the Conversation

The course was a very brief time to try to accomplish very big things. It made me realize that even if we get more computers into our schools and extend Internet access to all citizens, only part of the problem will be solved. If we really want to think of the Web as an engine of political change, we must pair the goal of universal accessibility with education to ensure that citizens become web literate and that they learn about the intrinsic social possibilities of the Internet.

As with other types of education, there are structural barriers to making this happen. Education isn't free. Travel is becoming increasingly expensive. Working single mothers have little time to feed their children, much less log onto Facebook and create activist groups. With a few, superhuman exceptions, young men working two jobs are often too tired to blog about community affairs or presidential politics.

When we talk about how online participation is changing our politics—and it really is—we all too often forget about those who are being left behind. For most Americans, the Web is becoming as typical and unremarkable as the analog phone. We need to ensure that this becomes true for more and more people across income barriers so that political consciousness—that special dream of mine—will follow. For me, it won't be adequate to use words like “revolution” or “people-powered democracy” until my students can join the conversation.

About the Author

Joshua Levy is a writer and web strategist whose work explores the intersections of technology, politics, and activism. He is Associate Editor of techPresident and Personal Democracy Forum, and his analysis and work at techPresident.com has been featured in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Huffington Post*, *Salon*, NPR, ABC News, ADL Politics, the CBC, Sky News, and XM Radio, among others.

SAVING AMERICA FROM ITS 18TH CENTURY POLITICAL SYSTEM

Jan Frel and Nicco Mele

“ The closest existing reform movements and campaigns that touch on this subject relate to campaign finance, the electoral college, run-off voting and the like, but none of these issues take on the entirety of the dangerously outdated culture of our political system. ”

We want to share with you what we believe is the most pressing problem facing our country: the meltdown of our 18th-century political system.

It is not easy to watch the American media culture (from progressive to hard right) being totally sold on the idea of one president for 300 million people, as though the presidency is still fit to human scale. The only issue at hand seems to be which individual is best suited for this task.

It is also difficult to observe the best political writers blaming Bush's White House for shredding the Constitution, when much of the cause has been the inertia of political decay. Jefferson warned that this is what would happen unless the Constitution was updated, totally rewritten,

every few decades. But the Constitution remains virtually unmodified from its inception—we've added only a handful of amendments.

And as the politics have stayed the same, everything else has raced ahead. Science and technology are changing society with increasing speed, and we are left with a primitive political system.

Looking around at the unfathomable numbers in the national debt and deficit; at the way the federal government was physically unable to respond to Hurricane Katrina; at its inability to change energy and environmental policy, the only solution we see at this point is that the political system itself must be radically updated. Otherwise we will watch the state continue to fold in on itself, stripping rights and freedoms, becoming more inept and more corrupt.

In 2006, Republican Senator Judd Gregg, Chair of the Budget Committee, said: "It's hard to understand what a trillion is. I don't know what it is." He said that hours after shepherding a \$2.8 trillion budget through the Senate. It may not be fair to expect anyone to understand what a trillion dollars is, or how to manage that kind of money in a democratic fashion. Our political system forces 535 members of Congress and a president to navigate impossibly large issues, often thousands of miles away from their 300 million constituents. The inertia of this process is virtually unstoppable. Who is to say that we have the right number of representatives? Or that they should physically live in Washington DC to pass laws?

To us, the idea of a political savior in the guise of a presidential candidate or congressional majority sounds downright scary. But the writers and journalists of our era (across the ideological spectrum) are still completely sold on it. Here and there, tucked away in transcripts and op-eds, are wisps and backhanded references, mostly gloomy, to our dying republic.

Former Reagan speechwriter and Wall Street Journal columnist Peggy Noonan wrote an article hinting that "we're at the end of something" in 2005. She continued:

Let me focus for a minute on the presidency, another institution in trouble. In the past I have been impatient with the idea that it's impossible now to be president, that it is impossible to run the government of the United States successfully or even competently. I always thought that was an excuse of losers. I'd seen a successful presidency up close. It can be done. But since 9/11, in the four years after that catastrophe, I have wondered if it hasn't all gotten too big, too complicated, too crucial, too many-fronted, too . . . impossible. . . It's beyond, 'The president is overwhelmed.' The presidency is overwhelmed. The whole government is.

The longer the state remains unchanged, the harder it becomes for it to enforce any laws other than those that protect itself. And that means that at some point, well-meaning politicians start passing laws and regulations that are meaningless. This is especially crucial because it means that the federal instrument and state governments are not equipped to adequately deal with gigantic issues like the environment and energy reform. This phenomenon is already in action at the state level: California has passed a series of emissions laws (which is laudable), but the state is unable to enforce them in any meaningful way.

This is the real political crisis we face: a political system that is ineffectual, disconnected from the people, and feeding on itself to survive. We need the thinkers and leaders of our time to come out and "fess up" that our political culture has become unmanageable—crazy, in fact. Even with the best people in office holding the best of ideals, our political system dooms them. The system needs to be updated, becoming more distributed and vastly more democratic.

We need to talk about our collapsing political system. It is the only way we will find a solution. We need a public discourse, started by our leaders, to support and encourage emerging democratic efforts across the country. Americans are looking for political figures in Washington

to affirm their beliefs about the dire state of our political culture—and to encourage them to re-imagine the Republic.

For a public figure of our day to embark on this path is to be regarded by the rest of the political class as at best a buffoon and at worst a threat. What makes it all the more embarrassing to go down this road is that the political class will expect a solution, when the only way to come up with a solution is to begin a national discussion.

The closest existing reform movements and campaigns that touch on this subject relate to campaign finance, the electoral college, run-off voting and the like, but none of these issues take on the entirety of the dangerously outdated culture of our political system. These reform efforts may even strengthen the fundamental architecture of our political system as they set the imaginative boundaries for what constitutes political reform.

It is worth wondering why there is not much political argument out there that goes after the fundamental precepts of our political culture—such as the suggestion that 300 million people sharing one president is itself a big problem. Looking around at the state of things, one would have guessed there would be a lot more demand for an examination of the fundamental mechanics of the system.

Instead, what is going on right now is that a large portion of the politically active element in society is expressing itself through the presidential format. Ten thousand people go to a Barack Obama speech, one of many rallies he has held with an audience that size. The explanation available in the media for the huge attendance is that people are inspired by Obama's appeal to "hope." And the general explanation for the interest in the presidential race is that there is no sitting incumbent, an unpopular war, and a defective president.

The truth is, of course, that 10,000 people are going to see Obama because seeing a presidential candidate speak for an hour is one of the few socially sanctioned ways to express your political concerns in this

country (sending checks to candidates is another). That is the way that these 10,000 people “knew” how to practice their politics. Never mind that it is deeply inefficient to try to squeeze the issues facing 300 million citizens into the bodies of a handful of presidential candidates in a two-year discussion before one of them has any real power. This is our political culture.

Until something is done to challenge the political culture, we will keep seeing citizens who want to change things using a tired vehicle, like a presidential candidate, or retreating with disaffection from the political process.

A good way to start a challenge to the existing political culture is by having a series of conversations. We could have public figures serve as ambassadors for various political and social viewpoints. They would communicate their perspective in their own ways to their audiences. Countless democratic efforts across the country would be emboldened when some of the voices in the national media and Washington confirm the discomfort with the state of the American political system. It would give Americans a resolve to try a different kind of politics where they live, in their communities.

We believe that it's not too late to save the republic because we believe in the American mind. We believe that the American people can craft and invent a new political culture, with the institutions and systems to match, that take advantage of all of the technological and social advances of the last three centuries.

About the Authors

Jan Frel is a senior editor of AlterNet.org. He lives in California.

Nicco Mele is a co-founder of EchoDitto and currently lives in Medford, Massachusetts with his wife and their dog and cat.

SMALL “d” DEMOCRACY

Susan Crawford

“ We should not discount the power of minor, visible, short-lived actions of Americans to make our lives more significant and to change democratic institutions. ”

We Americans are just trying to get by. Abstract ideas about democracy and the notion of civic engagement aren't as interesting and sticky as we professors might like. We're a busy people.

Every once in a while, though, Americans rise to the democratic occasion on their own, without needing a how-to guide to democratic ideals. They serve proudly on a jury, they wait patiently in line to vote, or they go to a neighborhood meeting and listen, arms folded. We feel, I think, a solemn impulse that this is the right thing to do. We wear a button, work on a campaign—why?

Here, I think, is why, and it points to what the Internet can facilitate. A significant life is one in which ideals are somehow linked to courage, will, or action. When we act in accordance with democratic ideals of participation or representation, we make our lives more sig-

nificant, and we feel this uprush of solemnity and citizenship. We exist, we have liberty, and if enough of us are interested in a particular person or issue we can exert change.

This may be too simple, but if I had the power to redesign our form of government I would make it far easier for ideals to be joined to action, and I would use the Internet to do it. Attention is the most valuable currency we have these days, and the great benefit (and, often, burden) of online communication is that it makes it possible to divide our attention into slender slices. We can read about politics, catch up on sports scores, find a news story, and talk to friends on Facebook almost simultaneously. If it were possible to pay attention every once in a while, between elections, to what our representatives or agency heads were about to do in an area of interest to us—and register our reaction to that proposed action—that would be useful.

This is a modest goal. Americans want to feel that our lives have been made more significant through participation in governance. Voting in elections is important, but it is not enough, and it need not be the ceiling for participation. With a little experimentation, we could be doing much more for ourselves.

For example: localities could generate radar-screens of issues coming before the city council or the mayor. With the weather report (something everyone seems to be interested in) on a local page could come a small radar visualization, with pulsing dots showing what matters were likely to have an effect on your neighborhood. If you were interested, you could click through and do a short amount of reading—perhaps just Twitter-length—about what was about to happen. And then act in some effective way (such as sharing the information with others, writing about it, or showing up at the meeting), with feedback showing how your action had been assessed/aggregated by others.

Easier communication with legislators or agency-actors could help facilitate that uprush of active citizenship. That uprush will be

strengthened when we can see the aggregated response of our neighbors and the resulting government response. Identifying public advocacy opportunities, such as chances to testify, would help—again, with feedback. These very simple and relatively minor actions can change lives and our institutions of government in powerful, nonlinear, and surprising ways. The opportunity to see results, to know that others are joining with you, is possible online.

Each essay like this has just one idea, and here is the idea of this one: We should not discount the power of minor, visible, short-lived actions of Americans to make our lives more significant and to change democratic institutions. Indeed, the change forced by these individual actions may be unpredictable and enormous, and that is as it should be. We should do whatever we can to make it easier for Americans to choose to spend some of their precious attention on democratic matters without having to devote their lives to deliberation. The Internet makes these kinds of visible interventions possible.

About the Author

Susan Crawford is currently a Visiting Professor of Law at Yale Law School, teaching Internet law and communications law. Last term (fall 2007), she was a visiting professor at the University of Michigan Law School, and starting on July 1, 2008 she will join the faculty at Michigan. She is a member of the board of directors of ICANN and is the founder of OneWebDay, a global Earth Day for the Internet that takes place each Sept. 22.

PROFESSIONAL POLITICIANS BEWARE!

Aaron Swartz

“By the power of exponents, just five levels of councils, each consisting of only fifty people, is enough to cover over three hundred million people.”

The government of a republic, James Madison wrote in Federalist No.39 (Conformity of the Plan to Republican Principles, 1788), must “be derived from the great body of the society, not from an inconsiderable proportion, or a favored class of it; otherwise a handful of tyrannical nobles, exercising their oppressions by a delegation of their powers, might aspire to the rank of republicans, and claim for their government the honorable title of republic.”

Looking at our government today—a House of professional politicians, a Senate filled with multimillionaires, a string of presidential family dynasties—it seems hard to maintain that our officials are in fact “derived from the great body of the society” and not “a favored class” merely posing as representatives of the people.

Unless politics is a tradition in your family, your odds of getting

elected to federal office are slim. And unless you're a white male lawyer, you rarely get to vote for someone like yourself in a national race. Nor, in reality, do we have an opportunity to choose policy positions: no major candidates support important proposals that most voters agree with, like single-payer health care.

Instead, national elections have been boiled down to simple binary choices, which advertising men and public relations teams reduce to pure emotions: Fear. (A bear prowls through the woods.) Hope. (The sun rises over a hill.) Vote Smith. Or maybe Jones.

Nor does the major media elevate the level of debate. Instead of substantive discussions about policy proposals and their effects, they spend their time on horse-race coverage (who's raised the most money? who's polling well in Ohio?) and petty scandals (how much did that haircut cost? was someone somewhere offended by that remark?)

The result after all this dumbing down? In 2004, voters who said they chose a presidential candidate based on the candidate's agendas, ideas, platforms, or goals comprised a whopping 10% of the electorate. So it's not too surprising when political scientists find that voters' decisions can be explained by such random factors as whether they like red or blue, whether the economy is good or bad, or whether the current party has been in office for long or not.

Aside from the occasional telephone poll, the opinions of "the great body of the society" have been edited out of the picture. Way back in Federalist No. 10 (*The Utility of the Union as a Safeguard Against Domestic Faction and Insurrection (continued)*, 1787), Madison put his finger on the reason. "However small the republic may be," he noted, "the representatives must be raised to a certain number, in order to guard against the cabals of a few." But similarly, "however large it may be, they must be limited to a certain number, in order to guard against the confusion of a multitude."

The result is that the population grows while the number of rep-

representatives stays fixed, leaving each politician to represent more and more people. The first Congress had a House of 65 members representing 40,000 voters and three million citizens (they had a whopping 1.3% voter turnout back then). That's a representative for around every 600 voters or 46,000 citizens (the size of the average baseball stadium). A baseball stadium may be a bit of an unruly mob, but it's not unimaginably large.

Today, by contrast, we have 435 representatives and 300 million citizens—one for roughly every 700,000 citizens. There isn't a stadium in the world big enough to hold that many people. It's a number more akin to a television audience (it's about how many people tune in to watch Keith Olbermann each night).

Which is exactly what the modern constituency has become: the TV audience following along at home. Even if you wanted to, you can't have a real conversation with a TV audience. It is too big to convey a sense of what each individual is thinking. Instead of a group to represent, it's a mob to be managed.



I agree with Madison that there is roughly a right size for a group of representatives “on both sides of which inconveniences will be found to lie. By enlarging too much the number of electors, you render the representatives too little acquainted with all their local circumstances and lesser interests; as by reducing it too much, you render him unduly attached to these, and too little fit to comprehend and pursue great and national objects.”

But what Madison missed is that there is no similar limit on the number of such groups. To take a technological analogy, the Internet is, at bottom, an enormous collection of wires. Yet nobody would ever think of it this way. Instead, we group the wires into chips and the

chips into computers and the computers into networks and the networks into the Internet. And people only deal with things at each level: when the computer breaks, we can't identify which wire failed; we take the whole thing into the shop.

One of the most compelling visions for rebooting democracy adopts this system of abstraction for politics. Parpolity, developed by the political scientist Stephen Shalom, would build a legislature out of a hierarchical series of nested councils. Agreeing with Madison, he says each council should be small enough that everyone can engage in face-to-face discussion but large enough that there is a diversity of opinion and the number of councils is minimized. He estimates the right size is 25 to 50 people.

So, to begin with, let us imagine a council of you and your 40 closest neighbors—perhaps the other people in your apartment building or on your block. You get together every so often to discuss the issues that concern you and your neighborhood. And you may vote to set policy for the area which the council covers.

But your council has another function: it selects one of its own to send as a representative to the next council up. There the process repeats itself: the representative from your block and its 40 closest neighbors meet every so often to discuss the political issues that concern the area. And, of course, your representative reports back to the group, gets your recommendations on difficult questions, and takes suggestions for issues to raise at the next area council meeting.

By the power of exponents, just five levels of councils, each consisting of only fifty people, is enough to cover over three hundred million people. But—and this is the truly clever bit—at the area council the whole process repeats itself. Just as each block council nominates a representative to the area council, each area council nominates a representative to the city council, and each city council to the state council, each state council to the national council, and so on.

Shalom discusses a number of further details—provisions for vot-

ing, recalls, and delegation—but it's the idea of nesting that's key. Under such a system, there are only four representatives who stand between you and the people setting national policy, each of whom is forced to account to their constituents in regular, small face-to-face meetings. Politicians in such a system could not be elected through empty appeals to mass emotions. Instead, they would have to sit down, face-to-face, with a council of their peers and persuade them that they are best suited to represent their interests and positions.



There is something rather old-fashioned about this notion of sitting down with one's fellow citizens and rationally discussing the issues of the day. But there is also something exciting and new about it. In the same way that blogs have given everyone a chance to be a publisher, Wikipedia lets everyone be an encyclopedia author, and YouTube lets anyone be a television producer, Parpolity would let everyone be a politician.

The Internet has shown us that the pool of people with talent far outnumbers the few with the background, connections, and wealth to get to a place in society where they can practice their talents professionally. (It also shows us that many people with those connections aren't particularly talented.)

The democratic power of the Net means you don't need connections to succeed. In a world where kids can be television stars just by finding a video camera and an Internet connection, citizens may begin to wonder why getting into politics is so much harder.

For many years, politicians had a ready excuse: politics was a difficult job, which required carefully weighing and evaluating evidence and making difficult decisions. Only a select few could be trusted to perform it; the vast majority of the population was woefully under-

qualified.

And perhaps in the era of a cozy relationship between politicians and the press, this illusion could be sustained. But as netroots activists and blogs push our national conversation ever closer to the real world, this excuse is becoming laughable. After all, these men and women of supposedly sober judgment voted overwhelmingly for disasters like the Iraq War. “No one could have ever predicted this,” TV’s talking heads all insist. No one, that is, except the great body of society, whose insistence that Iraq did not pose a threat and that an occupation would be long and brutal went ignored.

New online tools for interaction and collaboration have let people come together across space and time to build amazing things. As the Internet breaks down the last justifications for a professional class of politicians, it also builds up the tools for replacing them. For the most part, their efforts have so far been focused on education and entertainment, but it’s only a matter of time before they turn to politics. And when they do, professional politicians beware!

About the Author

Aaron Swartz is a hacker, writer, and activist. His latest project is watchdog.net, a website that holds politicians accountable.

SIDEWALKS FOR DEMOCRACY ONLINE

Steven L. Clift

“ The typical e-government experience is like walking into a barren room with a small glass window, a singular experience to the exclusion of other community members. ”

Government websites don't have sidewalks, newspaper racks, public hearing rooms, hallways or grand assemblies. There are no public forums or meeting places in the heart of representative democracy online.

The question that this essay will ask and answer is not what can we do to redesign democracy for the Internet Age, but, rather, why have we decided to delete democracy from the most visited interface citizens have with “their” government? And what are we going to do about it?

After almost two decades of “e-democracy,” we seem content with simply accelerating online what's already wrong with politics. We raise money online to support more political television ads, we “democratize” national partisan punditry through blogs aimed at influencing mass media agendas, and whip up outrage through e-advocacy campaigns that fall into the electronic trash cans of Congress. Online news,

campaigns, forums, blogs and other online social networks may appear public, but are ultimately privately controlled spaces where only the owner has real freedom.

Representative democracy is based on geography, on people connecting with one another locally to react to and influence government. And yet, rarely does anything truly interactive happen online that enables citizens to jointly solve problems or to get directly involved in efforts to make their communities better. Democratic participation online is having the effect of disconnecting us from our physical place in the world, to our collective demise.

The typical e-government experience is like walking into a barren room with a small glass window, a singular experience to the exclusion of other community members. There is no human face, just a one-way process of paying your taxes, registering for services, browsing the information that the government chooses to share, or leaving a private complaint that is never publicly aired. You have no ability to speak with a person next to you much less address your fellow citizen browsers as a group. As I've said for years, it is ironic that the best government websites are those that collect your taxes, while those that give you a say on how your taxes are spent are the worst or simply do not exist.

That said, around the world and in my hometown, I've seen transformative episodes where the online medium is used to build stronger communities. I've given "e-democracy" speeches to governments (and others) interested in using the Internet to improve democracy and citizen participation across 27 countries. In 1994, I helped create the world's first election information website, E-Democracy.Org. Through these experiences, I've been inspired by a small collection of "democracy builders" who are toiling on the edge of e-politics or dodging the grip of "services first, democracy later" e-government projects. The generational challenge we face in designing democracy to survive (perhaps even thrive) online is to identify the incremental contributions

the Internet can make when democratic intent is applied to it and then to make those tools, features, practices, and rights universally accessible to all people in all cities, states, and countries.

Big Ideas for the Next Decade

We know the Internet can connect people with ideas like no medium in history. It can raise voices, share experiences, distribute knowledge, and engage people. The challenge is building a local “anywhere, any time” representative democracy, perhaps paradoxically, through globally shared models and tools.

Government needs the capacity to listen to and engage people online to settle conflicts among the loudest and most powerful voices in society as well as to engage everyday people. We desperately need tools and techniques that provide a counterbalance to the politics of divisiveness and vitriol. We need places for civility and decorum online as all of our public life, particularly politics, substantially moves online.

I am an optimist at heart and every day I try to do something positive for democracy online. So, if I had a million dollars, make that, one hundred million dollars, to invest in the future of democracy online over the next decade, here is what I would do:

1. Make The Internet a Democracy Network by Nature

Because representative democracy is based on geography, content created by citizens must be identified by place instead of simply organized by issue. Content, from a news story to an online comment to a picture or video, needs to automatically be assigned (or “tagged”) with a geographic place. In addition, content bounded by a state or region or identified as global will be essential.

New content must be easily searched and aggregated for community-level display. As neighbors gravitate to talk about local issues online, so

will our elected representatives tap our public pulse online. To catalyze this idea, I'd work with large open source, user-generated content producing systems such as Drupal, Plone, Joomla, MediaWiki and WordPress. Within months, a new dynamic universe of content and interactivity for us to navigate and connect to by place would exist.

2. Connecting Locally Based on Common Public Interests

In the past fifty years, as shopping malls have privatized the historic public space of Main Street, we've lost something. Today's commercial online social networks do little more than "publicize" private life. Real "public life," be it local, national, or global, needs accessible and useful public places online (be they legally "public" or functionally public with restrictions on censorship or arbitrary control by the legal owner).

Local online news sites connect communities with shared local news experiences. However, almost all online social networking experiences that people have with their friends and family online are about private life. We need to invest significantly in efforts that encourage people to connect locally based on common interests and issues, not just globally based on highly specialized interests. We don't need to build any more echo chambers.

3. Restore and Deepen Access to Representative Democracy

and Governance Through New Laws and Online Public Hearings
Let's embrace the ideal of government "of, by and for" the people. Let's seize this Internet moment to build trust in our government through public interactions tied to decision-making as well as through transparency and the active dissemination of information.

We can build "sidewalks," or at least "limited public forums" in legalese, on government websites by authorizing external links to related resources so government websites are not dead-ends. Open meeting and other laws must be changed to require the proactive use of

the Internet for information dissemination and notification. I'd fund the creation of open source tools to support "online public hearings." Imagine starting with a standardized online "democratic pulse" (used by all governments) of all public meetings with schedules, agendas, minutes, handouts, and digital recordings. Then add the ability to share your own e-testimony for 48 hours after the in-person meeting. People could then rate or comment on the testimony of others (with civility and decorum requirements) to help us focus our scarce attention time on the most useful submissions.

Taking this a step further, if we really believe in a government that is owned by the people, how can any public information remain offline? While the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) continues to have its place, I predict a fundamental shift: By default, all taxpayer-funded government information from a memo by a township clerk to the town board to ethics filing by Members of Congress, will be available online. Period. That's it. Only legally narrowly defined private or secret information, such as military and national security information, will be offline. Sound fanciful? Estonia already has such a document register in operation. Perhaps a distrust of government power built over 50 years of communism has allowed them to leapfrog our democracy.

4. Restoring the Bonds of Community

When I was a child and my father had cancer, I remember neighbors coming to our assistance in our time of need. Today, with modern life keeping neighbors as strangers, we must use these new tools to break down barriers to community. You deserve the right to easily e-mail your immediate neighbors the morning after you've been burglarized without having to go door-to-door to collect e-mail addresses. We can balance safety and privacy with selective public disclosure of such personal contact information with an intelligent "unlisted to most" directory option that is not the all or nothing of today.

This is big “C” community and small “d” democracy. A collection of better-connected blocks, tied to broader neighborhood and community-wide online efforts will serve as the vibrant foundation we need for accountable and effective representative democracy right up to the Congress and president. You cannot force everyone to be neighborly, but the bonds of community can be restored and nurtured despite dual income families and the assault on time for community involvement.

I am helping build an online neighborhood forum that will soon connect 10% of the households daily (in an area with 10,000 residents) where I live in Minneapolis. Every neighborhood should have an online space (see links to E-Democracy.Org’s Issues Forums and projects like Vermont’s Front Porch Forum, and the academic i-Neighbors project from E-Democracy.Org/nf). We also need tools that allow people who live within a block of one another to connect many-to-many in secure, semi-public ways. This builds on the simple directory idea above and extends it to support all sorts of exchanges, from babysitting referrals to communicating as a group with city hall about potholes.

Small Actions We Can All Take Today

I have shared some big ideas that will help us make progress over the long term. But what can each one of us do now, today, to restore our democracy?

A. Join or create place-based forums or blogs for your neighborhood or community.

Recruit 100 people, require the use of real names, and open up your own local forum. Learn more at E-Democracy.Org/if. Be sure to give people a choice to participate by e-mail or online.

B. Work with your elected officials to introduce legislation requiring all public meetings to be announced on the Internet.

Updating open meeting laws to first require announcements, then agendas, handouts, digital recording, is a good starting point. Learn more at DoWire.Org.

C. Tag the content you produce with geographic terms or “geo tag” if you are technically inclined.

Add geographic tags to the content you share at every opportunity, whether you simply tag your blog post “Minnesota” so it shows up on WordPress.com or tag a video uploaded to YouTube. Learn more from our E-Democracy.Org/voices experiment.

We Have The Power And Obligation To Redesign Democracy

The democratic potential of this new medium has hit the grinder of partisan politics around the world. Too often in politics, the primary engine of innovation is the quest for media attention and power rather than real openness or a desire for democratic deliberation and engagement. No matter who wins in this 2008 “e-election,” the new president will likely and immediately turn off the interactivity that helped to get them elected. Hopefully I am wrong and we will see White House 2.0 alongside Community 2.0.

About the Author

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PRIVACY IN THE INTERNET AGE: TIME TO GO?

Glenn Harlan Reynolds

“ But here’s the real reason I think it’s going to be hard to protect privacy, I’m not sure how much people do care. ”

If I were in charge, how would I save privacy in the Internet Age? I’m not sure I would. Instead, I might opt for transparency.

Privacy may be overrated. At least, we should probably hope so. For most of human history, there wasn’t much privacy, you lived in a tribe or a small village, and everybody pretty much knew each other’s business. Even as late as the 19th century, apartment buildings were frowned upon because they made it hard for busybodies (then seen as virtuous defenders of community norms, not nosy annoyances) to monitor people’s comings, goings, and guests.

What we think of as privacy, in which most of our doings are our business and not easily discoverable by the general public, is a pretty recent development. Unfortunately, it may turn out to have been a short-lived artifact of a particular stage in technology. Before the Internet Age, gathering information on people was hard and organizing it

even harder, as other economic developments made escaping scrutiny from the village elders easier. Police and intelligence agencies could stay on top of things with regard to selected individuals, but the burden of keeping up with the populace at large was sufficiently high that there wasn't much danger of widespread surveillance.

Things are different now. The same technological revolution that has empowered individuals in other ways has also empowered states, businesses, and, yes, individuals to pry into other people's lives by making it easier and cheaper to collect and collate information. Cameras are ubiquitous in stores, on highways, in public squares and private buildings. Purchase, credit, and financial records are digital and easily indexed.

Of the changes, easy indexing is probably the biggest threat. Courts generally hold that things you do in public, with third parties, aren't private. When you dial a phone number, you're telling the phone company—a third party—the number, so it's not private. When you shop in a store, it's not private. When you drive down a highway, it's not private. But traditionally, people weren't able to put all those different bits of information together. Now, with computerization, that's child's play (sometimes literally so) and the product of all those isolated bits of information, each perhaps innocuous in itself, may be far more revealing than you imagine.

At present, there's no real protection against this sort of privacy threat (it's not legally defined as a privacy threat at all). Many people believe that there should be some sort of legal protection, but current statutes don't take the necessary overarching approach. Various bits of the problem get addressed. For example, a special statute protecting video rental records was passed when an alternative newsweekly published a list of the movies Robert Bork rented shortly after being nominated to the Supreme Court. But there's no big-picture treatment. In fact, there's not much agreement on what that kind of treatment

should look like, beyond a general sense that too much access to people's information is kind of creepy.

If I were going to change the law to protect privacy, I'd want to replace these scattered statutes with an overarching set of rules that apply consistently in all sorts of settings—to your video records, your medical records, your credit records, your Internet-surfing records, or store-camera footage of you shopping for birth control pills or hemorrhoid cream. Just thinking about how to come up with those rules is tiring, but in theory, at least, we could develop guidelines for returning a modicum of privacy to individuals, so long as others follow the rules. How likely is that, though?

David Brin, in his book, *The Transparent Society*, argues that privacy is a lost cause, given the tremendous technological boost to privacy invasions. He recommends that we substitute transparency—making sure that people can see what the authorities are doing and who is looking into their records—as a check on misbehavior. I think that this is a terrific idea, and have made similar arguments myself, but I wonder how well it will work. My own county government has been roiled by scandal because its members ignored the state's open-meetings law, something that's hardly rocket science. They did so, presumably, because they didn't want the citizens to know what they were doing. Regardless of the law, this is likely to be the position of authorities in general: "Privacy for us big shots, transparency for the rest of you."

I don't think that's an insuperable problem, if people care. But here's the real reason I think it's going to be hard to protect privacy, I'm not sure how much people do care. In our celebrity culture, individuals work hard to get television airtime to talk about their personal lives in ways that Americans a generation ago would have found startling, and that Americans a few more generations ago would have considered grounds for a duel, or a horsewhipping on the outskirts of town. Teens (and fat old people) post nude pictures on Flickr, a

photo-sharing website, by the millions. And shoppers happily hand over their personal information at the grocery store in exchange for a modest discount on peas and frozen yogurt. People's desire for privacy feeds on shame, and while people a few decades ago were ashamed of things like going to the bathroom or having a period, such things seem absurd as grounds for shame now. And with sharply reduced shame comes sharply reduced concerns about privacy.

My first item on privacy protection, then, before any laws or regulations are passed, would be an effort to get the public to care more about privacy, and to understand how information about them, even seemingly unimportant information, might be abused. What people care about in this regard matters, because, ultimately, the public will get as much privacy as it demands. And not one bit more.

About the Author

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CAN SOCIAL NETWORK SITES ENABLE POLITICAL ACTION?

danah boyd

“ Technology’s majestic luster makes it easy to fool people into believing that its structure determines practice.”

Social network sites (SNSes) like MySpace and Facebook have reorganized the Web. Activists have fantasized about ordinary citizens using SNSes for political action and speaking truth to power. Yet these daydreams are shattered through even a cursory look at actual practices. To date, the passion and interest for sharing political and policy information far and wide through SNSes—particularly by and for young people—doesn’t match the capability of the SNSes. It is this lack of motivation that we need to understand and address to improve our democracy and our government.

People participate in public life for many reasons: identity development, status negotiation, community maintenance, and, yes, civic engagement. Typical SNS participants are more invested in adding glitter to pages and SuperPoking their “friends” than engaging in any

form of civic-minded collective action. How did this happen, and is this outcome predetermined?

Technology's majestic luster makes it easy to fool people into believing that its structure determines practice. The conclusions seem obvious—video games will make us violent, the Internet will make us more informed, and social network sites will make us politically activated. Unfortunately, techno-determinist doctrine does not hold up to interrogation. Technologies are shaped by society and reflect society's values back at us, albeit a bit refracted.

If we accept that technologies mirror and magnify everyday culture, what do social network sites say about society? While we may wish that they shine a positive light on us, the most insidious practices on SNSes highlight how status-obsessed and narcissistic we are as a society. We may wish to blame the technology for creating self-absorbed people, but more likely, egoists love social network sites because of their desire to exhibit themselves for the purposes of mass validation. By demonizing the technology, we fail to fully grasp the not-so-subtle message that society values beauty, exhibitionism, and self-aggrandizement. Social network sites provide opportunities for ordinary people to showcase themselves as pseudo-celebrities. While these performances may not be "real," anyone can self-construct how to put their best foot forward, they are certainly less scripted than reality TV. It may not be possible for participants to get as much mindshare as Paris Hilton, but social network sites certainly provide a platform for attention-seeking people to do their thing.

While such a critique surely evokes profiles of women in provocative poses, the most active egoists on social network sites are musicians, politicians, marketers, and other populations who desperately want attention. By and large, when politicians and activists talk about using MySpace and Facebook, they aren't talking about using

it the way most people do; they are talking about leveraging it as a spamming device.

Most people are simply logging in to hang out with the friends that they already know. The warnings about stranger danger have worked; most people are not looking to meet new people, but to gather with friends when physical co-presence is impossible or impractical. For active participants on SNSes, particularly young people, networked publics substitute for physical publics that have become inaccessible, untenable, heavily regulated, or downright oppressive. If you can't grab a beer at a pub with friends or hang out in a public setting without being banned or shoed away for loitering, where else can you gather with friends? Online, of course.

A key aspect of SNSes is scale. Telephones allow people to communicate over long distances. Activists know that the bullhorn of the Web lets them reach many more people, even in the context of a supposed shared space. The Internet not only collapses space and time, but beyond bandwidth, there is no additional structural cost between communicating with ten people and broadcasting to millions.

Infinite scaling may be structurally possible online, but the attention economy—the tax on people's time and attention—regulates what actually scales. Just because someone wants to reach millions does not mean that they can effectively do so. Content may be public, but the public may not be interested in your content. Likewise, just because a private message is intended for ten people does not guarantee that it will stay just with those people if there is broader interest. Public and private are only guidelines online because there are no digital walls that can truly keep what is desired in and what is not out.

This possibility of scaling is what tickles the fancy of most political dreamers, who see the Internet as the ultimate democratizing technology. However, people pay attention to what interests them. Not surprisingly, offline or online, gossiping is far more common and inter-

esting to people than voting. While the Internet makes it much easier for activated people to seek out information and networks of like-minded others, what gains traction online is the least common denominator. Embarrassing videos and body fluid jokes fare much better than serious critiques of power. Gossip about Hollywood celebrities is alluring; the war in Iraq is depressing.

Over the last decade, the dominant networked publics have shifted from being topically organized to being structured around personal networks. Most users no longer seek out chat rooms or bulletin boards to discuss particular topics with strangers. Instead, they are hanging out online with people that they already know. SNSes are explicitly designed to be about “me and my friends.” Structurally, a social network site is the quintessential personal network tool. People are exposed to the things that their friends choose to share. If that content is valued, it is spread further through friend networks. Lack of shared interest results in a lack of spreadability.

Social network sites create cavernous echo chambers as people reiterate what their friends posted. Given the typical friend overlap in most networks, many within those networks hear the same thing over and over until they believe it to be true. It was the echo chambers of the blogosphere in 2004 that convinced mass media that Howard Dean had more traction in the U.S. presidential campaign than he did. Echo chambers are problematic because they give the impression that activists have spread a message further than they have.

Just as politically engaged people know one another, alienated and uninterested people mainly know people like themselves. Bridging the structural holes that divide these groups is just as challenging online as offline, if not more so. Offline, you know if a door has been slammed in your face; online, it is impossible to determine the response that the invisible audience is having to your message.

Rather than fantasizing about how social network sites will be a

cultural and democratic panacea, perhaps we need to focus on the causes of alienation and disillusionment that stop people from participating in communal and civic life. If we can figure out how to activate unmotivated groups, perhaps we can convince them to leverage their own networks and convince others to participate. The infrastructure is available for people to spread information, but the motivation is not there to either share or receive it. That's the problem we need to solve, and we'll know when we're successful from the messages that will be written on Facebook and MySpace.

About the Author

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IN SKYPE OOGLE TUBE APEDIA WE TRUST

Martin Kearns

“ We need to move away from the idea that democratic conversation and debate are the karaoke of the political elite, wherein words and issues are sung without passion or connection, but simply by rote and mainly for show. ”

Most normal people don't want to be politicians. They might like to solve a problem or two, but they are not going to make a life of it. We should design our government to accommodate the wisdom of our crowd and lower the barriers and disincentives to participation. We should design a system where Web 2.0 meets governmental management that provides new leadership, protects the privacy of citizens, enables them to participate, and provides easy-to-use and free tools to scale local participation.

If I was in charge of reshaping our democratic system, the first thing I would do is make it more ad hoc. People should not have to be involved in the process for years on end to make a difference in politics and governance. I would encourage fewer leadership positions and

design support staff, committees and offices to be flexible enough to support the leaders of the moment.

I would focus on providing stability through redundancy rather than through perfection. Our governmental system is designed to identify one right leader at a time, one person who will stay in power for years at a time, solving our problems for us. People have moments of greatness; they are just not great most of the time. We are living in a time that allows for large networks of people to work together to solve problems, where we can all lead when our gifts and expertise are needed most.

Government should mimic what is going on in the non-profit and advocacy worlds. New leaders and new activities are springing up to address specific concerns but then dissipating again. We saw this with the groundswell of support for Amber Alerts and the movement for a Airline Passengers' Bill of Rights. The more we remove barriers to entry into the political leadership process the more innovation and experimentation we will see.

Contrary to much of the current debate, I am not advocating a more participatory democracy focusing on referenda and constant live voting. I am calling for rolling admissions throughout more of the committees, administration, agencies, staffs in government and Congress. I am not suggesting term limits either, but rather a dedicated focus on changing the barriers to entry and participation in civic life. Ironically, in today's culture, the first step to increasing participation may be reclaiming the right to refuse it.

The original Constitutional Framers may not have believed that everyone was capable of leading government, but history has proven them wrong. The fact that we can download more information in a day than Thomas Jefferson had access to in a lifetime changes the equation of who can lead and how we should think about the paths to leadership. We need to shrug off our cultured system of elitism and the

protected bureaucracies that politicians have created to keep power in the hands of the few. No one leader, bureaucrat or office staff can see and understand all the complexity America is forced to address. We should create much more churn and transition of our leadership.

The barriers to participation are considerable, and worsened by the aggregation and scouring of our private data by public and commercial interests. Our data storage Big Brother can now store and mine a lifetime of comments, facts, deliberations, photos, purchases, votes or lack of votes. Anyone can buy data on the credit scores, contributions, magazine subscriptions and social networks of friends or foes. People refuse to join and engage in efforts online because they are afraid they cannot get off lists. Barriers to exit have become barriers to entry.

The first step to opening the gates to a new generation of participants and leaders is to establish a DO-NOT-DATA-MINE-MY-FAMILY list. The government should establish a right to privacy, a right to reinvent oneself, a right to change opinions, even a right to disappear from the grid of data storage. People should have the right to see all of the data stored on him or her or accessed about them by any public, political or civic engagement institution. The public should have a right to examine the data held about them and opt out of any database at any time.

Processes that require registering and leaving comments are fine, but all comments should not be able to be associated with a particular person and searched forever. The public should be able to prevent institutions they are at odds with from tracking any information on them or their families. For instance, military families should be able to oppose a war then delete their electronic history of opposition in the future.

We need to move away from the idea that democratic conversation and debate are the karaoke of the political elite, wherein words and issues are sung without passion or connection, but simply by rote and mainly for show. Once we have reinvigorated the capacity of everyday

and everywhere Americans to step in and out of public participation, we should then focus on the core issues of civic participation at the local level. Scores of tools and services aimed at increasing participation exist and can be provided easily and without cost. We should offer free conference calling and technical support for civic gatherings. We should redesign the notion of the town hall to fit the schedules of people who don't want to choose between family, babysitters, costs and participation in civic life. If you've ever gone to a government meeting you would see in attendance retirees, students, those with the means to take time from their work and those whose work it is to influence government decision makers. That leaves out a huge swath of working people with no real voice in governance. We need to move away from the idea that democratic conversation and debate are the karaoke of the political elite, wherein words and issues are sung without passion or connection, but simply by rote and mainly for show. We'll be serious about public participation when we have kiosks asking for feedback and input on government decisions and public policy located in malls, airports, hotels, and libraries —as ubiquitous as lottery ticket venders.

We should create new ways to participate in public hearings via tools such as Skype, chat and e-mail, and allow people to express themselves with text, voice or art. The public should have the opportunity to create daily briefings on key public events on wikis and blogs. We should encourage creative participation in the very management process of every agency (think YouTube debates meet functioning government).

The true power of democracy is its passion and connection with the citizenry. We should seek to recapture these feelings in our discourse and leadership. If we are able to reduce barriers to participation, open new pathways to leadership and support the efforts of real people who

want to wrestle with difficult public problems, we will create a redundancy of leadership, a check and balance to a system (not to a leader) and, ultimately, we will have an America that is even more exciting and democratic than it has been in the last 200 years.

About the Author

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GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM IS MORE THAN A CAMPAIGN

Morra Aarons-Mele

“ But the super-sized business of politics creates a lapse in responsibility. Who’s minding the store while everyone is out on the stump? ”

The cyclical, cash-rich environment of political campaigns is fertile ground for consultants and vendors who are paid premiums to hit the ground running with ads and talking points that fit into the continuous news cycles. Even better for the professional class are the long campaigns, when budgets matter less than the struggle to win every single day. Now more than ever, as has often been said, politics is a multi-billion dollar “show business for ugly people.”

But the super-sized business of politics creates a lapse in responsibility. Who’s minding the store while everyone is out on the stump? Endless hunger for campaign news marginalizes the work of government and creates headlines like this one from National Public Radio’s Website on April 9, 2008: “Petraeus Hearing a Campaign Stop for Candidates.” A significant Senate hearing on the future of the Iraq War, a matter of

national urgency, was turned into a photo opportunity for the presidential candidates.

Last year, MSNBC devoted 28% of its airtime to election coverage, while Fox News devoted 15% and CNN 12%. According to the Project for Excellence in Journalism, about 2% of television news coverage in March 2008 was dedicated to the Iraq war. Election coverage is exciting, full of all of the possibilities of competition and change. Governing, conversely, is a labyrinth of red tape that often reeks of failures and false starts. We yearn to be hopeful but we have a country to govern.

Governance is not sexy or popular work. But if citizens do not focus on what happens in our national legislature, another four years will fly by with few accomplishments. Digital technology makes campaign obsession all the more appealing. Americans are consuming more election news online than ever before. A recent study from the Pew Internet and American Life Project revealed that twice as many Americans are reading political news online than in 2004.¹⁵

But when our candidates morph into elected officials, when the time for real governing arrives, they need to bring us voters and constituents along with them. Today, advocacy groups such as Moveon.org or the National Rifle Association ask their members to e-mail elected officials or send form letters to newspapers on their behalf. That's it as far as citizen participation in governance goes, even though it is one of the ideals our nation was founded upon. Most elected officials want us to stay out of their way once the election is over.

But who says governance is only for elected officials and non-profits? Grassroots political engagement shouldn't end on Election Day. A candidate's online support base is a valuable commodity that can be used as a mighty civic tool, within the legal limits on fundraising and

15 Kohut, Andrew, "The Internet Gains in Politics," Pew Internet and American Life Project, http://pewInternet.org/PPF/r/234/report_display.asp, downloaded on April 21, 2008.

lobbying, when a candidate becomes an elected official. Just as candidates ask us to participate in an online phone bank to get out the vote in a primary state, a Senator or Representative can ask us to phone bank other citizens to support passage of health care reform in the Senate.

The White House's website has come a long way in eight years, as have the web operations of the congressional and Senatorial Committees. I get e-mails from all of them. But they usually just ask me for money, or tell me nasty things about the opposing side. They don't engage me civically. The most engaging online effort from the White House is the "Barney-Cam" video series about Bush's Scottie dog!

Barack Obama could be the first president to use the Internet as a tool for real civic action, in addition to electioneering.¹⁶ Obama's most significant legislative accomplishment as a U.S. Senator is the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, co-sponsored with John McCain. The Act directs the White House Office of Management and Budget to create a free, public website (www.USAspending.gov) listing all recipients of federal grants, contracts, and other payments. On his campaign website, Obama promises to use digital technology to open up government to the public, and appoint the first White House Chief Technology Officer. If he wins, we must hold him to this promise and more.

This time around, leaders cannot squander the energy of voters, only to build it back up again as the next election approaches. In this extended 2008 primary election season, the volume of political engagement and media attention is remarkable. But if we are to achieve real change in the "off-season," such as health care reform, we will need our citizens online and ready to act.

16 I am indebted to my friend and colleague Matt Wilson for this discussion.

About the Author

Morra Aarons-Mele is a blogger and political consultant who is also a graduate student at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. In between classes, she covers politics as Political Director for BlogHer.com, the largest site for women bloggers. Morra is also a columnist for the HuffingtonPost.com and TechPresident.com.

CORRUPTION, TECHNOLOGY AND CONSTITUTIONAL DESIGN

Zephyr Teachout

“The Framers were right to be obsessed about corruption, but could not have anticipated the ways in which various technologies—including the extensive road system, centralized media, and paid lobbying—would undermine the anti-corruption precautions they included in the Constitution.”

Corruption and Technology 1.0

“If we do not provide against corruption, our government will soon be at an end,” George Mason said, as the Constitutional Convention got under way. His concern was echoed in many voices throughout the summer of 1787, and discussed extensively in the public debates over the Constitution’s ratification. Corruption was discussed more often in the convention than factions, violence or instability. It was a topic on almost a quarter of the days that the members convened. If liberty was the warp of the political ideology of the era, corruption was the weft.

Reading the convention-era documents, the idea of corruption

inevitably seizes the reader with grotesque admiration for its force. The Founders wove their own stories and their histories around the corruption of the young country—certain it would happen, but nonetheless obsessed with attempting to stop it from happening, trying to control the inevitable venal forces that would overwhelm it.

Inasmuch as you can see the Constitution as creating a kind of technology, it was designed to provide structural encouragements to keep the logic and language of society as a whole from becoming corrupt, representing a technical and moral response to what they saw as a technical and moral problem. As Alexander Hamilton explained in Federalist No. 68, “Nothing was more to be desired than that every practicable obstacle should be opposed to cabal, intrigue, and corruption.”

One of the most extensive and recurring discussions about corruption concerned the size of the various bodies. “The larger the number, the less the danger of their being corrupted,” Elbridge Gerry argued about the representatives to the future Congress, and the other delegates agreed. “Besides the restraint of integrity and honor, the difficulty of acting in concert for purposes of corruption was a security to the public. And if one or a few members only should be seduced, the soundness of the remaining members would maintain the integrity and fidelity of the body,” James Madison averred.

Many clauses were intended to limit corrupting perks and temptations of office. Article 1, Section 9 of the Constitution requires an accounting of the treasury, to ensure that money is not siphoned from the national treasure. The power of the purse being placed in the legislature was also in part a response to fears of corruption. The Founders were concerned that an executive with the power of appropriation would use it to cultivate dependencies, by giving out money to political leaders who were loyal. Likewise, the No Conflict clause in the Constitution (Article 1, Section 6, Clause 2) prevents Congressmen from holding civil office while serving as a legislator, or from being appointed

to offices that had been created—or in which the compensation was increased—during their tenure. The Founders were concerned that members of Congress would use their position to enrich themselves and their friends, and would see public office as a place for gaining civil posts and preferences, rather than one of public duty.

The Founders were also concerned that certain methods of selecting the president could lead to collusion and corruption, and went to great lengths to create an election process that would withstand small-group corruption. First, Hamilton successfully repulsed the proposal that the president serve a limited number of years. A man's ineligibility for reelection, he argued, would lead to plunder. Second, there was extensive debate about who—and how many—should decide the presidency. Madison worried that the election of the president, if decided by a small number, would too easily facilitate corruption. To guard against corruption, presidential elections had several key features. First, legislators themselves could not be electors. Second, all the elections would be done at the exact same time, making it difficult, because of the long roads across the large country, to confidently collude and identify the electors that needed corrupting. The Framers Morris and Wilson both discussed the importance of physical distance as a protection against corruption. "It would be impossible also to corrupt them," Morris said, speaking of the fact that "the Electors would vote at the same time throughout the U.S. and at so great a distance from each other."

The chief corrupting forces were foreign governments, money, and power—all of which, it was argued, would have significant coordination problems to overcome if power were distributed between branches, and within the legislative branch, between classes. But the roads were too bad, the distances too great, and the numbers too formidable to allow for the concerted redirection of the minds of men to private gain, and the interests of the state to private or foreign interests.

Madison's Byzantine argument in Federalist No. 63 sums up the efforts of the Founders to create a constitution with such diffuse power that it would be resistant to corruption. The Senate, he argued, "must in the first place corrupt itself; must next corrupt the State legislatures; must then corrupt the House of Representatives; and must finally corrupt the people at large." Therefore, "It is evident that the Senate must be first corrupted . . . Without corrupting the State legislatures, it cannot prosecute the attempt, because the periodical change of members would otherwise regenerate the whole body." Moreover, the Senate would inevitably defeat corruption in the House of Representatives, "and without corrupting the people themselves, a succession of new representatives would speedily restore all things to their pristine order." There are too many obstructions and sequential steps of intrigue to be taken, in order to corrupt the federal body—or so the Founders hoped.

Corruption and Technology 2.0

If the Founders brought their sensibilities—and in particular their anti-corruption sensibilities—to the technologies of the contemporary world, what might they think, and what additional protections might they include within the Constitution to guard against the constant threat of encroaching corruption?

There are many areas in which technologies have improved the possibilities for self-government; other contributors to this volume have shone a spotlight on those. But there are at least a few areas in which technology, and the collective-action problem-solving powers of the Internet, have increased the threat of corruption, and of government being used to serve private, instead of public, ends. I will focus on three that I think would have garnered the attention of the Founders, and ought to grab our attention now.

Corporate Power in the Public Sphere

The capacity of the Internet, combined with shipping containers and cheap transportation, enables global corporations without national allegiance, but with legal obligations to maximize wealth and cultural habits, to concentrate unprecedented power and wealth. The Founders were concerned that foreign powers would co-opt democratic channels, and thus I think they would presumably treat any corporation as fundamentally “foreign,” in that the institution does not allow for patriotic obligations.

The Founders would have created protections against concentrated corporate power taking over the building blocks of democracy. They would have limited all corporate political speech and corporate lobbying, and constitutionally limited direct or indirect corporate funding of campaigns.

Being very savvy, they would have gone even further, recognizing that the mere existence of such concentrated private power threatens to overshadow the exercise of public power. The Constitution would include express prohibitions against limited liability extending to corporations that broke the nation’s laws, engaged in political action, or exceeded a certain size. As the discussions at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia reveal, there was an intense interest in the relationship between the size of certain entities and self-government, and that conversation would have extended to questions of the size of corporate organizations.

Gerrymandering

Technology has made the great artistry of professional gerrymandering easy. Political parties hire people to figure out political borders that destroy the democratic process. This means that our representatives pick their voters before the voters get to pick them. Local politicians,

assured of their seats, become unresponsive to citizens, and most challengers find it effectively impossible to unseat them. The Founders worried about districts falling out of alignment with their actual populations, which is why the Constitution requires a census every ten years. In their classic textbook, *The Law and Democracy: Legal Structure and the Political Process*, Pam Karlan, Richard Pildes, and Samuel Issacharoff call these new, technology-enabled districts, “designer districts.” They write that “the ability to create designer districts increased as more sophisticated programs were devised to include not only basic demographic and voting data, but projections of household income, magazine and cable television subscription patterns, car ownership and other socio-economic data deemed useful over the ten-year lifespan of a redistricting plan.” The Founders would have attempted to limit technologies’ capacity to directly undermine the democratic process through self-serving political boundary drawing—perhaps by including Constitutional requirements that nonpartisan commissions draw district lines.

The Presidency

The presidency was a reluctant compromise for many of the Founders, and if they could see the form it has taken now, and the role presidential elections play in our democratic culture, they would probably not include it, or they would include a far weaker version than currently exists. The design of the Constitution assumed that the electors would play only the first step in the choosing of the president—that each state would support its own candidate—and that it would be up to Congress to finally select the nation’s leader. The Founders went to great lengths to ensure that no particular group would have too much sway over the selection of the president, and attempted to limit the capacity of narrow interests to coordinate the selection of the president.

However, decreasing geographic difficulties, new technology and concentrated money sway the selection of the now very powerful position of the presidency. This combination has grotesquely distorted our democratic process, putting far too much power in the least responsive branch of the three representative parts of government.

In a second Founding, the executive would play a much more trivial role, and likely be more parliamentarian than presidential. The Constitution would include clearer limitations on executive power, and the campaign financing system would be completely public.

The Framers were right to be obsessed about corruption, but could not have anticipated the ways in which various technologies—including the extensive road system, centralized media, and paid lobbying—would undermine the anti-corruption precautions they included in the Constitution. It is now relatively simple to coordinate efforts to sway the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the Executive branch. There are hundreds of lobbying firms who see their job as taking money and effectively laundering it to overcome difficult collective action problems for entities that want to privatize public government.

In the United States of America 2.0, the new threats would be taken as seriously as the old, attempting to create even stronger counterweights to what Hamilton called “the business of corruption.”

About the Author

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OUR VOTING RE-PUBLIC

John C. Bonifaz

“ The threat of election privatization raises a fundamental question: Who owns our vote? ”

The struggle for the right to vote has never stopped in the United States. During our 200-plus-year history, we have traveled from a time when only white male property owners could vote, to the abolition of slavery and the passage of the 15th Amendment, and the prohibition of discrimination in voting based on race. The women’s suffrage movement in the early 20th century led to the enactment of the 19th Amendment, prohibiting discrimination in voting based on gender. The civil rights movement ended the legalized system of racial segregation and brought about the landmark Voting Rights Act of 1965.

But the past few election cycles are evidence that our struggle for equal voting rights continues. Certain legal barriers to voting continue (i.e., laws prohibiting ex-felons from voting), and new barriers have emerged that disproportionately target historically disenfranchised communities (i.e., photo identification requirements to vote). But a

quieter threat has emerged that further undermines the integrity of our electoral process.

Election privatization

Since the 2000 presidential election that was decided by the Supreme Court's decision in *Bush v. Gore*, we have seen an alarming increase in the influence and control of private companies over our elections. In a rush to respond to what happened in Florida, the United States Congress passed the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) in 2002. HAVA has provided more than three billion public dollars to states across the country to upgrade their voting systems. As a result, a small handful of private companies (including, but not limited to, The Election Systems & Software Company, Diebold Election Systems, now known as Premier Election Solutions, and Sequoia Voting Systems) have gained enormous profit and influence marketing their electronic voting systems to states and municipalities as the answer to the "hanging chad" fiasco in Florida.

There's only one problem. The electronic voting machines do not work. They are unreliable and insecure, and pose a serious threat to the integrity of our elections. A growing body of evidence, including two separate studies commissioned by the California and Ohio Secretaries of State, demonstrates that these machines are fundamentally flawed for counting and recording our votes. As a result, some states have shifted to a system of paper ballots with optical scan machines. In addition, voters with disabilities are increasingly using non-tabulating ballot marking devices that allow them to vote in an independent and private manner. But more than thirty states still use electronic voting machines. These machines have turned the election disaster of 2000 into something exponentially worse.

I saw firsthand the dangers of these machines as lead counsel for

a coalition of candidates and voters seeking a full and meaningful recount of the 2004 presidential election in Ohio. There was no way to conduct a recount in the Ohio jurisdictions that had used electronic voting machines. There were no paper ballots from which to derive voter intent. We were simply told to trust the machine as it reported again its original tally.

The threat of election privatization raises a fundamental question: Who owns our vote? The danger of electronic voting is best illustrated by the 2006 congressional election in Sarasota County, Florida. In that hotly contested race for Florida's 13th congressional district, 400 votes separated the declared winner, Republican candidate Vern Buchanan, from the Democratic candidate, Christine Jennings. However, 18,000 votes were lost by the electronic voting machines. Jennings filed a lawsuit contesting the outcome of the election, and a group of Florida voters filed a separate suit. [Voter Action, the organization for which I work, helped to bring the voters' case, with other public-interest organizations, and served as co-counsel in the litigation.] Jennings and the voters independently sought the source code, other key software, and the machines themselves in their investigation of the disappearance of nearly twenty thousand votes. The Election Systems & Software Company, which had manufactured the electronic voting machines in question, argued that neither Jennings nor the voters had a right to the requested materials on the grounds that they constituted trade secrets. The Florida courts agreed, allowing the alleged proprietary rights of a private company to trump election integrity and the right to vote. In other words, the election was ultimately under private control.

Electronic vote counting is part of a broader trend in the outsourcing of key election functions to private vendors. Many jurisdictions have privatized electronic poll books and voter registration databases to determine whether people are eligible to vote. In the Georgia presidential primary on February 5, 2008, numerous voters reported that

electronic poll books, made by Premier Election Solutions, were crashing and inoperable, leading to long lines and citizens leaving polling sites without casting ballots. In the New Mexico Democratic presidential caucus that same day, a flawed voter registration database prepared for the state by the Elections Systems & Software Company led to thousands of voters casting provisional ballots when their names did not appear on the voting rolls. Voters in other states have reported similar problems using these systems.

Seven Ways To Reclaim Public Control of Our Elections

The following list outlines changes that we can make to ensure that our public elections are publicly controlled.

Voter-marked paper ballots. Voters must be guaranteed that their votes will be properly counted. This can only be guaranteed via voter-marked paper ballots which reflect voter intent and which can, therefore, be recounted or audited. Electronic voting machines, with or without “paper trails,” should be banned, and the private companies that have marketed this defective product across the country should be held accountable. Paper ballots, marked either by hand or by a non-tabulating ballot-marking device, will ensure that the vote-counting process is controlled by the people and not by private corporations.

Mandatory audits of our elections. Anything of value should be audited, and that includes our votes. We should not rely on candidates to demand a recount to determine whether our votes are being properly counted. Every jurisdiction in the United States should be required to conduct rigorous audits after every election to guarantee that our voting systems are transparent and verifiable.

Public financing of our public elections. We ought to have a system of public financing open to all qualified candidates and their

voter-supporters, and the system ought to apply to all elections at the federal, state, and local level. In Arizona and Maine, where such systems are already in place for state elections, public support, not private money, is what counts. As a result, voters will exercise greater control over the electoral process.

Open-source voting systems. Even with voter-marked paper ballots, citizens must know that their right to vote overrides any alleged trade secret of a private corporation. When votes are counted in secret by private companies, the integrity of the process suffers. All voting systems in the United States should be required to adhere to open-source standards.

Public oversight. Public control of our elections is dependent upon an active, engaged citizenry monitoring the electoral process. Grassroots networks across the country have already helped to expose key voting-rights barriers that threaten the integrity of our elections. With even greater sunlight, we can help ensure that our elections are open, transparent, free and fair.

Election-day registration. Voters should be able to register and vote on the same day. States that use this system experience a higher voter turnout and avoid the barrier of voter registration. The elections industry relies on that barrier to market its privatized electronic poll books and voter registration databases. Election-day registration helps to restore public control of how we access the ballot.

Constitutional amendment guaranteeing the right to vote. Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr. has proposed an amendment to the United States Constitution to guarantee the right to vote for all citizens. One hundred and eight democratic nations in the world have explicit language guaranteeing the right to vote in their constitutions. The United States, along with only ten other nations, does not. How can this country claim to have an equal right to vote when the way we administer our elections changes from state to state, from county

to county, from locality to locality? In our ongoing struggle for democracy, we must go to the foundation of our political system: the US Constitution, the social contract between “We the People” and our government. It is this, our supreme legal document, which establishes the consent by which we agree to be governed. A constitutional amendment guaranteeing the right to vote will provide a powerful means to reclaim public control of our public elections.

At the end of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, a woman asked Benjamin Franklin, as he left Independence Hall, “Well, Doctor, what have we got—a Republic or a Monarchy?” Franklin responded, “A Republic, if you can keep it.” Today, the question is not so much whether we can keep it but whether we can take it back. History has shown that organized as a movement we have the power to do so. As we fight to end voter suppression, we must also wage a new fight for our time: the struggle to reclaim public control of our public elections. The power resides in each of us to take control of our vote and our democracy.

About the Author

John Bonifaz is the founder of the National Voting Rights Institute and the Legal Director of Voter Action, a national legal advocacy and public education center dedicated to fighting for election integrity throughout the United States.

CHECKS AND BALANCES REINVIGORATED

Craig Newmark

“ The Internet provides tools and information for journalists to aid them in their effective scrutiny of governmental accountability. ”

A democratic system incorporates a system of checks and balances to facilitate constant vigilance and scrutiny by the citizenry. Otherwise, people in power will inevitably abuse their power.

That's the story of the decline and fall of the Roman Republic. Its informal constitution and checks and balances were quite advanced for its time. However, abuse of power led to an increasingly corrupt and ineffective government. For example, powerful politicians and lobbyists started wars for purposes of vanity, and to enrich themselves and their allies, including defense contractors.

The American Founders created a similar governmental structure including a formal constitution with many checks and balances between the branches of government and the government and its citizenry. They knew this was necessary because corrupt politicians would find ways to

abuse power, say via a compromised Department of Justice or judicial branch, in the manner of the Roman Republic.

The Founders also realized that a free press with journalists asking tough questions was the only way to preserve checks and balances. Good reporting with mass communications would provide the scrutiny required for good government.

The Internet provides tools and information for journalists to aid them in their effective scrutiny of governmental accountability. To this end, the Sunlight Foundation funds the development of tools via “transparency grants.” Two great examples of these grants are Congresspedia, an open, collaborative wiki about congressional representatives, created in conjunction with the Center for Media and Democracy, and Open Secrets, a database that tracks lobbyist payments to Congress that is run by the Center for Responsive Politics.

The Internet provides tools and information for journalists to aid them in their effective scrutiny of governmental accountability. These tools enable journalists, and citizen journalists like me, to help preserve American values in Congress. For instance, I was able to verify media reports that a presidential candidate was dominated by special-interest lobbyists.

Sometimes, we need to uncover governmental corruption after the fact, in order to understand where we’re going. The investigative reporting done by the Center for Public Integrity, specifically their database on Defense Department contracts let in conjunction with the Iraq war, conclusively proves deliberate deception in the run up to the Iraq war.

In ancient Rome, with no mass media, political gangs spread disinformation via “whispering campaigns.” The same occurs now via loosely organized groups, such as the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth in the 2004 election. Investigative reporters now work together to expose such gangs, known often as swiftboaters (in the generic sense), front groups, or astroturf groups. To this end, Common Cause exposed “Hands Off the Internet,” a front group for big telecommunications

firms masquerading as a grassroots organization. The Center for Media and Democracy runs SourceWatch, which exposes front groups in the political space, such as “Freedom’s Watch.”

Finally, even the work of good investigative reporters and honest politicians need fact checking. The most notable group doing so is FactCheck.org, which according to its website, “analyzes what is said by major U.S. political players in the form of TV ads, debates, speeches, interviews, and news releases.”

The Founders recognized the role in our democracy of the press bringing government problems and issues to light. The press is aided in doing so with the Net and tools like those described above. Working together with the public, they provide checks and balances of unprecedented effectiveness. This requires that almost all governmental records be made available online. Although certain documents, particularly those regarding (honest) matters of national security, will always be too sensitive for publication.

We would all like to avoid the fate of the Roman Republic. To that end, we need reporters asking tough questions. We also need help exposing those who would deceive us for short-term profit and power. Fortunate for us, this help is being delivered by people of goodwill working together via the Net.

Disclaimers: Because of their good work, I’ve joined boards of The Sunlight Foundation, the Center for Public Integrity, FactCheck.org’s educational arm, and work with the Center for Media and Democracy via Sunlight and also via Consumers Union.

About the Author

Craig Newmark is the founder and customer service representative of craigslist, a non-commercial community bulletin board with classifieds and discussion forums.

THE “KILLER APP” OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Mark Murphy

“ Somewhere, sometime soon, the “killer app” will emerge—the American Idol of citizenship, as it were. ”

People all over the world are explicitly expressing their opinions in public ways, particularly online. Some of those opinions are prose, like blog entries and e-mails. Public opinion polls conducted online at websites like CNN.com, traditional polls conducted by telephone, and even text voting for American Idol gauge the feelings of a random slice of the public. There are more formal feedback mechanisms like eBay feedback or Amazon.com’s ratings-with-comments. There are even “meta” sites providing opinions about opinions, such as Amazon.com’s rating the relevancy of comments and the discussions those comments spawn.

Online, you can rate products; lawyers, doctors, and other service professionals; movies, songs, and other forms of entertainment, the list goes on and on. Why can’t these mechanisms be applied to public officials and the political process?

The answer is that this change is inevitable: Citizens of democracies will use online tools to voice their opinions of what is going on in their neighborhood, their nation, and the world.

In fact, the U.S. presidential campaign of 2006-2008 has demonstrated a number of new tools for rank-and-file citizens to engage with the campaigns, such as:

- Joining Facebook groups, whether they be for a candidate (e.g., One Million Strong for Barack) or against (e.g., One Million Strong Against Hillary)
- Recording questions and uploading them to YouTube for use in televised debates
- Using the website Eventful to ask a candidate to make a local campaign stop as John Edwards did when he visited Columbus, Kentucky based on the site's "Demand and Be Heard" promotion
- Twittering your thoughts on debates and election results in real time
- Spreading a candidate's message via a variety of online media, such as Ron Paul's advocates raising awareness of their candidate through innumerable online outlets

Of course, most of these are strictly aimed at the presidential race. However, the same concepts could be applied to other political campaigns, or even ongoing policy discussions. Somebody, somewhere is going to create the "killer app" that will allow citizens to become more engaged with their governments. That "killer app" could easily become as widespread as MySpace, Facebook, and the other social networks—not in the least because it could be embedded within those social networks.

So, what should this "killer app" look like?

Will it reflect citizens' rights and responsibilities in a democracy? Will it offer citizens a rich set of ways to express their opinions, or

will it be restricted like traditional Election Day voting systems? Will it offer the openness and transparency necessary for everybody to feel comfortable that the results aren't being rigged? Will it just be an idea that, as much as anything else, is designed to make the application's founders (and their investors) rich, or increase the power of some existing entrenched authority?

I do not claim to have definitive answers to these questions—after all, I'm just one person. My aim is to raise the questions and offer up a candidate set of answers, to spark a debate, rather than “let the chips fall as they may.”

If there is an overarching theme to what we need, it is trust in what is, essentially, a complicated three-way relationship.

Citizens need to trust that their opinions will be counted and reported fairly. They need to know that the collected opinions have a chance of being seen by The Powers That Be, can positively affect decision-making, and that the process won't be rigged to deny them their input.

Elected and appointed officials, and other authorities, need to trust that the feedback is not only accurate, but documents both total opinion and the opinions of those people directly affected by any given issue (e.g., citizens of Switzerland don't get to vote in our presidential elections).

Finally, technology providers who offer opinion-aggregating services need to trust that if they scrupulously follow a proscribed industry-wide code of conduct they will not be “thrown under the bus” for the results their services report.

Somewhere, sometime soon, the “killer app” will emerge—the American Idol of citizenship, as it were. Whether you agree with the above principles or not, I hope you agree that we need some principles established, and soon, lest somebody else determine the “rules of the game” for the benefit of a few, not the many.

Here are nine principles that will help ensure all three facets of trust described above:

1. Openness. Just as anyone can host a blog, run an e-mail server, or put up a web application, anybody should be able to build tools and participate in the aggregation of the resulting data. Conversely, if the aggregation only happens on a single, proprietary site, trust is broken due to lack of transparency. Everyone must be able to cast a vote on any issue. Determining which votes are from people with “a horse in the race” must be done after the fact, since screening beforehand could be applied indiscriminately and shut down useful opinions.

2. Public. Not only must issues be publicly visible, but so must the votes, in the same way that blog entries and comments are publicly visible. This is the key to supporting the first principle. Because the votes are public, anybody can build an aggregator to report results or verify the reported results of others. However, if nobody can validate the voting, trust is broken (witness the hullabaloo over voting machine flaws).

3. Standing. Some issues may be tied to a specific locality, such as whether or not a traffic light is needed at some town’s main intersection. There needs to be the means to determine if the voter has standing on that issue (e.g., is a resident of the town) in order to cast a vote. This will enable authorities to trust that the results accurately reflect their citizens’ input.

4. Nyms. The third principle notwithstanding, people should be able to vote anonymously, even though it may mean their standing cannot be proven and hence their vote may “count less.” People should also be able to vote under pseudonyms, with a “standing provider” empowered to indicate if the pseudonym has standing for some community. And people should be able to make their votes public, tied to their own identity, if they so choose, so as to use peer pressure to encourage more participation. Citizens need to trust that their visibility is under their own control, not the control of some outside party.

5. Framing. Anybody should be able to raise an issue using a group process to organize and synthesize related issues. If only pollsters,

government officials, or other privileged people are allowed to raise issues, trust is broken, since the framing of the question is a critical component for evaluating the resulting public opinion (push polls, anyone?)

6. Structure. Countability is central to trust: the public needs to see how their opinions can be counted, and authorities need to trust they won't get swamped with too much input that is too difficult to digest. Different voting methods can be used according to the specific issue (e.g., multiple choice), and voters need to spell out their selection in addition to any prose the voter wishes to provide.

7. Unencumbered. There must be no requirements of anyone providing issues, positions, or technology to the online opinion gathering system. This will not be possible if the system requires licensing patents or trademarks, or if the system requires technology providers to submit to some form of evaluation before they can participate. These kinds of requirements might serve to concentrate power into too few hands.

8. Unimpeded. Since the whole point of the exercise is for the citizens to provide input to the government, there can be no government interference in collection and reporting, lest the citizens lose trust in the process over fears of censorship or manipulation of results.

9. Self-Policing. Since anyone can participate (principle #1) and the government cannot interfere (principle #8), the system must provide culture, conventions, and community to help ensure that citizens can easily participate. Rules that might prevent “trolls” from participating will weaken trust, as those rules could be applied to others—and one person's troll could be another person's position advocate.

About the Author

Mark Murphy, a three-time entrepreneur, is the founder of CommonsWare, a newly-launched technical book and software publisher. His blog, covering CommonsWare and his public policy musings, can be found at commonsguy.wordpress.com.

CITIZEN 2.0

Nancy E. Tate and Mary G. Wilson

“If we want our politicians and decision-makers to be trustworthy and transparent, we must expect that citizens interacting with them in the public sphere do so in an open and transparent way.”

The notion of redesigning U.S. democracy for the Internet Age is an intriguing one, probably with endless possibilities. But Americans use the term “democracy” to mean a variety of things. Some mean the election process itself. Others mean the ways in which our governmental system—with its three levels and three branches—operates. And others focus on the role of the citizen (and the public at large) in the process of engagement and self-government. All of these components have been—and will continue to be—impacted by the online world and the emergence of many-to-many communications.

We at the League of Women Voters believe that the most significant changes are those affecting the ways ordinary Americans perceive and interact with both candidates and government officials and institutions. And we applaud these changes. We are already seeing that the

expanding possibilities for user-generated content online are providing new and positive changes for our democratic system. Here at the League we strive to empower citizens to “make democracy work” for themselves and their communities. The enhanced role of the Internet in recent years has helped to do just that. In so doing, it has increased the power—and expanded the responsibilities—of ordinary Americans. The potential is limitless.

Power to the People

As others have noted, the Internet expands the types of roles an individual can play in politics and government. Historically, citizens have been essentially observers in the civic sphere, making their views known periodically through voting and petitioning. In order to play that role, they were dependent on information provided by candidates, or by a government body, and filtered through the media. Today, the public can obtain information from many sources, including not only the original sources (such as a candidate’s website) but also from their peers and others whose judgment they trust. Getting information—and opinions—from people whom they trust greatly increases citizens’ confidence in discussing and formulating views on complex public policy subjects.

Even more significantly, individuals can now become players in the process, in the sense of creating and distributing content themselves. And increasingly, the views of individuals—shared on blogs or Facebook pages—directly affect what is happening in the political sphere. We have already seen this year how the ease and speed of transmission of new ideas, or challenges to official statements, or the unveiling of past indiscretions can produce instant reactions from candidates or public officials. Relatedly, many more sources of government data and information are available to those willing to “surf the Net.”

As a result of these trends, citizen expectations concerning their “right to know” about candidates and government operations continue to grow. This increases both the pressure for government transparency, and the ability of citizens to hold decision-makers accountable. Although public figures do not always welcome increased transparency or accountability, many have realized the advantages of more and better ways to gather public opinion and to expand the lines of communication. We are encouraged by these trends.

21st Century Worries

Americans’ role in the political life of the country has definitely expanded, with no end in sight. Now, instead of simply digesting the news provided by a daily newspaper or news show, individuals can drive the news, interact with one another, and actually influence the decisions of campaigns and government decision-makers in real time. All of this empowers citizens in ways that are better for them and for the country as a whole.

As we embrace the tremendous potential for individual Americans to play a bigger role in our democracy, however, we ought to consider ways to guard against the potential downsides of the new online world. The fact that more information is available from more sources increases the necessity for individuals to evaluate the credibility and validity of information they want to use and share. The recycling of misinformation or “urban myths,” for instance, is not a step forward in public discourse and decision-making. Relatedly, the growing “echo chamber” effect needs to be minimized. When people only visit the particular websites and blogs (or talk radio shows) whose views they agree with, they will most likely become less informed than if they are exposed to a more balanced perspective on issues and candidates. This will lead to more polarized—and presumably more partisan—discussions and decisions. Often the result of extreme polarization is gridlock.

More information on the web, in and of itself, will not improve the quantity or quality of public decisions.

Finally, accountability flows from openness. The anonymity allowed by the Internet may often be at odds with that. If we want our politicians and decision-makers to be trustworthy and transparent, we must expect that citizens interacting with them in the public sphere do so in an open and transparent way. This is particularly important in an era when news coverage often focuses on the personal lives and actions of our leaders. The instant access to information, no matter how dated or what the source, can foster a “gotcha” environment that stifles substantive dialogue and sullies the civic space.

Old Wine in New Bottles

One fear that is often expressed about the evolving online world is that it distances people; that people who once met and interacted face-to-face now just sit at their computers. We at the League disagree. New political technologies are helping people connect—across town and across the world. Town hall meetings are not being replaced; they are going online where no logistical constraints limit participation. Door-to-door voter engagement has not ended. New tools, such as databases connected to handheld tracking devices, are being deployed to knock on doors that have often been overlooked. And this is the final challenge: to make sure that the new tools of democracy are not just used by the elites or the special interests, but allow all Americans to be active participants in the democratic life of the 21st century.

About the Authors

Nancy E. Tate is the Executive Director and Mary G. Wilson is the President of the League of Women Voters of the United States.

THE LAST TOP DOWN CAMPAIGN

Joe Trippi

“ The Clinton campaign failed to grasp “it’s the network, stupid.” ”

It’s finally here. At long last, after waiting, evangelizing, strategizing, blogging and talking, networked politics came into its own during the presidential election of 2008. More than individual candidates losing, it was their old, creaky, top-down big-money methods of organizing and winning campaigns that was shown to be obsolete. We don’t have to wait to reboot American democracy; the revolution was won, here, now, today.

First I want to make clear that none of what I write here is aimed at some of the brilliant bottom-up thinkers in the Clinton campaign such as Peter Daou. The fact is that all the bottom-up thinking in the world will not break through the oppressive culture of top-down campaign management and a top-down candidate.

In 2008 we are seeing the strongest top-down campaign in the modern history of the Democratic Party. The Clinton campaign has been challenged and put on its heels by the Obama campaign, only the

second bottom-up presidential campaign in modern political history, after the Dean campaign.

The blunder that many will be talking about for a long, long time, will be how did Hillary Clinton, Bill Clinton and the top of the Clinton campaign miss the fact that politics had irrefutably and irreversibly changed in 2004 and that the best path to the nomination and the Presidency was to deploy a bottom-up strategy in 2008? I had high hopes for Hillary Clinton. I really thought that she could be a transformational candidate, capable of inspiring millions of Americans to engage in the political process and change the country and our politics.

As early as 2006 I urged a Clinton confidant to enter the campaign for president by announcing that her campaign would not accept money from lobbyists or special interest PACS and that she would not accept any contribution over \$250 for her campaign. Challenge women to help change the country, I said, say “I believe there are 5 million women in America who are willing to give \$100 to my campaign to change our country and make it a better place for our children.” I would have continued, “Every woman knows that we are not the status quo—we are change.” Do the math, that would be half a billion dollars for her campaign, much more than Obama has raised in this campaign. I have no doubt that would have been a successful strategy.

The Clinton campaign liked the idea but she was not going to “unilaterally disarm against the Republicans.” They didn’t get it.

A month or two later, I was invited to explain bottom-up campaigning to Clinton’s manager and a few others. After excitedly explaining how Hillary could run a transformative campaign for change that could engage five million women and many of their sons, husbands, and fathers that would change the country and our politics—a campaign that would raise more in small contributions than any big donor campaign in history—I realized I was talking to a room that saw me as an oddball wearing a tin foil hat (not the first time this

has happened to me) and was politely shown the door. They didn't get it either.

There were a few high-level staffers in the Clinton campaign, Howard Wolfson and Jay Carson (Jay worked with me in the Dean campaign), who got it and tried to get others in the campaign to 'get it,' but the Clinton campaign was doomed to run a top-down campaign of the past. It might be a strong campaign, but, even so, it would be at great peril in the bottom-up environment of 2008.

Then the final shoe dropped. I was on a panel in New York City with Mark Penn, Clinton's chief strategist, and we were asked what the impact of the Internet would be on the 2008 presidential campaign. Penn answered the question first, and to my amazement and horror, responded that the Internet wouldn't have any impact on the 2008 presidential election because too few Americans use it and all they did was talk to each other!

The top of the Clinton campaign had no fundamental understanding that politics had changed since 2004. They did not understand that the second bottom-up networked campaign would be in 2008, and it would be explosively different from anything before it. The Clinton campaign failed to grasp "it's the network, stupid."

Barack Obama's campaign raised more money from the bottom up than any campaign in history—swamping the Clinton top-down \$2,300 maxed-out big donor fundraising effort.

But the difference between the campaigns is based on more than money. Barack Obama's entire delegate lead was due to his defeat of Hillary Clinton in caucus states. These victories are directly related to Obama's ability to activate a decentralized network of supporters who out-organized the Clinton campaign in state after state.

I was wrong about something, though. I really thought in the closing days of the campaign we would be watching the best top-down campaign in history matched against the second networked bottom-up

campaign in history. But in February, I heard something I never thought I would hear. Hillary Clinton was on television asking people to help her by going to www.hillaryclinton.com! Turns out the last top-down campaign on the Democratic side was already dead. Now Clinton has gone bottom-up, too. May the best bottom-up campaign win.

About the Author

Joe Trippi began his political career working on Edward M. Kennedy's presidential campaign in 1980. His work in presidential politics continued with the campaigns of Walter Mondale, Gary Hart, Richard Gephardt and Howard Dean. Most recently, he was the Senior Advisor and Strategist for John Edwards' presidential campaign.

TANGLED SIGNALS OF DEMOCRACY

Micah L. Sifry

“Why should your only choice when you vote be to vote yes—or to stay home and abstain?”

Everyone agrees that our voting system needs an overhaul. But while others in this collection of essays, and elsewhere, are wrestling with what to do about electronic voting machines that can't be trusted, voter registration deadlines that depress participation, unfair ballot access rules that discriminate in favor of the two major parties, the disenfranchisement of millions of ex-felons, and new photo-ID requirements that may disenfranchise many other would-be voters, I want to focus on a different issue: whether our voting system actually helps us signal what we want from our representatives in a meaningful way.

In most of America today, elections are run on the “first-past-the-post” system. That is, whoever gets the most votes in a race wins—no matter how many, or how few, people vote. In a few places, a run-off is required if no one gets a simple majority on the first round, which often produces the odd result of a candidate who wins even though a majority

of voters didn't vote for her on the first round. The only thing that voters are asked to do is vote FOR someone. There's about as much communicative content in their choice as there is in reading an X in a box.

We're using a voting system invented in the 18th century—before there were railroads, telegraphs, cars, radio, TV, airplanes, let alone the Internet. Maybe it's time to try some experiments to open up our voting process? Here are five modest proposals:

1. Put "None-of-the-Above" (NOTA) on the ballot.

States would have to require a special election (held according to the existing rules for when an office becomes vacant) any time NOTA got more votes than the candidates on a ballot, with new candidates nominated. When I first wrote about this idea in an article for *The Nation* back in 1990, I was amazed to see it endorsed by voices as diverse as the *Boston Globe* and *Wall Street Journal* editorial pages.

The idea isn't as crazy as it may seem. Why should your only choice when you vote be to vote yes—or to stay home and abstain? And if none of the candidates running for a particular office can get more votes than "none-of-the-above," maybe that will send a useful message. After all, there's a reason so many campaigns use negative advertising against their opponents: it seems to work—and there's no penalty for going negative. But if NOTA were an option and two candidates were savaging each other on the campaign trail, the public would start voicing support for NOTA and pollsters would notice. The next idea follows this same theme.

2. Give voters the ability to vote 'No' to a candidate.

Today, if you want to signal your dissatisfaction with a particular candidate, you can only do so by voting 'Yes' for her opponent. (Staying

home doesn't really have the same effect.) But why force people to choose the lesser of two evils? I may have only one vote, but why not let me cast it against someone, to reduce their total vote—and let the candidate with the most net positive votes gain office?

I'm borrowing here directly from a 2001 article in *Political Science and Politics* called "Let's Take 'No' For An Answer," by Daniel Ferguson, an MIT physicist, and Theodore Lowi, a long-time professor of government at Cornell University and former president of the American Political Science Association. They call this approach "bipolar voting" and argue that it would have the effect of establishing a kind of quorum rule on who could win an election. If two candidates on the ballot both ended up with a net negative vote (i.e., voters choosing to vote 'No' more often than 'Yes' in both cases), the election could be held again with a new slate of candidates. In effect, a more elegant NOTA option.

Ferguson and Lowi argue that a "bipolar voting system elicits a fundamentally new piece of information from the voter as a sort of 'legitimater': It registers the relative measure of preference and also, albeit roughly, the absolute level of confidence in the candidates, the platforms, and the process." (We could use something similar in the blogosphere, so that a link to a post could contain a "positive" or "negative" association, as Kevin Marks, author of the weblog Epeus' Epigone, and others have suggested.)

Bipolar voting also has the virtue of balancing the most extreme blocs of opinion and would, perhaps, lead to more widely supported centrist candidates winning elections. Last year, we used a system of visible bipolar voting to enable viewers to vote for or against the best video questions submitted to the presidential candidates in our "10Questions.com" project. As the voting unfolded over the weeks we could clearly see how heavy votes in favor of one video would be balanced the next day by heavy votes against it. In effect, videos that

had a strong political bias had more trouble gaining a net positive vote total because they stirred up as much opposition as support, while videos that rose to the top had a broader level of consensus across the spectrum. And that idea of making results visible as the process unfolds gets to my next point.

3. Release early voting results.

As more states allow voting by mail and provide absentee ballots for practically any reason, and some even open polling locations weeks before Election Day, more Americans are availing themselves of the convenience of voting on their personal timetables. In some states, like Tennessee, a majority of votes were cast early in the 2006 elections. But other than reporting generic information like the total number of absentee ballots requested, or early votes cast, states are doing nothing with this information, on the old-fashioned notion that no one should know what anyone else has chosen to do until the end of Election Day.

But imagine if, every night, state registrars posted running totals of ballots that had already been cast, and even which voters had voted (though not their personal votes). Instead of relying on unreliable pollsters, we'd all have a real-time snapshot of each race as it was coming to a close. Campaigns would be able to focus their resources on people who hadn't yet voted, which would help boost turnout. And early results might signal problems for a candidate and cause them to change their positions accordingly. A final benefit of making early voting results public—and on this notion I am indebted to Jonathan Soros—since about two dozen states start mail-in or early voting well before the Iowa and New Hampshire presidential contests, we just might start to dissolve the disproportional power of those unrepresentative states over the nomination process.

4. Embrace instant-runoff voting, or ranked balloting.

Today's system forces most races down to two viable candidates, since most voters don't want to risk "wasting" their votes on lesser contenders. But with an instant runoff, or ranked balloting, system, we can liberate ourselves from that constrained set of options. Instead of only being able to vote for one candidate, under these systems you would be able to list your preferences in order. If your first choice didn't win a majority on the first, multi-candidate ballot, your vote would be instantly transferred to your second choice. If no candidate won a majority in that round, the process of transferring the votes of the weakest candidates to the voter's next choice would be repeated, until a winner emerged. (To use an elegant version of this system for your own group decision-making, go to ChoiceRanker.com.)

The benefit of this approach, which has been adopted in a few places in America including San Francisco, opens races up to more contenders and lets voters communicate more about their choices. And that gets me to my last suggestion...

5. Ascribe a reason for votes.

All of the ideas I've mentioned in this article are struggling with the same basic problem: how to tease the true meaning out of a voter's choice. And the answer is staring us in the face (or, at least, my face ever since my friend Andrew Rasiej suggested it to me). Let voters add a comment explaining their vote, and then let's aggregate those comments to build a richer picture of people's voting decisions. In other words, make the box where you put your vote a little bigger, so it can contain a few sentences.

From a technological standpoint, this would be child's play (assuming the other issues with the security and reliability of electronic voting

were solved). But even if this was a matter of reading through written comments on paper ballots, why do we deny ourselves the power to say what our votes actually mean? It might seem like a complicated task to collect, sift and report voters' comments, but the Internal Revenue Service manages to process more than a hundred million individual tax returns, plus countless other forms. Surely we can make our voting system as intelligent as our tax-collecting system.

When this country was founded, the right to vote was restricted to white, male landowners, and even they couldn't vote directly for president or senators. Generations of Americans have struggled and some have given their lives to expand that right to all citizens, and the struggle isn't over. But is the right to vote only about our ability to put an X in a box? Or is it time to make our votes more meaningful, too?

About the Author

Micah L. Sifry is co-founder and editor of the Personal Democracy Forum, a website and annual conference that covers the ways technology is changing politics, and TechPresident.com, a new award-winning group blog on how the American presidential candidates are using the Web and how the Web is using them. In addition to organizing the annual Personal Democracy Forum conference with his partner Andrew Rasiej, he consults with political organizations, campaigns, non-profits and media entities on how they can adapt to and thrive in a networked world. He is currently a senior technology advisor to the Sunlight Foundation.

FINDING YOUR OBVIOUSMETER

Matt Stoller

“ Did you know that members of Congress cannot post YouTube videos on their official member websites without breaking House and Senate rules? ”

I have an “Obviousmeter.” The Obviousmeter compares cultural trends and existing power centers and asks, “Can a sixteen year old do something our government can’t?” If the answer in any particular area is yes, then that’s a place to find out where the future is going to smack us in the ass.

I can’t predict the future of democracy in the digital age—no one really can—but certain characteristics of what the future will look like can be identified right now. And one of them is that obvious and stupid contradictions are ripe for attack.

For example: Did you know that members of Congress cannot post YouTube videos on their official member websites without breaking House and Senate rules? Yup. I am friendly with a tech-savvy member of Congress, or Congresscritter, as well as a whole bunch of staffers, and it is simply infuriating to them that they can’t put up a YouTube

clip on their website to communicate with constituents. They can call them. They can mail out tens of thousands of glossy and expensive brochures discussing their recent legislative activities. They can even run expensive TV ads through their political action committees. But they cannot post a YouTube video on a web address that has .gov at the end.

The reasons are manifold. If you talk to the Franking Commission, the body in Congress that governs member communication to the outside world, they will give you a list of different reasons. It's a SECURITY risk! It's a CORPORATE ENDORSEMENT of YouTube! It's an ethics VIOLATION! Or even the wonderful, "Just run it by us, we'll let you know if it's a violation of the rules." This bureaucracy-loving attitude is bipartisan, as is the contempt of their intransigence from tech-savvy insiders.

Sixteen-year-olds can put up YouTube clips, as the whole world knows. So the Obviousmeter is buzzing in the red. And while it seems as though the problem here is the inflexibility of a single bureaucratic committee, when you pick at the onion of the problem a bit, flakes of skin keep coming off. This problem, at its core, represents the complete breakdown of the line between politics and government, between charity and politics, and between democracy and a hundred-year tradition of Walter Lippman-esque disinterested expertise.

The Franking Commission exists because the Founders of the country knew that communication was key to democracy. They codified the ability to 'frank,' or mail for free, communications from a member of Congress to their constituency so that the citizenry would remain educated and vigilant. As communications systems became more powerful, centralized, and expensive during the 20th century, breaking down local community bonds and helping to eliminate public spaces in the process, franking created an asymmetry of power that favored elected officials over voters who were passive receivers of an

incumbent's information. If you could frank for free, and your opponent couldn't, you could raise money and your name recognition, and essentially run an election with taxpayer resources using sophisticated direct mail techniques.

In the 1970s, the Congressional Franking Commission began remedying this asymmetry of power by imposing speech restrictions on members. No fundraising. No electioneering. Let us see the mail you send out. Nothing political. This made sense as a sort of stopgap measure, since the citizenry could not talk back en masse and had limited public spaces in which to engage in conversation with the powerful forces of televised mass communications. Mail cost money, and citizens couldn't just bill taxpayers; they were the taxpayers! So when the Internet emerged in full force, the Franking Commission handled e-mail like snail mail. That makes perfect sense; they both have 'mail' in the name, right?

E-mail and the Web function both as information transmission vehicles and as public spaces. Restricting e-mail or web communication crippled the ability of Members of Congress to convene people on the Web the way they do at town hall discussions, roundtables, district meetings, offices, etc. It stopped the political body designed to collaborate from using the greatest set of collaborative tools ever devised. And it also stopped a medium whose cost structure takes care of power imbalances by making communicating with large groups of people essentially free. While the Internet doesn't guarantee a large audience, it is amazingly inexpensive to communicate with any size group. (For example, there is no cost associated with those annoying joke e-mail forwards.)

The asymmetry of power has been flipped in the Internet Age. Citizens can communicate online to potentially millions of people at no cost, but Members of Congress can't. But this is real life, and regardless of the rules, members and staffers post videos on their sites, go offsite to join the conversation on blogs, do events in Second Life using

congressional resources, etc. But the fact that the rules are in place tells us something very important about Congress, which is its antipathy to public spaces. Rather than delve into the difficult questions of whether an embedded YouTube clip of a government resource can be used on a political website, the Franking Commission just says “No” to YouTube. And the Obviousmeter goes off, and Members break the rules, and Congress appears to be clueless.

But it’s not clueless; it is protecting a lie. This lie is the supposed line between politics and government, a line that was always fiction but whose illusion could be maintained in a non-digital world. And there are similar fake lines between charities and political advocacy groups, government agencies and political parties, blogs and political action committees, citizens with websites and journalists, and foundations and corporations and governments. In David Weinberger’s book, *Everything is Miscellaneous*, he points out that there are no clear dividing lines between objects and institutions, and that this is particularly true in regards to information.

As the George W. Bush administration dissolves into a puddle of embarrassment, and the public begins to believe that change in governance and politics is possible, expect a massive increase of public spaces connected to political power, and a lot more confusion around bright border lines that, when put online, no longer seem particularly bright or even line-like. And listen to your own Obviousmeter, because the world is full of archaic Franking Commissions.

About the Author

Matt Stoller writes at the progressive strategy site OpenLeft.com and is the President of the political action committee BlogPAC. He consults for the Sunlight Foundation on open government, for Actblue, and for Working Assets, a progressive phone company.

CONGRESS RELOADED

Matthew Burton

“ Congress has always been a reactive body, responding to what happened yesterday instead of foreseeing tomorrow’s problems. ”

The House of Representatives should expand to make room for a new at-large delegation: the Delegation for Future Interests (DFI). These seats will be restricted to scientists and people under the age of 35. The representatives will be elected by a nationwide vote with no geographic apportionment (after all, the candidates for these jobs will be familiar with the decreasing relevance of geography). The members of this delegation will have equal status with all other members of the House, including voting rights and committee membership.

The DFI will bring something new to Congress: ample representation of future concerns. Congress has always been a reactive body, responding to what happened yesterday instead of foreseeing tomorrow’s problems. Its members are unfamiliar with new technologies and the problems they present. It shows in the backgrounds. Of our 100

senators, 56 are lawyers. Nineteen are lifelong politicians with little other professional or research experience. Zero senators have science doctorates; only four congressmen do. And according to the Congressional Research Service, the current Congress might be the oldest ever: only eight of 537 members are under the age of 35. We trust this body to keep our democracy up-to-date. We shouldn't.

Our population includes people much better suited than your average politician to keep democracy in touch with the future: scientists engaged with emerging technologies that will define how we communicate and work in the future, and the young people eager to embrace, understand, and challenge these technologies. Just as seasoned lawyers bring historical perspective to our legal code, scientists and young people could bring foresight to important issues for the future of the country. Just as our armed forces are run by military experts, and our economy is regulated by economists, so should our science and technology policies be guided at the highest levels by those with expertise.

Creating the DFI is a low-tech response to an essay prompt that is laden with high-tech overtones. Opportunities abound for web-based citizen engagement platforms and crowdsourced, or collaboratively tackled, to unearth government corruption. But no matter what widget we create, and no matter how we customize the Constitution for today's Internet, three things will certainly happen in the next 100 years:

- Both the widget and the Constitutional changes will become obsolete
- One or two more technological revolutions will pass us by
- Those revolutions will pose new challenges to our democracy, challenges that our generation will never foresee. Challenges that will require their own essay contests.

In short, no Net-centric solution to our problems will last long. Even if such a solution is an extraordinary success, the chances are good that it will be short-lived: our understanding of the Internet

undergoes a radical shift at least once every election cycle. High-tech solutions may sound sophisticated, but they are ultimately limited by their focus on the Internet. My DFI proposal may not make for the most exciting reading, but it is adaptable beyond the current definition of the Internet. When today's problems are long gone, the DFI will still be relevant.

That is what we must seek when changing our democracy: staying power. Major changes to a democratic system take decades to root themselves into the public consciousness. By then, the nation may have forgotten what inspired the changes in the first place. Our job is to make sure that when that day comes, our changes are still relevant.

My solution may not be custom-built FOR the Internet, but it is certainly inspired by it. The Internet has taught me a lesson: when challenged by a new technology, our democracy convulses for a few years. (It hasn't yet taught me what happens after that.) If given one redesign opportunity, we should heed that lesson and try to solve the root of the problem: a lack of foresight by our leaders. Technical solutions can certainly help; that's why I spend most days trying to hack American politics. But the DFI will help us not only through today's challenges but tomorrow's as well. Let's reboot for the future, not just for the Internet.

About the Author

Matthew Burton is formerly an intelligence analyst with the Department of Defense. Burton left the government in 2005 to attend NYU's Interactive Telecommunications Program. He is now building a web application that helps the Intelligence Community share information and collaborate. He created and maintains two government transparency projects: ReadableLaws.org and Speechology.org. He lives in New York.

BEYOND WARGAMES

Douglas Rushkoff

“ Our nation is both a functioning nation and a model for a functioning nation. ”

Whenever democracy and computers show up in the same sentence, I can't help but flash back to some early Cold War simulations conducted by RAND corporation. If we bomb Moscow and then they bomb Phoenix, and so on..... Basic zero-sum game theory, applied through the paranoid schizophrenic lens of *Beautiful Mind* mathematician John Nash, yielded the no-win Doomsday scenario eventually satirized in the cyber-action flick *War Games*.

The underlying assumption of these early computer simulations was that people and, by extrapolation, nations, behave with their own strategic interests in mind. Humans—and nations—are presumed to be fearful, self-interested, and hyper-rational. The solution of these kinds of prisoner's dilemmas was Mutually Assured Destruction: creating nuclear arsenals big enough to ensure that everyone dies if anyone attacks.

Even Nash has subsequently admitted that this way of applying game theory was based on his own paranoid delusions. While the math works out, the logic is hopelessly polar. In short, the paranoia plus binary technology equals an insane, oversimplified, and unstable stand-off. Differences and conflict are exacerbated because the competitive game is an underlying assumption. There's no possibility for reconciliation, compromise, or collaboration. It's my computer against yours.

To me, the most exciting thing about a networked computing era is the opportunity to model new kinds of games. More than anything else, computers are modeling systems. They let us model the function of a typewriter, a spreadsheet, or a paste-up board, not to mention all sorts of social and fantasy interactions. The most advanced models right now are the ones we're developing in forums, from MySpace to Second Life, Facebook to World of Warcraft. These are the places where people can experiment with alternative behaviors, life strategies, alliances, and goal sets.

Because our computers are networked rather than isolated, we no longer need to see the "other" team as on the opposite side of a discrete boundary. They are part of the same system. As a result, scenarios for cooperation more complex than "mutually assured destruction" begin to emerge.

What I'd like to see as a result of computer networking is the possibility for modeling new, as yet-to-be conceived, collaborative behaviors. Play behavior has almost always been relegated to the Dionysian side of the culture, while purpose remains with Apollo and the courts. Both of these artificially isolated aspects of society end up suffering as a result: politics ends up unsexy (leading to the salacious behavior of its repressed participants) and the arts end up unserious (leading to the equally disastrous attempts to bolster its relevancy through cruel entertainments like reality TV).

Gaming and government are actually one and the same. While we have to actually govern using the Constitution, we can't let it become so set in stone that we lose the ability to game with it. Our nation is both a functioning nation *and* a model for a functioning nation. Imagine a discussion of urban planning conducted through a simulation like SimCity. Or a model for local currency developed in a community within Second Life. How about reconfiguring the Electoral College model based on a year of in-person collaborative processes practiced by groups using Meetup.com? Or consider a bottom-up editorial process for amending the Constitution itself, pairing traditional legislative processes with the mass participation offered by wikis and other collective authorship tools. Or, finally, how about engaging the next generation of citizens in all of these collaborative online processes as a way of instilling curiosity and civic practices that will surpass what currently passes for debate in the chambers of Congress?

Networked gaming applied to the democratic process can restore our ability to evolve our republic, bring our international relationships beyond the presumption of mutual enmity, and —perhaps most importantly —make participating in government fun and interesting.

About the Author

Douglas Rushkoff is the author of several seminal books on media and society, including *Cyberia*, *Media Virus*, *Playing the Future*, *Open Source Democracy*, *Coercion*, and, most recently, *Get Back in the Box: Innovation from the Inside Out*. He founded the Narrative Lab at NYU's Interactive Telecommunications Program.

THE OBVIOUS ANSWER: ONLINE VOTING

Allison H. Fine

“Historians will undoubtedly consider our current era of voting machines the technological equivalent of the 8-track tape machine.”

Poll inspectors squinting helplessly at hanging chads was the lasting image from the federal election of 2000. We were shocked and frustrated by the fragility and archaic infrastructure of our election system. If only we could replace those dastardly little squares of paper with something better, something modern, electronic and foolproof, then all would be well in America.

Two years later, an irony-free Republican Congress passed the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA), a power grab by the federal government to standardize election processes in over three thousand municipalities across the country. HAVA provides funds to states to transition from paper ballot systems to electronic ones, but doesn't mandate which machines states must use. Six years and over three billion dollars later, a hodgepodge of delicate, complicated, expensive, and unreliable election machinery populates the countryside. Meanwhile,

not a single cent of HAVA money, or any other government funding, has gone into researching the electoral system of the future.

Seventy-six million Americans registered on the National Do Not Call Registry fueled almost entirely by friend-to-friend e-mails. Over seventy million blogs exist, according to the blog tracking site Technorati. Joe Lieberman and Dan Rather suffered the wrath of some of these bloggers—one survived, the other didn't, but political and media Goliaths have been put on red alert. YouTube videos were instrumental in sinking the incumbent senators Burns and Allen in the 2006 election and will surely be similarly influential in 2008. MoveOn.org boasted a membership of over three million in November 2006; at its height in the mid 1970s, Common Cause had one-tenth the number of members. As the ecosystem of political campaigns has changed radically, we have stubbornly, almost irrationally, refused to take advantage of the revolutionary power of the Internet when it comes to voting. Online voting is the obvious answer to our voting woes.

We replaced levers and punch cards with privately owned, proprietary electronic machines that are shut tight to the public like bank vaults. Some states, like Florida (why is it always Florida?), have thrown out their electronic voting machines in favor of optical scan machines. I spent Election Day last year in San Francisco, watching as poll workers repeatedly pulled the ballots of individual voters out of the scan machines, looked at their votes, and announced aloud to the room, "Well, the problem is that you voted for Gavin Newsom in column A, but didn't also vote for a candidate in columns B or C." (San Francisco has a ranked ballot system, which is a great idea but needs more educational outreach to be effective with voters.) Historians will undoubtedly consider our current era of voting machines the technological equivalent of the 8-track tape machine.

But the machinery is only a part of our voting problem. There is a quiet crisis in recruiting poll workers. The Election Assistance

Commission conducted a national survey in 2004 that revealed that on average poll workers were 72 years old, and presumably older still every day. Sixteen-hour days that ricochet between tense and tedious for paltry pay are not great recruiting enticements. In Maryland in 2006, almost a third of the poll workers didn't show up for work on Election Day.

We have come to the point where almost anybody will do in some places to relieve our "Greatest Generation" poll anchors. California and other states are recruiting high school and college students as poll workers, for pay and course credit incentives. It is a telling sign of the vulnerability of our system, and our poor planning for the future, that the most visible aspect of our democracy totters on the reliability of teens to help open polling places at dawn.

So why do we continue to hold onto an 18th-century voting process in a 21st-century world?

According to Celent, LLC, a research firm specializing in banking, nearly forty percent of households did some banking online in 2006.¹⁷ Bank of America alone has over 22 million online banking customers worldwide, and their services includes using mobile devices for banking.¹⁸ According to Forrester Research, online retail sales in the United States are projected to grow by about fifty percent and exceed \$300 billion annually.¹⁹ If we can trust our personal and business finances to online systems, with nary a worry about security as a result of institutions having worked hard to secure their systems, surely we should be able to do the same with our votes.

Imagine how many more people would vote if they could do so

17 Kim, Jane, J., "Call It Online Banking 2.0," *Wall Street Journal*, November 18, 2006, pg. B.1

18 Robel, Adam, "Internet Leaders Think Strategically," *Global Finance*, Dec 2007; 21, 11; ABI/INFORM Global pg. 46

19 Jonathan Birchall, "US online sales growth 'to defy slowdown,'" *Financial Times*. London (UK): Apr 8, 2008. pg. 20

from their desktops, laptops, the palm of their hand, or at a kiosk in the library or shopping mall. Also imagine how many more digital natives, young people born to, with, and of new media, will participate when the voting system is reflective of their online, mobile lives. Voting is the entry point for community life for millions of people; we are obliged to make it as simple and reliable as possible in the hope that it will lead to further civic participation.

The concerns about online voting are oft stated if misguided. The first, of course, is security. Even though study after study finds no significant amount of voter fraud today (see the voter fraud and integrity work at Demos.org that systematically dismantles the myth that voter fraud exists at any significant level), our outsized anxiety about elections being hijacked by nefarious vote stealers remains firmly intact. This anxiety begins to spiral out of control when discussing online voting—as if changing the voting system will create a huge, crowded field of election thieves. I will concede that this is a legitimate concern, but not an intractable problem. If online banks can be audited, so can online voting systems. The Defense Department and private corporations have sophisticated encryption systems that can be used for voting systems—and they will need to be updated and adjusted to stay ahead of the hackers, just as Bank of America does every day. We can't know all the answers today, but that doesn't make the task of transitioning to a new system impossible. If the criteria is that we must know all the answers before creating a new voting system, no such system will ever be created.

The second concern cited against online voting is a potential decrease in turnout and loss of civic capital generated by the gathering of citizens locally to vote. Oregon's voting-by-mail started in the mid-1990s lays this concern to rest. In 2001, researchers reported an increase in voting in Oregon after voting-by-mail was instituted,

with no deleterious affect on civic feelings.²⁰ And millions of dollars are saved every election since the cost of paying poll workers is gone. Continuing to hire poll workers to staff elections is the equivalent of rehiring bank tellers to replace ATM machines.

John Bonifaz argues in this book that voting systems must be open and transparent, and that they must be wrested from the clutches of for-profit companies more interested in quarterly profits than democratic participation. And online voting systems should be no different. Neutral parties, as opposed to political parties, would be charged with monitoring online voting systems for irregularities and auditing the results. The software code would be open-source. Translated from geek speak, this means that the engine behind online voting will a collaborative effort of a wide community of public-spirited individuals, yet still managed by municipalities. All we need to do to get started is put Meg Whitman of E-Bay and Eric Schmidt of Google in charge of a national task force for online voting—that will ensure that the system will be secure, easy-to-use and scalable.

Walk into a polling precinct anywhere in the country (except Oregon!) on Election Day and you will inevitably see a system riddled with human and technical mistakes and problems. The end result is that we citizens increasingly don't trust or believe the results of elections. Election systems have always been unreliable; what has changed is that now we can see all of the problems instantly, nationwide, on YouTube. The very same technology that is shining a spotlight on the problems of the system can be used to fix it.

It is human nature to think about all of the things that could go wrong with a new system. But at some point we have to decide that what we don't know yet, what details we haven't worked out today

20 Berinsky, Adam, Burns, Nancy, Traugott, Michael W., "Who Votes by Mail? A Dynamic Model of the Individual-Level Consequences of Voting-by-Mail System," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 65:178-197 (2001)

but will tomorrow, are not sufficient reasons to sit and do nothing. An online voting system built openly, honestly, and with great care is surely preferable to watching faulty machines, long lines, and human error erode our election system.

About the Author

Allison H. Fine is a senior editor of the Personal Democracy Forum and a senior fellow at Demos: A Network of Ideas and Action. She is the author of *Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age* (Wiley, 2006) and *Social Citizens^(beta)*, a discussion paper commissioned by The Case Foundation.

WHO NEEDS ELECTED OFFICIALS?

Tara Hunt

“When I’m in charge of redrafting democracy, I will make sure that we create more ways to put citizens in charge of the system. I will make it a mandate to create more turned on, tuned in citizens and see where that leads us.”

I recently gave a presentation on how individuals around the world were taking it upon themselves to improve government services by using web tools and technology to transform their communities. Afterward, a very astute government official walked up to me and asked a question, “If all of these amazing collaborative tools exist and all of these really tuned in, turned on people exist, why do we need government at all, really? Why don’t people just truly self-organize?”

Now, I’ve never been one to define myself as a no-government type, having been raised in socialist-leaning Canada and attributing much of my opportunities to that system, but I found myself quite intrigued by her question. Over the past couple of years of talking to government agencies about the wonders of Web 2.0, I have found that

it is a frustrating thing to be part of a large organization that has to make the whole country happy at once. Large government organizations move slowly and are inefficient. Government agencies also cost way more money to run than they produce in value in many cases (mostly through the heavy administrative costs).

My questioner was raising a valid point: in this emerging 2.0 world of collaboration, community and transparency, do we really need to elect people to run stuff?

Could we actually create a TRUE democracy and run it all ourselves? Oh, don't get me wrong, I don't mean that each one of us would need to take turns arresting people or putting out fires. I just mean that we can make good decisions ourselves without all the buttoned-up politicians in the way. Why couldn't we all be involved in our local, regional and national governments without having to entrust someone to make decisions on our behalf, but by actually making the decisions for ourselves every day? Couldn't we have an ongoing level of engagement with which to make public decisions wisely?

Now, you may be thinking "That's crazy! People don't have time to be deeply involved in the political process!" Of course they don't, particularly not with the current state of government. It's way too complicated. Bills are unwieldy and complex, with many people trying to stuff their interests into one piece of policy. But let me propose this: we need to run policy making more like we run startups. Simpler. Small pieces loosely joined. We need to deal with real issues that affect us now.

Let's start with a group of citizens, we'll call them Ombudsmen, who are focused on long-term issues. They will pay attention to trends and potential difficulties in the same way that Wikipedia deals with controversial topics using an iterative process of discussion and editing until the community comes to a consensus.

And then there are the here and now issues. Well, I suggest that

we deal with them here and now. And if we screw up? Well, we'll fix it. We can be in a perpetual beta, people. It's okay. We already don't know what we're doing; we may as well make that transparent, too.

Imagine an issue arising on Twitter, a free networking and micro-blogging site, wherein someone proposes a change to the legal driving age:

sassygirl123: "With the number of video games teaching our children to drive these days, why not drop the learners permit in Utah to 14? #utah" (The hashtag, #utah, alerts all Utah residents to the suggestion.)

concernedmom: "I'm not sure if I would equate video game driving with actual driving ability. I don't think my 14-year-old is ready. #utah"

The debate goes back and forth until there are enough people gathered around the subject. Someone sets up a survey and it is put to a vote. The vote is in favor of dropping the learners permit age to 14 in Utah with 73% voting for and 26% voting against. Google records the results and someone updates the Wikipedia entry. Craigslist sees a jump in 'Seeking Second Family Car' ads.

When I'm in charge of redrafting democracy, I will make sure that we create more ways to put citizens in charge of the system. I will make it a mandate to create more turned on, tuned in citizens and see where that leads us. I may be putting a little too much faith in our ability to make sound decisions for our communities using Twitter, but the point is that we can streamline our decision-making processes using new Web 2.0 technology. We also need our governments to begin to treat our personal data with the respect it deserves and move past their proprietary habits, such as forcing people to fill out awful, repetitive

forms that get lost in the system. We need to start using open systems that allow users, in this case citizens, to manage and safeguard their own information.

About the Author

Tara 'missrogue' Hunt understands how the participatory web is changing all of our relationships: B2C, B2B and C2C. She co-founded Citizen Agency in 2006 with the mission of teaching her clients how to work more effectively with the communities they serve and how to embrace and adjust to all of the changes in culture businesses are facing. Her forthcoming book on social capital and online communities called *The Whuffie Factor* is due out in November 2008 from Crown Publishing.

NEW GADGETS DO NOT NEW HUMANITY MAKE

Avery Knapp and Tennyson McCalla

“ Mice, click-wheels, keyboards, computers, Internet(s), [. . .] none of them change in any fundamental way what the Framers were working with: human nature. ”

Let it be understood that what the Framers of our Constitution attempted to do was not create a document that would be stuck in a particular time, begging to be replaced as the years passed it by and technology and mores changed. They attempted to create chains, manacles, bindings, and a gag on the great beast they had been taught much of their lives to fear (often by experience): the state. By some estimates, governments killed over 200,000,000 of their own people in the 20th century, not even counting wars. The Framers' fears of government power (which are our fears of government power) appear to have been well founded. The Constitution they created existed in accord with the philosophy they expounded. Philosophy, unlike fads and technology, reflects things of eternal nature. The Framers believed that human nature was one of the eternal things about which they had a fitting philosophy.

What was the nature of man to those great men of 1787? Was he an animal, incapable of being trusted, incapable of civilization, constantly in need of supervision? Was he an automaton, ready for instructions from some authority, ready to be a means to a master's end, capable of being perfected with the best of directions? No, man was none of these things, at least not wholly. He was an animal to be sure, as could be seen by his basest acts of barbarism on the individual scale of a criminal, and on the collective scale of despotism and war. He could undoubtedly act the part of a will-less, soulless, robot, and exist in slavish thrall to some pretended authority on behalf of a prince. But certainly that was not the totality of man. Man was something far grander in the Founders' eyes. Man was an individual created by the Author of the Universe, each one a reflection of the Divine. As the Creator was master of the Heavens, each man was a master of the Earth. As all were equally creations and reflections of the Supreme Being, they were equal to one another, and no one had more natural authority than the next. This state of existence, where subordination and subjection were absent, this state of nature, as it was referred to, was a state of perfectly realized liberty.

To clarify some concepts further, let us hear from some early Americans. In 1775 Alexander Hamilton wrote, "*The sacred rights of mankind are not to be rummaged for, among old parchments, or musty records. They are written, as with a sun beam in the whole volume of human nature, by the hand of the divinity itself; and can never be erased or obscured by mortal power.*" Thomas Jefferson wrote the line "...all men are created equal..." in the Declaration of Independence, but here's what he wrote in an earlier draft: "...all men are created equal and independent; that from that equal creation they derive rights inherent and inalienable, among which are the preservation of life, and liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...". Continuing with Jefferson, we learn: "*Rightful liberty is unobstructed action according to our will within limits drawn around us by the equal rights of others. I do not add 'within the limits of the law,'*

because law is often but the tyrant's will, and always so when it violates the right of an individual."

Putting these ideas together, we learn that all people are equal, that from their equality inalienable rights are derived, and that all unobstructed actions are rightful so long as they don't transgress the rights of any other individuals. Any individual's inalienable rights (e.g., freedoms of contract, property, association, thought, religious belief, etc.) could not rightfully be infringed upon by any other individual.

Mice, click-wheels, keyboards, computers, Internet(s), higher resolutions, light-speed communications, microprocessors, nanomachines, optical fiber roll-outs, satellites, space travel, wi-fi, LCDs, LEDs, OLEDs, HDTVs, etc., none of them change in any fundamental way what the Framers were working with: human nature. So let us now turn to the present day, a time of the future relative to the Framers. Man's nature has not changed. Man can still act in a bestial manner as an individual villain, and his bestial acts can and have been magnified exponentially with power over other men. No technology has changed this fact. No new devices have made this less true today than it was in the Framers' time. On the contrary, the creation of atomic weapons in the 20th century, and the potential for genetic weapons in the 21st, has made this point only more profound.

Reality forced them to work with principles, just as it forces us to do today. Our modern gadgets and trinkets cannot obviate self-evident truths. Man can still act as a subject, to be instructed as if he had no will; to just follow orders, with all of the danger that that phrase implies. Jefferson again: "Nothing is unchangeable but the inherent and inalienable rights of man."

The answer to the question of what we might change if we were redesigning American democracy for the modern day turns out to have little to do with the ephemeral, unimportant, and frankly uninteresting aspects of the manner in—and frequency with which—the mob

votes, or the means by which we view and rate our elected representatives. These changes merely placate people by giving them the illusion of more choice. Technology is not the engine that drives freedom—it's a tool that can encourage or destroy it, and it does both. Freedom is the engine that allows individuals to better their lives through such things as technology.

What we would change has far more to do with the eternal, crucial, and highly compelling issue of rights: unalienable, individual, civil, constitutional, and human. In drafting the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, realizing that, as Jefferson said, "The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield and government to gain ground," the Founders attempted to place strict bounds on the delegated powers of government. In that sense, these documents were a failure. We want to see even less opportunity for the majority to abuse the minority (the individual being the smallest minority of all). We would grant even less power to our servant, government. We demand even more restraints on that beast known as the state. With those changes, almost none of the legislation that does pass would pass. These United States, and the rest of the world, would be far better off for it. Collectivism won the 20th century. Our hope is that individual liberty can win in the 21st.

About the Authors

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DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Kaliya Hamlin

“At the heart of America’s liberal democracy are competitive elections, but this design choice does not enhance collective intelligence and wisdom.”

John Ralston Saul, in “The Unconscious Civilization,” wrote “The most powerful force possessed by the individual citizen is her own government. ... Government is the only organized mechanism that makes possible that level of shared disinterest known as the public good.” During the winter of 1997, fifteen Boston citizens—from a homeless shelter resident to a high-tech business manager, from a retired farmer to a recent inner-city high school graduate—undertook an intensive study of telecommunications issues. Over two weekends in February and March, they discussed background readings and got introductory briefings. Then, on April 2nd and 3rd, they heard ten hours of testimony from experts, computer specialists, government officials, business executives, educators, and interest-group

representatives. After interrogating the experts and deliberating late into the night (with excellent facilitation), they came up with a consensus statement recommending judicious but far-reaching policy changes which they presented at a press conference at Tufts University, covered by WCVB-TV/CNN and the Boston Globe, among other news organizations. U.S. Representative Edward J. Markey, ranking Democrat (and former Chair) of the House Telecommunications Subcommittee, said, "This is a process that I hope will be repeated in other parts of the country and on other issues."

These ordinary citizens ended up knowing more about telecommunications than the average congressperson who votes on the issue. Dick Sclove, a lead organizer of the event, says that their behavior contradicted the assertion that government and business officials are the only ones competent and caring enough to be involved in technological decision-making. This lay panel assimilated a broad array of testimony, which they integrated with their own very diverse life experiences to reach a well-reasoned collective judgment grounded in the real needs of everyday people. This proves that democratizing U.S. science and technology decision-making is not only advisable, but also possible and practical.²¹

When the Framers of our Constitution met in Philadelphia in 1787, digital media, modern psychology, social psychology, and ecological and systems science did not exist. The deliberative democracy approach outlined above and expanded upon in this essay integrates the best of face-to-face social collaboration technologies with information and communication technologies for wise governance decisions. Using these kinds of processes and technologies we can actually hear what my collaborator and network colleague Tom Atlee

21 "Ordinary Folks Make Good Policy," Co-Intelligence website, <http://www.co-intelligence.org/S-ordinaryfolksLOKA.html>, downloaded April 18, 2008.

calls the Voice of “We the People” expressing the public good.²²

At the heart of America’s liberal democracy are competitive elections, but this design choice does not enhance collective intelligence and wisdom. It fragments communities and societies into reductionist, adversarial “sides” and reduces complex spectra of possibilities to oversimplified “positions” that preclude creative alternatives. The norm is that citizens abdicate decision-making to elected officials, who are in turn heavily influenced by the special interests they must serve to raise money to be re-elected. With few exceptions, existing processes of democracy

- Do not provide much effective power to ordinary citizens
- Promote at least as much ignorance and distraction as informed public dialogue
- Serve special interests better than the general welfare
- Impede breakthroughs that could creatively resolve problems and conflicts, and
- Undermine the emergence of inclusive community wisdom

Voting developed as a process to support self-governance in American history, and at its inception in the 18th century it was new and innovative. In the town halls of New England, citizens gathered together, debated, and decided among themselves those who would hold leadership positions in the community. The method has not scaled to address the wicked problems we as a country and world face. Wicked problems are incomplete, contradictory and have changing requirements; and solutions to them are often difficult to recognize because of their complex interdependencies—solutions may reveal or create more wicked

22 How Can We Create an Authentic, Inclusive Voice of We the People from the Grassroots Up?
<http://thataway.org/forum/viewtopic.php?t=477> Initiated by Tom Atlee Modified by/ commented on by Kaliya Hamlin

problems.²³ Economic, environmental, social, and political issues are wicked problems.

In Tom Atlee's book, *The Tao of Democracy: Using Co-Intelligence to Create a World that Works for All*,²⁴ he highlights several working examples of Citizen Deliberative Councils., including Citizen Jury, Consensus Conference, and Wisdom Council.²⁵

These efforts have common characteristics that can be replicated in other communities. They are, to some extent, official, with an explicit mandate from government agencies to address public issues or the general concerns of the community. They generate a specific product such as findings or recommendations to the larger community and elected officials. They are real councils, meaning that they are in-person, face-to-face assemblies. Council members are from a fair cross-section of society, often randomly selected peer citizens. These bodies are temporary, not meeting for more than a few weeks. Their efforts are deliberative and balanced, and often facilitated to help participants to understand diverse points of view.

These processes were created before the Web existed, and as such were labor intensive, expensive and difficult to scale.²⁶ But now we have

23 Wicked problems are defined here: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wicked_problem

24 Atlee, Tom, *The Tao of Democracy: Using co-Intelligence to Create a World that Works for All*, available here: http://www.collectivewisdominitiative.org/files_people/Atlee_Tom.htm

25 The reader can learn more about these efforts at the following websites: http://www.collectivewisdominitiative.org/files_people/Atlee_Tom.htm, <http://radio.weblogs.com/0120875/stories/2003/03/23/citizenDeliberativeCouncils.html#13>, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizens'_jury, <http://www.co-intelligence.org/P-ConsensusConference1.html>, <http://www.co-intelligence.org/P-wisdomcouncil.html>

26 Scaling in the computing, network sense is the ability to to either handle growing amounts of work in a graceful manner, or to be readily enlarged. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scalability> In practical terms a website that can handle 2000 visitors a day may not work with 10,000 or 100,000 or a million visitors day. The democratic voting process that worked well in a New England town of 1,000 people or a state of 10,000 citizens is not scaling well to a nation of three hundred million

an emerging suite of online tools that can augment these processes and reduce their costs. The right combination of face-to-face deliberation with online tools can be as revolutionary as the self-governance process developed by the Framers in 1787.

Any neighborhood council, city council, region, state or even national lawmakers can use these processes to tap the wisdom and decision-making potential of the people. Here's how it could work:

Pick an Issue. Choose the topic from all the possible problems that could be tackled. Issues can be surfaced online using popular participation websites such as Digg that allow users to rank issues or polling via a network like Twitter.

Frame the Issue. Framing an issue for deliberation means describing the range of approaches to an issue and the arguments and evidence for and against each approach. A wiki is the kind of tool that will allow large groups of people (think Wikipedia) to work on understanding and elucidating an issue together.

Select Deliberators. This step is key to the legitimacy of citizen councils. The selection of deliberators must represent the diversity of the community and be resistant to outside pressures. This gives them a legitimacy that is similar to, but more refined than, the selection of juries, which also seeks to convene a cross-section of the community. Database tools can be used to create unbiased and inclusive selections of deliberators. These same kinds of tools can also be used to pool citizens willing to participate in deliberative councils.

Collect Information and Expertise. Gathering information from a range of experts and stakeholders about the pros and cons of different approaches is the next step. This is an important factor in both collective intelligence (which learns from and integrates diverse views) and legitimacy (the willingness of ordinary citizens and officials to respect the outcomes of the process). We can find experts via the Web, draw in their expert testimony via web video conferencing, and perhaps have

online forums where their knowledge is aggregated. Massive datasets of expert information are now free and available about critical issues, such as environmental toxins and the relationship between lobbying funds and legislation in Congress. These can be compiled, presented and widely shared with visualization tools, using methods beyond prose or PowerPoint to present critical information and tell relevant stories.

Deliberation. Most citizen deliberative councils involve 12-24 deliberators meeting in concentrated dialogue over four to eight days (distributed over one to ten weeks, depending on the method), led by professional facilitators. Since this may not be feasible in all circumstances, we can use the distributed intelligence of the Web to augment the in-person deliberations. Deliberations can happen both online and face-to-face over time, thus reducing the time and cost. Different algorithmic and semantic tools can be used to help deliberators see patterns of agreement and understanding.

Decision-Making. It is important to find processes that produce a deliberative Voice of “We the People” that the vast majority of the population will recognize as legitimate. Online tools like Synanim.com build consensus and shared statements using a multi-step online process. Iteration can also happen using methods like Digg or Slash-dot-style voting and community commentary.

Dissemination and Impact. It is critically important to the ultimate success of citizen deliberative councils that their impact on public awareness, public policy, and public programs be discussed and understood. Online tools are critical to these assessments in a variety of ways. Politicians and other officials should also sign pledges in support of these efforts (this can be a campaign issue) that can be shared online. Ongoing feedback can be integrated and continually shared with the public using online phenomena like Facebook and organized networks like MoveOn.org to share results and empower “We the People” to ensure its Voice is heard.

The approaches and processes discussed in this essay are not an answer to our democratic woes and difficulties. The tools and advantages of the Internet alone aren't enough to augment existing democratic processes and strengthen our country. This essay is intended as a call to action and research to learn how best to scale new methods of citizen consultation, leadership, and wisdom together with online tools. I invite a more thorough exploration of how these steps can create a deep well of ongoing, meaningful citizen participation in the critical decisions of our government at all levels.

About the Author

Kaliya Young Hamlin designs and facilitates gatherings of professional technical communities addressing large challenges. She is an expert in the field of user-centric digital identity, blogging at unconference.net and identitywoman.net. Born and raised in Vancouver, Canada she has lived her whole adult life in the United States and recently applied for citizenship.

GOVERNMENT BY THE PEOPLE

Beth Simone Noveck

“ Ordinary citizens have more to offer than voting or answering polls. People can work together to gather and analyze information, and even make decisions. The official no longer needs to be the sole decision-maker. This is a radical idea, but one whose time has come. ”

Our representative institutions of democracy create “single points of failure,” the concentration of power in the hands of too few, whether legislators in Congress, bureaucrats in the administrative agencies or cabinet officials in the executive branch. The insider-dealing and money-politics that have been the hallmark of the Bush administration exacerbate mounting illegitimacy and distrust of government. And with the complexity of our global economic and environmental crises, the strain on our institutions becomes increasingly manifest. Even in the absence of bad intentions and overt corruption, our political professionals are not in possession of the best information or expertise to make decisions in the public interest.

Bad decisions not only produce bad government; they lead to grave

consequences for jobs, the economy, education, healthcare and every issue of importance.

The solution is not only to pass laws against dishonesty and corruption. It is not even greater transparency and “sunshine” —knowing more about who takes an official to lunch. The answer to improving the legitimacy of our democratic institutions is nothing short of a fundamental overhaul of the practices of government to eliminate the single points of failure. We need to redesign democracy as a system of collaborative governance where more people are empowered to participate actively in making the decisions by which we order our collective lives.

We can now use Internet technology to build a 21st-century government that opens up many processes previously considered the realm of governmental professionals. There is a competition for talent between the public and private sector, but government need not lose this contest. Instead, we have the tools to extend the intelligence and improve the competence of an institution if we can connect it to the expertise of networks of people outside of government.

In the Peer-to-Patent project, the US Patent and Trademark Office has already begun by opening the examination process to scientists—not only to the examiners employed by the patent office, laboring under a dearth of pertinent information—for help deciding whether an invention deserves a patent. But this should be just the beginning. We could enable local communities around the world to submit information and photo-documentation to environmental authorities to inform decision-making about clean air and water and create accountability and impetus for clean-up. We could appoint citizen juries to “shadow” the work of every cabinet official or agency head. We could even empower local groups to spend money on our behalf —reporting back on how they addressed specific problems and thereby becoming eligible for more funding. We have the tools that allow government to

solicit help from those with know-how, passion and enthusiasm.

The notion that government knows best is a myth. Even in the absence of bad intentions or personally corrupt motives, the bureaucrat or politician in Washington simply lacks access to the right information and useful ways of making sense of good science. In a survey of environmental lawyers, for example, law professors J.B. Ruhl and James Salzman found that only 8% of respondents thought that the EPA has sufficient time to search for relevant science and only 6% believed that agencies employ adequate analysis. No matter how civic-minded the government official, she is blind to many opportunities to pursue the public good.

Ordinary citizens have more to offer than voting or answering polls. People can work together to gather and analyze information, and even make decisions. The official no longer needs to be the sole decision-maker. This is a radical idea, but one whose time has come. In the world before the Internet, it made sense to believe that accountability in a democracy could only happen once every few years at the polling booth, where individuals go to throw out unqualified elected officials. While we evolved new measures such as ballot motions and referenda, these also only allow for a thumbs-up or down vote. Ordinary citizens have more to offer than voting or answering polls. People can work together to gather and analyze information, and even make decisions. The official no longer needs to be the sole decision-maker. This is a radical idea, but one whose time has come.

The idea of citizen participation is not new, of course. Proponents of “deliberative democracy” have long argued for what they call the public exchange of reason and advocated for public hearings and town halls—and on-line versions of same—for citizens to talk about the business of government. But those deliberative conversations do not connect to action. They are generally one-off affairs, not tied to governmental practices of agenda-setting, policy-drafting and decision-making.

Effective government operations demand ongoing engagement—even if only for a few minutes a day.

Politics is hard and complicated. Most observers think that people are too busy to do the work of professionals in government. But such naysaying misunderstands the issues. The EPA doesn't need 100,000 people to work on the issue of asbestos or mercury. The congressman doesn't demand 10,000 citizens in a jury. While some issues attract a huge number of people, obscure (yet important) decisions get made every day in government that could be made better if we used technology to open up participation and oversight to a few dozen experts and enthusiasts, what blogger Andy Oram calls the micro-elite, the five or ten or hundred people who know best, and a percentage of whom will want to contribute to solving community problems or clarifying community knowledge.

Some will counter that more active involvement in government by private citizens self-selecting to participate will only increase the risk of corruption. If we design the practices of 21st-century governance to split up tasks into many smaller fact-gathering and decision-making exercises, we'll diversify against the risk of defection. It will also make it easier for busy people to do the work of participation. And if we design governmental decisions to be made in groups, group members will keep each other honest and blow the whistle if corruption occurs. In other words, if we start to think about governance as a much more granular and limited set of practices, we can delegate greater power to citizens to gather facts, spend money and make decisions.

Empowering people requires designing and building appropriate technologies and also enacting the best legal and policy framework to change the way government works. We should begin by:

- Employing “social networking” technology to create on-line networks based on expertise and interest in particular issues and decisions

- Delegating government practices like fact gathering and analysis to collaborative, on-line groups. This means getting governmental authorities to communicate their needs to citizens so that people understand what is being asked of them and can supply information to government in manageable and useful ways
- Mandating (through Executive Order) that every government agency develop a 21st-century government plan to engage citizens in its decision-making practices and report to OMB and to Congress on its progress. Every agency should undertake at least one pilot program each year
- Encouraging corporations, venture firms and philanthropies to support 21st-century government innovations by funding pilot projects for government institutions and awarding prizes for success
- Amending the E-Government Act of 2001 that was enacted to enhance access to government information by citizens through the Internet. Funds should be appropriated to institutionalize 21st-century government pilot programs
- Mandating (through legislation) that every congressperson and agency head convene a citizen jury to whom she regularly reports, and impose a duty to justify departures from the group's recommendations
- Mandating (through legislation) that the federal government provide information in formats designed for data retrieval and use, so that government information can be easily analyzed, mashed-up, visualized and used by those outside of government. This means offering the data in an open format that does not require special tools for reading, and in a documented, predictable structure that makes it easy to automate queries

- Creating a cabinet-level Chief Technology Officer post responsible for articulating and reporting to the nation a vision for 21st-century government and its progress

The most forward-looking companies know that innovation comes not from the center but from the periphery, from customers and employees, not from management. This same idea has yet to be applied to government. If we start collaborating actively to govern ourselves, we will both reduce corruption and strengthen democracy.

About the Author

Beth Simone Noveck is professor of law and director of the Institute for Information Law & Policy at New York Law School and the McClatchy Visiting Associate Professor at Stanford University, Department of Communication. Professor Noveck is the founder of the Democracy Design Workshop, an interdisciplinary “Do Tank” (<http://dotank.nyls.edu>) dedicated to deepening democratic practice through the application of both legal code and software code. She (and her students) blog at <http://cairns.typepad.com>. Her book, *Wiki Government: How Technology Can Make Government Better, Democracy Stronger, and Citizens More Powerful* will be released by Brookings Press in 2009.

SELF-ORGANIZED SELF-GOVERNMENT

Scott Heiferman

“ We’ll make the refreshed self-government we need
by continuing to boldly self-organize. ”

Self-government is like vegetarian chicken. Which is it, self or government? Vegetarian or chicken? Isn’t government a big bureaucratic institution that serves me like a customer? Maybe I use a national park once in a while, and the public works department picks up my garbage, and every four years I might vote, but governing isn’t something I do. It’s something an institution does, right? You can’t self-McDonald’s, you wouldn’t self-WalMart, or send a self-FedEx —so what’s self-government?

Self-government may sound oxymoronic to many Americans today, but it was a key concept for our Founders, who were desperately trying to escape the rule of a monarchical, oppressive government. As they self-organized America, the Founding Fathers used the word “association” to refer to people coming together voluntarily for a common purpose. Most often, they meant loose associations formed for political purposes, precursors of political parties that would develop

later. The right to meet with whomever they chose, and say whatever they wanted, was a fundamental building block of a free society for the Founders.

In the early 19th century, these loose associations evolved. Citizens were self-organizing into more organized associations. In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote, “Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. . . If men are to remain civilized or to become so, the art of associating together must grow and improve in the same ratio in which the equality of conditions is increased.”

Throughout the 20th century, associations, now more often known as non-profit organizations, increased in number and professional approach. The modern non-profit sector now includes associations, churches, unions, political action committees, and direct service and advocacy organizations of every size, for every cause, in every corner of the country. It would never have occurred to the Founders that professional organizations like Environmental Defense Fund or the National Rifle Association would take the place of individual citizens to advocate for legislation or services. Large non-profit organizations that came of age in the 20th century are generally organized hierarchically like centralized businesses. They became more institution-like as people were becoming more distrustful of institutions.

Now we’re seeing people self-organize in new ways through the Internet, creating new forms of decentralized associations and institutions. Just as the Founders of our country could not have predicted exactly how people would use the levers of democracy to advance the country’s interests, neither could Internet pioneers predict the incredible things people have done with their new platforms.

The Internet pioneers didn’t think of every contingency in the design; they just set a loose framework on top of which others could lay their own ideas and tools. And, as we know, millions of people have

participated in an unprecedented worldwide explosion of innovation. Human potential was unleashed, from Google to eBay to Wikipedia, to the millions of blogs with very few readers but impassioned, empowered authors.

I'm not going to pretend to be James Madison and offer ways to improve the structure and process of government. I am, however, the founder of a technology platform, Meetup (www.meetup.com), that helps people self-organize locally. Five million people have registered to meet up with neighbors around an issue, a health condition, or something important to them. Today, over 100,000 Meetups (local group meetings) happen monthly. I've come to understand that nothing will have a more positive impact on our world than the power to self-organize easily. The greatest opportunity for America to revive the spirit of self-government is through citizen self-organization.

So I'm stumped by the question of how to redesign American democracy. Citizens will feel—and will be—more powerful when they design the new system themselves. NBC couldn't make YouTube, Barry Diller couldn't make eBay, MTV couldn't make Facebook, and no traditional institution could have made Google. You can't change a culture from its original foundations. Thankfully, America was founded on self-organization. We'll make the refreshed self-government we need by continuing to boldly self-organize.

About the Author

Scott Heiferman co-founded the global group-gathering website, Meetup.com, in 2002. He also founded Fotolog.net in 2002, the leading photo weblog platform, used by over a quarter million people, and viewed by nearly 1 million people daily. In 1995 he created i-traffic, the first online ad agency, a pioneer in search-keyword media placement, and now one of the largest online media buyers, with offices in the U.S. and Europe.

THE DIGITAL WILL OF THE PEOPLE

Pablo del Real

“ Electronically publishing the collective wish of the populace for each House bill would result in the ‘digital’ will of the people.”

Never before in the history of the world has it been possible for elected representatives to hear the voices of their constituents simultaneously and instantaneously across great distances. The Internet enables this. Today, for the first time in a modern nation, citizens can be genuinely represented in the process of legislation.

But does your federal representative consult you before she casts her vote on bills and resolutions? Does she ask your opinion on laws that will affect you and the entire nation? For most of us, the answer is “No.”

However, does your representative talk to some citizens, maybe friends of his, as well as corporate lobbyists? We know he does. He is busy talking to somebody, just not to us. So why does he consult with those few and not with me or you? The answer used to be that it was a matter of logistics—it was impossible to solicit the opinion of each

constituent in every single district. But that's not true anymore, not since the advent of the Internet.

Today, U.S. representatives can easily ask constituents for their opinions on every bill and resolution. Now they can know how their districts want them to vote on every piece of law proposed. Electronically publishing the collective wish of the populace for each House bill would result in the "digital" will of the people.

Simply put, the digital will of the people is the measurement of our sentiment—a simple Yea or Nay—regarding proposed legislation. Let us use the Internet to render the will of the people visible, and let us give ourselves a voice in our own politics. Here is how it would work.

Each congressional district would have its own web page at www.house.gov. Citizens would be invited to register for representation with their district, just as they are invited to register to vote now. When bills are scheduled for a vote in the House, citizens would receive an e-mail with a simple poll asking them to indicate their preference with a Yes or No regarding any bills being proposed.

With an automatic tally of Yeas and Nays, each representative would know what her constituents want her to do and say. Aggregating the counts of all the districts across the country would create a national figure for each bill, allowing everyone first to see the collective wish of the people. Then, later, we could compare it to the actual vote in the House. For example:

Poll results for H.R. 103 Universal Health Care Act

the People: Yea (68% vs. 32%)

the House: Nay (49% vs. 51%)

To be effective, the digital will of the people would have to be official—it should be a governmental tool and bear the government's

imprimatur. Government sponsorship and implementation of the tool would ensure the best possible conditions for the integration of citizens and their representatives. The same tool managed by the people themselves would be ineffective.

To be clear, We the People want a voice, not a vote. Representatives need not heed the popular will once it does become visible; they would retain what amounts to veto power over the will of the people. The digital will can improve representative democracy, not by making it direct, but by requiring direct dialogue—a direct connection between citizens and their representatives.

Of course, representative government is alive and well. However, the entities being represented are corporations and not average citizens. Corporations, through lobbyists, have our representatives' ears. Meanwhile, We the People are voiceless—what we feel, nobody hears. Corporations are not the bad guys; they are merely gaming the system as it exists.

The opportunity to involve citizens in the process of legislation has existed since the year 2000 when the Internet achieved widespread reach. That the government has not seized or acted on the opportunity in eight years should make us believe that it needs some prodding from you and me, the people—We.

About the Author

Pablo del Real is the founder of Auroras Voice, a not-for-profit organization devoted to vesting American citizens with legitimate political power. The above essay is adapted from his book *P-poll: Are You Happy Now?*

POLITICAL COLLABORATIVE PRODUCTION

Clay Shirky

“ It’s not yet clear whether experiments in incorporation will do for group action what novel forms of copyright have done for collaborative production, but it’s worth a shot. ”

On a Monday morning in March of 2006, forty thousand students in Southern California stunned teachers and administrators by walking out of school to protest a proposed anti-immigrant bill. The students blocked traffic as they marched to City Hall, creating a very visible and public display. They had been inspired by an adult demonstration that had taken place two days prior, and had scrambled to find a way to participate themselves. Armed with MySpace and text messaging, the students were able to coordinate with one another rapidly and effectively, not just person-to-person, but also in groups.

We all know and love these stories of collective political action enabled by new tools. Mobile phones were essential in organizing protestors and forcing the resignation of Filipino President Joseph Estrada in 2001. And now, the Web is being used to organize the pro-Tibet

protests dogging the 2008 Olympic torch. These are great stories, and they bode well for a reinvention of political protest worldwide.

However, they all share the same characteristic, one that is true of many examples of collective action: they rely on stop energy. The usual stories of collective action have to do with short-term pressure brought upon existing institutions to try to stop them from doing something. Generally, the goal of the action is some sort of capitulation—someone resigns from office, some proposed law is defeated, and so on. There are comparatively few examples of groups using new digital tools to start or sustain long-term political action. These groups wouldn't be working to elect politicians or to propose or oppose laws, but to solve political problems directly, through the actions of their members.

This seems to be a particularly political failing; there are thousands of examples of large-scale and long-term creativity in the sphere of intellectual production. These efforts create value not just for the participants, but also for the millions of users who access these kinds of products for free.

What would it take to copy that collaborative pattern for politics? How can we find ways to encourage the formation of groups with explicitly political goals? One intriguing possibility is a legal structure similar to that of Open Source software systems such as Linux, or to those employed by open collaborative products like Wikipedia.

The curious piece of legal jujitsu that makes Open Source software possible is the licensing agreement. To qualify as Open Source, a piece of software has to have a license guaranteeing that its recipe—or source code—remains available to programmers, now and in the future. Rather than restricting rights of users through copyright, an Open Source license actually expands them.

Similarly, the Creative Commons project has created a set of licenses that allow writers, photographers, and other content-creators to ensure that their work remains available for republishing as well as for

other forms of re-use.²⁷ As Steve Weber points out in his brilliant book *The Success of Open Source*, these kinds of licensing schemes ensure participants—of the past, present and future—that their work can never be co-opted. This legal guarantee is critical both to bringing groups together and to sustaining communal work. The common thread is the use of copyright law. While this social mechanism has traditionally been designed to reserve and restrict rights, the models cited above employ copyright law to guarantee and expand them.

Copyright provides a formal mechanism for deferring to the wishes of creators. We don't have any such tool for group effort outside of intellectual production, but we could, because society also has a formal mechanism for deferring to the decision-making power of groups. It's called incorporation, and it could be pressed into service to create a new zone of expanded rights for collective action in the same way a Creative Commons license expands rights of production and re-use.

Imagine going into your local bank with four or five friends and announcing that you want to open a joint account. You'd be laughed out of the room. The best you can do is to get one person to open the account and add check-signing privileges, because the bank won't recognize the group as a unit. Now imagine coming back a month later and announcing that you and those same friends have incorporated—given your relationship a legal and formal body—and you want an account. No problem, just sign on the dotted line. Your group has become legally recognizable.

What incorporation allows us to do is to grant legal personhood to a group, so that group can raise and spend money, make decisions,

²⁷ Creative Commons is a non-profit organization started by Lawrence Lessig, law professor at Stanford University, devoted to expanding the range of creative works available for others to legally build upon and share. The organization has released several copyright licenses known as Creative Commons licenses. These licenses, depending on the one chosen, restrict only certain rights (or none) of the work instead of traditional copyright, which is more restrictive.

and enter into contracts. Incorporation so solidifies the existence of the group that even if all the members change, the group is still regarded as a legitimate unit. IBM still exists today, though not one of its founding employees is alive.

The problem, of course, is that incorporating is onerous, and, because the CEO generally has enormous and disproportionate executive power, it generally ends up subverting group decision-making. The analogous bit of jujitsu would be to create a corporate form that allows groups to come together easily and quickly in the ways now made possible by our digital and social tools, while giving those groups the legitimacy that incorporation provides, which includes the ability to raise and spend money, to offer and enter into contracts, and to adopt binding forms of governance.

A constellation of recent experiments points to this model of group action. Beth Noveck's wonderful paper "A Democracy of Groups" lays the groundwork for deference by the state in order to make group action more productive. David Johnson, a colleague of Noveck's at New York Law School, has created a Virtual Company model in Vermont, which allows the formation of corporations whose members know one another mainly or solely online. In addition, their productive contribution comes not in the form of invested capital, but in donated time and attention. (In the Virtual Company, sweat equity is the principal form of equity.) In the U.K., the Community Interest Corporation allows for the creation of businesses with social goals so deeply embedded in their charters that even future owners can't reverse them.

It's not yet clear whether experiments in incorporation will do for group action what novel forms of copyright have done for collaborative production, but it's worth a shot. As our society has become increasingly connected, we've generated a huge, and largely unused, participatory surplus of people who are ready to contribute to efforts and causes larger than themselves. We are only now figuring out how

to tap that surplus, and while protests and pressure groups are a necessary part of any political system, real political change will be generated by groups that start or sustain long-term action. If I had to pick one method of rebooting civic life, it would be by finding new ways to grant groups the legitimacy essential to pursuing long-term and constructive goals on their own.

About the Author

Clay Shirky is a writer, educator, and consultant on the social and economic effects of Internet technologies. He is the author of *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organization* (Penguin Press, 2008). He is an adjunct professor at New York University (NYU) in their graduate Interactive Telecommunications Program, and consultant to a variety of organizations on network technologies.

COMMUNITY INFORMATION COMMONS

Harry C. Boyte

“ We need a place to ground cyberspace. That will require online community information spaces that act as “e-commons,” a crucial balance to “e-commerce.” ”

New technologies have many positives. They can feed economic growth and create a “global village.” The spread of the Internet undermines repressive governments. Web 2.0 technologies create new opportunities for co-creation of content to inform and engage millions of people.

Yet they also hold dangers. Materialistic values threaten human values. Family life, community ties, and privacy are put at risk. The mass culture may well produce, as many have said, “more and more of less and less.” For all the promise, we could end up more powerless.

We need a place to ground cyberspace. That will require online community information spaces that act as “e-commons,” a crucial balance to “e-commerce.”

A Vital Civic Legacy

Many people today feel powerless over larger cultural trends, including the increasing prevalence and power of new technologies. But the civic legacy of the freedom movement of the 1960s (that I participated in as a young man as a field secretary for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference) provides models for overcoming this powerlessness. The movement's central theme of civic agency—that ordinary people can be architects of their lives, shapers of their communities, and collaborators with others across differences on common challenges—has re-emerged in the 2008 election season. In fact, “We are the ones we’ve been waiting for,” a central theme of Barack Obama’s campaign, comes directly from the freedom movement. Bernice Johnson Reagon composed the song in the early 1960s. It became a rallying cry of the movement, capturing the spirit of citizenship and freedom schools that trained blacks in skills of collective action such as how to chair a meeting, research an issue, and negotiate with people of other views and interests.

Beyond a particular candidate’s message, I believe these words have resurfaced because people once again feel a sense of urgency about gaining control over their lives, communities, and the future of our society and the world.

In 1954 the Supreme Court outlawed segregation, but it required a broad movement that enlisted the talents and energies of citizens to change a way of life. This involved returning to older concepts of the citizen as a builder and co-creator of our communities, our culture, and our democracy. In the process, people recalled that democracy itself is best seen as a way of life, not simply a vote (either at the ballot box or in the click of a mouse). These ideas had been eclipsed by consumerism and the focus on private life in the 1950s. But when Martin Luther King Jr. described the Civil Rights Movement in “Letter From a Birmingham Jail” as “bringing the entire nation back to the great

wells of democracy that were dug deep by the Founding Fathers,” he was helping the nation remember. The movement sought not only to “realize the promise of democracy” for African-Americans, but to make democracy’s larger meaning come alive again.

King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference sponsored hundreds of “citizenship schools.” “What is a citizen?” was the question posed in church basements and beauty parlors by leaders like Dorothy Cotton and Septima Clark. As people struggled with the answers, they came to see themselves as “first-class citizens.” And that meant that they would concentrate on community problems like sewers and roads and dilapidated schools, as well as voting rights. “Nobody is going to solve these problems for us,” Cotton would say. Government could be a resource, but people had to take on civic responsibility.

The Continuing Challenge

Though it did not end America’s racial divide, the movement made huge progress in dismantling legal segregation. It also left us with a vital legacy of civic agency to draw upon. The 21st century version of segregation is sometimes called the “digital divide”—the lack of access of poor and minority populations to new technologies. But in fact, in the U.S. and around the world, access is not the real question. The Digital Divide group (www.digitaldivide.org) has identified far graver problems internationally:

Yes, the poor are being given access and, chances are, in most countries virtually every citizen will eventually have his or her own wireless access device (or shared use of one in a village). But such access could hurt them, not help them, by loosening the bonds of tradition and enticing them with the allure of modern pop culture. A recent World Bank report, noting the

spread of networks into the rural areas of Thailand, argues that the quality of digital access being received by low income Thais is one-way, entertainment-oriented, commercial and technologically backward and may be accelerating the exodus of untrained youth from rural areas into cities. Like poor nations brutally exposed to market forces weighted against them, rural youth entering the cities with Playstation2 images of Laura Croft dancing in their heads, may not be well equipped for the challenges that await them in cities such as Bangkok.

In the U.S. the Internet can also loosen the roots and relationships of poor, minority, and working-class communities, as young people (and others) enter the intoxicating and seductive world of cyberspace. These are dangers faced by people in suburbs, as well. Many parents feel that they have little control over what their children watch, the music they listen to, or the friends they socialize with online. Growing numbers express concern about the exchange of private information on the Internet. As in agriculture, where we have come to recognize the danger of mono-cultures, we face the danger of a mass media monoculture, as communications industries become more concentrated and local cultures that are supported by local media are displaced.

What is to be done?

Past challenges facing our nation—the struggle to end racial segregation, the Great Depression, the struggle against fascism—required the energy, talents and wisdom of the whole citizenry. Today, the technological revolution is an occasion and a challenge for a new citizen movement.

The concept of the commons has relevance once again. Historically, the commons was a civic meeting ground rooted in the real life of com-

munities. The commons expressed the culture, traditions, histories and common work of particular places. It was something people helped to create; through the work of creating commons, people gained a sense of stake, pride, and ownership. The commons took many forms. Newspapers, congregations, schools, libraries, locally owned businesses, union hiring halls, settlement houses, community festivals, fairs, bands and sports teams all could be seen as commons in which people participated, around which they gathered, and through which they developed a collective public signature in the larger world.

As we shifted to an expert-dominated service society, many commons lost the qualities of civic centers and their roots in places. Libraries and schools began to serve “customers.” YMCAs shut down community problem-solving projects and opened racquetball courts. Health clinics in Minneapolis resembled those in Portland. The loss of the civic commons is a major reason for current widespread feelings of powerlessness.

But powerful countertrends are emerging using new technologies. Many libraries and schools and non-profits are reinventing themselves as “civic centers,” using information technologies as vital resources. Forms of citizen journalism, telling the news of community life, are proliferating. Citizens are creating neighborhood web pages and online conversations about public issues.

New federal, state, and local policies will be crucial to support this work, which also requires new institutions to spread the information commons approach. In 2001, I worked with a group including Paul Resnick, Peter Levine, Lew Friedland, and Robert Wachbroit, among others, to develop policy proposals for resources and technical assistance that could spread new information commons. We also proposed a “civic extension service” for the information age (<http://www.si.umich.edu/~presnick/papers/civicextension/index.html>).

Community information commons are part of a new, larger civic

movement. This movement involves the growth of anchoring community institutions of many kinds, through which people seek to control their destinies. Two examples include the Project for Public Spaces in New York City (www.pps.org) and Community-Wealth.Org (www.community-wealth.org), both of which provide tools and support services to strengthen local communities, what PPS calls “placemaking.” The civic movement is also generating new concepts and practices such as citizenship through public work. Public work—productive, sustained effort by people with diverse interests and views who develop capacities for work across differences on common civic challenges—is distinguished from dominant definitions of the citizen as voter, volunteer, or aggrieved protestor. Public work emphasizes the citizen as a strong civic agent, a co-producer of public goods and collaborator with others in solving public problems (www.publicwork.org). It is taking many forms, including an international youth civic movement called Public Achievement (www.publicachievement.org, www.publicachievement.com, www.paunite.org).

Both stronger public places and stronger citizens will be essential for a flourishing democracy—and for reclaiming control over the technologies that are, after all, our human creations. The digital world—if we see it as a supplement and not as a replacement for face-to-face interaction—has much to offer in building such a democracy.

About the Author

Harry Boyte is founder and co-director of the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute on Public Affairs's Center for Democracy and Citizenship. He is also founder of Public Achievement, a theory-based practice of citizen organizing to do public work for the common good, which is being used in schools, universities and communities across the United States and in more than a dozen countries.

THE ETHICS OF OPENNESS

Jeff Jarvis

“ Today the default in our discussion of government is negative: they are doing bad things badly, and we are the watchdog who’ll catch the bastards in the act. ”

Now that we have the technological means to open up government and make every action transparent, we must insist on a new ethic of openness. The Internet Age gives us not only new tools to change how our government operates and relates to its citizens, but also new ethics. Now that we have the technological means to open up government and make every action transparent, we must insist on a new ethic of openness. We have the tools of conversation that can involve citizens in decisions as they are made, so we should expect our politicians and bureaucrats to hear our ideas. If society is becoming connected and more (not less) social online, then so will politics as we use new tools to organize around our issues, rather than just gathering beneath party banners. If we’re lucky, technology may give us a more human government. Here are my dreams.

Abolish the Freedom of Information Act.

Turn it inside out. Why should we have to ask for information from our government? The government should need permission to keep things from us. Every act of government on our behalf should be free by default, with rare exceptions: the personal business of citizens, national security, ongoing criminal investigations. See Ellen Miller's call for transparent and open government on page 59 in this anthology. See also Barack Obama's technology policy, calling for standardization and openness of government data, citizen involvement in decisions, and a chief technology office to implement this.

Government officials and agencies should blog.

Openness should mean more than releasing official documents. It should mean engaging in conversations with citizens about the work of government. A blog is a convenient tool to do that—and a more efficient means of interaction than individual letters and phone calls. Hillary Clinton has said she wants agencies to blog: “We should even have a government blogging team where people in the agencies are constantly telling all of you, the taxpayers, the citizens of America, everything that's going on so that you have up-to-the-minute information about what your government is doing, so that you too can be informed, and hold the government accountable.”

Webcast government.

The government should put C-SPAN out of business by broadcasting itself. Obama has said he wants to webcast agency meetings. We should do the same with congressional meetings and, yes, court sessions, including Supreme Court hearings. I also believe that radio stations

and newspapers should get citizens to record and podcast local government meetings. All of government's deliberations should be public. That doesn't mean they'll be watched, of course; these are sure to be the lowest rated broadcasts since the invention of the cathode ray tube. But that doesn't matter. All it takes is for one reader of the blog Talking Points Memo to watch one hearing and catch a newsworthy moment. It would be good for government officials on the other side of the camera to know that they are being watched. The camera becomes the eye of the people, always on: Big Brother, reversed.

Start a government IdeaStorm.

To get itself out of Dell hell (a reference to when the computer company ignored a blogstorm which I started around its bad service), Dell started blogging and also created IdeaStorm, a platform that enables customers to submit, vote on, and discuss suggestions. Now Starbucks has used the same tool, from Salesforce.com, to solicit ideas from customers at MyStarbucksIdea.com. One sees trends emerge in the discussion: Starbucks could see that its greatest problem with customers was not the smell of its sandwiches but the length of its lines. One also sees an incredible generosity from customers; they offer thoughtful advice about how companies can improve. Citizens would surely do the same for government; after all, it is ours. So why not create IdeaStorms for our government just as Downing Street in the UK has opened up an ePetitions program?

There is another important aspect to this idea: turning the conversation about government to the positive. Today, the default in our discussion of government is negative: they are doing bad things badly, and we are the watchdogs who'll catch the bastards in the act. Too often, this is true. But it is destructive to concentrate only on the negative; we must also shift to the constructive: positive conversations

about positive action. This, one wishes, is what Obama's theme of hope is really about.

I am not in favor of turning to government-by-poll. Though the Internet has made me a populist, I do believe in the representative, republican (small 'r') structure of our government with its filters, balances, and deliberative process. But I do think that given a chance to participate in the process, citizens will. I hope technology helps us move past the gift economy to a gift society.

Personal political pages.

I believe the Internet's ethic of openness will spread across society. If the press demands that government be transparent, then the press—including individual journalists—must also be transparent. Likewise, as citizens demand transparency, so will they become more transparent. Ethics are synchronous.

We are already seeing more personal transparency in society. In Facebook, blogs and other social media, participants realize that they need to reveal things about themselves to find others who share their interests. One's online identity is increasingly made up of the parts of ourselves that we choose to create or make public, and other parts we choose to keep hidden.

I envision citizens' personal political pages where each of us may, if we choose, reveal our stands, opinions, alliances, and allegiances, and where we would manage our relationship with government, campaigns, and movements. Paraphrasing Harvard blogger Doc Searls' movement for VRM, vendor relationship management, call it PRM, political relationship management. Here's how I see it working. I post my personal statement online: I am a centrist Democrat; I voted for Hillary Clinton; I want to actively support such movements as protecting the First Amendment against FCC censorship and insuring a

national open broadband policy. On my page, I can explain and discuss any issues I choose. I already disclose many of those views on my blog's disclosures page. But on my personal political page, I also get to manage my relationship with politicians: I say which candidates and organizations and movements may approach me to ask for donations or to volunteer. I can also invite opponents of my views to try to convince me: send me a link to your best shot. I can change my views and votes on the page. The page could become a standard for disclosure of conflicts and biases for politicians and journalists as well.

Let's imagine that millions of these pages can be searched and analyzed to get a constant snapshot of people's views: Google as the polling place that never closes. This puts us in control of public opinion and takes it out of the hands of pollsters. It makes politics a constant process, not an annual event.

So this becomes a platform for organizing citizens around shared needs and beliefs. Reacting to this idea on my blog, TV industry analyst Andrew Tyndall said in a comment that the left/right political pigeonhole "makes it so much more difficult to form coalitions with those at radically different parts of the ideological spectrum...with born-again Christians who are leading activists on HIV/AIDS or Darfur genocide...with Wall Street free traders who want to liberalize immigration with Mexico.... Personal Political Pages allow each of us to escape from the conventional left-right authoritarian-libertarian divisions of the political parties and the opinion pollsters. They allow us to align ourselves on each issue discretely, forming ad hoc, opportunistic coalitions, not binding ones."

That is what the Internet is really all about—not content, not media, but connections among people. Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, said at the South by Southwest conference that as soon as Facebook was translated into Spanish, it was being used to organize against the guerilla movement, Revolutionary Armed Forces of

Colombia or FARC. Facebook has been used to organize the Obama movement. It could be used to organize any cause.

People replace television.

The political strategist Joe Trippi believes that the power of the Internet to help campaigns raise money from citizens—and to organize those citizens into movements—is what will free our political system from large donations and corporate contributions. That's not happening yet, witness record campaign spending this year and John McCain's efforts to run away from the campaign reform act that bears his name. Television still matters, so big money that pays for television ads still matters.

But let's imagine that we're in the future, when television's reach has shrunk to the point that is no longer an efficient means of getting out a message. If you want to win an election, you will have to inspire people to tell their friends, who will tell their friends. The future of campaigning—like the future of marketing—is not media but people serving as advocates for candidates, campaigns and causes.

About the Author

Jeff Jarvis, who blogs at [Buzzmachine.com](http://buzzmachine.com), teaches at the City University of New York Graduate School of Journalism. He is writing a book, *WWGD? (What Would Google Do?)*, and is a columnist for the Guardian.

CREATING HUMANE CODELAW

Gene Koo

“By using codelaw to carry out policy, government shoves analog pegs into round holes, resulting in the same loss of fidelity that occurs when music is ripped into digital formats.”

As a lawyer and techie at Massachusetts Law Reform Institute in the mid-2000s, I became aware of a computer system called Beacon used by the MA Department of Transitional Assistance (aka “welfare”) to distribute various benefits such as food stamps to Massachusetts residents. Occasionally, our clients would have their benefits reduced or cut off because of errors in Beacon programming, and our advocates would fight not only to restore their aid, but to fix the system.

What was happening in Massachusetts was happening around the nation, and indeed our errors were relatively benign by comparison. In Colorado, faulty software generated hundreds of thousands of incorrect benefits calculations, and in New York the state’s benefits distribution

system was so egregiously broken that our colleagues there brought suit in federal court and won sweeping changes.

These are some of the mundane but vitally important ways in which software is becoming the mechanism whereby government executes laws. It's not hard to find other examples, from "deadbeat dad" lists to terrorist "no fly lists" to the inner workings of voting machines, tax calculators, and even Predator drones. (Professor Danielle Citron, to whom I owe much of the following analysis, has documented many more examples.) So perhaps Lawrence Lessig's profound observation, *code is law*, has a corollary: *law is code*. That is to say, if software is increasingly the guise under which laws manifest in our daily lives, it behooves a democratic society to begin treating that software as law.

Software that executes law ("codelaw") presents a number of challenges to a democracy. The simplest are bugs, coding errors that lead to wrong results. Bugs present relatively easy cases: like potholes, if you find them, you fix them. As with potholes, the reality may be harder—a common excuse we heard was that the state just didn't have the money to hire someone to patch the software—but in principle everyone agreed that these problems should be fixed.

The larger democratic challenge arises when codelaw isn't so much *wrong* as it is *not necessarily right*: while it may not contradict the law, neither is this particular implementation the only way to construe the law. In short, the software assumes a particular *interpretation* of an ambiguous law, and in so doing, it essentially *makes* law.

By using codelaw to carry out policy, government shoves analog pegs into round holes, resulting in the same loss of fidelity that occurs when music is ripped into digital formats. The 20th-century administrative state in America relies on a particular cascade of power, carefully tweaked to ensure democratic accountability: the elected legislature passes law; an administrative agency, with public input, promulgates rules to implement that legislation; and agency workers carry out the

rules. The gradual replacement of agency workers with codelaw reveals the cracks in this system. Because legislatures lack time and expertise to tight-fit laws, they delegate specifics to agencies for further rulemaking. But rulemaking isn't comprehensive either: nuanced decision-making still resides in agency workers who interpret and apply the rules. Codelaw takes discretion out of the hands of human beings.

Eliminating discretion can be good governance: people are notoriously susceptible to bias, corruption, and just plain meanness. The real problem for democracy is the gap between the round curves of human laws and the sharp edges of computer code. Agencies have traditionally promulgated rules expecting people to fill the gaps later. With codelaw, the people who fill the gaps are not trained government employees, but software developers, often with no substantive knowledge of the law nor accountability to the general public.

So what can be done to ensure that increasingly automated codelaw remains accountable to the people?

First, software should be fully open for inspection. Democracy depends on laws and rules being accessible to the people; codelaw should be no exception. But because only the best-resourced lobbyists can bug-check machine code, mere transparency is not enough. There must be meaningful participation.

Existing principles that cover traditional (legal) code offer guidance on handling codelaw. For example, most state and federal rulemaking require a period of public "notice and comment," during which concerned citizens can offer input. A publicly accessible quality assurance cycle would create a parallel process for codelaw. So when Massachusetts prepares to release Beacon 2.0, it should enable people like my colleagues at MLRI to submit tricky food stamp scenarios to test that the software gets the right results.

In the long run, new forms of "semantic code" that's both human-readable and machine-executable may narrow the gap between fuzzy

legislation and binary software. “Legalese” as a software language may not deepen public confidence, but it would at least enable more precision for lawmakers.

Finally, we need a more nuanced understanding of the appropriate role of codelaw. Deployed properly, software can ameliorate systemic human failings such as sexism and susceptibility to scams. But conversely, we should also recognize the limits of software, and identify the aspects of governance best entrusted to thinking and feeling human beings. Codelaw may herald a terrifying dystopia where machines arbitrarily decide our fate. But it also invites us to imagine a world where software augments our greatest capacity for just, compassionate, and human governance.

About the Author

Gene Koo is a Fellow at the Berkman Center at Internet & Society, where he researches a variety of topics from open education to moral values embedded in video games. Prior to Berkman, he worked for Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, where he developed informational websites for lawyers and the general public, and also helped launch the Center for Legal Aid Education. He holds a J.D. and B.A. from Harvard.

DIGITAL NATIVES AS SELF-ACTUALIZING CITIZENS

W. Lance Bennett

“ But where some see crisis, others of us simply see changing patterns of engagement, and opportunities that will reshape the notion of citizenship in this new century. ”

Citizenship styles have changed dramatically in recent years. Young people in post-industrial democracies are less motivated by a sense of civic duty than were earlier generations. In particular, as noted by scholars, they are less interested in joining formal groups or political parties, less inclined to seek information via conventional news outlets, and more likely to avoid connecting to government through activities such as voting.²⁸ The famed sociologist Robert Putnam and others describe these trends as nothing short of a crisis in citizenship and civic engagement.

But where some see crisis, others of us simply see changing patterns of

28 Delli Carpini, M. X., & Keeter, S. (1996). *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*. New Haven: Yale University Press, Zukin, C., Keeter, S., Andolina, M., Jenkins, K., & Delli Carpini, M. X. (2006). *A new engagement? Political participation, civic life, and the changing American citizen*. New York: Oxford University Press.

engagement, and opportunities that will reshape the notion of citizenship in this new century. More than anything else, more than creating new government structures or adding new agencies or changing how we vote, our country desperately needs a change in our approach to engaging young citizens in community and government life to reinvigorate our democracy in the 21st century.

Learning to become an effective citizen does not happen automatically, and isn't enhanced in formal settings such as schools and youth programs that are often not attuned to the unique communication and social identity styles of young digital natives. Schools typically emphasize individualistic, knowledge-heavy, spectator styles of citizenship. Young "self-actualizing" citizens are connecting with peers through loose social networks, frequently online, focusing on lifestyle issues. They gravitate towards highly interactive modes, particularly on gaming and social networking websites. But, these young citizens are not solely focused on entertainment. Public-issue websites like Taking IT Global, YouthNoise, and election campaigns that enable social networking are also very popular. The bottom line is that digital natives largely do not participate in civic affairs out of a sense of duty or obligation but a sense of personal fulfillment.

The dramatic shift in citizenship styles can be cast in simple terms as a contrast between old century Dutiful Citizens (DC) and new century self-Actualizing Citizens (AC).²⁹ Dutiful Citizens have the following characteristics:

- Obligation to participate in government-centered activities
- Voting is the core democratic act, supported by surrounding knowledge and contact with government
- Mass media news informs about issues and government

29 Bennett, W. L. (2008). Changing citizenship in the digital age. In W. L. Bennett (Ed.), *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth*. (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press).

- Joins civil society organizations and/or expresses interests through political parties or interest groups that typically employ one-way conventional communication to mobilize supporters

Contrast this with the orientation of *Actualizing Citizens*:

- Diminished sense of government obligation—higher sense of individual purpose
- Voting is less meaningful than other, more personally defined acts such as consumerism, community volunteering, or transnational activism
- Mistrust of media and politicians is reinforced by negative mass media environment.
- Favors loose networks of community action—often established or sustained through friendships and peer relations and thin social ties maintained by interactive information technologies

Given these stark, clearly visible differences, why do public schools continue to teach young people as if they are their grandparents—sitting in their armchair, reading their afternoon paper, looking forward to their lodge meeting that night? They do this, in part, because it is both politically safe and easily testable. But perhaps the persistence of ineffective approaches to civics in public schools is simply a reflection that most school policy officers, curriculum developers, education researchers, and many older teachers are, themselves, *Dutiful Citizens*.

Schools should help students to develop their own public voices by using various digital media, allowing students to find their own means of engaging with and learning about issues, and forming peer-learning communities. However, despite some glimmerings of a national school civics reform movement, there is little immediate promise of school reform that will introduce more balanced learning goals for *Actualized*

Citizens. The ideal learning environment would find ways to combine the two styles. It would include identifying the individual preferences for personal expression and peer-to-peer discovery of issues within relatively open digital media spaces. It would also offer learning paths for issue resolution and public problem solving that included, among other options, contact with appropriate government officials and processes.

We are unlikely to find more balanced approaches to civic learning in schools. The integration of new civic styles in various learning environments remains a formidable challenge. Many adults (teachers, youth workers, scholars, policy makers) are unaware or unappreciative of the civic identity shift that has occurred among many young people. Similarly, many of the online communities developed by governments and youth experts fail to utilize the power of social networking involving participatory media in relatively open, democratic contexts. Too often when adult-run institutions such as schools, governments, NGOs, or community organizations build digital media projects, they impose limits on what young people can and “should” do. As a result, the more sustainable projects often strike young people as inauthentic and lacking credibility, and often fail.³⁰ At the same time, when young people are left to their own devices, they may lack models for effective communication, organizing, and democratic practice.

We need to create or identify existing, informal learning environments within which young people can learn civic skills and practice citizenship. We should consider creative ways to link those informal environments back to formal organizations such as schools, libraries, and youth organizations so that they indirectly aid the civic missions of those formal organizations.

Young people are creative and resilient. They are finding new and innovative ways to engage politically, often using online communities.

30 Coleman, S. (2008). Doing it for themselves: Management versus autonomy in youth e-citizenship. In W. L. Bennett (Ed.), *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth*.

For example, in fair trade and sweatshop campaigns, young people are using their power as consumers to communicate directly with corporations. In these and other ways, many “netizens” are forming online communities that Mimi Ito calls “networked publics.” These communities may have novel, and as yet, little, explored civic aspects. In a fascinating example of democratic action by young people in an arena of their own choosing, Earl and Schussman describe music fans petitioning companies to give their favorite musicians greater exposure or more creative freedom.³¹

All of these efforts are in their infancy. Challenges abound. We need to know what kinds of youth are attracted to what kinds of online environments. We also need to better understand to what degree online engagement networks reach youth who are at risk for democratic participation, as opposed to simply reproducing the involvement of high socio-economic status youth who participate actively in politics anyway. And even the most promising youth-built projects often lack the resources to make them sustainable and available to larger audiences. Yet when government and foundations attempt to create platforms for engagement, the efforts are generally well intentioned, but driven largely by old-fashioned notions of citizenship and engagement that often miss the mark.

Scholars and practitioners can forge more productive partnerships with sponsors to create research-driven models for digital environments that are more in tune with emerging civic styles. Those environments should offer rich resources and peer training in the public communication, organizing, and advocacy skills to help young people develop more effective voices and action.³² And then, the adults should step back and learn from what happens. Above all, the vitality of our democracy rests

31 Earl, J. & Schussman, A. (2008). Contesting cultural control: Youth culture and online petitioning. In W.L. Bennett (Ed.) *Civic Life Online: Learning How Digital Media Can Engage Youth*.

32 See the Civic Learning Online project: www.engagedyouth.org.

on reconciling changing youth civic styles with the more traditional notions of citizen engagement that still characterize most schools, governments, and public interest spheres.

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A MILLENNIAL UPGRADE FOR AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

David B. Smith

“ The greatest influence of 21st century technologies on the democratic process has taken place in the hearts and minds of individuals, not on computer screens or over the Web. ”

A few years ago I was asked to define the very large generation of teens and twenty-somethings who had recently come of age, my generation, known as the Millennials. I began with the notion that our generation refuses to be defined, partially due to our diversity and partially due to our arrogance and ignorance. At the same time, I was asked to provide some insights into the shared values and principles of the Internet. I began to see some similarities between the Internet and my generation (perhaps this is why we are often referred to as the Dot.com, Net and iGeneration).

Over the past couple of centuries, it seems as though the people have abdicated power to our local, state, and federal decision making bodies. Individuals have grown more and more powerless by allowing ourselves to get pushed to the outside of the political process. We have

relied upon our elected officials to identify the problems they want to fix. They have sold us on these issues, informed us about how they plan to solve them, and then gone about doing all of this with very limited input from us, the citizenry.

The greatest influence of 21st century technologies on the democratic process has taken place in the hearts and minds of individuals, not on computer screens or over the Web. We often talk about how new gadgets or emerging technology will change the way our government interacts with our electorate, but trying to apply these innovations directly to our current, arcane institutions misses the boat. Our Founding Fathers created a system that rebuffs change, particularly radical and significant shifts. We must look for venues where new ways of doing things can bear greater fruit—through individual and then institutional renewal. The phenomenon of the Internet and the various technologies related to it have changed the underlying values of individuals and society as a whole.

The Center for Individual and Institutional Renewal focuses on changing the way people think so as to change the way we act collectively and influence institutions. This methodology is based on the premise that our institutions reject change, rarely lead, and mostly follow the dominant culture. If this is an accurate assumption, then our first target for change should be the hearts and minds of citizens. We must then change how they act, which will ultimately lead to an institutional response.

Changing the Way We Think

The values of a world bogged down by television broadcasting, mass media distribution, and mass production leave a lot to be desired by Millennials. Traditional newspapers have nearly been run out of business, television shows are trying, and failing, to keep pace by inserting interactive themes and opportunities for viewer engagement, and our

elected officials have found themselves in the basement in terms of approval ratings and voter participation.

Contrary to broadcast media, the dominant values of the Internet include (but are certainly not limited to): transparency, openness, worthiness of varying views, collaboration, and horizontal communications. Again, I do not think it is a coincidence that these values resonate with Millennials as both personal values and ones we hope to see in our leaders. We value individual opinion and listen to our peers at a much higher rate than older generations. We feel a greater sense of self worth and empowerment as our thoughts, talents, and ideas are published alongside those of older generations.

The sheer size and networked structure of the Internet and its many-to-many communications platform changes the dominant culture of top-down, militaristic, hierarchical chains of command. Innate to this structure are concepts such as the wisdom of the crowd, permanent innovative processes, and respect for the notion that each individual holds a part of the larger truth. The Internet reinforces the Millennials' view that inclusion of all voices helps us find solutions to collective problems.

Changing the Way We Act

We crave instant gratification in all areas of our lives; celebrity culture and materialism run rampant in our streets. Contrary to the opinion of others, I understand that these personal choices reflect the value of our times for young people and the opportunity costs of participating in a political system that is broken. As voter participation has sunk, we are seeing increasing rates of social entrepreneurship. We are not apathetic; we are simply making a decision as to where our time is more valuable and needed.

The Millennial Generation participates in community service at a higher rate than any past generation, and this is mostly due to the instant gratification and tangible results that come from these actions. Young

leaders are stepping forward and starting non-profit organizations and creating socially conscious business ventures. Our time is best spent, we believe, working directly on solving our community's problems.

We have a nearly complete loss in faith in our political institutions. There is a disconnect between our own needs and those of our elected officials.

Changing Our Institutions

We need to upgrade our system of government to Democracy 2.0, a term coined by Mobilize.org and its extended network. Democracy 2.0 empowers citizens to identify problems facing our nation, propose solutions, and actively implement these solutions in our communities. These citizen-led programs provide pilot projects for local governments that will then be able to evaluate, and ultimately to institutionalize, the best solutions for their communities.

This deliberative democracy format engages citizens in civic problem solving and social entrepreneurship. This process leads to a much more informed and engaged citizenry where the citizen is part resource, expert, shareholder, and a member of a community think tank.

One example of this process is the recent launch of TRAIN (TRANsportation Assistance for INterns). This effort began when a group of college students from around the country began discussing their difficulties affording a summer internship. Some had interned previously and had to go into debt to pay for simple things like transportation to and from their jobs, while others were unable to take an internship due to the costs associated with them. Even with programs that provide college credit for which you can receive student loans, there are additional costs that make internships impractical and unaffordable for many students. Together, they decided to move their conversation from complaining to action and formed TRAIN.

The students began with a service learning approach and researched

the best practices and lessons learned from cities around the country and the world. Next, they took direct action and hosted TRAIN happy hours. Using online social networks, they were quickly and easily able to reach out to hundreds of supporters. The happy hours served as a public education opportunities as well as fundraisers. The funds raised during these events provide travel stipends to a limited number of students. TRAIN also connects students with non-profits and government agencies to find ways to support interns, and advocates with the public transportation providers to reduce the cost to these individuals.

Using dialogue and deliberation techniques in combination with new technology, we can explore the shared values, principles, and needs of communities. Using interactive keypad voting and 21st-century town hall meetings, we can achieve joint decision-making and policy recommendations. Using wiki technology, online dialogues, and web forums, we can further refine these ideas, include more voices in the process, and create agreed-upon language to present to our decision-making bodies. We can also use e-mail advocacy, online petitions, and text messaging as a means of further organizing a greater part of the population to learn about and support this community-created solution.

Still, most citizen-led approaches culminate in elected officials still needing to be convinced of the merit of the proposed solution. The actual power of community voices is still minimal and requires old-school community organizing techniques to support the truth that the wisdom of the crowd has greater merit than professional lobbyists and single-issue constituency groups. This is the major upgrade that has to happen to move us from Democracy 1.0 remnants to a Democracy 2.0 world.

About the Author

David B. Smith is the Founder of Mobilize.org, and is now the Executive Director of The National Conference on Citizenship.

GLOSSARY

Astroturf Groups

Apparently grassroots-based citizen groups or coalitions that are primarily conceived, created and/or funded by corporations, industry trade associations, and political interests or public relations firms. These are generally PR firms bankrolled by corporations that are trying to shape public opinion to push favorable state or federal legislation through.

Beta

The preliminary or testing stage of a new software or hardware product. Beta versions test the supportability, manufacturability and overall consumer reaction to the new product. Microsoft released a public beta of its Windows Vista platform in January 2005, using feedback from the beta users to make changes. Windows Vista was released as an official product in 2006. There are also many products on the Web that are said to be in “perpetual beta,” meaning people can use them but they are continuously changing. Gmail is an example of a perpetual beta.

Blog (See Web Log)

Blogosphere

The collection of all blogs that creates an ecosystem or community of bloggers who link to one another’s entries and can often create a group or “swarm” that serves to illuminate or advocate for a position or issue.

Blogstorm

When a large amount of activity, information and opinion erupts around a particular subject or controversy in the blogosphere. Also known as a blog swarm. For instance, the blogosphere created a “swarm” that brought to light the mistakes in Dan Rather’s reporting of President Bush’s national guard service.

Checks and Balances

The government is divided into three areas of power (also known as separation of powers): Executive (the president), Legislative (the Congress), and Judicial (the Courts). Each branch has its own jobs to fulfill, but each branch has the ability to keep the others in check. For example: Congress can pass a law, but the President can veto that law, but then Congress (with a 2/3rd vote) can override the President's veto. Another example: the President can appoint judges to the Supreme Court but the Senate must approve them.

Craigslist

An online network of communities that offers local classified advertisements in areas such as jobs, housing, cars, services, local activities and even romance. Craigslist has classifieds and forums for 567 cities in over 50 countries worldwide.

*Cybercitizen (see Netizen)**Data-mining*

The process of sorting through large amounts of data and picking out relevant information. Data-mining programs allow users to analyze data from many different dimensions or angles, categorize it, and summarize the relationships identified.

Digital Divide

The gap between people who have access to digital and information technology and those without access to it.

Digital Immigrant

A person who grew up without digital technology but was able to learn and adapt to it.

Digital Native

A person who has grown up with digital technology such as computers, the Internet, cell phones and MP3s. Young people, ages 15-29, also known as GenY or Millennials, are often called digital natives.

Echo Chambers

Online communities of like-minded people in which information, ideas or beliefs are amplified or reinforced by transmission within this "closed" space.

Echo Chamber Effect

When a piece of information is passed between many like-minded people, repeated, overheard and repeated again until most people assume that the newer (more extreme) variation of the story is true. The echo chamber effect can become a massive game of telephone on the Internet.

Facebook

A social networking website that was originally designed for college students, but is now open to anyone 13 years of age or older. Facebook users can create and customize their own profiles with photos, videos, and information about themselves. Friends can browse the profiles of other friends and write messages on their pages. See more at <http://www.techterms.com/definition/facebook>.

Federalist Papers

Written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay under the pseudonym "Publius," the Federalist Papers are a group of 85 articles advocating for the ratification of the United States Constitution.

Freedom of Information Act

A federal government law that allows for citizens to request the disclosure of documents from federal agencies. Government agencies are required to disclose the requested records unless they can be lawfully withheld under nine exceptions. See more at <http://www.usdoj.gov/oip/index.html>.

Hashtag (term of use on Twitter)

Used on Twitter to tag certain feeds. By using a '#' before a word or phrase it automatically links this 'hashtag' or keyword to a website that compiles all of these tags with links to the original feed.

Millennial Generation

Also known as Generation Y these are the group of people born from around 1980 to 1995.

Mindshare

The development of consumer awareness and popularity that is used in advertising and promoting a product. Marketers try to popularize their product so that the brand can be associated with the whole line of product. Kleenex and Band-Aid are two examples.

Mobilize.org

Formerly Mobilizing America's Youth is an "all-partisan network dedicated to educating, empowering, and energizing young people to increase our civic engagement and political participation." It works to show young people how their lives are impacted by public policy and in turn, how they can impact public policy.

MoveOn.org

MoveOn is a non-profit public advocacy group that focuses on supporting Democratic Party candidates and causes. It exemplifies a way for busy but concerned citizens to find their political voice in a system dominated by big money and big media.

MySpace

A popular social networking site open to anyone that features an interactive, user-created network of friends, personal profiles, blogs, groups, photos, music and videos.

Netizen (also known as a Cybercitizen)

A person actively involved in online communities.

Open-source Software

Software created with an open source code available to anybody. This type of software is freely distributed and permits users to use, change and improve the software and then redistribute the modified or unmodified form.

Porkbusters

An effort led by mostly conservative and libertarian bloggers to cut pork barrel, or wasteful, spending by the U.S. Congress.

Pew Internet and American Life Project

A non-profit organization that explores the impact of the Internet on children, families, communities, the workplace, schools, healthcare and civic/political life.

Six Degrees of Separation

The idea that if a person is one step away from each person he or she knows and two steps away from each person who is known by one of the people he or she knows, then everyone is an average of six "steps" away from each person on Earth.

Social Networking Website

A site that provides a virtual community for people interested in a particular subject or just to “hang out.” Members create a profile in which they can list as many or as few personal attributes as they choose (including photos, likes, dislikes or biographical data). Examples of such sites are Facebook and MySpace.

Skype

A computer program that allows you to make calls from your computer—free to other people on Skype and cheap to landlines and cell phones around the world.

Superpoking

An extension application to the native “poke” option on Facebook. A poke is a very simple application that enables Facebook users to in effect “tap” another person. The only way to respond to a poke is to poke back. A superpoke is basically anything you want, including “dance with,” “tickle,” “cuddle,” “high five,” “hug,” and even “drop kick.”

Swiftboating

Political jargon created in the 2004 presidential campaign used as a strong derogatory or belittling description of some kind of attack that the speaker considers unfair or untrue.

Tagging

A keyword or term assigned to a piece of information (a picture, a geographic map, a blog entry, a video clip etc.), which describes the item and allows for keyword-based classification and search of information.

Twitter

A free social networking tool that allows families, friends and co-workers to stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent answers to the question: What are you doing?

YouTube

A video-sharing website that allows users to easily upload, view and share video clips.

Webcast

A media file distributed over the internet that can be accessed by many users at once. Like a TV broadcast, a webcast can be distributed live or recorded.

Web Log (often shortened to Blog)

A website that is usually maintained by an individual with regular entries listed in reverse chronological order. It can contain interests, descriptions of events, or other media such as graphics or video.

Wiki

A single page or collection of web pages designed to enable anyone to contribute or modify joint projects like reports or lists or research data. Wikis are used to create collaborative and community websites. The best known wiki is Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia.

ABOUT THE EDITORS

Allison Fine is a successful social entrepreneur and writer dedicated to understanding the intersection between social change efforts and social media. Her first book, *Momentum: Igniting Social Change in the Connected Age* (Jossey-Bass/Wiley, 2006), was the winner of the Terry McAdams National Book Award and the Axiom Business Book Award.

She is a Senior Fellow on the Democracy Team at Demos: A Network for Change and Action in New York City, and a Senior Editor at the Personal Democracy Forum. Her paper, “Social Citizens^(beta)” about the ways that young people are using social media for social change was released in May 2008 by The Case Foundation. She is a prolific writer and her articles have been published in the Boston Globe, San Jose Mercury Times and the San Francisco Chronicle. She is also a frequent contributor to the Chronicle of Philanthropy, and The Huffington Post.

Fine was the Founder and Executive Director of Innovation Network, Inc. from 1992-2004 and the C.E.O. of The E-Volve Foundation in 2004-2006.

Micah L. Sifry is co-founder and editor of the Personal Democracy Forum, a website and annual conference that covers the ways technology is changing politics, and TechPresident.com, an award-winning

group blog on how the American presidential candidates are using the web and how the web is using them. In addition to organizing the annual Personal Democracy Forum conference with his partner Andrew Rasiej, he consults on how political organizations, campaigns, non-profits and media entities can adapt to and thrive in a networked world. In that capacity, he has been a senior technology adviser to the Sunlight Foundation since its founding in 2006.

From 1997-2006, he worked closely with Public Campaign, a non-profit, non-partisan organization focused on comprehensive campaign finance reform, as its senior analyst. Prior to that, Sifry was an editor and writer with *The Nation* magazine for thirteen years.

He is the co-author with Nancy Watzman of *Is That a Politician in Your Pocket? Washington on \$2 Million a Day* (John Wiley & Sons, 2004), author of *Spoiling for a Fight: Third-Party Politics in America* (Routledge, 2002) and co-edited *The Iraq War Reader* (Touchstone, 2003) and *The Gulf War Reader* (Times Books, 1991). He is also an adjunct professor at the Political Science Department of the City University of New York/Graduate Center, where he teaches a course called "Writing Politics." His personal blog is at micah.sifry.com.

Andrew Rasiej is a social entrepreneur, futurist, and Founder of Personal Democracy Forum, an annual conference and community website about the intersection of politics and technology. He is also the co-founder of techPresident, an award winning group blog that covers how the 2008 presidential candidates are using the web, and how voter generated content (a term he coined) is affecting the campaign. In the 2004 presidential race he served as Chairman of the Howard Dean Technology Advisory Council. In 2005 he ran a highly visible campaign for Public Advocate of New York City, running in the Democratic primary on a platform to bring low cost wireless Internet access to all New Yorkers. He co-writes a bi weekly column for Politico.com and he appears

regularly on CNN, ABC, NPR, and other major news outlets as a commentator on technology and politics.

Rasiej maintains the position of senior technology adviser for the Sunlight Foundation, a Washington D.C. based organization that focuses on using technology to expose corruption in Congress and facilitates citizen engagement and oversight.

Rasiej is the founder of www.MOUSE.org (Making Opportunities for Upgrading Schools and Education), an educational non-profit organization started in 1997 to connect public schools to the Internet. Currently, MOUSE trains students in public schools to provide technology support for their schools, teachers, and fellow students. MOUSE is active in over 100 public schools in New York City and has programs based on its student led tech support model operating in over 20 countries around the world.

Rasiej is a co-founder of Mideastwire.com, which is a Beirut based news service which translates opinion pieces from newspapers in all 22 Arab countries, Iran, and the Arab media Diaspora and makes them available over the Web to English speaking governments, corporations, media, and educational institutions.

In the aftermath of the September 11th tragedy, Rasiej helped organize local technology professionals to provide relief and recovery to small businesses and schools in lower Manhattan. Soon after, he proposed the creation of a National Tech Corps that would augment the National Guard and provide emergency technical, communication, and database support in the event of a natural disaster or terrorist strike. This idea, now called NetGuard, was approved in a bill by the US Senate by a vote of 97 to 0 and is now being implemented by the Department of Homeland Security.

Rasiej is a member of the Board of Directors of the social innovation conference Pop!Tech. He is a graduate of the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art and past recipient of the

prestigious David Rockefeller Fellowship Program administered by the New York City Partnership. He lives and works in New York City.

Joshua Levy is a writer and web strategist whose work explores the intersections of technology, politics, and activism. He is Associate Editor of techPresident and Personal Democracy Forum, two sites that cover how technology is changing politics.

Levy is a frequent commentator on the use of the Web in the 2008 election and social activism. He is a podcaster for NPR's Sunday Soapbox series, a filmmaker exploring the nature of social action in virtual worlds, and a blogger whose analysis has been featured in the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Huffington Post, Salon, NPR, ABC News, AOL Politics, the CBC, Sky News, and XM Radio. He has an MFA in nonfiction media from Hunter College in New York.

ABOUT PERSONAL DEMOCRACY FORUM

Personal Democracy Forum is an annual conference and online community (www.personaldemocracy.com) that covers how technology and the Internet are changing politics. Started in 2003 by Andrew Rasiej and Micah L. Sifry, Personal Democracy Forum (PdF) has become the seminal gathering place for the growing community of leaders and activists from the increasingly interconnected worlds of technology, politics, journalism, blogging, and advocacy who want to make sure they stay on top of what's coming next.

The annual Personal Democracy Forum conference is a cross-partisan event. Keynoters in past years have included: Google CEO Eric Schmidt, Stanford University Professor Larry Lessig, New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman, the Christian Coalition's Ralph Reed, Elizabeth Edwards, SEIU President Andy Stern, Arianna Huffington, Craig Newmark of Craigslist, political strategist Joe Trippi, and bloggers Markos Moulitsas, Hugh Hewitt, Jane Hamsher, Matt Stoller, and Josh Marshall.

PdF is also the home of techPresident.com, a group blog on how the candidates are using the web and how the web is using them, which was launched in February 2007. TechPresident.com covers the gamut of online campaign activities: from campaign websites, online

advertising and e-mail lists to video postings on YouTube and who's got the fastest growing group of friends on social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook. TechPresident's "Daily Digest" e-mail newsletter has become a must-read for the many journalists, bloggers and activists who are watching how voter-generated content is changing the contours of the electoral process, and are learning how to adapt and thrive in this new world. In September 2007, TechPresident won the prestigious Knight-Batten Award for Innovations in Journalism.

