

Democracy's Double-Edged Sword: How Internet Use Changes Citizens' Views of Their Government

Catie Snow Bailard



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The beauty of democracy is not only that citizens can vote a candidate into office but that they can also vote one out. As digital media grows omnipresent, it becomes more important for political scientists and communication scholars to understand its influence on all aspects of the political process, from campaigning to governance. Catie Snow Bailard argues that the Internet? by altering the quantity and range of information available to citizens? directly influences the ability of individuals to evaluate government performance. It also affects public satisfaction with the quality of available democratic practices and helps motivate political activity and organization.

Bailard originates two theories for democratization specialists to consider?mirror-holding and window-opening?which she tests using data collected from dozens of countries and two randomized field experiments. Mirror-holding explores how accessing the Internet allows citizens to see a more detailed and nuanced view of their own government's performance. Window-opening, however, enables those same citizens to glimpse how other governments perform, particularly in comparison to their own.

Although the book offers a robust empirical foundation for testing the Internet's effects on democratic attitudes, Bailard ultimately concludes that access to information does not necessarily ensure that democracy will automatically flourish.



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