

Internet and Democracy : Materialization of Democracy

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Internet and Democracy — Materialization of Democracy —

インターネットと民主主義 －民主主義の実質化－

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日本語要旨

議会民主主義が導入され、それに取って代わる体制は今のところ見あたらないが、民主主義というものは本当に機能しているのだろうか。現今の民主主義の弱点は誰の目にも明らかである。政治離れは、投票率の低下に顕著に表れている。政治工学によって、政治はますます巧妙になり、一般有権者の手に届かないものとなりつつある。有権者は、これは我々の選挙であるという感情を失う。投票している場合でも、本当に自分の投票が正しかったのか、心許ない状況である。投票行動は様々な問題を抱えている。政治家・マス・メディア・有権者という政治サイクルが機能していない証拠は数多く存在する。政治がメディアによって仲介されている今日、マス・メディアは有権者に投票するにふさわしい情報を提供してきたのだろうか。マス・メディアが与える選挙情報は選択的で浅い。娯楽とセンセーショナリズムがミックスされ、インフォテメン

トとなっている。選挙が始まると、ホース・レースのように、勝敗だけに関心が集まり、特定の選挙区に関心が向けられ、選挙報道は劇場型化する。

このような状況から脱出する一つの可能性は、情報量に制限が少なく、良質の選挙情報を提供する選挙サイトである。それは必ずしも政党や政治家のサイトを意味しない。政党や立候補者のホーム・ページは一方的な宣伝と実効性の疑わしい約束に満ちあふれており、政治に精通していない有権者には真偽を判断するに困難を覚える。この意味で、専門家集団の中立的な選挙ポータルサイトが、「情報の二段の流れのように」、これからはますます重要性を持つてくると考えられる。日本の選挙サイトの現状はどのようになっているのだろうか。日本の選挙サイトの今後のあり方に一石を投じたいという目的から、ステーク・ホルダー達が情報を提供している日本・アメリカ・ドイツの選挙サイトの比較を行った。その調査結果により、本論で書いているように、日本のサイトの立ち後れが明らかとなった。

Preface

Activism of citizens and active participation in politics are fundamentally necessary for sustainable society and functioning democracy. Otherwise, democracy becomes a form without content. How is the reality of voting in our society? Do voters get enough information from mass media and political parties to be able to judge public politics proposed by political parties and to be able to vote after careful deliberation? News organs with an increasing tendency of consumerism and tabloidization often provide audiences with shallow and trivial information. TV programs and newspapers are apt to mix politics with entertainment. Spin doctors cater information as consuming goods to electorates and set interesting agendas before Election Day. Politicians make unrealistic promises and election campaigns become media shows.

Political infotainments can arouse cynicism and populism among audiences. In the industrialized countries with advanced welfare- and pension-systems, people think, the occasional abstention from voting seems not to have a severe impact on their lives. There is no wonder that the voting rate is continually declining in many countries. Have electorates voted correctly? They have voted without enough information. This is the reality of democracy nowadays. Should we accept the status quo or should we change this? If three stakeholders, politicians, electorates and journalists earnestly want to realize genuine democracy, the internet can give us many possibilities. To make an inventory of such possibilities, I have compared election websites in Japan, the USA and Germany.

(I made an oral presentation with same title at the 18th annual meeting of the AMIC on 14 July 2009 in New Delhi¹. This thesis is based on the full paper of the presentation with some modifications and added data.)

1 Hollowed democracy

Democracy means rule by the people, if we go back to the etymology of the word democracy (demos=people + kratos=rule). Democracy is an irreversible institution. Even totalitarian and communistic countries will not dare to deny democracy and so name their countries democratic. GDR (German Democratic Republic) and North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) are exemplary cases. They can only stress social responsibility and social security and remind their people that freedom of expression has its limits. It is also true that there is no country which enjoys a full-fledged democracy.

Even in the United States, which Alexis de Tocqueville once praised in his book "*Democracy in America*", democracy is being hollowed out. Electorates have lost their interest in elections as the declining voting rate shows. At first glance it is true

1 [http://www.scribd.com/doc/17700271/18 th-AMIC-Annual-conference-programme](http://www.scribd.com/doc/17700271/18-th-AMIC-Annual-conference-programme)

that we are rich in information, but too much information means that we cannot consume and examine all this information and cannot separate an important message from a trivial one. Lippmann pointed out in *Public Opinion*: “the real environment is altogether too big, too complex and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations.” (Lippmann, 1965, p.11) To manage such plentiful information, we are happy with shopping for individually interesting and therefore narrow information. It is hard for ordinary citizens to follow all the articulations and the promises of lawmakers over a long-span. For a layperson it is difficult to understand the balance of costs and effectiveness of public policies. We therefore use our voting rights without accurate insights into politics. We vote intuitively or routinely. This is the reality of voting in a democratic country.

2 Lack of community consciousness

Aristotle once said, “The state is a creation of nature and man is by nature a political animal.”² This expression is interesting for me, because even today his statement has not lost its meaning, because our everyday’s behavior is far from this ideal. Media reporting getting increasingly shallow and entertaining, is one reason of the declining interest for politics. In modern society we have lost the communitarian way of thought. How many hours and how much energy have we invested for a better society? Robert D. Putnam, professor for political science of Harvard University, pointed out a lack of social bondage in the American society in his book *Bowling alone, the collapse and revival of American community* (New York, N.Y: Simon & Schuster, 2000). He describes the disinterest of citizens in the society with the image of playing bowling alone. Bowling was once a social game in the USA. But nowadays Americans play bowling alone. He points out the collapse of community and

2 In : Aristotle : Politics 1.2 ; 1253 a 2-3, The Complete Works of Aristotle, trans. by Jowett, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Princeton, Princeton University Press (1985).

the dilution of commitment for the community. This dilution causes a general disinterest for politics.

The voting rate in the examined three countries, Japan, the United States of America and Germany is continually declining, apart from some periodical ups and downs. How to increase political interest and how to let electorates share democracy becomes an important task. Figure 2.1³ shows the shift in the voting rate for the House of Representatives in Japan (middle and small constituencies) from 1946 to 2007.

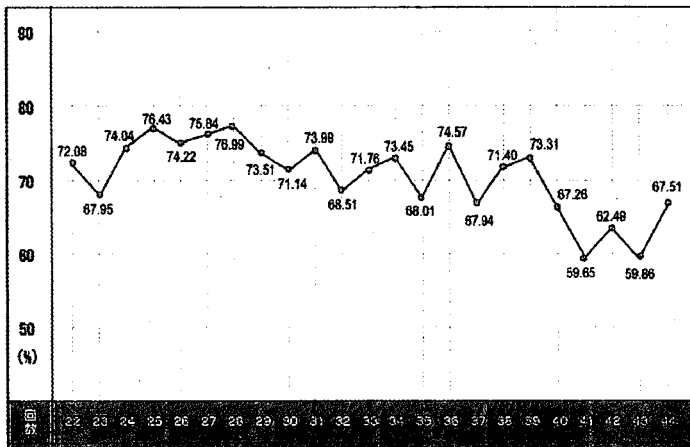


Figure 2.1

Figure 2.2⁴ shows the shift in the voting rate separated by age for the House of Representatives from 1967 to 2007. The rate of non-voters among younger people, especially 20s (the lowest line) and 30s (the second lowest line) is striking.

3 <http://www.akaruisenkyo.or.jp/070various/sg.html>.

4 http://www.akaruisenkyo.or.jp/070various/sg_nenrei.html

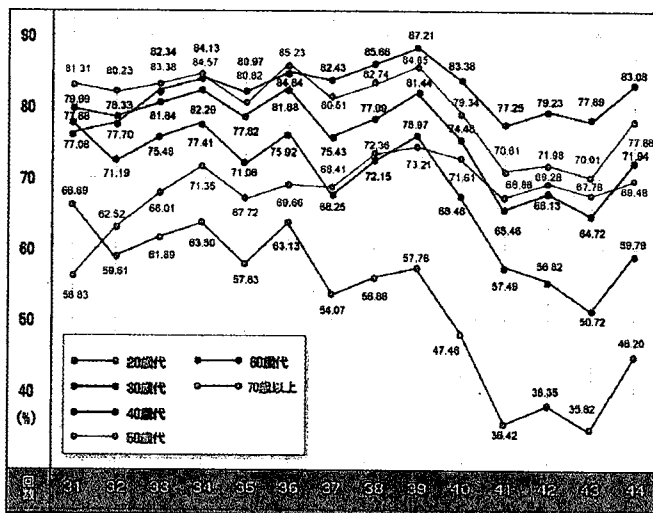


Figure 2.2 Voting rate separated by age for House of Representatives

The shift in the voting rate in the United States of America (presidential voting rate)⁵ is similar to that of Japan. Voter turnouts have decreased steadily over the last forty years. The voting rate of younger people shows the greatest decline⁶. If I add the newest data, the voting rate of all voters in 2004 improved a little, to 58.3%.

5 'Participation in congressional and local elections is even lower.' (Neuman, Just, Crigler, 1992, p.xv)

6 Davis et al : Click on Democracy p.10

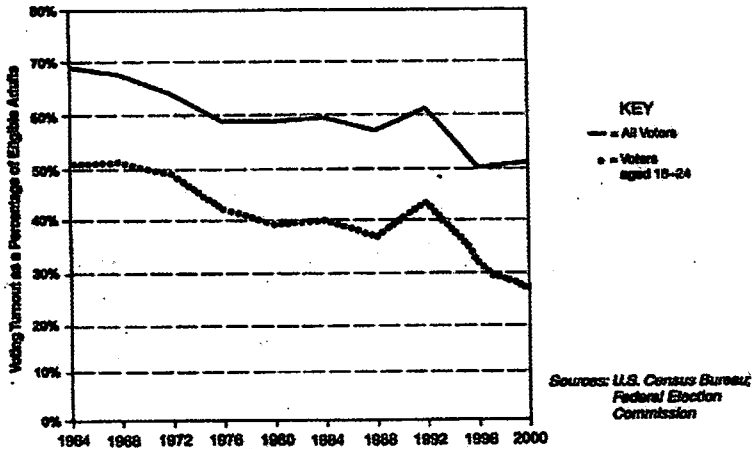


Figure 2.3 Voting rate separated by all voters and voters aged 18-24 in the USA

Figure 2.4 shows the voting rate of general elections in Germany⁷. On the same homepage I can also read the voting rate for younger people. The general voting rate has dropped from 88.6 per cent in 1980 to 79.1 per cent in 2002. But people under 25 show a stronger declining tendency. Their voting rate in 1980 is 79.65 per cent but it is only 69.12 per cent in 2002⁸. According to the Federal Statistic Bureau⁹, the age group between 21 and 24 has the lowest voting rate of 66.5 %.

7 http://de.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Bild:_Wahlbeteiligung_deutschland_bundestagswahlen.png&filetimestamp=20061113190436

8 <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wahlbeteiligung>

9 http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms/Sites/destatis/Internet/DE/Presse/pk/2006/Repraesentative_Wahlstatistik/Statement_Hahlen,templateId=renderPrint.psml

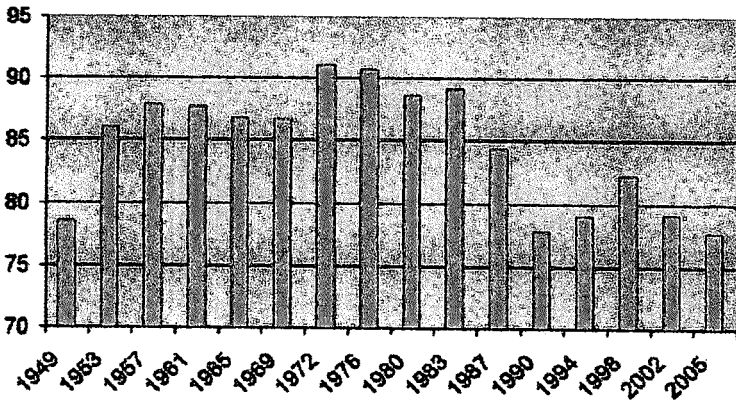


Figure 2.4 Voting rate of nationwide elections in Germany

Why are voters not so interested in voting? Beside the lack of likability of the candidates, they answer that voting is not so easy and information about the candidates is also limited. This investigation of not voting was conducted by Pew Research Centre. This data is based on the presidential election in 2000. Most people's answers as to why they are not voting are lack of likability and unfamiliarity of candidates. Those behaviors come also partly from lack of information.

Reasons For Not Voting*					
	<u>Total</u>	<u>18-29</u>	<u>30-49</u>	<u>50-64</u>	<u>65+</u>
<i>Percent who agree ...</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>%</i>	
Don't like candidates	72	70	75	72	60
Unfamiliar with candidates	64	69	65	58	60
Can make greater impact in community affairs	47	49	48	41	40
Don't want to get involved in politics	36	37	34	34	47
Difficult to get to polls	26	30	25	16	32
Complicated to register	13	14	14	8	20

* Based on those who don't always vote.

Figure 2.5 : Reasons for not voting¹⁰

3 Internet as political information in Japan, the USA and Germany

Mass media cannot provide substantial information for electorates but in the internet age, there are many possibilities to activate democracy. The internet can store information over a long-span and becomes an increasingly important source of information for elections. I intend to compare election sites in Japan, the USA and Germany to show how they use the internet for democracy. I will gather some developed examples from those countries.

3-1 Japan

KosoNippon (Conception of Japan)¹¹ aims to propose public policies for government. This independent organization has a database for elections, but this means only that it has links to 616 national assembly members. Such links to politicians alone cannot help much, because homepages of politicians are full of slogans and propaganda and electorates cannot estimate the possible realization of such slogans. The

¹⁰ <http://people-press.org/report/?pageid=196>

¹¹ <http://db.kosonippon.org/index.php>

second problem is that electorates cannot get neutral information about the assembly members' political achievements, articulations in and out of parliament. The homepage cannot tell us from whom the campaign money of the politicians comes. KosonNippon sent questionnaires to members of national parliament (altogether 722) but only 137 answered questions and the majority ignored such questionnaire as I checked at the end of the year 2008.

We can read blogs of politicians in ele-log¹². Readers can write comments to the blog, but there are some cases in which hot discussions turn to personal assaults. I have checked this homepage on May 11 2009. Politicians of the Democratic Party (the greatest opposition party in Japan at that time and now a ruling party) sent their information to the election sites almost two times more often than the politicians of the Liberal Democratic Party (a ruling conservative party at that time). Such an unbalance shows that Japanese political parties, especially conservative parties do not take the internet seriously. The number of politicians involved in this site is too few.

According to the explanation of Election¹³, it intends to boost the voting rate. The owner of Election also uses ele-log. The site is run since June 2000 by an internet company, I-Hive and an internet planning web managing company, TriShip Group, both in Fukuoka. Election conducts opinion polls. The results of the internet surveys on this homepage show the week points of such surveys. The voices of oppositional parties (that time) are stronger because politicians of oppositional parties are more likely to answer from easy understandable reasons. We can read blogs of politicians but the number of Diet lawmakers who have a link to this homepage is too few. So I must assume that Election is not enough as an information website for election.

The Senkyo (election)¹⁴ is the best election site in Japan. The internet newspaper

12 [http : //www.election.ne.jp/](http://www.election.ne.jp/)

13 www.election.co.jp

14 [http : //www.senkyo.janjan.jp/](http://www.senkyo.janjan.jp/)

JANJAN (Japan Alternative News for Justices and New Cultures) organizes the site. This is the most developed and advanced site among the election sites in Japan but the contents are not enough. Even though citizens can click the name of a certain politician to get election information about his/her person, usually, they are brought to a link to the homepage of this politician. What impresses me most is that The Senkyo uses a search machine of parliamentary documentation¹⁵ and we can check the articulations of politicians in parliament. But we must read their expressions from the beginning of the parliamentary documents so it takes too much time to find the necessary expression of a certain politician.

The information on the manifestos of political parties is also important for electorates. Manifesto-o-yonde-Senkyo-ni-ikou (Go Voting After Reading of Manifestos)¹⁶ is in this aspect an useful tool. Professor Masayasu Kitagawa, director of Institute for Manifesto-Research Centre runs this homepage. If we click on the site, we find a link to the homepage of Mani-Ken (Study of Manifestos)¹⁷ of the above mentioned The Senkyo of JANJAN. Kitagawa is responsible for the Manifesto classroom of this site. On Manifesto Map¹⁸, we can read the manifestos of individual politicians and political parties. Manifesto-Hyoka-Kiko (Evaluation Institution of Manifestos)¹⁹ is another site for manifestos. This site is now inactive because it seems not to have been renewed since 2007.

Genron-NPO (Opinion-NPO)²⁰ evaluates manifestos of political parties and politicians and writes comments. According to the site, it has about 500 active members. The process of evaluation is now ongoing, so we cannot read it now.

15 <http://kokkai.ndl.go.jp>

16 <http://www.manifesto-senkyo.jp/>

17 <http://www.senkyo.janjan.jp/special/manifesto.html>

18 <http://www.senkyo.janjan.jp/bin/manifest/mani-map.html>

19 <http://manifesto.or.jp/>

20 http://www.genron-npo.net/forum_policy.html

PHP (Peace and Happiness through Prosperity), General Research Institute has a homepage of Manifesto White Paper²¹ in which we can read Manifestos of 123 pages. We can read for example in 2008 year's Manifesto White Paper²² how the manifestos of LDP and Komeito Party (Buddhist Party) have been changed until 2008. 21st Century Public Policy Institute²³, a homepage of a think-tank is interesting. If we click, we can read many research reports and analyses of elections.

3-2 The United States of America

Now we turn to the situation in the USA. VoteSmart²⁴ is an exciting and informative homepage. The organization, supported by volunteers, gathers election information and gets no fund from the Political Action Committee (PAC), entrepreneurs and other pressure groups. More than 5000 people work together. If we choose for example the Congress²⁵ in Florida, then we get a list of congresspersons. If we want to gather information about Jeff Miller for example, we can read about his background, education, political activities and affiliations to certain organizations. If we click on Voting Record²⁶, we can read records of his attitudes to proposed bills and whether Congress has passed such bills. If we click on Issue Positions (Political Courage Test)²⁷, we can read his answers to the questions about the following 16 points in the 2008 Political Courage Test: 1 Abortion Issues 2 Budgetary, Spending and Tax Issues 3 Campaign Finance and Governmental Reform Issues 4 Crime Issues 5 Education 6 Employment 7 Environmental and Energy Issues 8 Legislative Priorities 9 Gun Issues 10 Health Issues 11 Immigration Issues 12 International Aid,

21 <http://research.php.co.jp/manifesto/>

22 <http://research.php.co.jp/manifesto/manifest2008.pdf>

23 <http://www.21ppi.org/>

24 <http://www.votesmart.org/>

25 http://www.votesmart.org/official_congress_state.php?state_id=FL

26 <http://www.votesmart.org/>

27 http://www.votesmart.org/npat.php?can_id=17276

International Policy and International Trade 13 National Security Issues 14 Social Issues 15 Social Security Issues 16 Welfare and Poverty Issues. If we click on Interest Group Ratings, we can gather some information on politicians and their affiliation with interest groups. In the topic Speeches and Public Statements, we can also read articulations²⁸ of politicians in parliament from the past. And if we click on Campaign Finances, we have links to the famous site of fund-raisers for congresspersons (OpenSecrets)²⁹. With the help of the last homepage we can find out how much money politicians have gotten from whom and how much money they have spent. We can find out also how far they have revealed their sources of fund-raising.

Smartvoter.org³⁰ established in November 1996, is the first homepage of this kind in America which provides neutral election information. According to the site many teams support this site. There are seven teams in California, one in Ohio, one in New York, one in Massachusetts, one in Missouri, one in Pennsylvania. The League of Women Voters of California Education Fund hosts Smartvoter.org. This is a nonprofit corporation and its aims are to 'provide voters with comprehensive non-partisan information about the contests on their ballot in an easy-to-use presentation' and to 'provide a means for candidates to publish information about themselves and their candidacy direct to voters.'³¹ This neutral homepage received the Tech Museum Award.

On the site of Vote.com³², citizens can vote on discussed topics. The site is hosted by an adviser of former President Clinton, Dick Morris and his wife Eileen McGann. The site is politically neutral and has 1.7 million members and aims to

28 http://www.votesmart.org/speech.php?can_id=1727

29 <http://www.opensecrets.org/politicians/summary.php?cid=N 00013846>

30 www.smartvoter.org

31 <http://www.smartvoter.org/voter/about.html>

32 www.vote.com

give citizens an opportunity to express their own opinion. Concord Coalition³³ specializes on the tendency of fiscal shortage of the USA. The name of this site comes from the city Concord in Massachusetts. English army must once retreat from the city.

The Centre for Responsive Politics runs OpenSecrets³⁴. This site has three missions : to inform, to empower and to advocate. According to the website, this site exists since 1983 and 'is the nation's premier research group tracking money in US politics and its effect on elections and public policy'³⁵. If we want to know how much campaigning funds Barack Obama and John McCain rose, we need only to enter this site.³⁶ If we click on Personal Finance Disclosures in OpenSecrets, we can find out how much fund politicians and Cabinet members have raised and how high their rate of fund disclosure is. We can also find out from Revolving Door who as lobbyists visits whom. If we want to know who is a sponsor for travel, we only need to click on Travel.

The FreeDictionary³⁷ is a great website. If you are interested in Barack Obama, you only need to enter his name. You can then get information about his early life and career, state legislature, keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, senate campaign, senate career, presidential campaign, political advocacy and personal life. In each section you can go deeper and also read papers about him. The big problem of this website comes from the character of a free dictionary. Everybody can add new data or erase some parts, so the contents of this site are not stable. Especially after Barack Obama won the presidency campaign, his page became a target of vandalism. This is the same problem that Wikipedia has. After Obama was

33 www.concordcoalition.org

34 <http://www.opensecrets.org/>

35 <http://www.opensecrets.org/about/index.php>

36 <http://www.opensecrets.org/pres08/index.php>

37 <http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/>

elected as President, his promises of policies disappeared. The lack of continuity and stability of information is a minus point of this website.

Commission on Presidential Debates³⁸ specializes on presidential elections. According to the website, its primary purpose is 'to sponsor and produce debates for the United States presidential and vice-presidential candidates and to undertake research and educational activities relating to the debates.'³⁹ If we go to Debate History, we must choose an election year. If we choose for example 2008, we can check the debates between Obama and McCain as TV news and as transcribed texts. Such a transcription is useful to check the articulations of candidates.

Slate.com⁴⁰ is a leading web magazine site for politics, set up in 1996 as an affiliated company of Microsoft. The Washington Post however took over this site in December 2004. The site once charged viewers but later became free and is regarded as politically democratic.

3-3 Germany

Die Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung (bpb) (The Federal Centre for Political Education)⁴¹ was set up on November 25 1952 as Centre for Homeland Service of Federal Republic of Germany. Since 1963 it has today's name and an office in Bonn. It has an informative political site which is a product of cooperation among, bpb, Politik-digital.de and Centre for Media and Interactivity of Giessen-University. This site is a political education site and belongs to the Ministry of Home Affairs. Die Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (bpb) has the task 'to promote understanding for politics, to consolidate democratic consciousness and to strengthen readiness to work politically together under decree of the Federal Ministry for Internal

38 <http://www.debates.org/>

39 <http://www.debates.org/>

40 www.slate.com

41 http://www.bpb.de/themen/7TQ8YO,,0,wahlthemen_de.html

Affairs.⁴² For the financing of the bpb the Federal Government paid 26.8 M Euro in the fiscal year 2002 and 26,7 M Euro in the fiscal year 2003 respectively.⁴³ This fact was new for me, because all internet sites in Japan and the USA which I have examined are independent and private sites and financially not supported by official institutions. I estimate that this homepage is the best which I could find in Germany. We can here also check many papers of experts. This site invites experts from the possibly widest fields, scholars and politicians from various parties. If we want to know about worker's problems, we can also read the opinion of BDA-President (President of Federal-Union of German Employers) Dieter Hundt. To get knowledge on disputed themes, there are explanations of glossaries. To give some examples, there is a glossary for workers' problems, social state, health policy, EU, problem of admitting Turkey into the EU, EU constitution and so forth. We can visit also homepages of 18 political parties in the Federal Republic of Germany and look at their election placards. In Chat Duel, young politicians discuss with each other. In Press Show, we can read articles from various newspapers. In Election Spots, we can look into election spots, shown in movies and TV programs.

The Federal Centre for Political Education has Wahl-O-Mat, a game-like educational program for elections. According to the website, the origin of this game goes back to the Institute for Public and Politics (Instituut voor Publiek en Politiek/IPP) in Amsterdam in 1985.⁴⁴ In September 2002 Spiegel On-line and stern.de introduced this game into Germany. This presentation system is introduced for elections on state level since 2003. In the Federal Election 2005, more than 5.1 Mio engaged in the program with the cooperation of various internet firms like zdf.de, FAZ.net, Spiegel On-line, sueddeutsche.de, N. 24, stern.de, Wissen.de, Netzeitung.de, T-Online, freenet.

42 http://www.bpb.de/die_bpb/. The author translated German into English.

43 http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bundeszentrale_f%C3%BCr_politische_Bildung

44 http://www.bpb.de/methodik/AN79O6,0,0,Making_of_WahlOMat.html

de, Berlin On-line and Endstand. In the program of Wahl-O-Mat, there are teaching materials⁴⁵. If we click on Parties for Election, we receive two 90 Min teaching units with homework for a certain theme.

Dol2day⁴⁶ received the Prix Ars Elctornica 2004, the Grimme On-line Award for International Competition of Cyberarts. The Adolf-Grimme-Institute awards the prize since 2001⁴⁷ for good websites. According to the homepage, 'dol 2 day is the biggest political community in Germany with more than 10.000 members. The members can meet people with political interest and discuss about various themes, and make inquiries or work with political parties. Every fourth month, there is an internet-election where amongst the virtual parties candidates an Internet Prime Minister is choosen. As a member of this site, you can get internet-money Bimbex, the currency of dol 2 day, if you take part in discussions and inquiries. If you improve your political IQ, you get also Dol-Points. If you are active in a net-community and in a virtual political party and are successful to get more than 10,000 Dol-Points, you can become Prime Minister after you win the nomination campaign.⁴⁸

Trupoli⁴⁹ gives us information about politicians. There are articulations of 4,355 politicians. If we click for example on Angela Merkel, we can read her 346 articulations. The Readership can evaluate those articulations from the standpoint of credibility, agreement and importance. We can read 13,437 evaluations from participants.⁵⁰ Besides this, we can write our own opinion to any articulation of politicians. If we find inconsequence between the past articulation and the present articulation of a certain politician, we can point out such inconsequence and comment on it.

45 <http://www.bpb.de/methodik/QYQNR/9,0,0,Unterrichtsmaterialien.html>

46 <http://www.dol2day.com>

47 <http://www.grimme-institut.de/html/index.php?id=33>

48 http://www.dol2day.com/help/?n=DOCU_NOVICE#

49 <http://www.trupoli.com/de>

50 Those data are based on 30. December 2008.

According to the homepage /e-politik.de/⁵¹, this web magazine for politics, society and political science exists since 1999 and belongs to no political party. It has offices in Berlin, Munich, Leipzig, Greifswald and Heidelberg. Around 40 free journalists in Germany, France, Austria and Switzerland write for the magazine. Donations and membership-fees finance this site. It aims to tell its audience about real problems and themes and to promote and to educate journalists and non-journalists. It enables them to invest for political education and to take part in public and academic discussion on politics, society and political science.

Wahlen, Wahlrecht und Wahlsysteme (Election, Election Law and Election System)⁵² is an interesting homepage. This homepage explains the election system, technical terms and news from newspapers and so forth. abgeordnetenwatch.de is the homepage of watch-teams for German election. On this homepage we can communicate with other people. bundestag.de⁵³ is an official site of parliament. On this homepage, we can read articulations in German parliament and its committees.

4 Result of comparison research among Japan, America and Germany

After checking internet sites for election in Germany, in contradiction to Japan and the US, citizens, universities and government together try to realize democracy to stop non-voting and to promote political participation. The homepages of Japanese politicians are not so developed. The level of election sites in America, which I checked for this research, exceeds those of Japanese sites. The American homepages provide information about candidates and politicians in detail. We can follow articulations of congresspersons and easily understand the flow of campaign money and the relation between politicians and corporations. Politics become transparent. Even

51 [http : //www.e-politik.de/lesen/wp-content/plugins/downloads-manager/upload/was_ist_e-politik_de_050208.doc](http://www.e-politik.de/lesen/wp-content/plugins/downloads-manager/upload/was_ist_e-politik_de_050208.doc)

52 [http : //www.wahlrecht.de/](http://www.wahlrecht.de/)

53 [http : //www.bundestag.de/](http://www.bundestag.de/)

though we visit the election sites in Japan, we find only direct links to politicians and read their propaganda, apart from manifesto-analysis and proposals of public policies. To be able to build our own opinion, it is very important to discuss issues under the consideration of the opinions of experts, to follow long-standing expressions of politicians and to take part in discussions with other internet-users. From this standpoint, the election sites in America are more developed than those in Japan, but German sites stress the educational aspect of election sites more. I assume from my research that in this aspect German sites are better than American and Japanese sites. Regarding to flow of campaign money, American sites are more progressive and informative.

5 Internet and democracy

The internet is a useful tool to realize democracy but the internet is surrounded with many problems to be solved. I will elaborate those problems of the internet.

5-1 Difficulty of maintenance of election sites

It is difficult to keep election sites for a long period for various reasons. First, people tend to lose their interest for election sites when Election Day is over. Fewer viewers mean fewer revenues. Second, 'the political sites just couldn't compete with the content-rich news sites of established media companies' (Davis et al., 2002, p.77). 'Even though the technology exists to target ads at specific Internet users, few of them saw any political advertising from the parties or campaigns or even from political portals or news organizations promoting political coverage' (Davis et al., 2002, p.78). Especially in Japan where there is no strong donation culture like in the US, election sites meet with financial difficulties. As we have already elaborated, the German site, Die Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung (bpb) (The Federal Centre for Political Education) shows one solution to keep such a political site. Federal government financially supports this site.

5-2 Are opinions in the internet representative for electorates?

The election sites are independent and neutral, but if political parties will not send their information to such election sites, we cannot guarantee fairness and neutrality of the sites. In Japan the needs and wishes of political parties to make ads are not equally strong. Lawmakers from the oppositional parties (before the general election in 2009) have a stronger will to advertise and to discuss with internet-users. The citizens, who are active to gather election information by internet, are high-minded. Their opinions on the internet and the results of statistics conducted for internet-users are different from that of average citizens. If one considers the digital divide, opinions on the internet cannot be representative for all voters. The percentage of younger people who use internet is higher, so opinions of younger people are stronger articulated than those of elder people. To avoid an imbalance, not only political parties, but also citizens' groups, government officers and scholars should cooperate with election sites and provide high-qualified and deliberative information for electorates.

5-3 Information on the internet has its origin in the mass media

Most information, which one can find on the internet, stems from commercial news media. Original news from individuals are rare (Davis et al., 2000, p.98). Many people read articles of newspapers in the internet because it costs nothing. They shop for certain articles and write their opinion to the sites. We need more deeper and better balanced information for elections. Experts and politicians must work together.

6 Realization of democracy

From the comparison of election sites in three countries, I have gotten some insight into Internet sites in those countries. I can list up some ideas which are useful to build better election sites in order to realize civil society :

6-1 Fair and deep sites with links to neutral political institutes

It is important to provide electorates with deep, fair and neutral information for elections, to give electorates an easy access to politics and to help them to make vot-

ing decisions. Links to homepages and weblogs of politicians alone cannot meet such a demand. It is too difficult and time-consuming for ordinary citizens to have information about politicians, their campaign money, their articulations in parliament, evaluation of public policies and so forth. Lippmann wrote in *Public Opinion*: 'The real environment is altogether too big, too complex and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations (Lippmann, 1965, p.11)'. Election information without evaluation is therefore not useful for the realization of a true and effective democracy. We need experts who can conduct such tasks instead of us. Election sites must have links to neutral political institutes, think-tanks, scholars, NPOs, NGOs and other stakeholders which provide us with reliable information and evaluation.

6-2. Elimination of the digital divide

To remove the digital divide is an important task. Assuming that election sites are ideal tools to realize democracy, the digital divide should be solved in order to have fair elections. Important information must be open for all people. The generation between their 20s and 40s is mostly connected with networks (netizens). Regarding to the computer access, there are also differences in social layer and gender.⁵⁴ So their opinions become stronger representative. Each government must make an effort to eliminate digital divide.

6-3 Access to good-balanced forums and different opinions

Citizens must have access to different and balanced opinions. Cass Sunstein, professor of Chicago University, pointed out three important characters of good forums: 'First, it ensures that speakers can have access to a wide array of people' 'Second, the public-forum doctrine allows speakers not only to have general access to heterogeneous people, but also to specific people and specific institutions with

54 <http://www.keidanren.or.jp/japanese/profile/soukai/063/50-houkoku.html>

whom they have a complaint'. 'Third, the public-forum doctrine increases the likelihood that people generally will be exposed to a wide variety of people and views' (Sunstein, 2007, p.26 and p.27). Cass Sunstein focuses on polarization in Republic.com 2.0(Sunstein, 2007, pp.46-96). People have an inclination to visit homepages of the like-minded people and to discuss with the like-minded people, so their opinions become easily extremer. Sunstein searches 1400 political blogs and analyses the links of those blogs. 91 % of the blogs have links to like-minded blogs(Sunstein, 2007, p.149). Davis also points out the same danger and stresses the need of neutral sites (Davis et al., 2002, p. 85). Such behavior for information gathering is a threat to democracy. This fact also advocates the necessity of fair and good-balanced election sites with various opinions.

7 Proposals

We can observe indifference in politics not only in Japan, but also in the US and Germany. Declining voting rates deprive democracy from its legitimacy. Mass media's political coverage with sensationalism is counter-productive to democracy. It is common that electorates go voting without enough information. New technology can change such a situation and make deliberative democracy possible. Election sites can provide enough and deep information for election and storage issues, discourses for long-pan time. After analysis of the internet sites in tree countries, the week points of Japanese sites become obvious. The Japanese election sites show only the beginning stage of internet use for elections. From the advanced cases of election sites in Germany, I can learn a lot. To host educational election sites with various argumentations more financial and personal resources are necessary. The efforts of stakeholders and civil activities are important factors for the realization of democracy. In this sense to keep good election sites is indispensable. After I have observed that many famous sites had to shut down for financial reasons, to spend tax money for the maintenance of election sites is a good idea for the sake of common interest

and for the further realization of civil society.

From the sites in the US, I can also learn a lot. Many citizens are politically active and gather information for electorates. They set up many useful homepages with deep insights into politics. On the internet we can find out about the articulations of politicians, campaign money, names of fund-raisers, personal data, travelling and its payers and so forth in the American sites. The most important point is civil activity. Democracy is an institution which we must keep alive. Technology alone cannot change this world as Barber said : 'technologies tend not to be determinative but rather are conditioned by what is going on in the society in which they grow, which is why, when I talk about technology, I generally focus on the characteristics of the society beyond and why, I think, we really need to be focusing on those characteristics here today as well'⁵⁵. Democracy without awaken citizens is like despotism. I wish that this paper may cast a stone to change the status quo of politics and to animate citizens to become politically more active.

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55 Barber 2000/2001 : p.8 [http : //web.mit.edu/m-i-t/articles/barber.html](http://web.mit.edu/m-i-t/articles/barber.html)

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