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U.K. Political Parties and the Internet: Prospects for Democracy

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**U.K. Political Parties and the Internet:
Prospects for Democracy**

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Abstract

This paper examines how and with what effect political parties in the United Kingdom are making use of the internet in the form of electronic mail and the world wide web. The use and impact of these aspects of the internet by the parties is examined in light of its consequences for democracy conceived of in three dimensions: intra-party democracy; inter-party democracy; and systemic democracy. More specifically the paper addresses the question of whether the parties have utilized the internet to promote greater internal party democracy, (i.e. increased the role of party members); second, the paper asks whether political parties' use of the internet has enhanced levels of inter-party competition (i.e. how far has it extended their reach vis-a-vis voters, and provided a more level playing field for small parties?); finally, the paper confronts the broader question of whether U.K. parties' use of the internet has promoted democracy on a systemic level, (i.e. does it allow greater access to information and opportunities for greater participation by citizens?).

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Introduction

The rapid growth of internet usage among the general population of Western democracies during the past two years has provoked much speculation on the part of academics and journalists about its societal, and particularly political, implications. Much of this speculation has taken the form of general theorizing about the systemic level implications of the new information and communication technology. Doomsday scenarios of an Orwellian dystopia dominated by a technological elite (Lipow & Seyd, 1995), and the ending of discursive democracy (Wheeler, 1997; Street, 1996) compete with more visionary accounts of a return to the Athenian agora and a new citizen based politics (Rheingold, 1995; Katz, 1995; Allen, 1995). Recently, however, empirical work by Margolis (1996) on U.S. political parties during the 1996 Presidential election campaign has cast doubt on whether this new medium will significantly affect the conduct of democratic politics. Instead of revolutionizing politics, Margolis argues, the use of the internet by the American political parties has simply reinforced the dominance of the Republicans and Democrats in other more traditional media.

This paper examines Margolis' argument in the context of the British party system by assessing how far the British parties' use of the internet has affected levels of inter-party competition. It also extends Margolis' focus on external party democracy to examine internal party democracy and asks whether the parties' use of the internet has begun to promote higher levels of intra-party democracy.

Politics and the Internet: Alternative scenarios

According to Abramson et al. (1988) the internet, along with other new

digital information and communication technologies (ICT's), differ from the traditional forms of media in six crucial ways:

- (1) They can transmit a far greater volume of information from a wider range of sources to a single access point.
- (2) They can transmit the information at a much faster speed.
- (3) They allow for far greater user control of information received. Consumers can collate and print their own news sources.
- (4) They allow for greater targeting of audiences by distributors since the higher volume of media traffic permits "narrow-casting" in the place of "broad-casting".
- (5) They allow for decentralization of information control since the number of sources of information has increased and the costs of establishing oneself as a vendor of information (on the internet particularly) have decreased.
- (6) They introduce interactivity to media technology, allowing citizens to debate politicians, or other groups of citizens from considerable distances, or engage in written dialogue via computer.

Given these unique aspects of the new ICT's, in particular their interactive capabilities, theorizing on their societal and political impact has taken a number of forms. 'True believers' such as John Katz, Harold Rheingold, and Graham Allen hold out utopian visions of an electronic republic in which intermediary institutions are no longer needed, and citizen based politics flourish. Countering such optimism are Lipow and Seyd (1995) and Street (1996) who warn of the dangers of the erosion of the traditional institutions of representative democracy. The demise of intermediary organs such as political parties, they argue, would remove rather than increase citizens' power, since organization of numbers is the principle means by which the masses can exert influence over their political leaders.

Striking a less radical note are commentators such as Geoff Mulgan (1994) and Janie Percy-Smith (1995) who argue that internet will have a significant impact on the conduct of democratic politics but in a reforming rather than revolutionary fashion. Mulgan, director of DEMOS, a think tank devoted to democracy, for instance, envisages "...a more participative, responsible democracy which will use the new technologies of push button democracy." Politicians will have more opportunities to consult their constituents opinions on particular issues through electronic referenda, and be held more accountable by voter rights of recall and veto over legislation. Percy-Smith similarly argues that the "...greatest potential..." of the new information and communication technologies (ICT's) lies in "improving representative democracy rather than replacing it." (p.14), by encouraging more direct contact between MP's and their constituents and increasing the participation of the physically disabled.

These theories of institutional erosion and reform are highly thought provoking and perhaps prescient but offer little empirical analysis to support their claims. Further, neither theory will yield analysis for a considerable number of years to come. Ultimately, however, while these authors divide over the extent and beneficial effects of the internet for politics, they are united on the opinion that the internet is bringing change.

Margolis et al's (1996) analysis of U.S. parties' use of the internet, however, challenges these theories of change. The authors examine U.S. parties' and candidates' world wide web sites during the most recent presidential election campaign, and conclude that the internet simply served to bolster the dominance of the Republican and Democratic parties and their candidates.:

Cyberspace heralds neither a new world of egalitarian communalism and

participatory democracy nor one of isolated computer-addicted pseudo citizens wandering a virtual reality that is manipulated by totalitarians....When all is said and done, commercial interests and mainstream political interests will control the WWW or its successor in a manner similar to the control they presently exert over other mass media....most people will act as high tech consumers rather than political activists. (pp.10-11).

The crux of their argument rests on their perception that the costs of establishing and maintaining party web sites are escalating rapidly. The cost to the political process they argue is two-fold: minor parties are clearly disadvantaged since they cannot afford the sophisticated graphics and audio devices that the major parties are able to provide. Secondly, the increased resources have not gone into better content provision but gimmicks and more eye catching designs. Thus, politics is as trivialized on the net as on other medium's and is becoming just as commercialized. As the corporate interests move in, the 'virtual' political marketplace will become simply another means for advertising and propaganda. Thus, the dreams of small scale political operations such as the U.S. Libertarian Party that their "...website gives us a national presence. It creates an equal footing." (Stone, 1996:45), and those of Ian Anderson, chair of the National Democrats, one of the minor parties in the U.K., that "the internet is the best invention since the printing press...The media focuses on a two-horse race. The smaller parties are being squeezed... [The internet] is a direct line of communication",¹ Margolis would argue, are highly unrealistic.

¹ *The Guardian Online*, 20 March 1997, p.13.

This paper intends to examine Margolis' 'reinforcement' thesis in the U.K. party system to see if the traditional dominance of the Conservative and Labour Parties persists through the new media. While one could argue that the relative 'newness' of the British parties to the internet (the Labour Party were the first to go online in October, 1994), precludes any meaningful analysis of that relationship at this stage, it is argued here that it is precisely this infancy that makes study of the British case now, rather than later, important. Who knows how parties' future relationship with the internet may blossom or decline? Research into the beginnings of that relationship can provide us with a useful benchmark to assess the significance of future developments. Further, to dismiss efforts to study this area of British politics on the basis that it is too early to make any judgements of how the parties are utilizing the internet, is an assertion which is as yet unsupported and requires empirical validation.

The paper will also extend Margolis' analysis beyond intensification of party competition to examine how the internet facilitates two further dimensions of party democracy: the expansion of party competition into new electoral turf, and levels of intra-party democracy. Given the youthful profile of the average internet user, the parties' forays into cyberspace could open up a whole new set of potential voters who were previously inaccessible through other more traditional media, a move which would significantly expand the base of political competition. Also, the internet's interactivity allows the potential for the parties to become more accessible and transparent to their members' and supporters' opinions on policy, and other party-related issues.

These additional variables are included since the unspoken assumption of Margolis' analysis is that a more equalized playing field for party competition on the internet would advance democracy on a systemic level. These other variables tap important additional aspects of party behavior, in terms of the mobilization and empowerment of citizens, that contribute to the overall health

of democratic governance.

Data and Methodology

Two types of survey data are used to assess the effects of the internet on intensification and expansion of inter-party competition and levels of intra-party democracy: questionnaire data from the party officials responsible for establishing and/or maintaining the websites, and a survey of party web sites. The party questionnaire (see Appendix 1 for the full questionnaire) was sent to 27 U.K. parties and was returned by 13 (a response rate of just under 50% [which includes the two major parties, the Conservatives and Labour]). The website survey includes 27 U.K. parties and compares the structure, visual appeal, substantive content, and feedback facilities of these pages, amongst other features (see Appendix 2 for the website survey form).

Intensification of inter-party competition

This was measured through the web site survey data. The intensification of party competition through the establishment of a more equalized playing field is assessed by comparing the sophistication of the parties' web sites in terms of their visual appeal and sophistication, and the regularity of updates, provided in the website survey data. Visual appeal and sophistication of the web sites was measured by checking for the existence of the following:

- graphics
- split screen
- flashing/moving icons
- links to other sites
- use of professional web designers

Also, the access provided to the major and minor parties via the major indices

of U.K. political parties will be examined. If only the major parties are accessible on these indices then clearly the playing field is not being equalized.

Expansion of inter-party competition

Both party questionnaire data and web survey data are used to establish whether cyberspace is becoming a new and important forum for political competition between the parties. Two items from the party questionnaire data were used:

(1) The parties were asked to indicate how important recruitment of non-voters and other parties' voters on the internet is for them, on a scale of 1 to 5. '5' indicates that this function is most important, '1' indicates that this function is not important.

If a large number of parties place a high premium on such recruitment this would indicate that the internet may indeed be expanding political competition.

(2) The parties were asked to indicate how advantageous the targeting of young voters on the internet is for them, again using a scale of 1 to 5. '5' indicates that targeting is considered the internet's greatest advantage, '1' indicating that targeting on the internet is not an advantage for the party.

Again, if many of the parties are making a concerted effort to target younger voters on the internet, this would indicate that this medium can increase levels of political competition.

In addition to party questionnaire data, the parties' web sites were surveyed to see if they make an explicit appeal to the younger population. This evidence is an additional and more objective way to measure (2).

Both the questionnaire and the web survey data provide, admittedly, only a partial answer to the issue of expanding party competition on the internet since they do not indicate whether the parties are actually attracting new voters

through this medium. However, if the parties are using the internet to try to reach new voters or poach existing ones, one can argue that levels of inter-party competition are increasing at the elite level, if not at the level of the masses.

Intra-party democracy

Two items from the questionnaire were particularly useful to assess the extent to which the party considered its web site to be important in promoting internal democracy.

(1) The parties were asked to indicate the importance of the following functions of the internet on a scale of 1 to 5.

(Note the parties were asked to score not rank the functions)

- Provision of greater information for members/voters
- Education of voters in general on the issues
- Promotion of greater feedback from members/voters

While the first two functions deal with downward communication by the party on the internet, the last function relates to upward communication. A comparison of the relative importance of these functions will illustrate how far the parties see the internet's role as enhancing bottom up communication rather than top down.

(2) The parties were asked to indicate how advantageous the following features of the internet were for them on a scale 1 to 5.

(Note the parties were asked to score not rank the functions)

- allows for quick feedback from party activists
- allows for feedback from interested members of the public
- offers greater information than traditional sources

This item like (1) above deals with the relative importance of upward vs downward internet communication for the parties. However, it also allows for a more specific assessment of how far the internet is used to promote feedback from party members (i.e. intra-party feedback) as opposed to that of the general public.

The web survey also examined the parties' use of interactivity on its web site by recording the number and nature of the direct email contacts that the parties offered. More specifically:

- (1) Did the parties make available direct email to the party headquarters, members of parliament, and/or regional/local parties.
- (2) What was the nature of the feedback requested? i.e. was it substantive or policy-based or more trivial.

It was reasoned that a highly interactive site that offered readers the opportunity to communicate their views on the party's policy was likely to promote higher levels of intra-party democracy than one which did not invite feedback, or invited reader comments on non-substantive issues.

Since all interested members of the public can access the party's website these data clearly do not measure levels of intra-party communication exclusively. However, it is not overstating the case to argue that feedback from members would be promoted through such a mechanism.

Findings

Intensification of inter-party competition

In terms of the equality of access offered to the parties by the web indices, there was no clear cause for complaint by most of the minor parties. There are four main indices currently providing access to U.K. political parties, Keele and Warwick University's, the Agora index available through Yahoo, and

Online Magic's general election site (see bibliography for full details). Each of these indices provide links to over twenty parties' web sites. Keele University's site provides the most links with 27 parties being listed, the general election site provides links to 25 parties, Warwick and agora (Yahoo) provide 21 links apiece. Thus, all four sites provide access to both the major parties and also many of the minor parties.² The web site survey data for assessing the internet's impact on levels of inter-party competition (reported in table 1) reveals that despite Margolis' gloomy predictions, the smaller parties are indeed holding their own in terms of their web sites' appeal, next to the major parties. While the design and updating of the Conservative and Labour sites are sophisticated and very frequent, parties such as the Scottish Nationalist Party, Sinn Fein, the National Democratic Party, and even the lowly Albion Party have established and maintain highly visually appealing web pages. Only the Liberal Party, the Referendum Party, and the Whig Party rely on basic text without graphics. Further, despite costs, a significant number of the smaller parties rely on professional webmasters to design and produce their web sites. The internet, therefore, far from leaving the minor parties in the dust, might actually prove to be an equalizing force in electoral politics.

Expansion of inter-party competition

The party questionnaire data regarding the expansion of party competition to younger (i.e. new) voters via the internet reveals a somewhat contradictory

² While the Keele site provides access to the largest number of parties, the other sites do provide links that it lacks. The general election site for instance provides access to the Revolutionary Platform of the Socialist Labour Party and the Scottish Socialist Alliance. Agora provides a link to the Communist party, and Warwick offers access to the Democratic Left Party of Ireland. All latter three sites, however, miss between six and eight of the parties included in the Keele site.

picture. As table 2 reveals, only three parties (the National Democrats, the Scottish Tories, and the Labour Party) consider recruitment of either non-voters or other parties' voters to be of most importance to them. The other parties indicate a distinct lack of interest in voter recruitment via the web by assigning very low scores to these functions. This is particularly the case with regard to the recruitment of other parties voters. Such a response is not too surprising, however, since the parties might consider an admission of poaching voters from other parties via the net to be a sign of weakness (a point which makes the Labour Party's admission to this aggressive strategy all the more surprising).

When the advantages of the internet in targeting younger voters are considered by the parties, however, (see table 3) such wide variance is not exhibited. Most of the parties consider the internet's capabilities in targeting to be of moderate advantage. Only one party, the Independence Party, sees the internet as offering no advantage in targeting the youth vote. Thus, the questionnaire data indicate that while the parties are divided as to how aggressively they pursue voters online, they do broadly recognize the potential of the internet to provide them with access to younger voters.

The web survey data on targeting (reported in the last column of table 1), reveal that while the parties may appreciate the access that the internet allows them to younger voters, not many of them have done much to exploit that advantage. Only nine of the parties have any pages that are exclusively oriented toward younger voters, and most of these pages are simply profiles of the party's youth organizations and contact addresses (either email or postal). None of the parties use their web site to pitch a specific appeal to the youth vote, although the Conservatives do have a specially designed section for children which contains cartoon-like graphics and simple language designed to educate them in politics and the importance of the party.

Thus, as a whole, these data indicate that the parties are not using

internet as a new battle ground for recruiting voters at the moment. However, they clearly do remain alive to the possibilities that the new medium may offer in the future for expanded party competition.

Intra-party democracy

The party questionnaire data reveal that while the parties clearly consider member or voter feedback via the net to be important, for most, the internet is considered to be more important as a channel for the downward provision of information. As table 4 shows, although most parties assigned a score of 3 or above to both downward and upward communication functions, when the degrees of importance beyond 3 are compared, a majority of the parties consider downward communication to be the more important function of their web site.

Only two of the parties consider feedback to be one of the most important functions of the net whereas nine parties consider either one or both of the downward communication functions to be of such importance. Two parties, the Referendum Party and the National Democrats, clearly see the primary function of their websites in starkly different terms to the other parties.³

Given that there are two forms of downward communication listed and only one of upward communication it can be argued that these findings simply reflect the greater likelihood of finding the former to be more important for the parties. However, when the ordering of the functions is considered, in addition

³ Although not reported in this table, the Referendum party, displaying a surprising degree of candour here, admits that its web site exists principally to keep up with modern technology. The National Democrats, however, are far more functional in their approach to the value of the internet, seeing its greatest boon as the enhanced ability to recruit voters.

to the number of top scores each one is assigned, the prioritizing by the parties of downward over upward communication on the internet is reinforced (see table 5). Information provision and the education of voters (downward communication) are both considered to be more important than voter feedback (upward communication) by over half of the parties. Even the National Democrats, who, as noted above did not consider communication, either upward or downward, to be a particularly important aspect of the internet, rank both downward communication functions of moderate importance, while feedback is given no importance whatsoever. What is most significant from these results perhaps, is that none of the parties assigned a higher importance to upward communication than to the downward communication functions (although the Scottish Liberal Democrats did consider all three functions to be of equal importance).

The remaining five parties are mixed cases in that they consider one of the downward communication functions of the internet and the upward function (i.e. feedback and education, or feedback and information provision) to be more important than the remaining downward communication function (information or education). However, within that preference structure it should be noted that three of the parties (the Social Democratic Labour Party, the Alliance Party, and the Democratic Unionist Party) ranked the downward communication function as more important than the upward. Thus, these data show a clear disposition by the parties to view the internet as a mechanism for downward rather than upward flows of information.

The question dealing with the internet's advantages as a communication tool reveal a slightly more balanced picture between upward and downward flows of intra-party communication. The overall scores assigned to these "advantages" (table 6) show again that most of the parties consider the enhancement of communication both downward and upward to be the one of the

principle merits of the internet. Five parties consider the greater amount of information made available on the internet to be its greatest advantage while five parties consider feedback from either the public or party members to be such. Only two scores of "not important" (1) are recorded for any of these options.

This picture of balance is reinforced when examining the structure of the individual parties' rating of these two advantages. The parties seem fairly evenly split with eight of the parties rating the advantages of feedback (from either activists or the public) over those of greater information provision, and five displaying the contrary ordering. However, when the particular nature of the feedback desired is examined, (see table 7) only three of these eight parties rate quick feedback from party members as a greater advantage than feedback from the general public (the Labour Party, the Conservative Party, and the Independence Party). All of the five remaining parties consider public feedback more important than that of members. Thus, the benefits of feedback through the internet, for most of the parties are not considered in terms of intra-party democracy.

These findings suggest that currently the internet is considered to be a means for downward rather than upward communication by British political parties. The parties are clearly not blind to the interactive benefits of the internet, but the views that they most seek to solicit are those of ordinary citizens rather than of party activists. This would suggest that the internet is not destined to enact higher levels of intra-party democracy within British parties. However, such a generalization needs to be weighted by the fact that the two largest parties merit feedback from their members over that from the general public.

The web site survey data, reported in table 8, reveal a varied picture of

how interactive the parties' web sites are, however, on the whole, these data support the basic conclusion of the party questionnaire data that the parties are not exploiting the internet's potential benefits for intra-party democracy.

While most parties offer a general party address for direct contact and general comments (the Conservatives and Scottish Conservatives being the clear exceptions here), only a few parties make access to their MP's (where relevant) and local party branches available, and fewer still actively encourage specific policy based feedback. It is interesting to note that more parties offer readers the chance directly to email the designers of the web site with their comments than offer their substantive opinions on particular issues that the party promotes.

In terms of the most interactive sites, the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish Liberal Democrats, Labour, the Greens, and the National Democrats clearly offer their readers the most extensive opportunities for substantive feedback. All of these parties provide multiple email contacts that can be directly accessed and that are clearly inviting policy based feedback. It is interesting to note that although the Liberal Democrats score quite highly on the check list, since the original survey was done, the party has truncated its web site significantly and actually decreased the opportunities for interaction.⁴ A possible explanation for this change is anticipation of the general election date announcement on March

⁴ Before mid-March the Liberal Democrats opening page presented an immediate email link to Paddy Ashdown and invited viewers to write with their opinion, political or otherwise. The face of Ashdown was pictured and a quote from him extolling the merits of the internet as the "best example in the world today of a communication which is democratic, open, and in which power is as decentralised as possible" was presented. One was also offered specific email contact to the party's Policy Unit, the Liberal Democrats Newspaper, the press office, the whips office, the Gay and Lesbian section, the environmental section, the student and youth organization, the campaigns and training office, and assorted Liberal Democratic local councillors, were also listed.

16th, and the potential for increased email use by readers at a time when the party will want to focus all its efforts on the election campaign. The Scottish Liberal Democrats, however, have not altered their web forum and along with the Green Party seem the most clearly committed to using the web site to promote focused and substantive feedback.

While Plaid Cymru does not provide the extensive opportunities for substantive feedback that the above parties do, it should be noted, however, that it is the only party that offers an online referendum (on the question of devolution for Wales).

At the other end of the interactive spectrum are the Scottish Conservatives who offer their readers no feedback opportunities at all. One step up from the Scottish Tories is the Conservative Party itself, which has established email contacts on its web sites', but only for a non-substantive type of feedback. The Conservatives for instance offer a questionnaire for immediate online return, however, its purpose is to build a profile of willing campaign workers. The other direct email contacts they provide are to solicit campaign workers, to request information on how to cast a proxy vote, and to return a "spot the ball" competition!

Most of the other parties, while not as specifically policy oriented in the feedback they desire as Labour, the Liberal Democrats, or Plaid Cymru, are not as self serving and non-substantive in the email contacts they offer as the Conservatives. Parties such as the Natural Law Party, the Liberals, and many of the Northern Ireland parties do invite general feedback, as well as queries about membership and requests for information.

Thus, the web survey data largely confirm the findings from the party questionnaire data. On the whole, the parties do not consider their web sites' primary function to be to promote dialogue with their supporters, with a few notable exceptions.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the impact of the internet on U.K. political parties in three specific dimensions of party democracy: intensification of inter-party competition, expansion of inter-party competition, and levels of intra-party democracy.

In examining the first dimension - intensity of party competition - we find that, contrary to Margolis' assessment of U.S. parties, that there is significant equalization of the communications playing field. The internet is offering the minor parties a more equal footing to compete with their major counterparts. However, our findings regarding the expansion of party competition onto the internet qualify too much optimism in this regard. While the minor parties might be able to hold their own in cyberspace and intensify their challenge to the major parties, if the space of political competition remains located in the traditional media then this 'equalization' will not lead to any significant redistribution of power in the party system.

With regard to the internet and levels of intra-party democracy, our conclusions are also rather mixed. Most of the parties consider the internet to be a useful tool for the downward dissemination of information but are less likely to view it as a conduit for the filtering through of grass roots opinion. However, the few parties that are exploiting the interactive capabilities of the internet include two of the larger parties, the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats. Further, while the Conservative web site does not offer much opportunity for substantive feedback from members or voters, the party does rate this capability from members particularly, as being one of the great advantages of the internet. Further exploration and explanation of the variance uncovered in party site interactivity is clearly an avenue for future research.

With regard to democracy at the systemic level, one can argue that these

findings suggest the internet may carry with it the potential for political change in the U.K. The parties are not rushing headlong to exploit all the unique properties of the internet as a new information and communication technology, however, they clearly understand the importance of the medium. Thus, while the parties' harnessing of the new technology has not as yet had the revolutionary, or even reformist, impact foreseen by some, neither has it entirely replicated 'politics as usual'. It is acknowledged, however, that ultimately for any significant democratization of parties through the internet to occur a number of external factors, beyond the scope of this paper will also need to change. Principal among these is that popular access to the internet will need to be significantly expanded and at the elite level any lingering technophobia on the part of politicians will need to be overcome. Given the speed of developments over the last five years, it is not unreasonable to assume that over the next decade party communication and campaigning on the internet will have moved from the fringe towards the mainstream.

TABLE 1: COMPARISON OF PARTY WEBSITES (Intensification of party competition)

PARTY	Graphics & Text	Split Screen	Flashing/ Moving icon	Other site links	Update Frequency	Prof. Web Design	Targeted
Conservative	x	x	x	x	Daily	x	x
Labour	x	x	x	x	Daily	x	x
Lib Dems	x		x	x	Daily	x	x
Sc. Lib Dem	x		x	x	Weekly	?	x
Sc. Conserv.	x				Monthly	?	
SNP	x	x	x	x	Daily		
Plaid Cymru	x				+ 6 mos. ²	x	
Liberal					+ 1 mo.		
Islamic	x				Weekly*		
Workers		x			?		
Albion	x	x		x	Weekly*	x	
Greens	x ¹			x	Monthly		
Referendum				x	+ 3 mos.		x
Third Way	x	x		x	+ 1 mo.	x	
Independence	x			x	+ 1 mo.	?	
Natural Law	x				Weekly	x	

x feature present * self-reported ? unable to ascertain

¹ Pale blue text on green background made it very difficult to read

² Plaid Cymru said their site was updated twice daily, however, the most recent documents found were dated June 1996.

TABLE 1 (contd.): COMPARISON OF PARTY WEB SITES (Intensification of party competition)

PARTY	Graphics & Text	Split Screen	Flashing/ Moving icon	Other site links	Update Frequency	Prof. Web Design	Targeted
NDP	x	x	x		+ 1 mo	x	
Whig Party					?		
Sc. Soc All	x			x	?		x
Revo. SLP	x	x	x	x	Daily	?	
Sinn Fein	x	x	x	x	Daily*	x	
Alliance	x			x	+ 2 mos.		
UUP	x		x	x	Monthly		x
UDP	x				+ 4 mos.		
DUP	x		x		Daily		x
SDLP	x			x	Weekly		x
NI Lab					?		
PUP	x				+ 1 yr		

x feature present * self-reported ? unable to ascertain

**TABLE 2: IMPORTANCE OF THE INTERNET FOR
VOTER RECRUITMENT BY PARTY**

PARTY	RECRUITMENT OF NON-VOTERS	RECRUITMENT OF OTHER PTY VOTERS
SNP	3	2
Alliance (NI)	2	2
Independence	3	4
DUP	NR	NR
Conservative	3	1
Scot. Lib Dem	2	2
Referendum	1	1
UUP	1	NR
Plaid Cymru	3	2
SDLP	2	NR
NDP	5	5
Scot. Cons.	5	3
Labour	5	5

Scores were assigned from continuum of 1-5

5 = most important function

1 = function not important

NR = function not ranked

**TABLE 3: ADVANTAGE OF THE INTERNET FOR TARGETTING
YOUNG VOTERS BY PARTY**

PARTY	ADVANTAGE OF TARGETTING YOUNG VOTERS
SNP	2
Alliance (NI)	3
Independence	1
DUP	2
Conservative	4
Scot. Lib Dem	2
Referendum	4
UUP	3
Plaid Cymru	4
SDLP	3
NDP	4
Scot. Cons.	3
Labour	3

Scores were assigned from continuum of 1-5

5 = greatest advantage

1 = not an advantage

TABLE 4: IMPORTANCE OF WEB SITE FUNCTIONS BY PARTY

PARTY	UPWARD COMMUNICATION	DOWNWARD COMMUNICATION	
	FEEDBACK	INFO.	EDUCATION
SNP	5	4	5
Alliance (NI)	3	4	2
Independence	3	5	5
DUP	4	5	3
Conservative	3	5	4
Scot. Lib Dem	5	5	5
Referendum	1	2	2
UUP	2	5	4
Plaid Cymru	4	3	4
SDLP	3	1	5
NDP	1	3	3
Scot. Cons.	4	5	5
Labour	3	5	5

Scores were assigned from continuum of 1-5

5 = most important function

1 = function not important

TABLE 5: RANKING OF IMPORTANCE OF DOWNWARD AND UPWARD COMMUNICATION FUNCTIONS OF THE INTERNET BY PARTY

	EDUC & INFO. > FEEDBACK	FEEDBACK > EDUC & INFO
PURE CASES	Scottish Cons. NDP UUP Referendum Party Conservatives Independence Party Labour	
	FEEDBACK & EDUC > INFO	FEEDBACK & INFO > EDUC
MIXED CASES	SNP Plaid Cymru SDLP	Alliance DUP

Note: The Scottish Liberal Democrats are not included in this table since they ranked all functions equally.

**TABLE 6: COMMUNICATION ADVANTAGES OF THE INTERNET
BY PARTY**

PARTY	UPWARD COMMUNICATION		DOWNWARD COMMUNICATION
	ACTIVIST FEEDBACK	PUBLIC FEEDBACK	GREATER INFO. PROV.
SNP	3	4	5
Alliance (NI)	3	5	4
Independence	5	4	4
DUP	1	4	5
Conservative	5	3	4
Scot. Lib Dem	2	4	5
Referendum	4	4	3
UUP	2	4	5
Plaid Cymru	2	3	2
SDLP	1	3	5
NDP	2	4	3
Scot. Cons.	3	5	3
Labour	5	3	4

Scores were assigned from continuum of 1-5
 5 = greatest advantage
 1 = not an advantage

**TABLE 7: PREFERENCE FOR ACTIVIST VS PUBLIC FEEDBACK
ON THE INTERNET BY PARTY**

PARTY	ACTIVIST FEEDBACK	PUBLIC FEEDBACK
SNP		x
Alliance (NI)		x
Independence	x	
DUP		x
Conservative	x	
Scot. Lib Dem		x
UUP		x
Plaid Cymru		x
SDLP		x
NDP		x
Scot. Cons.		x
Labour	x	

Note: The Referendum party are not included because they ranked both types of feedback equally.

TABLE 8: COMPARISON OF PARTY WEBSITES (Intra-party democracy)

TYPE OF EMAIL CONTACT										
PARTY	Party HQ	MP's	Local Party	Policy comments	General comments	Member-ship	Reader info.	Info. request	Trivia	Web design.
Conservative			x				x	x	x	
Labour	x	x	x	x	x	x				x
Lib Dems	x	x	x	x	x	Direct		x		x
Sc. Lib Dem	x	x	x	x	x	x				
Sc. Conserv.										
SNP	x	x ¹	x		x	x				x
Plaid Cymru	x			x	x					x
Liberal	x	na	x		x	x				
Islamic	x	na			x					
Workers	x	na			x					
Albion	x	na			x	Direct		x		x
Greens	x	na		x	x					
Referendum	x	na			x			x		x
Third Way	x	na			x			x ²		
Independence	x	na			x					

x feature present * self-reported ? unable to ascertain

¹ Also includes MEP's

² You can subscribe to email news on 3rd Way

TABLE 8 (contd.): COMPARISON OF PARTY WEBSITES (Intra-party democracy)

PARTY	TYPE OF EMAIL CONTACT									
	Party HQ	MP's	Local Party	Policy comments	General comments	Membership	Reader info.	Info. request	Trivia	Web design.
Natural Law	x	na	x		x	x		x		
NDP	x	na			x					
Whig Party	x	na			x	x				
Sc. Soc All	x	na			x	x ²	x ³			x
Revo. SLP	x	na			x	x				
Sinn Fein	x	na	x		x	x	x			
Alliance	x ¹				x	x				
UUP	x	na			x					
UDP	x				x					
DUP	x				x			x		
SDLP		na			x					
NI Labour	x	na								
PUP					x					

x feature present

* self-reported ? unable to ascertain

¹ The North American bureau is also listed.

² The email contact is not specifically for membership of the party but of the emailing list.

³ The reader is asked to list the papers he/she reads.

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APPENDIX 1
PARTY QUESTIONNAIRE

POLITICAL PARTIES THE INTERNET SURVEY

11. Which three party websites does the party most commonly review?

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

12a. How many local constituency parties have established an independent website? (approx. number)

12b. Are these websites subject to central party approval? Yes/No

13a. How many members of parliament have established an independent website?

13b. Are these websites subject to central party approval? Yes/No

14. Does the party consider that the internet will eventually replace traditional methods of communication? Yes/No

Party _____

Position _____

Name (optional) _____

1. When was the party's web site established? (Month and Year)

2. Did the party itself establish the website or employ an external organization?

3. Which of the following groups was most influential in establishing the web site? (please circle one)

a. Party leadership (Politicians)

b. Party leadership (Extra-parliamentary organisation)

c. Central organisation staff

d. Constituency activists

e. Other (please specify) _____

4. Please indicate the importance of the following functions of the web site for the party by assigning a score from 1 to 5, using the following scale:

5 - Most important
1 - NOT important

_____ To provide greater information for members/voters

_____ To recruit non-voters

_____ To recruit voters from other parties

_____ To recruit members for the party organisation

_____ To promote greater feedback from members/voters

_____ To promote research on the party

_____ To educate voters in general on the issues

THANKYOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY
PLEASE RETURN IT IN THE ENVELOPE PROVIDED BY DECEMBER 2ND

5. Using the same scale (1-5) please rank the importance of the following methods of communication with the electorate for the party.

- ___ Direct Mail
- ___ Telephone/direct dialling
- ___ TV News
- ___ Radio News
- ___ Newspapers
- ___ Constituency meetings
- ___ Parliamentary debate
- ___ Party Conference
- ___ Internet
- ___ Other (please specify) _____

6a. In your estimation how frequently do individuals from the following groups visit the party's official website? Please indicate the frequency by assigning to each group a score from 1 to 5, using the following scale:

- 1 - Never
- ___ Party Activists
- ___ Researchers/Academics
- ___ General public
- ___ Press/Media
- ___ Interest groups
- ___ Other political parties
- ___ Foreign users

What is your estimate based upon?
(please circle all those that apply)

- a. A general impression
- b. Personal contact with group members
- c. Feedback via email
- d. Formal survey data
- e. Other (please specify) _____

7. Please indicate how far the party considers the following aspects of the internet to be a problem for communication by assigning a score of 1 - 5, using the following scale.

- 1 - Not a problem
- ___ Requires user initiative
- ___ Cannot target specific groups
- ___ Narrow appeal to highly educated and affluent
- ___ High setup and maintenance costs to user
- ___ Highly impersonal
- ___ High setup and maintenance costs to party
- ___ Cannot determine return on investment
- ___ Too complicated to access
- ___ Too much information offered to consumers

8. Please indicate how far the party considers the following aspects of the internet to be an advantage for communication, by assigning a score of 1 - 5, using the following scale.

- 1 - Not an advantage
- ___ Allows for feedback from interested members of public
- ___ Allows for quick feedback from party activists
- ___ Reduces waste of natural resources
- ___ Offers greater information than traditional sources
- ___ Allows for targeting of younger voters
- ___ Reduces the need for campaign workers

9. Has the party recorded the number of members recruited through the party website? If so, please provide an approximate number.

- 10. How often does the party review other parties websites?
British Parties
a. daily
b. weekly
c. monthly
Foreign Parties
a. daily
b. weekly
c. monthly

APPENDIX 2
WEB SURVEY FORM

Party Web Sites: Survey of Features

Party Name: _____

Feature	Yes/No	Comments
Links to: Local parties	y / n	
MPs	y / n	
Other	y / n	
Graphics	y / n	
Frequency of Updates	Daily Weekly Monthly Other	
Web Specific Features	y / n	
Party History	y / n	
Party Values/ Aims/Ideology	y / n	
Party Policies	y / n	
Party Documents	y / n	

Speeches	y / n	
Party Structure/Org	y / n	
Negative Advertising	y / n	
Positive Advertising	y / n	
Corporate Advertising	y / n	
Target Groups (Youth, Women)	y / n	
Membership Application Forms	y / n	
Donations	y / n	
E-Mail Contacts:		
a) Party HQ	y / n	
b) Indiv MPs	y / n	
c) Regional/local	y / n	
Feedback on Own Policies	y / n	
Petitions/Votes/Referenda on Issues	y / n	