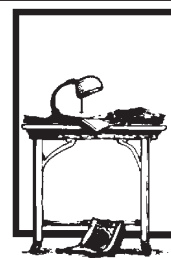

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION



The intersection of information technology (IT) and politics is nearly ubiquitous. Studying phenomena at this intersection is like studying the interplay of government or language with politics. IT, like government and language, is fundamental to the definition and practice of politics. All three are foundational aspects in the study of modern political life.

To grasp the enormous IT changes currently underway, imagine Washington, DC, without Blackberries, Brussels without mobiles, Qatar without satellites, Jordan without Internet cafés, or the world without the BBC, Al Jazeera, and CNN. IT transmits, archives, and renders searchable the global politics of language and government on a daily basis. The breadth and accuracy of our reach as navigators of the digital landscape is nothing short of astounding. One test drive on Google Earth assures us that IT and politics are intimately interrelated and that considerable unexplored territory remains for future innovative ventures in research and teaching.

Along with our pervasive technological icons, intriguing new issues related to the scope, scale, and reach of IT are emerging continuously for political scientists and their collaborators across the disciplines. Lawrence Lessig punctuated the close of the twentieth century, cautioning that lawmakers and members of the judiciary face the rising power of network architecture as either a constraint to or an enabler of individual actions. All government regulators confront various IT-fueled

challenges that are characterized by expanding and uncertain dimensions. These concerns range from privacy and security to meaningful public participation and long-term preservation of digital objects.

Citizen bloggers, amateur video mashers, and legions of increasingly clever podcasters and wikipedians all find they are becoming a compelling new source of globally-viewable alternative media. People are tuning in as campaigns go the route of the YouTube, MySpace, and Facebook. Rapidly growing virtual worlds, like Second Life, are spilling over their borders and generating real-world governance and government issues, in a cyberspace variant of the all-consuming debate over the virtues and problems associated with human immigration across national borders. In each of these media, questions of design and purpose matter greatly, and how these questions are addressed gets right to the heart of democratic theory and the future of political legitimacy, authenticity, and power. Weighty subjects indeed!

Scholars and officials alike now comb through accumulating—or sometimes missing—stockpiles of digitized text. The missing 18 minutes of Richard Nixon's Watergate-era audio tape have morphed through time and cyberspace into what now amounts to five million missing White House e-mails. Heretofore unavailable data, like the Enron e-mails, provide rich opportunities for basic research in both the social sciences and computer science. In this data-rich environment, possible goals for researchers are

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to develop innovative tools (for social network analysis), scalable and fungible metrics (that apply to studies of gigabytes or terabytes of data, and across diverse types of measurements), and a collaborative research community that can harness the computational power of IT as fully as possible and bring it to bear in the study of politics. Many of these goals will require an interdisciplinary approach to generate valid inferences and a willingness to look at new ways of conceptualizing, organizing, publishing, and rewarding interdisciplinary research on politics.

Does any of this IT really make a difference? Thumbing the pages of the major disciplinary political science journals in the United States, one would be likely to conclude that it does not. Studies featuring the intersection of IT with politics are exceedingly rare in the top tier of political science and international affairs journals. These gatekeepers may be wise to steer clear of studies featuring the role and impact of IT, as a work in progress rather than a proven product. After all, technological determinist predictions of a new political order, hypodermic effects, or a changing face of *homo politicus* are likely to fall well short, just as they did when radio and television were the “new” media. In so doing, they push ITP-style research into the hiring and promotion backwaters of the interdisciplinary journals.

However, what if IT does fundamentally alter key aspects of political life? The Internet and its simple, open protocols make us take notice of the genius and creativity of separate yet interconnected globally-distributed individuals. Ideas, art, and a potentially limitless stream of other digital objects are emergent and possess viral attributes. Critical transformations indeed may be underway that will reshape the political order. A democratizing potential is often discussed, and in certain spheres and practices self-publishing, collaborative social filtering, peer-to-peer technology, and recommender systems do seem to be able to upend historic hierarchies of knowledge management. Conversely, the trends may be less encouraging in other respects. Scholarship can inform us if officials lack confidence in political expression and participation mediated by IT, or when citizens consider their rights to be under siege.

Whatever the case, the time is right for this inaugural issue of the *Journal of Information Technology & Politics (JITP)*. The journal, formerly the *Journal of E-Government*, seeks manuscripts covering a wide range of issues at the intersection of IT and politics. *JITP* is premised on the view that we do not yet know where and when IT innovation decisively shapes or determines political outcomes, but we do think it can and should be central to what is studied in modern politics and government. Affiliated with the organized section on Information Technology & Politics of the American Political Science Association, *JITP* aims to:

- promote a better understanding of how evolving information technologies interact with political and governmental processes and outcomes at many levels,
- encourage the development of governmental and political processes that employ IT in novel and interesting ways, and
- foster the development of new IT tools and theories that can capture, analyze, and report on these developments.

On behalf of the approximately 100 people serving either as Associate Editors, Senior Editorial Board members, or Full Editorial Board members, and the 375 reviewers in our database, it is my pleasure to welcome you to *JITP*. As a group, we in the ITP community are genuinely excited by the changes underway, but not necessarily in awe of them. Political players, old and new, do indeed dot the digital landscape; their embrace of IT to pursue political ends merits careful study. New rules and norms are emerging and embedding themselves, but in places they fail to emerge, and we should wonder why they have not yet materialized and what might stimulate their development.

Perhaps most exciting to me are the tools built with IT that are being developed and deployed to study politics in innovative ways. These “power tools” for language promise to transform what researchers consider possible in the social sciences. The Editorial Board of *JITP* has created a special submission type, “Workbench Notes,” to foster scholarly reports on the development and deployment of such tools. We also seek work of all types that helps

to educate the wider ITP community of researchers and practitioners regarding methods, data, and research opportunities that enrich and expand the collective knowledge base.

This inaugural issue of *JITP* is a good harbinger of some of what will define this journal. Since politics is driven by perceptions, it follows that we ought to pay close attention to emerging views of online political activity. In "The Effect of Risk Perceptions on Online Political Participatory Decisions," Samuel J. Best, Brian S. Krueger, and Jeffrey Ladewig empirically test the notion that differential perceptions of risk online and offline may dampen hopes for the promised land of enhanced electronic public participation. In looking specifically at risk, which they point out is relevant in nearly all domains of decisionmaking, they bypass more common and longstanding dominant theories centered on the cost of voting or participating versus the rewards and notions of interpersonal trust. For Best and his collaborators, the focus is the online medium itself, its inherent and perceived risk characteristics as a secure or reliable place to engage in political activity, and the implications for future participation. They find "a new source of participatory risk" and argue that "those who most agree that going online puts their privacy at risk tend to have lower odds of sending persuasive political e-mails, signing online political petitions, and donating money to online political entities."

Risk perception is often driven by risk definition in the public sphere. As I write this essay on May 29, 2007, my eyes drift to a stark headline above the fold on the front page of *The New York Times*. The story, juxtaposed—one assumes not accidentally—with a larger than usual color picture of mayhem in Baghdad, is titled "After Computer Siege in Estonia, War Fears Turn to Cyberspace." In it, the attacks on Estonia's digital infrastructure are described as a "national security situation," in which the "electronic Maginot Line was crumbling." It is precisely this sort of story that lies at the center of a puzzle explored by Myriam Dunn Cavelty, in "Cyber-Terror—Looming Threat or Phantom Menace? The Framing of the US Cyber-Threat Debate." If there have been no cyber attacks with significant carnage, she asks, why is the threat so firmly established on the security agenda? To answer, Dunn Cavelty draws on a

constructivist security studies approach focusing on threat frames used by key political actors to "identify those traits that have made cyber-threats such prominent features on the national security policy agendas."

In "Democracy and E-Rulemaking: Web-Based Technologies, Participation, and the Potential for Deliberation," David Schlosberg, Stephen Zavestoski, and I report findings from an exploratory survey of over 1,500 public commenters engaged in the U.S. regulatory rulemaking process. The aim was to explore the potential for deliberation in the open docket system whereby public commenters could view the comments of others or other relevant information online and potentially respond accordingly. We created an item bank that looked for indicators of deliberative behavior in the ways that commenters considered such information. While the intent was to compare electronic versus paper submitters, the findings of interest revolved primarily around the differences between the authors of original comments and those who submitted form letters. So, while we found that "taking the rulemaking process online probably did make the process more deliberative," it is the original commenters "who embody significantly more of the deliberative qualities we hypothesized."

Mass political mobilization and cohesion are central in Jongwoo Han's study, "From Indifference to Making the Difference: New Networked Information Technologies (NNITs) and Patterns of Political Participation Among Korea's Younger Generations." In it, he asks whether new networked information technologies (NNITs) are making an impact in Korea, home to "the most wired individuals on the planet." Han presents empirical evidence that with certain pre-conditions, NNITs can play an important role in the mobilization or cohesion of particular voter blocs, helping them make "the leap from politically indifferent and insignificant to politically powerful and relevant." In this case, it appears that NNITs directly foster social capital and generational consciousness and indirectly impact voter behavior.

Finally, in "Rethinking Government-Public Relationships in a Digital World: Customers, Clients, or Citizens?," Patrice A. Dutil, Cosmo Howard, John Langford, and Jeffrey Roy tackle some of the challenging dimensions of

“new democratic engagement opportunities” in the adoption of electronic government and various public administration reforms. It is yet another open question whether the triumph of the “logic of customer-centric governance” comes at a deeper, democratic cost. Dutil and his team sound a careful cautionary note in their exploration of the important distinctions between, for example, new public management and customer relations management. Under-

standing, mutuality, and trust are different, depending on the orientation, and therefore service transformation must avoid the “danger of inappropriate fusing of objectives and means,” which is “serious and potentially harmful” in an epoch of accelerating technological determinism.

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