Chapter 1.31
An Evaluation of Digital Deliberative Democracy in Local Government

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ABSTRACT

This chapter evaluates the current status of digital deliberation in the local governments of Seoul Metropolitan area in Korea. In order to do that, this study first reviews literature on digital democracy and develops a Web site evaluation framework of digital deliberative democracy. The four stages of digital deliberative democracy consist of information acquisition, communication and consultation, citizen participation, and public deliberation. Then, after evaluating the current practices in digital deliberative democracy of 25 administrative districts in the City of Seoul based on the four stages of digital deliberative democracy, the results show that a few administrative districts have performed good practices in digital deliberative democracy. Though it could be said that many administrative districts have performed good practices of information acquisition (1st stage of digital deliberative democracy), communication and consultation (2nd stage), and citizen participation (3rd stage). Public deliberation (4th stage) is not fully performed in the Web sites of the administrative districts. Based on the results, this research explores some policy recommendations to improve digital deliberative democracy.

INTRODUCTION

Two types of government deficit, namely, the "budget deficit" and the "trust deficit," are terms we hear frequently. Of those two types of deficit, citizens' perception of trust in government has decreased in a large number of democratic countries throughout the world (Gore, 1994; Lipset & Schneider, 1983; Miller, 1974; Norris, 1999; Nye, 1997, pp. 1-2). Figure 1 shows the level of trust in the federal government of the United States from 1958 to 2002, indicating a decline of public trust in government since the 1960s. From the early 1960s to the late 1970s, trust in the federal

Figure 1. Americans' level of trust in the national government, 1958-2002 (Source: American National Election Studies, available at http://www.umich.edu/~nes/)
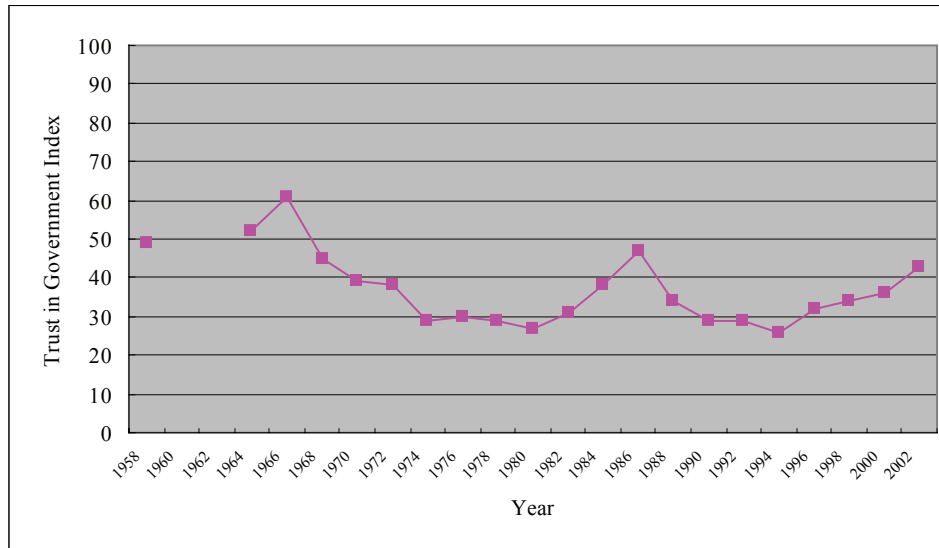
Note: The original questions read, "How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right — just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time?"

government, in Washington, DC, fell by over 30 points. Even though it improved in the early- and mid-1980s, it declined by about 20 points from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s.

Most developed democracies are experiencing a collapse of confidence in traditional models of democratic governance. This collapse is manifested in almost every Western country by falling voter turnout, lower levels of public participation in civic life, and public cynicism towards political institutions and parties (Berman, 1997; Erber & Lau, 1990). Traditional structures and cultures of policy formation and decision-making are perceived as being remote from ordinary citizens. Researchers (Baldassare, 2000; Norris, 1999; Rosenthal, 1997) indicate a gap between citizen expectations and the reality of institutional behaviors.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have led to the rapid transformation of society and world order (Deibert, 1997), and have had an impact on governance institutions as well. Research concerning the virtual state (Fountain, 2001; Frissen, 1999; Loader, 1997) has become more common in the field of public administration. Researches have pinpointed the issues of ICTs and governance. One of the most important problems in modern public administration is how to embody democratic governance, reflecting citizens' demands and the collective will in the overall process of policy making and public management. Some scholars argue that ICTs can facilitate a more direct interaction between citizens and government and make this interaction a viable next step. Casting one's vote on the Internet, attending Congressional hearings or

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