

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

By 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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Editorial Review

Review

A trailblazing comparative analysis of the effects of Internet use on key political outcomes, *Democracy's Double-Edged Sword* makes a bold theoretical argument about contemporary Internet issues and tests that theory with an impressive collection of data. Well written and original, this book will appeal to both students and researchers in the field.

(Michael A. Xenos, University of Wisconsin–Madison)

Bailard's groundbreaking study shows how internet access affects demands for political change. New technologies provide information about the democratic performance of both domestic and foreign countries. An unfavorable comparison of the two reduces satisfaction, which may motivate action. The book offers novel insights on the effects of new technology and the precursors of political movements.

(Devra C. Moehler, Assistant Professor, the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania)

Bailard takes up a deep question about digital media: whether the Internet advances democratic satisfaction. Drawing on surveys and experiments, she presents fresh analysis from around the world showing the contingencies that affect how digital media use shapes citizen satisfaction with government. This ambitious book belongs on the shelf of everyone interested in the comparative study of digital media and democracy.

(Bruce Bimber, Professor, Department of Political Science, University of California, Santa Barbara)

In Democracy's Double Edged Sword, Bailard takes us from Bosnia to Tanzania to explore the impact of the internet on political communication. Yet she does more than explore, she tests. Her natural experiments reveal how people become more politically cynical using the internet but also how they start to peg their political norms to those of their neighbors. Bailard's book is a must read for anyone interested in how the internet is shaping emerging democracies.

(Phil Howard, Professor, University of Washington)

This book offers a sophisticated look at the democratizing effects of the Internet. Playing into the hands of neither the cyber-optimists nor the cyber-pessimists, Bailard skillfully illustrates the contingent nature of the Internet's effects. Employing country- and individual-level analysis, as well as field experiments, this book makes a major contribution to our understanding of the causal effects of the Internet on a global scale.

(Talia Stroud, Author of *Niche News: The Politics of News Choice*)

[Bailard] has written an outstanding book on democracy and the Internet.. a highly original exploration of the

democratic potential of the Internet.

(*Choice*)

About the Author

Catie Snow Bailard is an assistant professor of media and public affairs at George Washington University.

Users Review

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Jackie Ballesteros:

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Marlys Wieland:

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Debbie Gray:

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