

Preface and Acknowledgments

This book originated as a cooperative project between the European Union Democracy Observatory (EUDO) at the European University Institute's (EUI) Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies (RSCAS) and the Center for the Study of Democracy (CSD), School of Social Sciences, University of California, and Irvine (UCI). This collaboration led to two conferences, one in Fiesole at the EUI, June 3–4 2010, and one in Laguna Beach, California, hosted by CSD in May 14–15, 2011. Most of the papers in the volume were drawn from one or the other of these two conferences. The idea for the joint project came in a conversation between Mark Franklin, then at the EUI, and Bernard Grofman, and it quickly led to Alexander Trechsel's involvement in the project. Alexander Trechsel was the Director of EUDO and Bernard Grofman Director of CSD at the time the conferences were held. The "Internet and Democracy" seemed like an ideal project for international institutional cooperation because of its timeliness, and because of the centrality of its topic to both EUDO and CSD. Additional funding for the Laguna Beach conference came from the Jack W. Peltason (Bren Foundation) Endowed Chair held by Bernard Grofman. We are grateful for logistic support at UCI from CSD's Administrator, Shani Brasier; at the EUI we are grateful to the financial support offered by EUDO and the academic and administrative help offered by Valentina Bettin, Andrea Calderaro, Amy Chamberlain, and Ingo Linsenmann.

We owe very special thanks to Rachel Gibson, a leading scholar of political communication, for writing a comprehensive Preface to the volume that places its papers in the context of recent scholarship on the Internet. Her preface plays the role that the more customary form of editors' introduction plays in most edited volumes, since we regard her as far more knowledgeable about the literature on the Internet and politics than any of the three co-editors. In this editors' introduction, we will simply note the central features of this book and the vision that inspired it.

Looking at the many excellent papers that were given at the two conferences the editors sought to put together a small set of first-rate papers that reflected two kinds of diversity: diversity in the nature of the actors using computer-mediated communications to get their message across and/or to identify and coordinate those with shared ideas (e.g., candidates, parties, activist groups and social movements, and public interest groups seeking to disseminate reliable information about election choices), and diversity across sites. We are especially pleased that we

have research dealing not only just on the USA, the UK, and across Europe, but also on Canada and Brazil, as well as on Iran, Tunisia, and Egypt, and that we have studies that look at both local and national elections.

Because we did not have any paper at the conferences that dealt with voting in actual elections using the Internet, and we believe this to be a mode of voting that will grow dramatically in future importance, we were pleased to add to the volume the chapter by Nicole Goodman “[Internet Voting in a Local Election in Canada](#)” on Canada’s pioneering use of Internet voting for local elections, and to make that paper our opening chapter. Her paper shows the promise of this method. The chapter by Garzia, Trechsel, Vassil, and Dinas “[Indirect Campaigning: Past, Present and Future of Voting Advice Applications](#)” is a review of another important innovation in the use of the Internet, Voting Advice Applications (VAAs), which is at the moment far more visible in its implementation in Europe than in the USA. The idea of a VAA is simple: ask candidates or parties to answer questions about where they stand on key issues (or, as is done most commonly, have experts code their positions) and store these responses online in a publicly accessible way. Then allow voters to input their own answers to this same set of questions, and provide an algorithm that tells the voters which candidates or parties are closest, in sum, to their own positions. Providing information about the breadth of their use and reviewing the present research literature on the political consequences of access to VAAs, Garzia et al. demonstrate that they appear to have increased turnout, and voter knowledge and sense of political involvement, though they sound a note of caution in terms of waiting for validation of results from more controlled experiments. But they also note that voter responses to VAAs provide an incredible new data source for those studying voter’s cognitive processes, since the sample sizes are often much much larger than for traditional surveys.

The next four chapters take us away from Internet uses that are motivated primarily by a concern for improving citizen information and participation, to ones with a goal of persuasion in favor of and/or mobilization on behalf of a candidate, party or cause. While these chapters are primarily descriptive, which is appropriate given how fast changing campaign technologies have been and how little we know about the spread of these technologies, the authors also try to come to grips with assessing the impact of these new technologies, albeit in a very preliminary fashion.

“[Indirect Campaigning: Past, Present, and Future of Voting Advice Applications](#)” and “[Digital Media and the 2010 National Elections in Brazil](#)” deal with candidates and parties. In the Gilmore and Howard chapter, looking at national legislative elections and other elections in Brazil, they find, for higher levels of office, what to our eye, are remarkably high levels of use of media such as Facebook and Twitter, with the creation of candidate website now being essentially universal. But they also point out that the use of these technologies are, by and large, not that sophisticated, especially in being able to take advantage of feedback or tailoring messages to narrowly targeted audiences. Moreover, for the lower chamber of the legislature, where they had a representative sample of 20 %

of the viable candidates “only 40 % of candidates nationwide for the lower house had any form of online campaign presence. Candidate websites, by and large, had simple structures and tended to have only a few pages of information on the candidate.” For candidates from minor parties, they do find some evidence of a link between success and Internet use, especially the use of Twitter, because Brazil is a society where “mobile phone use is as extensive,” but recognize that assessing causality is difficult. The next chapter, by Jensen and Anstead, on campaigning for parliament in the UK, contrasts the use of “new media” at the national level, as used in communications from party leaders, and that at the constituency level, where individual candidates send messages and create sites for supporters and those in search of more information. In particular, they contrast top-down communication strategies with ones that are more interactive. Their key finding is that, “while a predominantly command and control structure of the campaign operates at the national level, communications at the local level are more horizontal and personal in nature.”

“Campaigns and Social Media Communications: A Look at Digital Campaigning in the 2010 U.K. General Election” and “Virtual Power Plays: Social Movements, Internet Communication Technology, and Political Parties” deal with the use of the Internet by social movements, from groups seeking to take over an existing major political party or shift its political direction to ones that are seeking regime change. The Rohlinger, Bunnage, and Klein chapter deals with social movements such as the Tea Party Movement and MoveOn that reflect very different political attitudes. As the authors note, social movements have been neglected in the literature on elections in part because of an historic division of labor between sociologists, who study movements, and political scientists who study elections, yet social movements can be vital participants in the political process such that it is hard to understand election outcomes and the nature of campaigning without examining closely their role. This is especially true in very recent elections in the USA when we look at organizations like the Tea Party Movement or MoveOn, but also in the 2013 national Italian elections, where the “Movimento 5 Stelle” of Beppe Grillo, by heavily relying on an Internet platform for its campaign, gained a quarter of all votes. The study by Rohlinger, Bunnage and Klein is characteristic of much new social research in combining multiple methodologies, e.g., large n (e.g., of Internet communication patterns), elite interviewing, and participant observation. They show how “savvy organizations can use ICT in ways that can ultimately help activists transform a party.” They also show that, despite important similarities in their use of information communication technologies, the two organizations have very different styles of use, with the latter more top-down and the former more participatory and bottom up. Thus, the contrast they make between variation in ICT use in the two different political organizations parallels in an intriguing way the contrast drawn in ICT use between national and localized campaigns by Jensen and Anstead. The last chapter, by Ritter and Trechsel, like the previous chapter by Rohlinger, Bunnage and Klein, is remarkably timely. It deals with a debate within academia triggered by press and activist bloggers claims of the critical importance of the Internet as a

coordinating device in the events leading to Arab Spring, especially the regime change in Tunisia and Egypt. Ritter and Trechsel note that “even among those sociologists and political scientists who have focused on agency in revolutions, few contributions have been devoted to the role of information and communication technology (ICT) in the process of regime change, nonviolent or otherwise.” They claim that this neglect is “mainly due to two interrelated facts: first, the study of revolutions ... tilted heavily toward structural analyses that leave little room for the role of the actual revolutionaries, and even less for their communication tactics. Second, and perhaps more important ..., nonviolent revolutions remain severely understudied.” These authors argue that “successful use of ICTs [such as the Internet and cell phone tweets] seems to be correlated with nonviolent revolutions in particular, not their violent counterparts.” They posit two interrelated factors: domestic mobilization and the potential for global awareness. But they also call attention to historical parallels such as the use of the telegraph in the Iranian “Tobacco Revolution” of 1891 and the remarkable distribution of over 1,00,000 cassette tapes recording messages by the Ayatollah Khomeini in the prelude to the 1970s Iranian Revolution. Such historical examples suggest we should not overstate the importance of “contemporary” communication technology. Ritter and Trechsel provide a carefully nuanced bottom line: While they argue that, “in both Tunisia and Egypt, ICTs played an important role in the very early stages of the revolutions,” they also assert that, while “bloggers continued to report on the progression of the protests and announced meeting points and times for planned demonstrations, ... mobilization in the latter part of the revolution would likely have occurred even without the participation of online activists.”

While no set of six papers could possibly do justice to the rapidly growing literatures in multiple disciplines on the communication uses of the Internet and other contemporary information technologies in politics, and the prospects of ICTs advancing the cause of democracy, we believe that the six papers in this volume, along with Rachel Gibson’s survey of the literature, will provide the reader with an excellent introduction to the topic. We are happy to offer this collection as what we believe will be a very useful contribution to one of the most exciting areas of current research in the social sciences.

The Internet and Democracy in Global Perspective
Voters, Candidates, Parties, and Social Movements

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