

# The opportunities and challenges brought by the Internet to Democracy

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**Abstract:** This paper holds that the revolution of information and network technology with the Internet as its core provides new opportunities for democracy to develop, and at the same time, it also brings about many negative impacts on democracy. To prevent the potential harm of Internet technology to democracy.

**Keywords:** Democracy; impact; computer network

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At present, the development of information technology with the Internet as the core is bringing human beings into the networked society. According to the data system, by the end of 1999, the number of Internet users in the world has exceeded 150 million, and it is estimated that by the year 2000, the number of Internet users will reach 300 to 400 million. In China, the number of users has been increasing year by year since 1994, when China realized the full connection with the Internet. By the end of February 2000, the number of Internet users in China has reached 8.9 million, ranking the eighth in the world. Projected to 2002 According to the statistics of the Ministry of Information Industry, as of February 11, 2000, the number of websites registered by governments at all levels in China reached 2300. The rapid development of the Internet has become the main symbol of the current information technology revolution.

There is no doubt that the rapid expansion of the Internet will have a profound impact on human democratic political life. It is an important and meaningful new subject to recognize and study this problem in time. Foreign scholars have made a lot of comments and viewpoints worth paying attention to. Veshad Woicke, a scholar at the University of Minster in Germany, pointed out: "the rapid growth of the Internet raises the question of whether the enormous potential of the Internet will make democracy more dynamic." There are two opposite understandings of this problem. The pessimist thinks the new Information technology will not bring any political benefits. "New technologies are inevitably dominated and controlled by a handful of politicians or powerful figures, enabling them to influence and manipulate the mood of the crowd." "the new technology merely promotes greater concentration of power and thus heralds an omen." "an electronic computerized communication system would certainly threaten possible public ownership and the freedom of speech of the people." "the computer-dominated world will be ruled by a certain class." some people even worry about "electronic fascism." Optimism "New technologies promote and defend democracy and freedom of expression," he said. "the new technology itself has the potential to involve more people in the flood of social life in the way of democratic participation." 3 Network technology will be the most important democratic reference and means and work in the 21st century. It will bring mankind into a new era of electronic democracy and speed up the process of democratization. This paper holds that the emergence of network technology has dual influence on democratic politics. It not only provides unprecedented power and opportunity for the development of democratic politics, but also makes democracy develop. The exhibition faces great challenges. We should not only actively use network technology to promote

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democracy, but also attach great importance to the harm of network technology to democracy, and take measures to prevent it.

## **1. As a revolutionary force, science and technology have always been the main driving force to promote the development of human society and the progress of civilization**

The emergence of network technology is the same, it will provide new impetus, conditions and space for the development of democratic politics.

### **1.1 The Internet has made possible the realization of the direct democracy that people have been longing for for thousands of years**

As an ancient political ideal, direct democracy has been respected and pursued by some people since ancient Greece and Rome. However, since modern times, the nation-state, because of its vast territory, large population, transportation, communications and other technical means of underdevelopment, citizens do not have enough cultural knowledge, can not organize the implementation of direct democracy on a large scale. Therefore, direct democracy has always been an unrealistic ideal. Representative democracy, an indirect form of democracy, has solved the problem that a large number of ethnic citizens can not participate in decision-making and management, and has become the main form of democracy since modern times. However, with the rapid development of network technology, representative democracy is facing a crisis and direct democracy is possible.

1.1.1 In the past, owing to the limitation of backward traffic, communication means, the quantity and speed of information dissemination, the high cost and long cycle of citizens' will directly hindered the realization of democratic participation

Nowadays, human beings have entered the information society. The network supported by computer technology, modern communication technology and information technology links all the countries and regions in the world into a "global village". Democratic participation has become very convenient. People even stay at home, press a few keys at home, and click a few mouse to the country and the land. Party affairs express their views. The cost of democratic participation has also been greatly reduced. According to a report by ITU at the end of 1998, the cost of building transatlantic fiber optic cables per minute is less than 1% cents, and the combined cost of operating high-cost international communications satellites per minute is less than 1 cents. If properly utilized, the unit cost of transmission increases with the expansion of capacity. Approaching zero. With the improvement of computer performance and the decrease of price, home computers will become more and more popular, the network will become more and more convenient, and the cost will become lower and lower. All these have reduced the cost of democratic participation and created conditions for democratic participation.

#### **1.1.2 Information is the raw material of decision making**

Under representative democracy, information is monopolized by officials. The higher the officials go, the more they can grasp a large amount of overall information. The lower stratum and the people can only understand limited local information, or even do not understand information. This makes the public do not have the information basis to participate in politics. The information revolution has changed the single channel of information transmission in the past, and has established a comprehensive, multi-level and multi-form transmission channel. The scope, quantity and time difference of the information obtained by government officials and the people, the upper and lower levels are constantly narrowing. The public and government officials can understand almost all kinds of information at the same time. Government officials have lost the advantage of monopolized information in the past to monopolize decision-making power and management power. Moreover, modern information technology has greatly promoted the dissemination of cultural knowledge and information, improved the level of cultural knowledge and management of citizens, so that they can make a rational decision on the issue directly, without relying on the "representative" to make decisions. The direct participation of the public in decision-making is the general trend. Nash has long foreseen that the information age will be an era of "participation in democracy". Indeed, the popularity and development of the Internet has opened up vast space

for democratic participation. The Internet provides people with a virtual network community that transcends geographical boundaries. In the network community, netizens can get rid of political control based on geographical boundaries and social administrative divisions, freely express their opinions and interests, and those with similar interests and political opinions can easily communicate and organize activities across time and space. Netizens can even conduct their own opinion polls and organize "electronic parties", "electronic off-campus groups" and "digital parliamentary party groups". When the government accesses the Internet, the government's decisions can be made on the computer network referendum system, and government elections can also be operated on the network. "Online participation" will become one of the main ways of political activities in the Internet era.

1.2 The Internet erodes the power structure of the pyramid-like hierarchical centralization system, and promotes the progress of decentralized science and technology closely related to the change of social structure

Science and technology, as the primary productive force, is a basic force to promote the change of superstructure. The development of science and technology always has an impact on the traditional social structure in one way or another. When it develops to a certain period, it will force the power structure to change. The advent of the information society has greatly affected the power structure of the traditional society. It "weakens every pillar of the old power system and ultimately changes the structure of family life, commerce, politics, nation-states, and global power itself." The power structure of industrial society is a pyramid structure, in which a large number of management organizations and personnel at the lower level are subordinate to a small number of management institutions and personnel management information from the lower level, management power from the top to the lower level to implement, and the scale of management institutions and personnel is large at the upper level and small at the lower level. A Pyramid type, the management power is the upper and lower levels, forming the inverted Pyramid type. This is a highly centralized, hierarchical, top-down, vertical control and management of bureaucratic hierarchy. Nowadays, the development of information network technology has strongly eroded and shaken this power structure. "Now, the proliferation of computers is transforming institutional structures from machine-like hierarchies in the old industrial age into organic networks." information network organization is obviously different from the structure of Pyramid. First, "the network tends to extend horizontally rather than vertically." That is to say, the network relationship is a horizontal connection with the hierarchy, which is not found in the Pyramid structure. As Nesbitt put it, "Network organizations can provide something that bureaucracy can never provide - Horizontal linkages." \_This lateral extension can effectively destroy the vertical bureaucratic hierarchy and gradually flatten the social structure. Secondly, each information point on this network can publish and receive information, so each information point is an information center. Everyone is an information center, which means there is no information center, so the network is a world without a center. This feature can overcome the centralized control of the single information center of the pyramid structure and support multiple decision centers. In short, the above characteristics of the network are breaking the pyramid-like vertical hierarchical power structure of highly centralized industrial society and restructuring the power structure: the network parallel structure is simplifying the traditional hierarchical system, making the power rapidly declining, the organization flattening, centralization and autocracy are giving way to decentralization and democracy, a unified decision-making. The centre is developing into a multi decision-making centre.

The decentralization of power brought about by the development of network is manifested in many aspects. In many countries, a series of changes are taking place, such as the decentralization of central government to local governments, the decentralization of governmental organizations to non-governmental organizations, the decentralization of high-level enterprises to low-level enterprises, and citizens' participation in decision-making and management of state and social affairs. For example, in recent years, some of the foreign powers of central governments in many countries are being overstepped by non-central government organizations. Dozens of state and local governments in the United States participate in foreign affairs, which involve a wide range of fields, such as contracting, investment, education, lobbying, research and so on. At the same time, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in various countries are partially replacing the traditional government functions, and their role and influence in international economic and political affairs are increasing. At present, the number of non-governmental organizations in the world is increasing dramatically. According to the statistics of former United Nations Secretary-General Gali, by 1995, the number of non-governmental

organizations in the world has reached 36 000, and their fields of action are also expanding. The above situation shows that the tradition of central government's sovereign monopolize is being weakened, and centralization of power is moving towards decentralization.

### **1.3 Internet will promote freedom of speech, social equality and political openness**

The Internet naturally has the function of freedom and equality. The emergence of the Internet provides people with a "Cyberspace" across national boundaries. This is the kingdom of freedom of speech. Any netizen can transcend the barriers of time and space, freely exchange information, freely publish and disseminate their own speech. A person can freely communicate with millions of people, exchange information, knowledge, experience, expound their views and opinions, put forward their own requirements and conditions. The Internet is like a "forum" without a gatekeeper. Anyone in the network can publish any digital information on this "forum" and distribute it to the broad audience. No one can control this "forum". Although there are also attempts to control, the actual control measures have so far achieved little success. Because of the free nature of the Internet, some people call the Internet "a free information commune".

The Internet is a free world and an equal world. This equality is mainly reflected in the equality of communication. First, as mentioned above, the Internet has changed the pyramidal social structure of the industrial society, reduced management levels, weakened bureaucratic hierarchy, flattened the organizational structure of government, and made it easier for civilians to communicate with government officials. With the help of the Internet, the common people can easily communicate directly with the head of state and talk freely. Secondly, on the Internet, all people have equal opportunities to participate in politics. Whether they are civilians or heads of state, they can speak and participate in discussions as long as you like. No one has more opportunities than anyone else, and no one has less opportunities than anyone else. Again, "all links in the network belong to the same level, or there is no grade difference at all." The exchange of information on the Internet is thought, without regard to the identity and status of the parties involved in the exchange. In other words, the exchange of information on the Internet strips away the power, wealth, identity, status, appearance and other factors of netizens, and only exchanges of ideas and speeches. Although the status of participants may be different, the exchange of ideas is equal. "In a network organization, information itself makes everything balanced... Members of a network organization treat each other equally because the most important thing is information, which balances everything. There is authority in the network, but "the authority of the network is established by ability and charm, and not based on social rank or official position." Russian scholar Ratpov more vividly pointed out: "In the World Wide Web, everyone is the center of the universe. In the control space ('virtual reality'), the country bumpkin mentality disappeared. There was no 'capital', no governor, no monopoly, no state or government. Finally, the Internet has brought about a wide range of books and publications and equality in publishing. In the past, writing books and publishing works seemed to be the privilege of literati, the mass media and publishers, not of ordinary people. In the network, it can be said that everyone is a publisher, the network is by far the largest automatic "publishing" tool, users can publish their "works" at will. As Donald Lamborough, the chief political correspondent for the Washington Times, puts it, the Internet "makes it possible for ordinary people to become publishers without huge capital and to engage the media as participants, not just observers. Even without millions of dollars, you can start your own publishing or media organizations. Anyone can set up a website to compete with the media giants. The Internet will be the most important democratic means in twenty-first Century.

The network also has the characteristics of openness and openness. In the past, in some hierarchical countries, a small number of powerful people decided and manipulated the country's politics by means of the blockade and control of information in an undisclosed state. The Internet has the function of breaking information and political monopoly. The Internet is a straightforward, borderless, decentralized structure with no center. Anyone can publish information, it's extremely difficult to control, and banned messages somewhere can be easily accessed from elsewhere. "Politicians can't control the network, either by law or by bombs. Information is still coming out, not through this road, but to take another road out. " breaks the blockade and monopoly power of politicians in the past, making information public. Politicians have become more and more difficult to operate black boxes by monopolization of information. The openness of

government affairs is the general trend. At present, governments have started the "Internet Project", which is consistent with this trend. The government goes online and releases the public on the Internet.

Information, government announcements, and information and consultation on laws, regulations, policies, municipal planning, public administration, environmental protection, employment, medical care, personnel, and prices have improved the transparency of government work, and expanded citizens' rights to know, participate and supervise.

The characteristics of freedom, equality and openness of the network help to cultivate people's ideas of freedom, equality and openness. As some scholars have said, "Free, democratic and open network leads to the freedom, democracy and openness of the network residents."

#### **1.4 The revolution of network technology has improved the technological means of democracy, opened up a new channel of "electronic democracy"**

The rapid development of the Internet has provided advanced technological means for democratic participation and opened up a new channel for democratic participation. At present, all countries in the world are actively advocating the construction of "information superhighway" to construct "electronic government" and establish a more open and sharing democracy. In this regard, western countries with advanced information technology are undoubtedly ahead. As early as the mid-1970s, the United States established the world's first "electronic city hall" in Columbia, Ohio. Using this two-way communication system, residents participate in meetings of the local planning committee through electronic equipment. At home, they can immediately vote on proposals for local urban planning, housing regulations, highway construction, etc. by pressing an indoor button. Not long ago, in order to make government information widely available electronically, the National Information Center of the U.S. Department of Commerce created the Federal World, which interacts with more than 100 federal bulletin systems and information centers. To improve citizens' access to government information, the United States is piloting a plan to include thousands of offices across federal agencies in an interactive Citizen Participation Center, where citizens can communicate with the public affairs departments of all federal agencies. In addition, the U.S. government is planning to use the information superhighway to build a more comprehensive "electronic commons" that will provide services in three ways: (1) community information storage networks: grassroots networks throughout the country, providing citizens with a wide range of information services. (2) Dissemination of government information: provision of government information to taxpayers; dissemination of government policies and regulations to the public for compliance and implementation. (3) Universal Use: The national information infrastructure must be used to unite the American people without further polarization between the information "rich" and the information "poor". In Europe, EU countries are also promoting the movement of digital cities. The EU is ready to build ten or more examples of digital cities. Amsterdam is the preferred city. The city's municipal authorities have built a citywide computer network on the basis of existing telephone lines. Citizens can obtain government information through electronic means, and can also discuss issues with members. In addition, the government also uses the traditional cable television system to hold regular hearings and dialogues with the general public. As long as there is television and telephone at home, citizens can directly ask government officials questions and express their opinions on city-wide issues. Our country also pays great attention to using modern information technology to communicate with citizens and expand public participation. Some cities have set up mayor hotlines and mayor complaint calls to connect mayors and citizens directly by telephone. From December 1 to 5, 1999, more than 1,400 people visited the website and 524 people participated in the discussion and compilation of the Tenth Five-Year Plan through online discussion. In 1999, the government's Internet access project was officially launched, which will greatly improve the technical means of democratic participation in China.

The Internet has built an electronic bridge between the government and the public to communicate and dialogue, and promoted direct dialogue between citizens and government officials. With it, people can express their opinions immediately and increase their influence on government decision-making; the government can understand the opinions of the public more widely, which is conducive to brainstorming, making decision-making democratic and scientific. At the same time, these superior information and technological means have opened up a new channel for "electronic democracy". Nowadays, electronic opinion polls, electronic campaigns, electronic votes, electronic town hall meetings, etc.

have been piloted in some countries. From these new democratic channels, we have seen the attractive prospect of "electronic democracy" and mankind is entering a new era of electronic democracy.

## **1.5 Network will promote the transformation and innovation of democratic principles and democratic mechanisms, and make democracy more precise and perfect**

1.5.1 The information technology revolution will challenge the traditional democratic principle of minority subordination to the majority, highlight the power of the minority, and make it possible to construct a new democratic mechanism including the power of the minority

Industrial society produces "big democracy", which is based on a group society. "The present democratic system is the embodiment of mass production, mass consumption, mass education, mass media and mass society." The 15th Great Democracy is governed by the principle that the minority is subordinate to the majority. In the whole industrial civilization era, the struggle for majority rule is humane and liberating. In the second wave society, majority rule almost always means the fair opportunity for the poor. Because the poor are the majority. <sup>[1]</sup> However, in today's information society, the traditional concept of the rule of the majority and its justice is challenged. In today's world network, the poor are a minority, and the principle of majority rule is not necessarily humanitarian and democratic. Moreover, the non-central structure of the distributed network in the information society makes the society non-centralized. The infinite interest of the network and the individual choice of the network all reduce the public's dependence on social groups, which makes the society non-group. In a highly complex and differentiated society, social mobilization is becoming more and more difficult and impossible. Toffler pointed out: "in this society, there are countless minorities. They rarely agree on major issues. <sup>[2]</sup> it is even more important to integrate the power of minorities. "The era of man-made characteristics of those groups that are most effective in mobilizing their own special interests is coming. Minority veto instead of majority vote. In order to adapt to this change, mankind must design a new mechanism reflecting the democratic rights of minorities, combine it with the traditional majority democracy, and form a new democratic mechanism of "the rule of the majority plus the integration of minority powers". Toffler envisioned a way to achieve this new democratic mechanism by means of electronic technology: using computers, advanced radio communications and voting methods to elect at will some typical representatives of the public, using traditional methods to elect only 50 per cent of the votes, from arbitrarily elected representatives, wherever they are scattered, In the home or in the office, through the electronic communication equipment to vote for the remaining 50% of the votes. This can accommodate differences in the new democratic mechanism and reflect the needs of minorities. This democratic system is more broadly representative, which is the "mini-majority" democratic political model envisaged by Toffler for tomorrow.

### **1.5.2 The use of electronic technology in elections can also overcome the shortcomings of traditional electoral procedures and more accurately reflect the will of voters**

For example, the traditional method of electing is to adopt a simple majority principle and choose between "yes" and "no", which is very rough. "The principle of 51% is obviously a rigid quantitative tool. Deciding the majority by voting does not tell people what the nature of the opinion is. It tells us how many people need someone (or something) at a certain time, but it doesn't mean how much they want.... First of all, it does not tell us what people are willing to exchange for someone (or something). 20 electronic elections can overcome this shortcoming. Electronic elections can not only choose between "yes" and "no", but also record the degree and order of voters'choices, and even reflect the conditions for voters to bargain with others. All these make the democratic procedure more accurate and perfect.

In short, the revolution in information technology has brought unprecedented opportunities for democratic innovation, and these new technologies have provided access to new democratic institutions.

## **2. The influence of any science and technology has two sides**

The same is true of network technology, which brings not only opportunities for the development of democratic politics, but also negative impacts on democracy that can not be ignored. Democracy is facing great challenges of network technology.

2.1 Network technology has been used by some countries to promote their values and ideologies, and poses a real

threat to the sovereignty, independence, freedom of internal affairs and social stability of developing countries

The Internet is a new media with obvious ideological color. It originated in the United States and has American color. Under the control of the United States, the Internet standard created by the Internet is promoted to the global standard. At the 20th Congress of the International Society for Mass Communication Studies, held in August 1996, the representative of France, referring to the Internet, pointed out sharply that the two opposite concepts of 'internationalization' and 'Americanization' should be studied. The United States is in fact labeling its legal, sexual and technical standards 'international' and imposing them on other countries through the Internet.<sup>[3]</sup> It can be said that the United States is using the Internet to promote its ideology, including its values of freedom and democracy, around the world in an all-round and round-the-clock manner. It is precisely under the strong penetration of certain Western ideas that many developing countries have accepted democratic models that do not suit their national conditions, resulting in political instability, military involvement, tribal conflicts, civil wars, economic regression in these countries, and people and countries suffered tremendous disasters. Talking about the causes of the third wave of democratization, former U.S. Secretary of State Tolport pointed out unequivocally: "Technology is an important factor. Even the strongest frontiers are constantly impacted and penetrated by radio, television, fax and e-mail."<sup>[4]</sup> Internet will also help cultural invasion and promote "cultural imperialism". The Internet is full of American culture, which has a serious erosion on the culture of other countries. People even worry that its Congress will lose its cultural sovereignty under the erosion of American culture. Malaysia's Deputy Prime minister, Abdullah Ahmed Badawi, spoke seriously of the risks of globalization, pointing out that globalization exposes people to a variety of cultures, "but it also causes the most dirty, worthless and decadent things in Western culture to overflow in non-Western societies, putting local cultures at risk. The local culture of some countries is likely to die out or be replaced by western culture."<sup>[5]</sup> At present, English culture dominates the Internet. According to statistics, 90% of the content is in English, 5% is in French, and only 5% is in other languages. Microsoft's computer software accounts for 80% of the global personal software market, and English has become the standard language for computer network technology. In the face of this situation, even French President Jacques Chirac exclaimed: the world today is facing the threat of a single culture, the future of non-English-speaking countries have the risk of cultural marginalization. The erosion of national cultural sovereignty by "cyber cultural colonialism" should be paid enough attention to. In addition, some people in western countries often use network technology to rumor, slander, defame, falsify or distort facts, disseminate political prejudices and subversive statements, promote racial and ethnic hatred, and encourage ethnic division to socialist countries and their so-called hostile countries, which seriously threaten their sovereignty, independence and freedom of internal affairs. And national security.

## **2.2 The development of the network provides a convenient tool for some politicians and special interest groups to influence and control politics and achieve their own political goals**

Modern information technology is not only the material and technological means of people's democratic participation, but also a convenient tool for some politicians and interest groups in different forms to influence and control politics. Politicians can use the Internet to attack their political opponents, free use of cyberspace to beautify and propagate themselves, and even deceive and fool the people to achieve their political goals. During the 1980 U.S. presidential campaign, Reagan drew terrible conclusions from the loopholes in the defense system, which caused panic among many people. Using this point, Reagan advocated the war of arms expansion and put forward the theory of "Star Wars". The emergence of this theory is the use of a virtual conference website on the Internet. Interest groups are also one of the biggest beneficiaries of the information technology revolution, and their lobbying activities have become very convenient with the advent of telephones, faxes, computer databases and the Internet. An article in the Economist magazine on June 17, 1995, pointed out that the lobby group's "efficiency has also been greatly improved by faxes, computers and other devices in the market information base. Mobile computers allow hallway lawmakers sitting in parliamentary galleries to give timely briefings to lobby leaders; press a button to send 'broadcast faxes' to thousands of sympathizers, a technique that has been used in the Uruguay Round and North American Free Trade Area negotiations to launch assaults on politicians; or Those who use the telephone to persuade potential supporters to talk directly with their legislators to build momentum."<sup>[6]</sup>

## 2.3 The development of information technology tends to foster extreme democratization tendencies such as absolute liberalism and anarchism

Information is an important resource for democratic participation and political influence in today's society. Many interest groups pay great attention to the use of information for political service, while the use of computers can easily edit and manipulate information. In order to influence and control others, some people do not hesitate to use unfair means, the use of free speech in cyberspace to create false information, spread on the Internet at will. "The Internet now acts as a `big wall'on which rumors can scribble freely for the world to read."<sup>[7]</sup> this makes online information true and false. Some netizens regard personal freedom above everything, advocate unlimited network freedom, abuse of computer resources, engaged in "computer intrusion" activities. This is illustrated by the increasing number of incidents in recent years in which computer hackers have frequently invaded personal, corporate and government computer systems. According to a 1992 U.S. research firm, unauthorized computer intrusions in the workplace rose from nearly 340,000 in 1989 to 680,000 in 1991, accounting for 42% of these incidents. These acts infringe upon the rights of liberty and privacy of others and damage other people's economic interests. In particular, computer hackers are keen to invade official websites, which seriously threaten national interests and national security. The consequences of organized computer intrusion are even more frightening. People who are dissatisfied with the reality, terrorist organizations and dissidents often use cyberspace to disseminate political rumors, carry out political incitement, attack and defame the government, and systematically and purposefully break into the political, economic, military decision-making departments and information centers of the country, steal secrets, or destroy computer and data protection systems. . This "digital terrorism" seriously undermines the authority of the government and threatens the security of the country. All these cyber-anarchism undoubtedly poses a great challenge to civil liberties and national democracy.

2.4 Over-reliance on instant "electronic democracy" may lead to irrational "emotional democracy" of the people around the political use of modern information means, citizens'direct democratic participation is very easy to carry out, which is one of the reasons for the rise of e-democracy in recent years

However, if the government relies too much on e-democracy and conducts e-polls on individuals on all issues, it will also bring about negative consequences: First, the interests of the people and the interests of the state are not always the same. When the two conflicts occur, the people tend to consider their own interests, "immediate and excessive." Public opinion polls can lead to decisions made by government officials based solely on possible impacts on the population"<sup>[8]</sup>, potentially damaging the overall interests of the country. Second, too many public opinion polls may cause government officials to rely too much on the judgment of others, weakening their ability to formulate, think, analyze and implement plans. "To resort to an immediate poll is to cancel the captain and the senior crew and leave all decisions on board to the passengers. This is essentially a mob rule. "<sup>[9]</sup> Thirdly, compared with the elected representatives, the general public lacks rationality and is apt to be emotional when things happen, so it is not as calm and prudent as the representative. It is dangerous for the state's decision-making to be influenced by the mood of the masses, and some even fear the emergence of "electronic fascism". Therefore, "the new electronic voting is a good helper to provide more information for voters when making decisions, but by no means the best way to express voters'decisions."<sup>[10]</sup> When implementing electronic democracy, how to guard against the negative tendency of "emotional democracy" is a question that needs to be further explored.

2.5 Information technology may lead to the polarization of information between the rich and the poor, resulting in the emergence of "information technology elite" rule, hindering the equal participation of citizens in politics

Nowadays, it is generally believed that the high development of information technology will widen the information gap. Jean-Claude Gail, a professor of culture at the University of Montreal in Canada, warned that humans could be "divided into two classes: those who can use the Internet and those who can't." This is mainly because, in a country, people's ability to use information network systems and access to information is very different. People who own and fully master information systems will become "information rich" and those who are poor and unable to buy computers will become "information poor". According to 1993 statistics, the richer the American family, the higher the rate of computer ownership and use, the white family computer ownership rate is three times that of black or Hispanic Ameri-



can families.

The polarization of access to information will result in inequality in political participation. The "information rich" can control a large amount of information and effectively participate in and influence politics. The "information poor" will be excluded from the mainstream society and be on the edge of politics. In the information society, information is not only an economic resource, but also an important power resource. Controlling and monopolizing information means having power and having the ability to dominate others. People have reason to worry that "new technology power" may use its monopoly of information resources to influence the public, and then control and manipulate the masses, the emergence of "information elite rule". As the famous American scholar Horowitz pointed out: "A small number of top-notch people in the nation have the ability to grasp new information systems and thus become powerful groups in democratic societies, while people of all other classes who are still mysterious about new technologies are reduced to commoners in the computer culture." The uneven distribution of hardware and software will cause special problems to democratic society.

The same is true in the international community. Most developing countries are poor and backward, unable to afford the luxury of information network. The United States and other developed countries, with their strong economic strength and advanced technology, have most of the computer network systems in the world. According to statistics, 70% of the world's computer network users in the United States, and less than 10 countries in Africa and the international network. The United States has 3.4 million hosts, 500,000 in Western Europe, 27.1 million in Africa, 16,000 in South America and 13.8 million in the Middle East. If the international community does not take measures to help developing countries develop information networks, the "information gap" between developed and developing countries will deepen. The inequality of information resources will aggravate the polarization between the rich and the poor worldwide, and widen the political inequality between developed and developing countries.

We should pay enough attention to the negative impact of information technology on democracy and take precautionary measures as soon as possible so as to ensure the healthy development of democracy in the network age.

### **3. The network technology revolution indicates that Internet Democracy is rising**

The dream of democracy that mankind has dreamed of for thousands of years is now possible with the help of network technology. However, in order to turn this possibility into reality, a series of changes must be made.

First of all, the government should attach importance to it and actively promote it. The development of network technology provides a possible condition for "electronic democracy", "political leadership makes democracy a reality". Government officials and elected representatives should overcome conservative ideas, actively use the conditions provided by network technology, and open up electronic democratic channels of communication with citizens. In recent years, some deputies to the National People's Congress (NPC) in China have surfed the Internet and published their own websites, welcoming citizens to reflect public opinion and have online dialogues with citizens, which actively conforms to the trend of network democracy. Network democracy is a two-way, interactive and direct democracy. Government officials and elected representatives should actively communicate with citizens, listen to their opinions, adapt to the participation of more and more people, get used to it, and give them understanding and tolerance. At the same time, government officials should also have more equal spirit, honest and equal dialogue with citizens, to overcome the high-ranking, one-way preaching of the old concept.

Secondly, to adapt to the flattening of the network structure, reform the hierarchical centralization of bureaucratic and bureaucratic organizations, the implementation of decentralized management. The traditional pyramid-like centralized, rigid information transmission and problem-solving mechanism often shows the drawbacks of slow response, poor adaptability and inflexibility. It has become increasingly unsuitable for the rapid development of the information network society with new situations and problems emerging in endlessly. The government should speed up the reform of administrative system, promote the transformation of organizational structure from pure pyramid structure to network structure, and realize the democratization of organizational structure. This requires the government to decentralization in a timely manner, to decentralization to the subsystems, to the localities and to the society. At the same time, the gov-

ernment should change its functions, reduce management levels, streamline institutions, improve efficiency and better serve the public. At present, governments in various countries have paid more attention to conforming to the trend of networking, reforming administrative organizations, and achieved good results. From 1992 to 1996, the U.S. government abolished nearly 200 federal programs and agencies, closed nearly 2,000 offices, cut 240,000 government employees, cut government spending by \$118 billion, and scrapped more than 16,000 pages of outdated administrative regulations.

Thirdly, we should speed up the construction of "e-government" and gradually realize the democratization of information transmission, openness of government affairs and electronization. In the construction of "information super-highway" which the governments attach great importance to, the construction of "electronic government" is listed in the first place. The construction of "e-government" is the most basic project of network democracy. With "e-government", the government can obtain information from the Internet, and the government's own information can be put on the network for the public to understand, query and use. This is conducive to the openness of information, the transparency of government affairs and the openness of government affairs. At the same time, the government can also put the affairs on the Internet and interact with the public to realize "e-government". In 1999, China started the "Government Online Project" in an all-round way. By 2000, 80% of the state ministries, local governments at all levels and relevant departments have set up websites on the public multimedia communication network in China. Our government should pay attention to both hardware construction and software construction, avoid formalism, prevent the occurrence of websites, no information, or information quality is not high. In addition to the construction of e-government projects, the government should also attach importance to the construction of the "home Internet project", so that citizens can express their opinions, understand information, participate in the management and implementation of supervision.

While making use of network technology and actively building network democracy, we should also attach great importance to the possible side effects of network technology on democracy, and think about countermeasures as soon as possible, so as to cure and prevent the trouble before it happens. This problem is especially important and necessary for the developing countries with lagging behind in information technology. In order to eliminate the side effects of Internet technology on democracy, developing countries should make efforts in two aspects: one is to strengthen the management of the Internet and actively seek ways to resist some unhealthy ideas and other harmful information from the West. To prevent the infiltration of some Western ideas which are not suitable for the national conditions, we need to improve the level of network technology and actively study the technical means and methods to resist the "network hegemony" of the West. On this issue, the most important thing is to strengthen the management of information sources and control the production of information. Clark, an American scholar, put forward an idea: "Can we control the production of information as we control birth? Or can we use eugenic procedures to publish and publish only the best scientific literature? Or can we improve the procedures for processing information and improve its storage, collation and delivery?" It's a very difficult problem. At present, people haven't found such a way, but they should not give up their efforts. The two is to carry out network legislation. With the popularity of Internet, network legislation has become an imminent problem. A Network Law should be enacted, which should regulate actions that endanger individuals, groups and countries, as well as a series of issues such as the limits of network freedom, privacy protection, network equality and intellectual property rights. Because of the global nature of the Internet, network legislation is very difficult, but the difficulties can not be avoided, we should study it as soon as possible, and make preparations for network legislation.

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