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INTRODUCTION

I believe in the necessity of participative democracy for implementing reforms that are fair. I don't believe in reforms, even the ones based on good intention, that are imposed on the citizens after pretence of consultation

Speech of Segolène Royal to the international seminar on participative budgeting in Bello Horizonte, December 17, 2008

Government should be participatory. Public engagement enhances the Government's effectiveness and improves the quality of its decisions. Knowledge is widely dispersed in society, and public officials benefit from having access to that dispersed knowledge. Executive departments and agencies should offer Americans increased opportunities to participate in policymaking and to provide their Government with the benefits of their collective expertise and information. Executive departments and agencies should also solicit public input on how we can increase and improve opportunities for public participation in Government.

Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Government and Agencies, Transparency and Open Government, January 21, 2009

Royal and Obama are two prominent and influential political figures of our century who have in common a strong belief in the benefits of a large diffusion of participative and deliberative ideals to improve the democratic process. Segolène Royal, the unexpected finalist of the French presidential elections of 2007, made an important use of the Internet during her political campaign through her Web site “*désir d’avenir*” (www.desirsdavenir.org/) that aimed to gather new sympathizers and get their feedback on the topics of the campaign. She has also implemented an impressive amount of deliberative experiments in the French political entity of Poitou-Charente that she leads, such as “participative budgeting” for high schools that allows citizens directly concerned about the future of these schools (students, parents, school staff) to deliberate and vote on the projects that should be financed by the region and the “citizens’ jury,” which in turn allows randomly chosen citizens to evaluate, during a period of three days, the efficiency of the politics of the region. Barack Obama,



1 who famously started his career as a community organizer on the South
2 Side of Chicago, made an even more efficient use of the interactive and
3 collaborative potential of the new media during his political campaign
4 and continues to do so as president of the United States through the
5 White House Web site (www.whitehouse.gov). This portal is extensively
6 used, not only to increase the transparency of and accessibility to the official
7 documents and speeches, but also to promote a direct and convivial
8 communication between the president and the citizens (in particular
9 through the weekly video address of the president) and to foster direct
10 participation of the citizens by promoting online debates and consultations.
11 Macon Phillips, the young Director of New Media for the White House,
12 declared in one of the first messages sent in the White House blog that
13 the administration plans to publish all nonemergency legislation on the
14 Web site for five days and allow the public to review and comment
15 before the President signs it (Philips 2009). The cases of Obama and
16 Royal are in reality the most visible part of a much broader tendency to
17 modify the existing limited forms of political participation in favor of a
18 more inclusive, participative, and deliberative forms of participation.

19 While new interactive media, particularly the Internet, cannot be con-
20 sidered to be at the source of this phenomenon, they have certainly con-
21 tributed to its diffusion by facilitating the development of these new forms
22 of political involvement. Recent data reveal that one in four Internet users
23 within the then 15 member states of the European Union claimed to
24 have visited online forums (Flash EB 135 2002), that 17 percent of French
25 Internet users debated online during the 2007 presidential election (IFOP
26 2007), and that one in four young citizens (24 percent) from the 27 EU
27 member states posted political comments on online forums in the last year
28 (Flash EB 202 2007). The democratic potentialities of the new communi-
29 cation technologies that are regularly promoted by major supranational
30 organizations (OECD 2003; Hansard Society 2007; United Nations and
31 Interparliamentary Union 2008; Council of Europe 2009) have already
32 been implemented by a wide range of political actors: many political parties
33 and civil society associations use the Internet for their militant work and
34 for conducting their campaigns. Some institutional actors—such as the
35 parliaments, local authorities, or the governmental agencies—use it in order
36 to promote public debates and to conduct e-consultations on specific topics,
37 and an increasing number of traditional media—such as the radio, the
38 television, and the press—refer to the debates taking place on the forums
39 of their Web sites to organize and enrich their broadcasts. This trend
40 toward *virtualization of public debates* is very differently assessed by those
41 scholars who have analyzed the democratic consequences that may result
42 from it. Optimists welcome the potential diffusion of online political

1 debates to promote a decision-making process that is more participative,
2 inclusive, and plural (Grossman 1995; Coleman and Goetz 2001). On
3 the opposite side, pessimists see dire consequences for the future of
4 democracy. Among other things, it is argued that the online debates
5 attract citizens who are already politically active, therefore increasing
6 the gap between the civic and noncivic citizens (Davis 2005; Norris
7 2001). It is also argued that the virtualization of debates by creating and
8 fostering communities of like-minded people could lead to an increased
9 balkanization of the society and to a polarization of opinions (Sunstein
10 2001). Finally, several scholars and practitioners believe that Computer
11 Mediated Communication (CMC)—generally based on anonymity,
12 absence of direct contact, and absence of moderation—does not allow
13 for the emergence of qualitative and accountable political debates (Davis
14 2005). According to this view, CMC is conducive to cheap talk on private
15 matters but certainly not to deliberative political debates.

16 The study presented in this volume aims to offer a first global assess-
17 ment of the deliberative potentials that derive from the virtualization of
18 the political debates by focusing on three issues. The first concerns the
19 *usage* of the online forums: only if the online debates are used by a large
20 amount of people that represent the plurality of opinions present in the
21 society could the virtualization of the political debates be considered
22 able to promote the deliberative model of democracy. The second issue
23 concerns the *offer* of the online political forum. On the basis of existing
24 Web content analysis we will evaluate which political actors' categories
25 offer possibilities of online debates. From a deliberative perspective, this
26 question is important for the potential of online debate to influence the
27 decision-making process and, as we will see, the quality of online debates
28 will depend on the contexts where these are implemented. The third issue
29 concerns the *quality* of the online debates by empirically assessing their
30 deliberativeness and by identifying the factors that influence it. This is
31 based on a comprehensive review of existing findings on the deliberative-
32 ness of online political debates and on the basis of two original case studies:
33 the analysis of the Italian Radical Party's online forum and the online
34 campaign for local elections in Issy-les-Moulineaux in France.

35 The investigation of these three issues—usage, offer, and deliberativeness
36 of online debates—will be subdivided into six chapters. In Chapter 1 we
37 will discuss the concept of deliberative democracy from a broad perspec-
38 tive. We will first focus on the notion of the public sphere, which is the
39 beating heart of the deliberative democratic project, by presenting and
40 discussing the complementary and still-relevant analysis of the emergence
41 and disappearance of the public sphere since the eighteenth century that
42 Habermas (1989) and Sennet (1992) performed. This sociohistorical

1 review is followed by an updated definition of the notion of the deliberative
2 model of democracy and is concluded by presenting and discussing
3 the major criticisms that are generally formulated against the deliberative
4 model. In Chapter 2 we will present the deliberative discursive criteria
5 that are traditionally developed in the specialized literature. The delib-
6 erative criteria scrutinized are the following: *inclusion*, *discursive equality*,
7 *reciprocity*, *justification*, *reflexivity*, *empathy*, *sincerity*, *plurality* and *external*
8 *impact*. For each of them we propose a strategy of operationalization that
9 is considered to be the most appropriate to evaluate the deliberativeness
10 of the online public spaces. In the same chapter we will also distinguish
11 four different theoretical models of deliberative democracy (*globalizing*
12 *model*, *two-track model*, the *critical democratic model*, and the *impact model*)
13 that highlight contradictory views on how the discursive criteria should
14 be applied to the different categories of political actors (civil society,
15 institutional actors, private actors). We suggest that such contradictions
16 invite the deliberative research to enter in an empirical phase aiming at
17 identifying how concretely the deliberative criteria could be applied at
18 the different levels of the decision-making process. Only if the delibera-
19 tive research follows this path can it contribute to the elaboration of a
20 credible, coherent and useful model of democracy. In Chapter 3 we will
21 start the empirical analysis of the online public spaces by looking first at
22 their diffusion. We will look at the *user* side by referring to broad online
23 surveys that quantify the participation of EU and U.S. citizens according to
24 the kind of debates (general *versus* political) and the sociodemographic
25 categories of users (age, gender, political activism, Information and
26 Communication Technologies skills, etc.). We will then look at the offer
27 side by analyzing the online offer of three essential actors of the political
28 process: the *parliament* through the analysis of the interactive offer of 42
29 parliamentary Web sites from the EU countries; the *political parties* through
30 the analysis of the interactive offer of 163 political parties from the EU
31 countries; and the *cities* through the analysis of studies that have looked
32 at the interactive offer of the major cities in the EU and the United States
33 and of hundreds of cities in the UK, France, Norway, and Sweden. This
34 comparative analysis is interesting not only because it presents a unique
35 broad comparison of the Web-interactive offer of these actors but also
36 because it reflects their different participative cultures.

37 In Chapter 4 we will start our investigation of the deliberativeness of
38 the online debates and of the factors that may influence it. This will be
39 completed through the analysis of the existing studies that have attempted
40 to measure it in different contexts. There are studies looking at the delib-
41 erativeness of political *newsgroups* in different countries and on different
42 topics. Other studies look at the deliberativeness of debates on the *Web*

1 *forums* hosted by different newspapers/magazines. Finally, some studies
2 will look at the deliberativeness of the debates in *experimental forums* and
3 *e-consultation forums*. This broad comparative analysis, though its signifi-
4 cance is weakened by the fact that they are not always based on the same
5 deliberative criteria and on the same strategies for operationalizing them,
6 nevertheless reveals some factors that may influence the level of partici-
7 pation and deliberation of the online public spaces. We argue that the
8 factor that has the most prominent impact on the deliberativeness of the
9 debates is the *external impact factor*, by which we suggest that if partici-
10 pants at an online forum believe that what they write is widely read and
11 is likely to have an impact on the decision-making process, they should be
12 more motivated to participate and to adopt a deliberative attitude.

13 The investigation of the deliberativeness of the online debates and of
14 the factors that may influence it continues in the last two chapters by
15 analyzing two original case studies. The first one is the forum hosted by
16 the web site of a small and highly innovative Italian political party, the
17 Radicali Italiani (Chapter 5). This Web forum is particularly interest-
18 ing because it is a very successful Web forum and also because it has
19 an important impact on the decision-making process of the party itself.
20 Such a case study therefore contributes in understanding the factors that
21 explain the success of a Web forum and the functions that an online
22 forum can play within a partisan structure. The second case study we
23 analyzed is the Web-electoral campaign set up for the online election of
24 16 local councilors in Issy-les-Moulineaux, a city situated in the periphery
25 of Paris famous for its innovative democratic experiments (Chapter 6).
26 This unique trial offers the possibility to analyze for the first time a pre-
27 electoral public space that could prefigure the types of debates that could
28 emerge in the future if, as it seems to be the case, voting procedures were
29 increasingly transferred to the Web.

30 In synthesis, the purpose of this research is to first analyze the extent
31 of the offer and usage of online political debates, then to evaluate the
32 quality of the online debates in general and to identify the factors that
33 may influence it, and finally to promote an empirical-based strategy for
34 implementing a more realistic model of deliberative democracy. A criti-
35 cism that can already be anticipated is that such a type of research is in
36 reality futile because of the *rapid technological evolution*. One can indeed
37 argue that the findings obtained are already or will become meaningless
38 very soon due to the extremely swift evolution of the new media and
39 of their use. Our research is essentially based on written-online debates
40 (newsgroups, Web forums, the e-consultation debates), and it is true
41 that many debates nowadays take place on other types of platforms,
42 which also involve the audiovisual media. This being said, one should also



1 recognize that written exchanges will never be totally replaced by the
2 audio-video exchanges because they offer a system of exchange that is
3 unique and irreplaceable. Moreover there are some lessons that can be
4 drawn from our investigation that do not depend on external factors, such
5 as technological evolution, but that are related to the general behavioral
6 aspects. These are the ones that are related to the deliberative attitude of
7 the citizens, which, as we will try to demonstrate, is likely to vary accord-
8 ing to different contextual factors such as the one we identified as the
9 external impact factor. Finally, we elaborated sophisticated methods for
10 operationalizing the deliberative discursive criteria that, this is our hope,
11 should be useful not only for the *online* deliberative empiricists, but also
12 for the *offline* deliberative empiricists to elaborate a model of deliberative
13 democracy in which the normative principles could be concretely applicable
14 in the real world.

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QUERY FORM

BOOK TITLE:	KIES
CHAPTER NO:	Introduction

Queries and / or remarks

Query No.	Query / remark	Response
	No Queries.	