

# Is the Internet really more democratic?

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I'm not going, but the [PersonalDemocracy](#) conference in New York looks more interesting than ever. A bunch of US netroots advocates will gather to praise the role of the Internet in reviving democratic discourse and political activism. The motto is 'technology is changing politics':



*"Rebooting the System" is our overall theme, and we'll be delving deep into how internet-driven mass participation is transforming everything from political media and message-making to fundraising and field organizing, along with how big institutions like governments, campaigns and membership organizations are adapting.*

It sounds great and I am sure that when you look at phenomena like Barack Obama's campaign it is clear that it is changing political practice. But is this anything more than a practical reform with no impact on underlying power relations?

People like [Clay Shirkey](#) will preach about how new technology allows us to organise in different ways. [Adrianna Huffington](#) will tell us that she us challenged mainstream media monopolies. There will be people from the right-wing blogosphere like [Patrick Ruffini](#) and far more from the Left net-roots tribe like Jane Hamsher of [Firedoglake](#).

There will also be dozens more tech-activists from grass-roots campaign groups as well as from all the major political parties. I have two questions for them.

1. Tell me in concrete terms what the new technology has allowed you to do that is significantly different in political terms from before? Not just being faster, more connected, more responsive. Tell me what difference it has made, if any, in policy outcomes and the distribution of power?
2. Is this just an American thing? Is it because US politics was so sterile, so locked up by lobbyists and big money and ideological stasis? or can new technology unleash new democratic forces in other countries?

I will be looking for answers from Polis' representative at the conference, [Tim Watts](#).

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