

From the Left

The
REVITALIZATION
of DEMOCRACY
in AMERICA

The New Democratic Politics of Cyberspace

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| <p>Thesis: Based upon current and canonical theories of democratic discourse and political communication, current research on the nature of new media, and electoral case-studies, new information and communications technologies, especially those used on the internet such as blogs, social networks, information databases, and virtual worlds, are enabling a new kind of <i>mass public</i> from the Left to participate and mobilize in a new and emerging democratic public sphere, helping to revitalize democracy in America by appealing to citizens previously estranged from the political system and engaging them in deliberation and campaigns.</p> | |
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Donna Edwards' Victory in Maryland-04

"If you're willing to compromise on core values, with people who operate in bad faith, then you will always be ruled, you just will never get anything done."

In the 2008 election cycle, Donna Edwards, a "lawyer and community activist" who co-founded the National Network to End Domestic Violence, was explicitly and endorsed by a new movement of progressive activists--especially those part of what will be referred to as the New Electronic Left¹ who use new information and communications technology to organize, publish and promote ideas, agendas and candidacies--in her primary race against the Democratic incumbent Al Wynn in Maryland's 4th Congressional district. The Blue Majority Project, a coalition of progressive blog-based communities of Open Left, DailyKos and Swing State Project backed Edwards, who defeated "corporate Democrat Al Wynn" in the February 12, 2008 primary election, taking 60 percent of the vote to Wynn's 35 percent. The New Left bloggers and their readers raised over \$420,000 from 8,000 donors (\$50 was the average donation) using the internet-based Democratic fundraising tool, ActBlue.²

This race was the perfect storm for the new progressive movement that seeks to move the Democratic Party more to the Left, and it allowed the bloggers and online activists to use all available resources to influence the race from all over the country. It represented the best the New Electronic Left had to offer to American democracy. Al Wynn was a 15-year congressional incumbent, a stalwart in Maryland politics, and a member of the Black Congressional Caucus. Combined with the fact that only three percent of congressional incumbents are defeated,³ and that MD-04 is a 70% Democratic performing district, Edwards should have

¹ The dominant demographic here is white, male, middle to upper-middle class, ages 25-40, post-graduate education. There is evidence, however, that minorities are more likely to turn to the internet to find community when it is lacking in their physical surroundings (see "Interactivity, Equality, and the Prospects for Electronic Democracy: A Review" by Lori M. Weber, and Sean Murray in *Democracy Online*, 2004, Routledge).

² "ActBlue—Blue Majority." *ActBlue*. <<http://www.actblue.com/page/bluemajority>>. 25 April 2008.

³ Merida, Kevin. "On an Icy Day, A Challenger Wins Her Heated Contest." *The Washington Post*. 13 Feb 2008.