

## Of the people, By the people, for the people 2.0

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This paper is motivated by the recent trends in social computing that apply to the public policy lifecycle as envisioned by Abraham Lincoln in his Gettysburg address [1]. We illustrate the Lincoln vision of a government that is “*of the people, for the people and by the people*” in Figure 1. In this generally accepted model of public policy and governance, people contribute votes, money, and ideas through their chosen representatives. The government that is formed from such representation initiates, formulates, and prioritizes policy ideas to serve the people they represent. This typically happens by enacting policies that serve as law, regulations, and guidelines aimed at enhancing professional, personal, and social interactions in society.

Today, social computing (via different social media such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Blogs and interactive web publishing) is revolutionizing the public policy lifecycle. Policy makers and politicians in the United States have embraced the digital media culture for advertising their leadership and communicating their governance manifestoes [2]. These advertisements succeed as social objects to influence people and determine who represents them in the government. In addition, governments are adopting social media to communicate directly with the people. The recent White House release [3] on transparent, accountable and collaborative governance publishes policy documents as readily accessible objects through which the government hopes to rapidly disseminate policy ideas, solicit access to expertise outside of the government, and identify opportunities for co-operation in policy making.

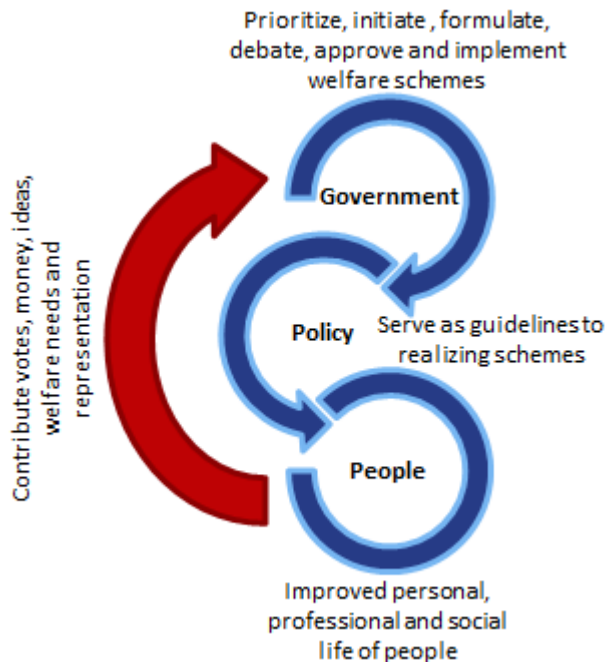


Figure 1: An illustration of the public policy lifecycle that tries to capture the Lincoln vision of a government that is of the people, for the people and by the people.

Recent (circa, spring and summer 2011) events in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and England, have shown that social networks such as Facebook and Twitter dramatically enabled the citizenry to express their views. Social networks acted as tools to propagate ideas and mobilize movements leading in many cases to dramatic changes to the country's governance (as in Egypt), and in some cases undesired consequences (as in England). Clearly this is a shift from communicating through traditional media (newspaper, television, radio, etc.) to a kind of personalized expressive democracy – a mode of expression that governments should understand, listen to, and act upon to be

effective and efficient. So, how can governments listen to people through social networks? How can social computing assist both the government and the people to improve the process of public policy making? Can we accept social networks as a quick census mechanism? Can we apply algorithmic thinking to conduct social science experiments as computer simulations and thereby predict relevance and impact of a public policy idea? How can we use social computing to seek reliable feedback from the society?

As an attempt to find answers to the aforementioned questions, we have begun developing computational models and tools with specific application to public policy artifacts. We discuss a new tool here that is designed to: (i) evaluate policy consistency over time using semantic reasoning concepts, (ii) summarize and cluster expertise (skillsets) in the society, and (iii) estimate/visualize the interaction and societal responses to a policy publication.