

**A High-tech Illusion or a Solution?**

**American Political Scientists' Perspectives on E-Democracy**

**電子化民主行不行？美國政治學界的評估與經驗**

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#### **Abstract**

As the application of the Internet has stretched from business and education to public services, the U.S. and Taiwan have put great attention on how governmental agencies facilitate their services. However, these questions remain unanswered: Will governmental investment on infrastructures contribute to the quality of democratic participation? What political scientists see the influence of applying the Internet to people's political life? What subjects in this new field have been addressed over the past years and what fields needs more research? This paper provides an overview of the literature of research of E-democracy in U.S. It outlines how the studies about influence of Internet on today's democracy. Based on Americans' experiences, I provide suggestions for the development of E-democracy in Taiwan.

#### **中文摘要**

繼電子化政府之後，美國與台灣同樣選擇了發展電子化民主作為應用網路於政治過程的重大工程。電子化政府著眼於透過網路提供便民的措施，而電子化民主則強調透過網路進行民主的深化。兩者看似相似，但在執行及效果上卻大相逕庭。執行上，後者所涉及的社會正義問題更為複雜，而在效果上則難及於電子化政府。本文將美國學界對電子化民主的相關文獻加以提理，並依學術研究與實務兩個脈絡提出報告。在學術研究面，本文列出美國在電子化民主上已經開展的九大研究課題並簡述其研究成果；在實務操作面則依據實證的發現及學者已經進行的批判提出建議。本文總結學者的發現指出：電子化民主的推行必須從建立立法機構對於透過網路提供選民服務的信心開始，而非以建造虛擬論壇的方式進行。國內政治學界對虛擬社群、民意變化，以及政治傳播的研究才剛起步，因此探討電子化民主的可行性與作法不失為一個科際合作的機會。

**Keywords:** E-democracy (電子化民主), E-government (電子化政府), political communication (政治傳播), virtual democracy (虛擬民主), virtual community (虛擬社群)

# **A High-tech Illusion or a Solution? American Political Scientists' Perspectives on E-Democracy**

## **1. Introduction**

Like TV, the Internet is becoming as common as electricity in people's daily life. Political scientists and sociologists in the United States and the Britain have been studying E-government (i.e. the application of the Internet on governmental services) and E-democracy (i.e. on democratic participation and policymaking) since the late 1990s and have paved way for scholars to explore these young fields. Therefore, this research note is aimed to provide an overview of the studies and summarized the suggestions abstracted from the literature.

The scope of the research on the Internet influence on politics is broad. E-government and E-democracy are two major research branches in political science, public administration, and policy studies. E-government is the study of how governments adopt online facilities to enhance public services; E-democracy, which covers almost every perspective of citizens' political life, is the study of the interaction between citizens and the government, of strengthening the legitimacy of governance, of governments' policymaking process, and the quality of those policies.

Both E-government and E-democracy are topics covering multiple disciplines. E-government is application-oriented. It has been attracting students from economics, public administration, computer science, software engineering, geography, and website designing. This field focuses on how to enhance and evaluate the interface of interaction between and among governmental branches and citizens. E-democracy, on the other hand, covering issues concerned by scholars of public administration, area studies, psychology, sociology, communication studies, and philosophy.

The literature search for this research note was conducted from 2001 and 2003. The databases used for this paper include JSTORE (political science journals), Ingenta, SSCI (Web of Science), Annual Reviews, and the online catalog of the Library of Congress. The keywords used for searching the literature include e-democracy, electronic democracy, e-government, e-ruling, and representation. To avoid the omission of important literature, I subscribed mailing lists, such as dgOnline (Digital Government Online), DoWire (Democracies Online Newswire), and dynnet. Even though, the scope of search is narrowed down to political science journals.

With the scope of literature search defined, this paper provides an overview of E-democracy studies and focus on how scholars summarize the influence of applying

the Internet to policymaking processes and to enhance representation.<sup>1</sup> Besides pointing out the gap between what research has been done what needs to be done in Section 2, I summarize the concerns scholars hold in Section 3 and suggest how the government avoid the problem in Section 4. Section 5 is the conclusion and a direction to future work.

## **2. E-democracy: What do we know about it?**

E-democracy means applying information technology in political processes, which range from elections to policymaking. The first part of this section categorizes the subjects about the role of the Internet that American political researchers have studied; the second part presents how those subjects were expanded to the study of civil society.

The 2000 American presidential election is the first time the political parties and candidates formally used the Internet for fundraising and advertising. Before 2000, American political scientists primarily examined the Internet as a campaign tool rather than a utility of interpersonal communication about politics. Around the year 2000, scholars started to shift attention to E-democracy topics when political virtual communities became popular and when voters became used to use websites and E-mails to voice out their political views. Therefore, I divide this section by the year 2001 to outline the literature. Note that there is no specific time when scholars swiftly change their research interest. Instead, political scientists (contrasting to political activists and campaign strategists) have been consistently dubious about the positive influence of the Internet use, so readers will find some arguments and attitudes about the Internet initiated before 2001 will reappear after 2002. The purpose of the division is to help present the *gradual* change of research interest around the 2000 presidential election.

### **(1) The study of political use of the Internet before 2001**

Politicians, activists, and campaign practitioners before 2000 saw positively that the Internet can be used to change people's political preferences. Scholars acknowledged this potential but cautioned that the impact of the Internet could be less than most people have been expected. The five subjects below evidence the development of this optimistic view, and the next section show the development of the cautious agreement.

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1 There are seven fields associated with E-democracy: Representation, Personalization and Notification, Decision-Making and Leadership, Consultation and E-Rulemaking, Accountability, Policy Implementation, Citizen Participation and Online Dialogue Steven Clift, [Global E-Democracy Trends Presentation Outline](http://www.publicus.net/speaker.html), Decembr 16 2002, Available: <http://www.publicus.net/speaker.html>, May 24 2003..

First, *studying the Internet is a tactical utility for grass-root mobilization* (Rash; G. Browning, & Weitzner, D.; Wittig). While Rash (1997) and Browning (1996) recommend group leaders to use web sites or E-mails to organize people. Although a positive case shows that in 1996 many Internet users were mobilized to overturn the Communications Decency Act (CDA), researchers have sensed that this kind of effort would not affect the behavior or attitude of legislators very much (Pal; Rash).

Second, *studying the Internet is a tactical utility in election campaigns* (Weber; Davis; Natta; Dulio; Bruce Bimber; Klotz, "Virtual Criticism: Negative Advertising on Th Internet in the 1996 Sente Races"; Rash; G. Browning, & Weitzner, D.). The series of research on election campaigns shows that E-mail is the most frequently used and recommended tactical utility in election campaigns. Bimber's (1998a) study shows that in the 1996 election year, 26% of U.S. adults had access to the Internet, and about 25% of them have been reached by E-mail, the "barrage" (Davis & Cummings, 2000). In the 1996 Senate election, the Internet contains more positive materials than negative messages, but nontraditional media such as the Internet and MTV had little influence on political attitudes and behaviors (Klotz, "Virtual Criticism: Negative Advertising on Th Internet in the 1996 Sente Races"). The effect of web sites on voters in campaigns lags far behind TV advertising (Klotz, "Positive Spin: Senate Campaigning on the Web"). Besides, web sites are used to solicit donation. For example, John McCain used a web site to raise an impressing amount of campaign funds for the 2000 Republican Primary, in the speed of \$18,000 per hour (Natta). All research here suggests that the Internet was an immature tool in campaigns around 2000, compared to TV news and newspapers.

Third, *studying the Internet is an information source to increase voters' political knowledge* (T. Johnson, Braima, M., & Sothirajah, J.; B. Bimber; Schneider). The literature shows that American political scientists hold a more prudent view in this issue. For example, Bimber, as one of the pioneers conducting series of research on this topic, points out that the increase of information access and education is not associated with political engagement and sophistication. As he writes,

"There is no evidence of a historical correlation between expanding information levels in society and increasing rates of voting participation. Neither voter participation rates nor overall levels of public affairs in the United States have been positively correlated with the evolution of telecommunication technologies, or with increasing education levels" (Bimber, 1998a).

Fourth, *studying the Internet as an alternative to traditional ballots* (Solop; Alvarez; Howley; G. Browning, & Weitzner, D.). Browning and Weitzner (1996) propose using online voting to energize grass-roots organizations and to influence politicians in the Congress. Solop (2000) discusses the bright future of democracy

derived from the experimental use of the Internet ballot system and the 575% increase over 1996 in voter turnout in Arizona Democratic Primary. The discussion of this subtopic leads to the discussion of accelerating of the digital divide (Alvarez).

Finally, *studying the Internet as a medium or a forum where citizens express their opinions* (Ranerup; McLeod). Scholars also pay their attention to how individual citizen uses the Internet in his/her daily life, such as using E-mails, attending online public forums, using newsgroups or mailing lists, and joining online chat rooms. Bimber (1999) finds out that using E-mail does not change voters' attitudes toward contact politicians. Mcleod, Scheufele, and Moy (1999) point out that public forums are "compatible with normative democratic standards because they appear to have considerable appeal to respondents". More importantly, Ranerup (2000) finds that citizens are much more active to use online public forums than politicians and civil servants. This view is critical in the following discussion of E-democracy.

## (2) The study of political use of the Internet after 2000

The year 2001 was the heart-breaking year for numerous dotcoms, but interestingly the discussion about E-government and E-democracy soared. Social scientists started to ponder the consequences of applying the Internet to the political aspects of life, while political scientists remain cautious about the consequence of the application. This section outlines the E-government and E-democracy as new fields of research in political science, public administration, and other social science disciplines in the U.S.

First, as mentioned earlier, studies of E-government address ways to enhancing governmental services, such as enhancing the management inside the executive branch of the government and enhancing the interface between citizens and the offices of the government. Holmes created the term "Administration to Citizen" (or "A to C"), an analogy to "business to customer" (or "B to C"), to promote a top-down governmental service. Similarly, Fountain suggests that to build a "virtual state," an efficient format of bureaucracy that is based on efficient information flow, a government needs to enhance bureaucracy capability, networking organizations, facilitating data accessibility.

Chadwick and May clarify the scope of E-government studies and point out the limitations of E-government studies. In a comparison of the function of E-government across countries, they conclude that the participatory function (i.e. deliberation, participation, and enhanced democracy) is an important perspective of enhancing a digitalized government. Nevertheless, the construction of E-government is a top-down way that omits this participatory function (Ono and Zavodny).

This participatory function is then moved to E-democracy that emphasizes the

bottom-up perspective of people's political life. Below I outline the scope of E-democracy research by categorizing the literature into two groups of themes and nine topics.

Group 1: Reforming the legislative branch of the government

1. *Strengthening congressional service and lawmaking processes:*<sup>2</sup> Scholars in this sub-field put attention on how to make Congress or Parliament more efficient with respects to servicing the constituency (Marcella, Baxter and Moore; Bellamy and Raab; Taylor, Coleman and Donk; D. W. Johnson).
2. *Enhancing the existing voting system.* Scholars in this field are interested in enhancing E-voting systems. This theme hosts issues like Internet-aided voter registration, online voting and polling system (Holmes; Graeme Browning; Solop).

Group 2: political culture development in the digital age

3. *Citizens' interaction within virtual networks:* Scholars of social networks discuss the changes in citizens' political identification in the dynamical processes of interacting with other Internet users. For instance, a finding shows that computer-mediated communication (CMC) to a certain extent affects social and group identity of Internet users (Taylor, Coleman and Donk). This finding is gaining more empirical evidence from countries outside the US, like Scotland (Macintosh et al.). Generally, scholars in this field see virtual space as an extension of practical social space (Saco; Katz and Rice).
4. *Citizens' interaction with candidates.* The discussion of the application of the Internet to political campaigns continues. This theme hosts the discussion of how citizens and candidates use the Internet in mobilizing people in both campaign season and normal time (Graeme Browning; G. Browning, & Weitzner, D.; G. Browning). Another cases study, suggests that using the Internet enhances deliberative democracy (Shulman et al.).
5. *Citizens' involvement in politics.* This topic is associated with on the formation of aggregated opinion, social movement, and collective actions. For instance, a research of Dutch people suggests that Internet users are more likely to be persuaded and take actions online and those actions are less confrontation oriented; this evidence positively implies that the Internet plays a role of transforming aggregated actions and fostering social deliberation (Postmes and Brunsting). A study that is based on a 1998 survey about "netizens" (i.e.

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<sup>2</sup> The term E-rulemaking is not used here because it can be categorized to E-government and E-democracy. The first meaning of it refers to using the Internet to facilitate the rulemaking quality of the executive branch of the government. The second meaning refers to using the Internet to enhance the representation of legislators.

citizens on the net) in America supports a positive relationship between using the Internet and civic engagement of political affairs (Weber, Loumakis and Bergman). An increasing number of scholars in political science and communication studies come together to study the formation of public opinion online and offline.

6. *Citizens' interaction with political dot-coms.* This topic continues the optimistic view about the Internet influence before 2001. It focuses on how dotcoms establish a web-based public forum to affect citizens' political participation. Quite different from most political scientists that are less sanguine, if not indifferent, about E-democracy, authors in this sub-field keep suggesting the great potential of the Internet (Davis, Elin and Reeher; Graeme Browning; Morris).
7. *Citizens' interaction with legislators and accessing governmental information.* In America, the information from Congress flows one direction: from Congress to citizens (King). But, there is a increase number of citizens accessing governmental information online (Larsen and Raine).<sup>3</sup> Therefore, scholars of this topic concern how to enhance the quality of legislators' representation by making greater connection between citizens and legislators through the Internet.
8. *The globalization of democracy.* This topic is about what is the role of the Internet in the globally spreading democracy. Contrary to common view that the Internet will boot more democracy around the world, American political scientists generally hold passive predictions (Wolfensberger; Loo).
9. *The inheritance of power relationship and politics.* Scholars of this topic discuss the role of politics in this information age, rather than the role of the Internet in political life. For them, the Internet will not change anything in politics; politics will function as usual. What we need to concern about is how politicians grasp more power through the Internet (Margolis).

The above topics and preliminary findings shows that finding an E-democracy solution for existing democratic politics is more like an illusion than a solution. The next section will summarize the arguments among American political scientists about E-democracy and details the concern they have raised.

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<sup>3</sup> There are "42 million Americans have used government Web sites to research public policy issues; 23 million Americans have used the Internet to send comments to public officials about policy choices; 14 million have used government Web sites to gather information to help them decide how to cast their votes; 13 million have participated in online lobbying campaigns. There were 68 million government web users in January 2002, up from 40 million in March 2000."

### **3. More like an Illusion: The Concerns about E-democracy**

Since *Politics as Usual* (Margolis), there has been an impressive amount of literature that have cooled down political scientists' enthusiasm about the possible and immediate influence of the Internet on politics. The consensus I draw from the literature is that E-democracy will remain an unrealistic goal before the following three issues are solved or at least well addressed: digital divide, the costs of IT investments, and the way politics works offline.

#### **(1) Digital divide remains a major concern**

“Where and who are the participants of a system of E-democracy?” is the first question scholars used to challenge the ideal of E-democracy. Knowing the political behavior of participants of E-democracy is critical to evaluate if a E-democracy system would work. Although American and Taiwanese scholars have shown some profiles of “netizens,” the study targeting on legislators' behavior of using the Internet to enhance representation is in its infancy in both countries (Soong and Chen). Preliminary studies about the U.S. Congress members show that E-mail communication have brought greater burden for the members and decreases the quality of communication.

Additionally, no matter how well an online participatory system is designed, scholars concern about the small portion of citizens that really participate. In other words, “netizens” will only refer to those who are younger and having higher levels of education. Worse, scholars point out that there is no statistically significant relationship between using the Internet and the increase of political knowledge (Larsen and Raine; Hu and Chen; Katz and Rice). Americans don't talk thoughtfully and inclusively online (Wilhelm, Democracy in the Digital Age : Challenges to Political Life in Cyberspace), and they are not responsible for what they talked and suggested (Kakabadse, Kakabadse and Kouzmin). Russian people who are interested in exchanges of views through mailing lists and news lists are more likely to participate virtual democracy. They are the major participants of virtual community and their issues are very specific (Garskova and Leonard). These findings imply that netizens (today) is no more deliberative than their offline counterparts.

Moreover, scholars conclude that, so far, there is no positive evidence supporting the scenario that governmental officials and legislators sincerely use the Internet as a way to communicate with citizens and constituents. In America, the society has “for many years systematically shackled the ability of citizens to use the tools of electronic speech directly, should wake up to find itself with a shriveled, distorted public sphere and an increasingly cynical populace” (Winner, p.181). If either politicians or voters

lack interest in communicating, E-democracy becomes an empty word. Furthermore, although it is important that Congress people are deliberative on policy issues, we do not know exactly how much online deliberation citizen should be involved. Most importantly, we do not have a satisfactory way to aggregate individual citizen's opinion beyond voting, not to mention one online (Bellamy and Raab; Wilhelm, "Civic Participation and Technology Inequality: The "Killer" Application Is Education"; B. A. Bimber).

## (2) IT investments may not lead to satisfactory results.

If investing in E-government will enhance the public's satisfactory level of governmental services, investing in E-democracy may not have quick and satisfactory result. Scholars suggest three issues about IT investment to consider: information and accountability asymmetry, representation and legitimacy, and social costs.

*Information asymmetry and accountability asymmetry.* Information asymmetry means that a government holds much more amount of information than citizens do. Information asymmetry does not only exist between a government and citizens (Chen, Huang and Hsiao, "Information and Democracy: An Evaluation of Political Communication Capacity of Taiwan Legislatures's Websites"), it also appears among branches of a government (Keohane and Nye Jr.). Responsibility asymmetry, on the contrary, means that the government officials and legislators may suffer from unnecessarily additional responsibility beyond their routine jobs. For governmental officials, "the speed or instantaneity of Internet time means that all governments, whether central or local, have less control of their agendas. This may make all government more difficult, as there will be fewer degrees or freedom for political leaders to enjoy before they must respond to events" (Nye, p.11). For elected representatives, they will find that they are receiving more requests than before and bearing additional responsibility on some issues on which they have little influence (Kakabadse, Kakabadse and Kouzmin; Bellamy and Raab).<sup>4</sup>

*Representation and legitimacy.* Political scientists are less enthusiastic than software engineers about using IT to make the Congress more representative and gain more legitimacy of making laws. Arthur Applbaum and his colleagues at Harvard University argue that direct democracy does not justify the legitimacy of the governance. Using the Internet would not guarantee direct democracy before a full

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<sup>4</sup> In the U.S. in 2000, 48 million electronic messages (mainly E-mails) per month were sent to the congressional legislators, the amount that was 1.2 times as much as that in 1998 Donald R. Wolfensberger, "Congress and the Internet: Democracy's Uncertain Link," Democracy and the Internet : Allies or Adversaries?, ed. Leslie David Simon (Washington, D.C. Baltimore: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002)..

inspection of the effect of those technologies. “What technology can do, in ways that are difficult to predict is create new powerful gatekeepers, increase the ease of political organization and participation for some (but not all) citizens, and give politicians much more sophisticated tools for political analysis and communication” (Applbaum). Besides taking into account the burden of legislators in processing information, a successful project of adopting IT in enhancing democracy depends on (1) the ever-growing sophistication of information and communication technologies, (2) rules restricting the use of information and communication technologies, and (3) the nature of entity that makes the rules about the use of information and communication technologies (Kakabadse, Kakabadse and Kouzmin). In other words, we have to ask ourselves if the technology will really enhance communication, if the rules of game for communication have been specified, and if we have a responsible team to make such game rules. As Kakabadse et al. (2003) warn, an improper design or adoption of a IT system can lead to worse communication quality, higher cost, and degraded performance.

*Social Costs.* As scholars have been pointing out, equality, privacy (Holmes), and racial conflicts (Holmes) are three social problems of an information society. Digital divide (i.e. the inequality of accessing computer and knowledge of using the Internet) grows along education level (Graeme Browning). Therefore, the distribution of political knowledge will vary along with the frequency of accessing Internet news sources (Wilhelm, "Civic Participation and Technology Inequality: The "Killer" Application Is Education"). Those trends in American were also founded in Taiwan (Hu and Chen).

### (3) Politics is very likely to be as usual

The third concern about seeing E-democracy a way to enhance democracy is more serious than the above two. Although technology has fundamentally changed people’s life over the past two hundred years, the way people perceive and use power relationships remains little changed. Politics within the Internets (e.g. some netizens have greater influence than the others), politics that affects the Internet, and political use of the Internet, will remain. (Anderson; Margolis). Additionally, IT investment hardly increase the quality of policy making, because policy making is more related to political institutions than voters’ input (Baumgartner and Jones).

One IT investment in constructing E-democracy is creating virtual communities to bridge policy makers and constituencies. Unfortunately, findings show that such virtual communities are not very likely to enhance voluntary participation, political deliberation, and active interaction between citizens and their representatives, because these communities are homogenous, i.e. with little disagreement and profound

discussion about policy issues. Worse, because citizens tend to use the Internet to exclude others' opinions, such IT investment are likely to accelerate the fragmentation of interests (Galston, "The Impact of the Internet on Civic Life: An Early Assessment"; Galston, "If Political Fragmentation Is the Problem, Is the Internet the Solution?"; Weber, Loumakis and Bergman). People who get involved in interacting with like-minded people are more likely to adopt more extreme rather than more moderate variants of the groups' shared beliefs (Sunstein).

#### 4. Suggestions

Taking full advantage of the Internet and strengthen democracy are important goals in the U.S. and in Taiwan. Beyond the E-government projects, E-democracy is becoming a prominent topic about the application of the Internet. When I started to collect literature for this essay in 2002, E-democracy (or E society) was enlisted into Taiwan Executive Yuan's proposal for E-Taiwan plan.<sup>5</sup> The motivation of providing suggestions is to draw American experiences, arguments, and academic findings about E-democracy to help Taiwan avoid the problems in the first place. Although this paper is not about evaluating the government's plan, I use this section to connect what I learned from the literature and the ideas that help avoid the problems scholars have foreseen. First, I suggest that the government develop a long-term agenda, where the first step is to establish convenience and trust for both citizens and legislators. Second, I suggest that social sciences cooperate in studying citizens and legislators' political behavior.

##### (1) Suggestions to the government

If spending on IT for constructing the government is a must go, I suggest extend existing successful E-government investment to create a system, which is better than creating virtual communities that would not necessarily lead to better representation and deliberative society. As an experimental E-Congress site led by two U.S. Senators shows, the agenda of innovation for the Legislative Yuan of Taiwan could be enhanced with the steps:<sup>6</sup>

*Step1: provide benefits for legislators and encourage them to use webs.* It takes some efforts to "sell" a web system, including a fully interactive bulletin board, to

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<sup>5</sup> In the U.S., National Science Foundation identifies E-democracy as a prominent research field (see, <http://www.nsf.gov/od/lpa/newsroom/pr.cfm?ni=1510000000120>); in Taiwan the E-democracy is entitled as National E-government project of 2008 (挑戰 2008 國家發展重點計畫, see, <http://www.stag.gov.tw/group/application/stag/index.php> and <http://www.cepd.gov.tw/2008/index.htm>).

<sup>6</sup> See, [http://www.senate.gov/~gov\\_affairs/egov/index.cfm](http://www.senate.gov/~gov_affairs/egov/index.cfm)

legislators and political parties. Since all legislators need a good system to broadcast to their constituents what they have done, the system should provide an interface for each legislator by which anyone can see legislators' records.<sup>7</sup> A team maintaining the web system within the Legislative Yuan should be established at this stage.

*Step2: establish and increase the quality of reports and accessibility of legislators' activity.* It is critical to have legislators start to use the system before citizens start to use it. This is the stage of earning citizens' trust. "Democracy requires citizen understanding of government responsibilities and functions, including funding sources and levels" (Clift, "E-Democracy: Lessons from Minnesota", 158). Before making sure that legislators can control their own system, which could be achieved by help of legislators' assistants, it is important *not* to open the system to the public. This site should be able to function as a virtual workplaces where legislators and their staff can access to electorate's message and private documents remotely.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, public laws should be clearly categorized on a web page with brief description of the goal, process, and importance of each policy.

*Step3: open the system to the accessibility of citizens and enhance direct Interaction between legislators and citizens, with a support.* To keep the credibility of "E-Congress," the Congress holds at least one online public hearing in its series of public hearings.

With the three steps in mind, the literature gives four technical suggests for establishing workable E-Congress. First, the system should be able to deal with numerous messages passed through the Internet. Legislators are limited in their time and attention.

"One should not expect Congress to become an Internet well of public dialogue anytime soon. To the extent that lawmakers continue to feel that too much information and too many opinions are already available to them, Congress will continue using the Internet as little more than a fancy all-hours viewing gallery in which citizens constitute the audience" (King).

Second, an E-Congress requires a friendly "entrance website" by which citizens can easily locate legislators by zip code, by region, by issue, by party, and by name. This also should become the major window through which citizens can find links of political parties and their local legislators. The website needs to tell its users how the

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<sup>7</sup> What is the best interface and design for legislators is beyond the purpose of this article. It would need another articles to discuss.

<sup>8</sup> After the 911 attacks and the anthrax attach in 2001, internal communication inside Congress offices became an hot issue. How to make lawmakers access their files and enable constituencies access lawmakers' website is new task for future E-Congress Wolfensberger, "Congress and the Internet: Democracy's Uncertain Link."

system will process their suggestions and how they get the response from the other end. The Minnesota E-Democracy's successful experiences suggest that it is better to use two mailing lists. One list is only for broadcasting, while the other list is for the communication between the electorate and their representatives (Clift, "E-Democracy: Lessons from Minnesota", p.164).

Third, to lower down the burden of responding E-mails, the system needs to allow legislators to know who is asking questions. "Few officials will listen unless they know who is speaking" (Clift, "E-Democracy: Lessons from Minnesota", p.164). This will help ease responsibility asymmetry.

Fourth, the Congress needs to think about creating a team of online legal and policy consultants. People who are involved in virtual communities are more likely restricted by a specific issue (Garskova and Leonard). To encourage citizens' participation on policy issues and voice, "mediators," the staff consultants providing broader views of thinking is necessary for online deliberation (Clift, "E-Democracy: Lessons from Minnesota"). The ideal is that the Congress develops this site to become a national policy deliberation site.<sup>9</sup>

## (2) Suggestions to the discipline

"While most cyberdemocracy researchers are drawn to the subject by their intuition that the Internet will effect democratic governance, mainstream political science has only recently made tentative steps to analyze issues concerning information and communication that arise with the Internet. Accordingly, a tighter linkage between traditional political science theory and cyberdemocracy studies can yield mutual gains for both areas of study" (Weare, p.685).

The long-term study of the civil society in American political science has greatly contributed to the prosperous research on citizens' behavior and institutes. This trend is evidenced by the quick growth of the Political Communication Section within both American Political Science Association (APSA) and Intentional Communication Association (ICA).<sup>10</sup> In Taiwan, similar efforts have started, too. A number of

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<sup>9</sup> The way to keep citizens to discuss and participate in online forums is mixing discussions of regular policy issues with election activities Steven Clift, "E-Democracy: Lessons from Minnesota," The Civic Web : Online Politics and Democratic Values, eds. David M. Anderson and Michael Cornfield (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).. However, even in America, a relative mature civil society in the world, a big political virtual community like DNet (<http://www.dnet.org/>) was not as successful as expected Sharon Docter, William H. Dutton and Anita Elberse, "An American Democracy Network: Factors Shaping the Future of on-Line Political Campaigns," Parliament in the Age of the Internet, eds. John Taylor, Stephen Coleman and Wim B. H. J. van de Donk, Hansard Society Series in Politics and Government ; 8 (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Hansard Society for Parliamentary Government, 1999).. This kind of virtual community could be found in Taiwan, too. See TWPolitics.com <http://www.twpolitics.com/>

<sup>10</sup> For current news about the section, see [http://www.ou.edu/policom/1302\\_2003\\_spring/index.htm](http://www.ou.edu/policom/1302_2003_spring/index.htm)

conferences on politics and the Internet have been attracting scholars from disciplines to focus on the issue of E-government and E-democracy.

Taiwanese scholars' recent study of the role of the Internet in political process include: using the Internet in election campaigns (Wang) and the profile of Internet users accessing candidates' website (Hong and Chang). The prominent works on E-government is the evaluation of Taipei city government's online services, such as citizen complains system (Chen, Huang and Hsiao, "Information and Democracy: An Evaluation of Political Communication Capacity of Taiwan Legislatures's Websites"), and documentation and information service (Wu and Liao). Specific articles on E-democracy include the examination of the concept of virtual democracy from the perspective of economics (Lee and Tong), and the evaluation of the online service of the legislative branch, such as the construction and function of websites (Chen, Huang and Hsiao, "The Management of Citizen Participation in Taiwan: A Case Study of Taipei City Government's Citizen Complaints System") and the way legislators use Congress websites (Yu). To correspond to USA's current research on E-democracy, political science in Taiwan can take a role of studying the politics of virtual communities, political behavior, and political communication between legislators and their electorates.

Political science in Taiwan has long time been focusing on conventional fields of political formal theories, political philosophy, foreign affairs, comparative politics, China studies, and public administration. However, when new research questions concerning democracy and people's political life emerge, interdisciplinary research on political behavior and public opinion becomes important.<sup>11</sup> Among the nine sub-fields of E-democracy listed in 2.2, I suggest four E-democracy research topics that would require more political scientists' contribution:

1. The influence of public opinion and legislative performance;
2. The interaction between voters and their representatives;
3. Successful cases of digitalized parliament outside the U.S, e.g. Great Britain.
4. The survival of disagreement in virtual communities.

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<sup>11</sup> For the list of the sections in USA political science, see <http://www.apsanet.org/about/sections/list.cfm>

## 5. Conclusion

As E-democracy have become significant interdisciplinary field of research, it is important to summarize the scope of the field for future researchers. This research note is an attempt to fill this gap.

American political scientists studying E-democracy have been holding passive views about the influence of the Internet on the health of democracy and argues that *politics as usual*. I hope that this essay provides an opportunity for cross-disciplinary deliberation about whether this conclusion is too early and too conservative. However, one thing is clear: E-democracy is not a single and simple solution to solve current problems that a democracy is facing, such as deliberative society, representation, and policymaking quality. Political scientists have seen E-democracy as more an illusion than a solution. The government should be cautious about the national investment on this E-democracy and the social scientists, especially political scientists, need to invest more on people's political life, the aggregation of individual opinions, and legislators' behavior of policymaking. Because this paper focuses on drawing experiences and conclusions from the literature, it omits the evaluation of research methods. Future works that built upon this essay are encouraged to address this part.

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