DISCUSSION PAPER

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Transforming, Not Digitizing
Germany's Path to Digital Democracy

Liberal democracies in Europe and beyond are facing challenges, and so does the German democracy. In the debate on how to strengthen and revive democracy, digitalization of the political sphere is predominantly seen as a threat to democratic discourse and not as an opportunity in Germany.

This paper[1] goes to the source of this paradox and offers a concept of digital democracy as a combination of the dimensions information – participation – transformation. In urging to see digitalization as a process reaching beyond the digitalization of former analog processes, it lays out four paths towards implementing and seizing the opportunities of digital democracy in Germany.

While Germany is an economic powerhouse within the European Union and worldwide, it is far from pioneering when it comes to digital transformation. Political efforts regarding digitalization mostly focus on regulating digital industries and weathering the digitalization of the SMEs driving Germany's economy. While practically all political stakeholders emphasize the importance of the digital transformation, it is still treated rhetorically as a novelty[2], and Germany lags behind other European Union countries in many areas of digitalization.[3] The importance of digitalization beyond internet politics and in advancing 'classical' policy fields (e.g. social and labor affairs, investment policy, education etc.) is slowly being understood, but is not yet mirrored in the way political administrations organize and recruit talent.

1. This paper was first published in September 2017 as a chapter of Disrupting Democracy by the Bertelsmann Foundation for an international audience and is part of the program "Democracy 2025 – Democratic innovations for a changing society" at Das Progressive Zentrum. We warmly thank the Bertelsmann Foundation North America for the collaboration.

2. Morris, H. (2013). Chancellor Merkel Discovers the Internet. *The New York Times*, (online). Retrieved from http://nyti.ms/2vZCOpQ
3. European Commission (2017). *Europe's Digital Progress Report (EDPR) 2017 Country Profile Germany*. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2q5Nh1q

Thinking ahead.

In this environment, digital democracy and digitalization opportunities within the democratic process and social change have, at best, taken a backseat, while debates concerning other aspects of digitalization have been given priority. The discussion around digital democracy remains buzzwordy and abstract, especially within organized politics. While civil society has started to embrace the opportunities offered by digital tools – in terms of different forms of engagement and local initiatives – only a few official institutions have looked beyond digitalization as a means of providing information and grasped its full potential.

At present, liberal democracies are facing challenges in Europe and beyond. This is also true for Germany, despite its stable government coalitions and administrative structures. By way of example, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD, Alternative for Germany), a right-wing populist party, is represented in 13 out of 16 state parliaments for the first time, gained more than 20 percent of the votes in recent state-level elections. This is especially remarkable, given that the AfD was only founded in 2013. The refugee situation, which saw 890,000 refugees entering Germany in 2015, according to the German Ministry of Interior, has spurred both a wave of civic engagement as well as one of xenophobic crime.[4] German political parties, gifted with a stable party system, see their membership dwindling and are faced with the challenge of providing an attractive place for political engagement.[5] Germany is faced with the same transformation of the public sphere through digitalization as other nations. Political stakeholders, as well as the media, are still searching for their place in this new landscape.

At the same time, Germany is currently seeing a surge of civic engagement towards the strengthening of democracy and the protection of an open society. The Brexit vote in June 2016, the election of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States, and neighbors Austria and France almost electing right-wing presidents, have caused many Germans to ask themselves if their democracy is also less stable than it seems. Many new

organizations concerned with this issue have formed in recent months, and major parties have seen an influx of new members in winter 2016-2017.

What is missing is an overarching conceptualization of 'digital democracy' and a debate on how ongoing efforts could be combined to truly 'digitally transform' Germany's liberal democracy.

It would, therefore, be an understatement to say that there is fertile ground for a debate on digital democracy in Germany. Finding answers to political disenchantment and populism for the modernization of institutions and the revitalization of political parties in digital transformation seems promising. However, this debate is, at best, taking place on individual aspects of digital democracy, such as e-government or e-participation. What is missing in Germany is an overarching conceptualization of the potential of 'digital democracy' and a debate on how ongoing efforts within public administration and civil society could be combined to truly 'digitally transform' Germany's liberal democracy.

Making a Case for Digital Democracy

Political actors need to respond to increasingly complex challenges. Our democratic system has to be – today more than ever – responsive to global challenges and able to handle an increasingly complex and digital political environment. Rising populism, increasingly radical mindsets, waning confidence in political institutions, and increased expectations towards political participation, add extra challenges to the established processes and structures of liberal democracies that were set up decades ago. While digital transformation will not be the only answer to these challenges, it will be key to democratic institutions and political stakeholders acting decisively in an increasingly digital world.

4. German Ministry of Interior (2016). *890.000 Asylsuchende im Jahr 2015*, (online) Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2jdSLHc
5. For an intro into the debate on the state of political parties compare Burmester, H. (2015). Adaptable, diverse, innovative: Five future impulses for political parties, (online) Berlin: Das Progressive Zentrum. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2tBzxMX

But what does a 'digital transformation of democracy' actually entail? Does it mean digitizing the current political system and taking advantage of the new communication channels the internet provides? To define digitalization simply as digitizing existing processes and structures would disregard the opportunities the technological and social innovation of digitalization affords. It is important to digitize what is already in existence, but this should only be the first step. It must also be recognized that the new information and communication infrastructures emerging through digitalization profoundly shape our understanding of politics, political organization, institutional designs, and therefore, the democratic process itself.[6] This needs to be reflected in a debate on digital democracy.

In this regard, lessons can be drawn from the French philosopher Derrida. "New technologies are more than just more efficient techniques or means to perform a certain function or task. Rather, they are effecting profound transformations in the public sphere, changes that alter the dimensions of public space as well as the very structure of res publica."[7] In other words, digitalization might be both the trigger as well as the agent for the transformation of liberal democracies.

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Looking at digital democracy from this perspective does not mean that democratic processes are transformed simply through the incorporation of digital tools. While tools can certainly trigger further process innovations, a debate on digital democracy should look beyond a tool-orientated approach. Moreover, it is important that transformation is understood as a change in attitude and as experimentation in process, and that a full agreement that a 'digitized democracy' – while never fully digital – will look different than democratic systems built in the 20th century.

Thinking Beyond Participation – What Does a Digital Democracy Entail?

The digital transformation of democracy could serve as an opportunity to provide answers to a binary choice that has occupied the debate on the future of democracy in Germany for a good part of the past few decades. Direct democratic measures – for which digitalization truly served as a stepping stone – are often framed as antithetical to representative democracy. At the same time, direct democracy and participation may offer a chance to bypass frustration and annoyance with political institutions that increasingly seem clumsy, opaque and outdated.[8] This result is an either-or framing of representative democracy and civic participation.

Digital democracy could do both – Strengthen representative democracy while responding to demands for participation.

Digital democracy could essentially do both, strengthening representative democracy and its institutions while responding to demands for political participation beyond elections and opening new and sustainable avenues to participation. One of the leading questions in this context is how to use digital devices for engaging more citizens in a 'user-friendly' way. The rise of digital technology does not only call for new forms of participation and deliberation, but also requires a discussion on the adequate political organization and institutional designs of democracy. In response to quickly evolving digital communications, structural innovation in liberal democracies is highly relevant and required.

In this spirit, the potential for digital democracy in Germany should be comprised of three pillars:

6. Hoffman, J. (2014). *Digitalisation and democracy: The challenges of shaping the digital society*, (online). Retrieved from goo.gl/DJZGTl.
7. Derrida, J. (1994). *Spectres of Marx: The state of the debt, the work of mourning and the new international*. London:Routledge.
8. For an assessment on the binary debate and a 'machine that needs fixing' view on democracy see Burmester, H. (2017). Shifting frames – Six thoughts on innovating liberal democracy, (online). Das Progressive Zentrum. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2uAxk5P.

- **Information:** Digitalization and the (mobile) internet create quick and easy opportunities to obtain information. Political institutions and stakeholders now have the opportunity to directly (and remotely) connect with and inform citizens on a large scale. The power of the internet to offer access to knowledge is unmatched, and seizing the opportunity to inform oneself (either directly or through media outlets) is the first step to actively participate in a democratic society. Providing this access to citizens is not limited to news and current events, but should also include information on institutions and political processes themselves.

- **Participation:** The internet creates a virtual space for deliberation and is therefore a powerful source for new forms of political organization. Online-petition, mobilization platforms of political parties, and local initiatives organized with the help of digital tools are only some examples of digital opportunities for participation. Communications technology can also be applied in public assemblies, mini-publics, or for legislative consultation.[9] Furthermore, digitalization is useful in forging connections with the "offline world," by combining digital and analog participation concepts. The digitalization of participation holds the promise of eventually involving and including each and every citizen in the political process.

- **Transformation:** Today's democracy needs to be agile, resilient and capable of responding swiftly to outside challenges. The digital transformation of democracy calls for a "user-centered" approach to democracy, reorganizing (or at least experimenting with the reorganization of) structures in the administration, party organization and established political processes. This approach can be applied to inter-institutional interactions and interactions between institutions and citizens. One example of this approach is the internal transforming of government institutions so they are able to incorporate the results of direct democracy and participation into administrative and political processes. Without this user-centric focus, participation is at risk of getting lost in structures that – at least in the case of Germany – were conceived in the Bismarckian era. Transformation is therefore necessary to provide an organizational counterpart to participation and to fully incorporate other (digital) innovations to democracy.

9. Another example are 21st Century Town Meetings which combine face-to-face interaction in small groups with digital networks that allow a high number of remote participants as well as collective decision-making processes.

The State of Digital Democracy in Germany

So where does Germany stand on the possibility of embracing the concept of digital democracy, and do the necessary prerequisites exist for transformation? While this paper cannot serve as a full assessment of the ongoing efforts on digital democracy (something which is much needed), it is safe to say that German stakeholders ought to contribute more effort towards developing all three dimensions addressed above.

Germany has one of the lowest rates of online interaction between citizens and public administrations in the EU.

Eighty-seven percent of German citizens use the internet on a regular basis, with surveys attributing digital competency to 68 percent of them.[10] Compared to other European Union countries, Germany is clearly above average, ranking seventh in the regional grouping. This assessment stands, despite the fact that Germany is not on track to fulfill its goal of providing 100 percent of the country with broadband internet by 2018.[11] The high numbers on overall use of the internet among citizens stands in stark contrast to the digitalization of the public sector. Germany has one of the lowest rates of online interaction between citizens and public administrations in the EU. Only 19 percent of Germans use electronic services offered by the public administration, ranking Germany near the bottom in the EU. Part of the reason for this is that e-government services in Germany are not user-friendly.[12] Citizens are also often unaware of the online opportunities already in place, although this information deficit is declining.[13] When the European Commission analyzed the overall state of digitalization in all European Union member states, it

10. European Commission (2017). *Europe's Digital Progress Report (EDPR) 2017 Country Profile Germany*. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2q5Nh1q
11. Rzepka, D. (2017). Dobrindt hält Breitband-Ziel noch für erreichbar. *Heute*, (online). Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2tJ3K0C
12. Prognos & Behördenspiegel (2017) *Trendreport digitaler Staat*. (online) Berlin/Bonn: Prognos/Behördenspiegel, p.10. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2qI0OTm
13. In 2016 57 % of those asked stated "no knowledge of many online-offers" as a reason against more frequent use of online administrative services, a decline by 19 points.

concluded, "[t]his [digital public sector] is the area in which Germany does worst and makes practically no progress."[14]

Efforts to Digitize the Administration

There have been a number of efforts by the federal government to advance e-government services, some of which are still ongoing. The German Ministry of Interior launched the initiative *Digitale Verwaltung 2020* (Digital Administration 2020) in 2014 and previously supported e-government initiatives. In 2013, the German parliament passed an act to promote electronic government, intended to establish the requirements for digital administrative services.[15] Expanding digital administrative services and working on a country-wide portal network is also part of a recent agreement among the German states and the federal government on the restructuring of the federal financial relationship. But a completion of these goals is still a long way off, and e-government maintains its status as an evergreen political demand in German politics. This is also evident in the run up to the 2017 federal elections.[16] Digitalization of the administration is one of the election promises that both major parties have brought forward[17], while the Ministry of the Interior has promised a digitalization of all proceedings by 2022. Many critics, however, wonder whether this plan ought to, instead, be undertaken at the local level.

Providing a digital administration should not be an end in and of itself, but a precondition for implementing innovations.

E-government obviously does not equate to digital democracy. But the early stage of political debate in Germany, combined with the fact that the digitalization of the administration is still an ongoing task, shows that the path toward an actual transformation of the administration will take even longer. Furthermore, government and public institutions are mostly concentrated on digitizing existing structures and procedures, rather than creating new ones. Examples range from services, such as applying for a passport or filing tax return forms, to ensuring reachability via secure email (De-Mail), or facilitating digital file management. This is also true for one of the few participatory tools at the federal level, the opportunity to file e-petitions to the German parliament.[18] The e-petition is practically a digitized version of the analog petition, which has a long history in Germany. In digital democracies, providing a digital administration should not be an end in and of itself, but should be a precondition for implementing innovations that serve the previously discussed dimensions: information, participation, and transformation.

Efforts to Think Broadly about Digital Democracy in Germany

The most recent effort to think broadly about the context of digitalization and democracy on a federal level was the Special Commission of the German parliament "Internet and Digital Society," which ran from 2010 to 2013. The bipartisan special commission worked closely with experts from civil society and academia. The sub-group "Democracy and State" made proposals on a wide range of issues, including, but not limited to, e-government, online-participation, transparency of the political process, and the transformation of the public sphere.[19] Some of the proposals were taken up (such as live-streaming every session of the plenary of the German Bundestag), but many of the bipartisan working group's ideas have not been implemented. At the very least, the reports of the special commission should be revisited by the incoming government and serve as a reservoir of ideas, as participatory tools are

14. European Commission (2017). *Europe's Digital Progress Report (EDPR) 2017 Country Profile Germany.* p.10. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2q5Nh1q
15. Article 1, E-Government Act- EGovG (2013). Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2uwnXpl
16. This text was written before the election on 24 September 2017.
17. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) is putting forward the idea of a "Deutschlandportal" (Germany portal), combining all services at the federal, state, and local level in one digital offer; the Christian Democratic Union is planning a "Digitales Bürgerportal" (digital citizen portal).

18. Deutscher Bundestag (2017). *Petitionen*, (online) Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2tC6MQj
19. Deutscher Bundestag (2013). *Siebter Zwischenbericht der Enquete-Kommission. "Internet und digitale Gesellschaft".* Retrieved from http://bit.ly/1UytUXi

scarce on the federal level and digital efforts for democracy in the German parliament currently focus mostly on providing information online.

The major German political parties experiment with some aspects of digital democracy. Practically all federal parties have launched online platforms for party members and make wide use of social communication channels. The right-wing, populist AfD owes much to its success to social media, and has a stronger following there than larger parties.[20] The German Pirate Party, successful in the years 2010-2015, is also organized primarily online.

While all established parties search for new ways to interact with voters and offer attractive formats for (new) party members, this search is mainly focused on finding tools, not on making parties more attractive through organizational changes, including changes through digitalization. The German *Parteiengesetz* (Party Act) sets strict limitations on party organization. For example, the current regulatory framework does not allow remote party membership in place of membership in one's local chapter, nor permit the creation of digitally organized issue-focused working groups on the federal party level. The legal framework thus hinders the incorporation of innovative elements into party processes that could make party engagement appealing to a more diverse population. So far, no concrete political will has formed to amend the Party Act in the upcoming years.

Focusing on organizational change through digitalization and not merely "tools" can make German parties more attractive.

Similar to government administration, German political parties have not substantially transformed their structures to provide an organizational framework to accommodate increasing civic participation. Until this occurs, online tools and platforms will be limited to consulting party members and citizens (in a form that basically constitutes opinion surveys), and will fall short of full participation (e.g. two-way communication). Even in the dimension of information, Germany's parties and government institutions have room to improve. Most online activity takes for granted that citizens have a fundamental understanding of the party's structure, institutions and democratic processes. It is critical that online platforms serve, furthermore, as an information resource about the democratic process itself.

Many best-practice examples for digital democracy (beyond e-government) can be found at the state and local level, an indication that it is easier to implement them on lower levels of government. A number of cities experiment with *Bürgerhaushalten* (citizens budgets), inviting citizens to make proposals for budgetary decisions, and often, to vote on them. Other efforts include combining information on local initiatives and participation processes on one digital, state- level platform[21], and efforts to include e-participation in the legislative process.[22]

To put it simple – (digital) democracy requires constant learning.

Some of the 16 German states have launched overarching digital strategies, most notably the states of Rhineland-Palatine, Hesse, and Thuringia. All of these programs cover different aspects of digitalization, such as e-government and the digitalization of the administrative processes. One of the most notable strategies regarding digital democracy is the Rhineland-Palatinate government's "Digital Dialogue," which deals with societal participation more broadly.[23] What the advancement of digital democracy in Germany needs is a broader understanding of what falls under this concept, including bolder experiments, and a strategy to make best practice approaches at the local level widely known. To put it simple, democracy requires constant learning.

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20. This mirrors a trend with other, newly founded parties in Europe, e.g. 5 Stelle (Italy), En Marche (France), or Podemos (Spain) using the internet more forcefully (and more successfully) that established parties and positioning themselves as opposition to them.

21. Düsseldorfer Institut für Demokratie (2017). *Monitor Online-Partizipation*, (online). Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2uWvvm8
22. Staatsministerium Baden-Württemberg (2017). *Beteiligungsportal Baden-Württemberg*, (online). Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2uWr2A5
23. Staatskanzlei Rheinland-Pfalz (2017). *Rheinland-Pfalz digital*, (online). Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2vZB7Jm

Germany's Civil Society Experiments with Digitalization

Cognizant of the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom, the U.S. presidential election, successful populist candidates in France, Austria, the Netherlands, and neighboring Eastern countries whose democracies seem fragile these days, German civil society has become more involved in defending liberal democracy. Germans demonstrated an increase in civic engagement during the 2015 refugee situation, and a multitude of initiatives on democracy subsequently emerged in Germany during 2016 and 2017. Many of them[24] rely on digital communication and online platforms to organize, like Pulse of Europe, a pro-European demonstration that takes place every Sunday in many German and other European cities.). Civil society can also leverage platforms for initiatives like die Offene Gesellschaft, a fact checking portal[25], or hold demo-days to call for ideas to counter populism.

Germany's vibrant civil society is increasingly embracing digital tools for engagement and organization.

Not all of these initiatives span across Germany, and many focus on maximizing local impact. They show that civil society is embracing digital tools for engagement, which allows for a degree of organization, knowledge transfer and mobilization that would otherwise not be possible. The challenge now remains how these efforts can be connected with the digitalization of political processes, and how digital tools and platforms can serve to increase and widen political engagement – particularly beyond an already active civil society. Some studies suggest that digital platforms do not mobilize new people, only those who are already engaged in the political process.[26]

24. Disrupt Populism (2017). *Home*, (online). Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2qcmwYL

25. Betterplace Lab lists a multitude of portals (beyond Germany) in their ''75 tools for civil society and democracy'' spreadsheet Silbernagl, C. (2017). Raus aus der Filterbubble! 75 Tools für Zivilgesellschaft und Demokratie, (online). *Betterplace-Lab.* Retrieved from http://www.betterplace-lab.org/de/raus-aus-der-filterbubble-75-tools-fuer-zivilgesellschaft-und-demokratie/

26. Gerl, K., Marschall, S., & Wilker, N. (2017). Does the Internet Encourage Political Participation? Use of an Online Platform by Members of a German Political Party. *Policy & Internet*.

What Shapes German Digital Democracy

A transformation process like digitalization is obviously also influenced by the political landscape and the political culture of a country. Most assessments of the slow advance of e-government in Germany attribute it to a German specialty: federalism. The German Norms Control Council reports on a yearly basis on de-bureaucratization and on the implementation of e-government.[27] It names the "scattered" German administrative landscape as being the main obstacle for e-government. It urges a modernization and a close cooperation among the federal level, the German states and local communities.

An overall reluctance to digitize the political process could also work toward the advancement of e-government and other forms of digital democracy. This reluctance stems from a German culture that shapes attitudes towards data protection and skepticism of government surveillance in Germany. Germans traditionally place high value on their privacy and are skeptical of government data collection. The experience of two totalitarian regimes (the fascist Nazi Regime and the communist German Democratic Republic) has rooted skepticism for public collection of personal data into the German culture. The most notable example of the emotional potential of the issue is the federal census that was carried out in West Germany in the 1980s. Originally intended to take place in 1983, the census caused heavy protests and was boycotted by a broad movement of parties and civil society actors. At the time, almost half of the population rejected the census[28] on the basis of concerns over privacy and the creation of "glass citizens" (the state having a wide array of data on its citizens) through data collection. The protests were accompanied by a case before the Federal Constitutional Court that ordered the census to be held again on the grounds of "informational self-determination," the German legal construct for right to privacy. The census was conducted again in 1987, and was once again met with protests.

27. Norms Control Council (Normenkontrollrat) (2017). *Jahresbericht 2017*. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2eNBYJQ

28. Reymann, K. (2011). Bürgerproteste und Boykott-Initiativen. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* (online). Retrieved from http://bit.ly/1jasjbw(online). Nürnberg: Open-Xchange. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2tC1aFzRetrieved from http://bit.ly/2eNBYJQ

While data protection does not spur the same emotions today, sentiments surrounding the high value of data protection still stand. Germans are very skeptical of information-sharing between German companies and governments[29], and place a higher value on their personal data than citizens of other countries.[30] Analyses also show that while the fear of being glass citizens is declining, almost half of German citizens remain worried about this phenomenon.[31] More than half of Germans favor the protection of the right to personal privacy as highly as the protection of national security, with 22 percent even preferring personal privacy to the latter.[32]

The experience of two totalitarian regimes has rooted skepticism for public collection of personal data into German culture.

There are, however, certain signs that Germans have become more carefree when it comes to their privacy protection. Overall, concerns about data protection and security of online administrative practices fell half between 2014 and 2016.[33] Use of online media and social networks by Germans during this timeframe remained comparable to other European populations.

Despite some trends in this field, Germany maintains a de facto ban on electronic voting machines. The Federal Constitutional Court ruled in 2009 that the use of voting machines in the 2005 federal election was unconstitutional.[34] The court did not ban the use of machines but placed relatively high restrictions on their use (e.g. citizens needed to be able to check that their vote was counted correctly after casting it).

The most recent public debate on digital democracy focused on the negative effects of digitalization in the transformation of the public sphere. In an effort to

regulate political debates on the internet, the German parliament passed the *Netzwerkdurchsetzungsgesetz* (network enforcement law) in its last session before the federal elections. It intends to hold social-media platforms accountable for content and asks them to remove prosecutable content within 24 hours (in drastic cases) or 7 days. The measure was widely criticized by net activists, NGOs and organizations such as Reporters without Borders, mainly for "outsourcing" the decision on prosecutable content to the private sector. The debate around the bill mainly focused on the surge of hate speech, filter bubbles, fake news and other digital phenomena. During the debate, the internet and new communication channels were mostly framed as a threat to democracy, and, at best, as a magnifying glass for societal developments.

The extent to which concerns on data protection and privacy influence the course of digital democracy in Germany will need to be studied in greater depth. It would be particularly interesting to look more closely at attitudes on modernization and the transformation of government. Nevertheless, digital democracy is still possible despite these concerns, as long as it is understood as a combination of the dimensions of information, participation, and transformation.

Digital transformation will demand working outside of learned structures and incrementally working towards new best practices.

Four Pledges to Digital Democracy

As the assessment of digital democracy in Germany oscillates between skeptical and negative, forward movement on digital democracy is necessary – and possible. Digitalization still holds substantial potential for a (re)vitalization of political processes and institutions already in existence. To seize this potential, it is necessary to continue unpacking the notion of digital

29. 49 % of Germans believe that German companies should not pass along personal data to the German government if requested; 76 % percent believe it should not be passed along to the American government Open-Xchange (2016). *Consumer Openness Index 2016*,

30. Morey, T., Forbath, T., & Schoop, A. (2015). Customer data: Designing for transparency and trust. *Harvard Business Review*, 93(5), 96-105.

31. D21 & ipima (2016). *eGovernment Monitor 2016*, (online). Berlin: Initiative D21. p. 17. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2vZsGNR

32. Open-Xchange (2016). *Consumer Openness Index 2016*, (online). Nürnberg: Open-Xchange. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2tC1aFz

33. D21 & ipima (2016). *eGovernment Monitor 2016*, (online). Berlin: Initiative D21. p. 16. Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2vZsGNR

34. Bundesverfassungsgericht (2009). *Leitsätze zum Urteil des Zweiten Senats vom 3. März 2009*, (online). Retrieved from http://bit.ly/2tCfFJj

democracy itself, and thereby make the concept more tangible when we talk about it. Most importantly, digital transformation will demand that we start working with each other outside of learned structures, and that we incrementally work towards new best practices. These four pledges on digital democracy will hopefully make this feasible in Germany's case:

• **Thinking Beyond Tools:** Digital democracy can take the form of introducing digital tools into the political process, but is not limited to this alone. When addressing digitalization, we need to think beyond how current processes and structures can be complemented by technical improvements, and focus on how digitalization might allow for entirely new processes and offer new resources that will help us to come up with new ideas. For example, despite digitalization, political parties do not know enough about their members to provide them with tailored participation offers or to actually benefit from their expertise in a systematic manner. Digitalization could help change the status quo. Party members from all over the country could work together on issues through digitalization if given a platform and – more importantly – a say in the decision-making process. This would require changes in policymaking procedures and greater power-sharing, but it would ultimately strengthen German democracy itself.

• **Strengthen Institutions and Civic Participation Concurrently:** Strengthening institutions, and representative democracy for that matter, is not the antithesis of allowing and enabling more participation. On the other hand, participation should not merely serve as a quick fix for institutions that are perceived as outdated. Digital democracy ultimately holds the potential to organize participation on a large scale. But participation can only be consequential if it is accompanied by functioning and modern institutions. This will require further organizational changes within institutions, such as hiring more staff to process input gathered through civic participation, and more (semi-)formalized ways for institutions to interact with civil society and citizens. Both parties and administration ought to establish more formats in which they receive input and – most importantly – converse with civil society. Digitalization can help, both in establishing these formats online as well as in making it easier to set them up offline.

• **Innovation Happens in Small Steps:** Digital democracy does not mean abolishing analog democracy, nor should it mean imposing a new system on citizens and institutions. Digital democracy is not one large concept, but rather, many small innovative steps. Trying a new form of public deliberation, creating more transparency in political decision-making processes, offering more possibilities for political engagement within parties and beyond – all of this has become easier thanks to digitalization, and offers a reservoir of new concepts. In this approach lie the resources for democratic innovation that have not been sufficiently utilized. Taking an experimental approach to digital innovation in democracy might result in some failed initiatives, but it will also eventually give rise to additional best practices. Not everything has to be created from scratch. Building on current experiences with innovative political projects elsewhere (in Germany and beyond) will help bolster the concept of digital democracy and seize the opportunities it offers.

• **Don't Just Digitize What is Already There, Innovate within Organizations:** Organizational innovation will be crucial for progress in the field of digital transformation. How political problems are solved and how public administration is organized are not set in stone. Especially on the federal level, political parties and institutions need additional or alternative structures. One such structure could be a division within all institutions that examines output though a citizen-centered approach, taking psychological and sociological aspects of users into account. Are administrative services effectively serving the users (citizens)? Are procedures outdated, and could they be improved? Are there incentives for different kinds of political engagement? Another target area would be organizational transformation, which could establish a democratic innovation council, a government committee solely responsible for dealing with innovations for democracy and with the authority to undertake change processes in public administration.

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The Democracy Lab of Das Progressive Zentrum

The Democracy Lab is the platform for projects on innovating democracy within *Das Progressive Zentrum*. The Lab hosts, fosters, and connects projects that aim to generate ideas and practical approaches on how to innovate liber- al democracy and to enable political actors and institutions. The projects span different disciplines, countries, and regions and are realized in cooperation with a multitude of partner organizations.

The Democracy Lab deals with questions of digital democracy in the context of the project *"Democracy 2025 - Democratic innovations for a changing society"*, funded by the *federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth* as part of the federal pro-gramme *"Demokratie leben!"*

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as part of the federal programme

Demokratie *leben!*

About Das Progressive Zentrum

Das Progressive Zentrum, located in Berlin, is an independent and non-profit think tank. The aim of *Das Progressive Zentrum* is to foster new networks of progressive actors from different or-igins and work towards a general acceptance of inno-vative politics and aiming at economic and social pro-gress. In this respect *Das Progressive Zentrum* gathers in its progressive debates mainly young thinkers and decisionmakers from Germany and Europe.

The Discussion Papers by *Das Progressive Zentrum* are directed at political decisionmakers and those who pre-pare decisions in ministries, parliaments and parties, but also at stakeholders from academia, economy and civil society. It is its proclaimed aim to address urging challenges and to deliver concrete advice for progres-sive and fair politics in Germany and Europe through new perspectives, programmatic ideas and precise ar-gumentations.

Thinking ahead.