DIGITAL DEMOCRACY: IS TECHNOLOGY EMPOWERING THOSE WHO NEED TO BE HEARD?
Two case studies from Chile and Brazil

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Abstract

Digital democracy has become a popular topic in current political debates. The relation between technology and theories of participatory and deliberative democracy has been analysed by a variety of scholars. The internet can strengthen democracy by: 1) making political information accessible to citizens, 2) creating new spaces for public discussion and social mobilization, and 3) enabling new channels of communication between representatives and those represented.

Early studies of e-democracy practices were characterised by great enthusiasm for the potential of the Internet for solving democratic deficits. Nowadays, scholars are cautiously focused on empirical-driven approaches that aim to research how to adapt theoretical models to socio-political realities. This dissertation wants to highlight the importance of the inclusion of all voices in democracy. In order to do so, two case studies of e-democracy in Latin America (specifically in Chile and Brazil) will be analysed with the objective of identifying current barriers to participation and to find out what voices might be underrepresented online.

The challenges of democracy in the 21st Century remain huge and are not only related to the empowerment of citizens through the web but, to a greater extent, to institutional architectures and political contexts that may hinder citizen participation.

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