**Why eDemocracy?**

**Exploiting the Characteristics of the Internet**  
  
The traditional methods of political engagement have [lost much of their appeal](http://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&source=web&cd=2&ved=0CCkQFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fjava.cs.vt.edu%2Fpublic%2Fprojects%2Fdigitalgov%2Fpapers%2FNetchaeva.EGov.Edemo.pdf&ei=wtUCTsfTH4rjrAeiptjfCg&usg=AFQjCNGd-JpfSi0yjYPaOFo3qtUfZWiZ4Q&sig2=HyLFUlAt6pBzrv6M2ulCSA) amongst the populations of many Western democracies, and particularly so amongst younger generations. The internet, leveraging Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 platforms, offers new methods through which people can communicate, collaborate, participate and innovate towards an improved society, and a more legitimate and representative democratic system. The internet possesses a range of advantageous features; its ubiquity, interactivity, and cheap scalability have revolutionised the way in which societies and economies are structured, organised and run. Democracy, too, can be transformed by exploiting the positive features of the internet. The internet has [greatly reduced the costs](http://www.finance.gov.au/publications/gov20taskforcereport/doc/Government20TaskforceReport.pdf) of broadcasting and mass-replicating data and information, opening the possibility for citizens to bypass traditional intermediaries to content, or even create their own content. The prime examples of this development have been the rise of blogs and social media:

This [blog post](http://thefailedestate.blogspot.com/2011/06/journos-in-jarmies.html) on *The Failed Estate*provides an account of the role of political bloggers in Australia, and how some sections of the mainstream media have reacted with hostility towards the contemporary decentralisation of information control. It is questionable, however, whether this decentralisation has gone far enough, particularly in Australia where one corporation dominates media ownership – to the point of a monopoly in several states. Additionally, within what little diversity the Australian media possesses exists a [narrow and concentrated media class](http://www.abc.net.au/unleashed/2767322.html), whose constituents possess what is effectively a megaphone for their views through ubiquitous appearances across different media outlets. Afterall, a diverse and independent media is just as critical as a free media in ensuring a functioning democracy; a centralised and homogeneous media is [far less conducive to communicative justice](http://mt.educarchile.cl/MT/jjbrunner/archives/1-Habermas_Deliberation2006.pdf), where the interests of citizens are given more prominence than the interests of influential or highly-resourced lobby groups.

The internet also renders political activity more convenient through dismantling traditional barriers such as time, distance, and the organisational requirements of physical mass mobilisation. The range of choice made available through online platforms – for instance, semi-anonymous web forums and social media – allows individuals to [escape the limitations](http://osaka.law.miami.edu/~froomkin/discourse/ils.pdf) of prejudice, social cues, timorousness, disability, and financial disadvantage. Moreover, psychological barriers such as perceived dearth of knowledge, lack of expertise, aversion to conflict, and hesitation to dissent from majority opinion are each [established impediments to political engagement](http://www.u-topic.nl/05links/02_Witschge_Online.pdf) that can potentially be overcome through online initiatives and eDemocracy. Overall, eDemocracy wields the potential to cultivate diverse and heterogeneous political debate, and equality and communicative justice within those debates.

How this has occurred is largely due to the advent of Web 2.0, and will be further facilitated by what is being referred to as Web 3.0 or the ‘Semantic Web’. What is meant by each of these terms has been thoroughly discussed in the project blog, in the post entitled “[How to stop worrying and learn to love the internet.](http://joshdpc.wordpress.com/2011/05/13/how-to-stop-worrying-and-learn-to-love-the-internet/)” The project blog post of “[The times they are a-changin’](http://joshdpc.wordpress.com/2011/04/28/the-times-they-are-a-changin/)” also provides some introductory information on social media and RSS feeds. To expand upon those blog posts, it is also crucial to highlight that Web 2.0 has a number of underlying core principles. Those [principles include](http://www.rhul.ac.uk/politics-and-IR/about-us/chadwick/Pdf/Chadwick_Web_2.0_New_Challenges_for_the_Study_of_E-Democracy_I-S_2009.pdf) a belief in collective intelligence, successful reliance upon pervasive voluntarism, flexibility and mobility, transparency, experimentalism, innovation, and the fundamental importance of open access to data and information. The movement towards Web 3.0 is only further elevating the importance of open data, as Tim Berners-Lee explains:

Overall, the internet and new technology offer methods through which citizens, the state, and the third sector can increase both the quantity and quality of mass participation, collaboration, and engagement. Information and data is empowering, and through online platforms, can be made more accessible, replicable and transformable than ever before, enhancing political debate and the deliberative practices of the broader public sphere. It is critical to note, however, that the internet and eDemocracy are not substitutes for reform in the offline world; it enriches, not replaces, traditional face-to-face aspects of democracy.  
  
To explore the reasons for pursuing eDemocracy further, please see the pages on [Beyond the Vote](http://edemocracy.weebly.com/beyond-the-vote.html), [eGovernment](http://edemocracy.weebly.com/egovernment.html), and [Empowerment and Engagement](http://edemocracy.weebly.com/empowerment-and-engagement.html).