**E-Democracy—Past, Present, and Future**

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The first goal of this article is to examine how the use of internet technology helped **in the past** to surmount technical challenges related to the conduct of parliamentarian elections—and, in turn, may help to enhance citizens’ motivation to extend their participation to direct voting on legislation. The second goal is to discuss at the current level, **in the present,** the costs and benefits of boosting civil engagement by using internet media in parliamentary governance. This article breaks new ground by showing that the benefits of e-democracy (also known as teledemocracy and cyberdemocracy), involving the use of internet technology to intensify civil engagement in voting for parliament and in the legislative process, exceed their costs. The conclusion arising from discussion of the advantages and drawbacks of e-democracy is that the proposed solutions may attenuate much of the impact of various difficulties and challenges while leaving the utility for the democratization of the political system intact. The third goal of the article turns to **the future,**proposinga model of governance typified by the hybridization of civil engagement in parliamentary activity. In this model, known as “hybrid democracy,” civil engagement in the legislative process is integral to parliamentary rule and not a mere appendage.

Introduction

Our world abounds with technological devices that enrich various mechanisms in fields as diverse as business, communication, medicine, and leisure culture, to name only a few. The legal profession also benefits from internet developments in sense of legaltech, and the impact has entered the public sphere as well, by providing citizens with a well-appointed array of online services. When it comes to the democratic process, however—be it by electing representatives to parliament or through involvement in the legislative process itself—these resources are hardly used despite their immense potential utility.

Parliamentary democracy rests on several underlying assumptions. First, it is assumed that controversy exists in almost every political setting. Within every political unit there are different views about the right way to settle things, with no possible way of deeming one view right and the other views wrong. Another assumption is that, under these circumstances, the principle of justice that should dominate is democratic decision-making, with democracy properly perceived as requiring decisions to be made by a majority of the public. The third assumption is that given the size of the modern state and the sheer number of political decisions that have to be made, matters should be resolved by means of representatives elected to the parliament by the public. The main purpose of this article is to test this third assumption by discussing e-democracy (aka teledemocracy or cyberdemocracy). The discussion will be conducted in regard to the application of e-democracy in voting for parliament and legislating by plebiscite (hereinafter: direct legislation).

Holding parliamentary elections is no trifling matter. It usually entails extensive and very expensive technical organization—from establishing an infrastructure for citizens’ voting, then encouraging them to vote, creating accessible polling places, and making the voting secure and honest, up to processing the data and the results reliably and rapidly. On top of these are the costs of a national day off. The technical challenge in producing a democratic vote is in fact a popular counterargument to holding plebiscites even among those who favor direct democracy in principle.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The first purpose of this article is to ask how using internet technology helped to resolve these technical difficulties in the past—and, in turn, may help whet citizens’ motivation to take part in the democratic process, both in parliamentary elections and in direct voting on legislation.

The second purpose is a discussion at the current level, focusing on the present, that investigates the costs and benefits of stepping up civil engagement by employing technological measures in parliamentary governance. E-democracy proposes an internet platform that makes the political process accessible to citizens. In so doing, it has to cope with two main types of drawbacks. The first relate to the disadvantages of “human nature” that emerge when civil engagement in the political process is widened. The second class of drawbacks is based on the use of technological media in democratic procedure, which on this account exposes the procedure to manipulations that may degrade it. Within the frame of this article, I will present these drawbacks and offer answers to them.

The novelty of this article is that within the framework of e-democracy, in which internet technology is utilized to step up civil engagement in voting for parliament and in direct legislation, the benefits surpass the costs. This conclusion flows from discussion of the advantages and drawbacks of e-democracy, which imply that the proposed solutions may attenuate much of the impact of the difficulties and challenges without diminishing the utility gained by democratizing the political system.

The third purpose of the article turns to **the future,**proposinga model of governance typified by the hybridization of civil engagement in parliamentary activity. In this model, known as “hybrid democracy,” civil engagement in the legislative process is integral to parliamentary rule and not a mere appendage.

The article is divided into three main sections. Section 1 describes the past, in which democracy and the internet intersect within the framework of a technological matrix that citizens can access in parliamentary elections and the political process at large; it gives a concise account of the advantages and drawbacks of using online media in these processes. The conclusion drawn in this section is that e-democracy makes the political process much more accessible to the citizenry and, by so doing, broadens civil engagement in creating the country’s political products. It also, however, carries concern about human misconduct—in the form of shallow political discourse, lack of solidarity, violence in political debate, and democratic impotence—that may make e-democracy less attractive. In response to these concerns, Section 2 of the article focuses on the present by surveying the intereffects of parliamentary rule and direct civil engagement in the political process. This discussion includes the possibility that the characteristics of parliamentary rule may soften the rough edges of civil conduct in the political process and addresses itself to the advantages that civil engagement lends to the parliamentary process. This discussion converges into Section 3, the future, which presents the idea of “hybrid democracy”—a model by which e-democracy does not limit itself to giving the public access to the parliamentary election process and civil engagement in shaping political issues on the parliament’s agenda. Instead, it offers a political framework based on e-democracy in which parliamentary democracy and civil engagement neither contradict each other nor exist independently in symbiosis but come together to form one ideal system.

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)