

The growing use of tech tools in politics

Posted by [Levi Sumagaysay](#) on July 18th, 2011 at 11:45 am | Categorized as [Uncategorized](#) | Tagged as [Adobe](#), [California Forward](#), [e-signatures](#), [EchoSign](#), [elections](#), [Facebook](#), [petitions](#), [politics](#), [social](#), [social media](#), [technology](#), [Twitter](#), [What's Next California](#)

[Facebook](#) and NBC [announced](#) today that they will co-host the Republican candidate debate before the presidential primary in New Hampshire next year. President Obama held a [Twitter](#) town hall a couple of weeks ago, and talked with Mark Zuckerberg at Facebook headquarters [in April](#). More and more, politicians are using social media and other technology to communicate with potential voters. The big difference between today's tools and yesterday's: immediate, and increased, interaction. In some instances, that interaction can backfire. But examples such as the [Anthony Weiner case](#) — the congressman from New York stepped down last month after admitting to indiscretions via Twitter — aside, those who care about being politically engaged have more options to make their voices heard.

The cynics among us might point out that the increased visibility of politician-constituent interaction doesn't necessarily translate to power of the people. But in at least one recent high-profile example, New York State Sen. Joseph P. Addabbo Jr. reportedly changed his mind about supporting gay marriage (New York legalized it last month) because of the sheer number of people in his district who voiced their support for it. Many of those people were encouraged to get in touch with Addabbo by a website tool that at their request automatically connected them by phone to his office, according to the [New York Times](#). The convenient tool removed what for some might have been a barrier to action. It made calling a legislator's office as easy as clicking the Like button on Facebook.

Last month, I was on a panel, moderated by Judy Woodruff of PBS, to talk about the challenges of politically engaging the many voices of California. The lively discussion, part of [What's Next California](#) — a first-of-its-kind deliberative poll that addressed the legislative and economic problems facing this state — centered on diversity, and inevitably led to the difficult issues that can result when trying to take into account the differing needs and viewpoints of people from various backgrounds. I stressed that today's technological tools can help bring people together. We've seen plenty of examples this year all over the world, particularly in Egypt and other parts of the Middle East, where Facebook groups and Twitter conversations helped people organize and act toward a common goal. For some people who might not have interaction with others from different cultural backgrounds, chat rooms, websites, fan pages, online groups and more all could help at least initiate a conversation.

California Forward is one of the many nonprofit organizations involved in What's Next California. California Forward's digital director, Vance Hickin, told GMSV by email after the June deliberative poll in Torrance that Facebook, Twitter and the poll's website not only helped publicize the event, they are helping keep the conversation going.

The number of technological tools that could help break down the barriers of political participation continues to grow. Today, Adobe [announced](#) a deal to purchase Palo Alto-based EchoSign, which makes electronic-signature technology. Because of the widespread use of Adobe's PDF technology, this move opens up many possibilities. Although a court recently ruled that [e-signatures are not valid for online petitions](#) because California election law does not allow for them, the push toward acceptance of e-signatures probably won't die. Laws are having to catch up to the Internet age in many other matters; after careful study and consideration, e-signatures could become a tool for voters of the future.

Recommend  8

Send

0

Share