

Chapter 12

Stays Home? Political Mobilization

Do newspapers, television and the Internet serve to mobilize voters? Or instead do these media reinforce activism? Or even damage civic engagement? The literature remains divided. After outlining the theoretical framework for understanding political participation, the chapter examines the evidence for two issues: what is the impact of traditional political communications on electoral turnout? And, given the explosion in the use of new technology, does the Internet have the capacity to play a distinctive role in civic engagement? The conclusion considers the broader implications of the findings.

Understanding Political Participation

Explanations of political participation focus on four sets of factors. The *institutional* perspective stresses the importance of the legal context including the level of political rights and civil liberties, the type of electoral system, the facilities for registration and voting, the expansion of the franchise, the frequency, level and timing of elections, and the competitiveness of electoral politics¹. In one of the most thorough comparative studies, Jackman and Miller examined voter participation in twenty-two democracies and found that political institutions and electoral laws provided the most plausible explanation for variations in voter turnout, including levels of electoral participation and proportionality, multi-partyism and compulsory voting². Franklin, van der Eijk and Oppenhuis argue that variations in participation in European elections can be attributed in large part to differences in systemic factors, notably the use of compulsory voting, the proportionality of the electoral system, and the closeness of European to nation elections³. In the United States, as well, the legal hurdle of registration requirements and the frequency of elections are widely believed to depress American turnout⁴.

At individual-level, the cultural perspective based on survey analysis has emphasized the importance of individual *resources*, like education, age, socioeconomic status and time, combined with *motivation*, meaning the attitudes people bring to the electoral process like a sense of efficacy, political interest and party identification. Almond and Verba stressed the importance of 'civic values' learnt through the early socialization process⁵. In a long series of studies, Verba has demonstrated how various forms of participation make different demands of skills, money or time, so that political participation can best be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon⁶. That is, people who regularly donate money to campaigns, or contact their representative, are not necessarily involved in other dimensions like party work, or community activism. There are different costs and benefits associated with different types of participation. The main categories distinguished by Verba and his colleagues concern voting, campaign work, communal activity, and contact specialists. In addition a few citizens are active across all dimensions, while some are involved in none.

Lastly, the organizational perspective has stressed the role of *mobilizing agencies*, referring to the electoral functions of party and

candidate organizations, group networks like churches, voluntary associations and trade unions, social networks of families, friends and colleagues, and the role of the news media⁷. Putnam has argued that the decline of dense networks of local associations and community organizations has reduced social capital and contributed towards a long-term erosion of American turnout among the post-war generation. Verba found that churches and voluntary organizations provide networks of recruitment, so that those drawn into the political process through these associations develop the organizational and communication skills that facilitate further activity⁸. In the United States, Aldrich and Wattenberg suggest that the decline of party organizations, and their replacement by entrepreneurial candidates, has been critical to this process⁹.

The role of political communications via parties and the news media fall into this latter category of factors. Parties act as mobilizing agencies through direct communications with voters, including traditional grassroots activities such as canvassing, leafleting and contacting voters, as well as holding party meetings and campaign rallies, and using national advertising or party political broadcasts. The news media serve this function through providing information about parties, candidates and policies that can help to crystallize voting choices, and the partisan press, in particular, has long been thought to help reinforce party support. In these activities through positive messages both parties and the news media can serve to increase party and candidate support among electors, and the propensity to turnout, or they can convey negative messages that function to depress participation.

The literature is divided about the effects of media activity. In the traditional 'Columbia' model, partisan-leaning newspapers and party campaigns were seen as playing a vital role in reinforcing support and getting out the vote: "*The more that people read about or listened to the campaign on the mass media, the more interested they became in the election and the more strongly they come to feel about their candidate...Media exposure gets out the vote at the same time that it solidifies preferences. It crystallizes and reinforces more than it converts.*"¹⁰ The 'Michigan' model conceptualized attention to political communications somewhat differently, as itself a minor form of activism, instead of an independent factor capable of influencing turnout. This perspective became so influential that it developed into the mainstream view in studies of political participation, which rarely treated the media as an important causal factor in their models¹¹. A range of more recent studies has credited the media with boosting public participation¹².

In contrast, as discussed in Chapter 1, in recent years many popular commentators commonly suggest that the public has become disengaged through negative messages. There are two separate issues here. One concerns the effects of the use of negative or 'attack' ads by politicians where candidate or party campaigns criticize their opponents' character or record¹³. In the United States, Ansolabehere and Iyengar provide some of the most convincing experimental evidence that the use of 'negative' or 'attack' television campaign ads, meaning those designed to criticize the opponent, has the capacity to turn off American voters at the ballot box. "*Negative advertising drives people away from the polls in large numbers...Negative advertising breeds*

distrust of the electoral process and pessimism about the value of an individual's own voice."¹⁴. Yet it is difficult to know how far we can generalize from these findings more broadly in part because of the different institutional context of advertising in European campaigns¹⁵. As discussed in Chapter 7, commercial political advertising has come late to most European countries. In some, like Austria, negative advertisements are banned by law. In others like the Netherlands, although ads are allowed, few are aired because parties have limited financial resources. And in still others like Britain it is difficult to compare the effects of a five to ten minute party political broadcast, shown once per channel, with the effects of repetitive 30-second ads common in the United States. Lacking systematic comparative data on exposure to negative ads, we cannot pursue these claims further here.

The other concern claim relates to common practices originating in the news media, which we can examine, such as where routine headlines emphasize political scandals, government incompetence and/or partisan conflict¹⁶. For example, Patterson suggests that American voters are turned off by the media's routine emphasis on the 'game' schema, characterized by horse race journalism (who's ahead, who's behind) and extensive coverage of opinion polls¹⁷. He argues that changes in journalism in the 1960s produce a shift towards game-immersed news, strengthening voters' mistrust of the candidates and reducing their sense of involvement. For Cappella and Jamieson strategic frames for political news activate cynical responses to politicians, governance and campaigns¹⁸. Yet others argue that a strategic focus and horse race polls function in a positive way, by increasing the American public's attention to issue information and political knowledge. Zhao and Beske conclude that coverage of opinion polls is complimentary to issue coverage, stimulating rather than displacing attention¹⁹. It seems equally plausible that what matters for electoral participation is what the polls report, not the extent of their coverage per se. In Britain, for example, Heath and Taylor found that the closeness of the race, as monitored by reported opinion polls, is one of the best predictors of turnout²⁰. Neck-and-neck contests increased the incentive to vote. In addition, the effects of negative news are not well established. In the British context, for example, large-scale experiments in the 1997 election demonstrated that exposure to 'negative' television news about the major parties had no influence on party images or propensity to vote, whereas positive news did have a significant impact on voters²¹.

Therefore we need to go further to understand the effects of political communications on public participation. Since most of the research has been conducted within the context of American campaigns, which are atypical of most established democracies, it is useful to reexamine the evidence in a broader range of post-industrial societies. This chapter focuses on political participation in European elections, which allow us to explore the effects of campaign communications across the fifteen member states, controlling for some of the major cultural and the structural factors already discussed. In chapter 13 we consider whether there are similar, or different, effects of media use on campaign participation in American mid-term elections. Political participation involves many different types of activity, from contacting representatives to becoming active in community organizations, political parties, or interest groups. In this study we

focus on comparing voter turnout, one of the least demanding forms of activity but also one of the most universal. For many people, casting the ballot provides their only form of political expression. This measure is also comparable across established democracies, unlike involvement in parties or interest groups that may mean very different things in different institutional settings.

Political Communications and Electoral Turnout

Many assume that there has been a general decline in voter participation in established democracies but in fact levels of turnout have remained fairly stable during the last two decades; 71% of voting age population participated in elections in the 1990s, down only 3% from the 1970s²². Despite similar socioeconomic and political developments in post-industrial societies, there are persistent cross-national disparities in levels of electoral participation. Some countries like Switzerland, France and the Netherlands have experienced substantial long-term falls (see Figure 12.1). In American presidential elections, in 1996 less than half (47.2%) the voting age popular cast a ballot, down from almost two-thirds (63.1%) in 1960. If we calculate average turnout in 171 countries worldwide, in all national elections from 1945 to 1998, Switzerland ranks 137th, the US ranks 138th, and Mexico ranks 139th²³.

[Figure 12.1 about here]

Problems of turnout are particularly relevant in election to the European Parliament. The level of voting participation fell from almost two-thirds (63%) of the electorate in the first direct elections in 1979 to just under half (49.2%) of European citizens in June 1999, its historical nadir (see Figure 12.2). The decline over successive election is particularly clear in the Netherlands and Portugal, as well as in Austria, Finland and Sweden, which saw a sharp drop after their first 'founding' European elections. There are also stark national differences, in the most recent elections 90% of Belgian citizens voted compared with only one quarter (23%) of the British electorate (see Table 12.1). As Franklin and his colleagues have argued²⁴, the institutional system of electoral laws provides much of the explanation for these persistent systemic differences, notably the use of compulsory voting (in Belgium, Luxembourg and Italy), Sunday polling day (Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain and Sweden), and the majoritarian first-past-the-post electoral system (used in mainland Britain until the 1999 contests).

[Table 12.1 and Figure 12.2 about here]

But, within this context, can the news media or party campaigns be blamed for the downward trend in European participation? If news headlines highlighted corruption at the Commission, bureaucratic over regulation in Brussels, and junkets for the European parliament, it would not be surprising if voters deserted the polling stations. Yet if we compare the sources of campaign information for those who reported voting in the 1994 European elections, contrary to the videomalaise thesis, a positive relationship is evident: those who saw something about the campaign in newspapers and television, or who received an election leaflet or saw party advertising, were more likely to cast a

ballot (see Table 12.2). All the zero-order correlations (with the exception of being contacted by a party worker) proved significant. In many cases the gap between voters and non-voters proved modest but in the case of newspaper readers the gap reached 10 percentage points.

[Table 12.2 about here]

To see whether this relationship held up to multivariate analysis, regression models was run in 1989 and 1994 predicting voting turnout using the standard structural, attitudinal and national-level controls employed throughout this book. This includes education, age and income (the latter as a proxy for SES), which have most commonly been found to be associated with turnout, along with political interest. The results in Table 12.3 confirm the pattern we have already observed in both elections. As many previous studies have found, age and income proved strong predictors of turnout, along with political interest. The younger generation is particularly prone to stay home. In contrast the gender gap in turnout has shrunk over the years to become insignificant while education (measured on a restricted scale) proved inconsistent. National factors also proved important, with below-average reported turnout in Britain, the Netherlands, Portugal and Ireland, a pattern already shown in official aggregate figures in Table 12.1. As noted earlier, the legal and institutional context, such as the use of compulsory voting, provides by far the most convincing explanation for these national contrasts. After these controls were included, all the forms of political communication proved significant and positive, including use of newspapers, television/radio and party campaign activity. The strength of these factors did vary across these models, in part because of functionally equivalent but different measures of media attention, but all pointed in the same direction. The replication of these models in both elections increases our confidence in the results in the European context. We will return to consider whether there are similar patterns in American mid-term elections, as comparable low-salience contests, in later chapters.

[Table 12.3 about here]

Yet interpretations of these findings are open to the same issues of causality that we have already observed in the last chapter. Does media attention to the campaign (which is sequentially prior) lead to turnout? Or does a general propensity to turnout lead to media attention (because I want to cast my vote, I seek out information about the parties and candidates)? Or is there, as seems most plausible, a virtuous circle where watching the news activates existing predispositions and prior tendencies lead people to turn on the news. What we find no evidence for is the claim that those most attentive to news coverage during the campaign were demobilized by the experience.

These issues cannot be resolved with cross-sectional data but to explore some of the reasons behind this pattern we can look at how people evaluated a series of statements concerning television coverage of the campaign. Table 12.4 shows that compared with those who did not turnout, voters were significantly more likely to report that TV coverage showed them where their party stood on Europe, helped make up their mind how to vote, and highlighted party differences. This supports the idea, which Paul Lazarsfeld argued fifty years ago, that the attentive use the information on the news to help crystallize their

voting choices. In contrast, non-voters were more prone to feel that coverage left them feeling confused or bored. If we can generalize more broadly from these results, they suggest that campaign communications may thereby reinforce the division between those who tune in and tune out from public affairs. Some people will have more civic skills, social networks, and interest to find out about events in Brussels or Luxembourg, and to cast their vote accordingly. The institutional context also does seem important for electoral turnout, and devices like compulsory voting and Sunday polling days can raise levels of participation. But the evidence here suggests that coverage of public affairs in the traditional news media should not be blamed for broader inequalities in educational skills or socio-economic resources common throughout post-industrial societies.

[Table 12.4 about here]

The Internet and Political Participation

But what is the impact of new technology, and, in particular, will the Internet play a distinctive role in expanding political participation? The literature remains divided about this issue. Mobilization theories reviewed in chapter 6 assume that use of the net will facilitate and encourage new forms of political activism²⁵. The strongest claims of mobilization theories are that net activism represents a distinctive type of political participation which differs, in significant ways, from conventional activities like working for political parties, organizing grassroots social movements, or lobbying elected officials. By sharply reducing the barriers to civic engagement, leveling some of the financial hurdles, and widening the opportunities for political debate, the dissemination of information, and group interaction, it is thought that more people will become involved in public life. For enthusiasts, the net promises to provide new forms of horizontal and vertical communication, which facilitate and enrich deliberation in the public sphere.

Yet in contrast reinforcement theories suggest that use of the net will strengthen, but not radically transform, existing patterns of civic involvement. From this more skeptical perspective, despite the new technology, and the interactive potential of the net, the effects of the new media are very similar to the role of television and newspapers that we have already observed²⁶.

Both the mobilisation and reinforcement theories may be plausible and in the midst of the conjecture it is difficult to find systematic comparative evidence that can throw light on this debate. Given the remarkable expansion in use of the Web in just a few years, as in the early television age, it would be foolish to attempt to provide conclusive answers concerning the direction of future developments. Much depends upon political and economic conditions, for example how far access becomes more level. In this chapter we focus on patterns of net activism in American campaigns, as one of the countries with the highest levels of Internet access, and then consider whether these trends are becoming evident in Europe as well.

Analysis in the 1996 and 1998 American elections campaigns demonstrates that net activists are among the most motivated, informed

and interested groups in the electorate. In this sense, the new capacities for interactive communication do hold promise for strengthening the process of political communications. As argued in chapter 7, the typical campaign uses of the new media can be located between the traditional sort of face-to-face activism of pre-modern communications, characterized by town-hall meetings, party rallies and personal candidate-voter contact, and the more passive and distant campaign conducted via national party leaders across the airwaves. Party web sites, especially intranet linkages that facilitate more interactive and horizontal within parties, as well as Internet discussion groups, and email, can be envisaged as a return to some of the older forms of campaign communications (see Figure 7.2). Nevertheless the available survey evidence also shows that, as with the traditional media, at present politics on the Internet reinforces the activism of the activists, rather than magically transforming the apathetic into engaged citizens²⁷.

Chapter 6 examined how many people use the internet and found that, according to the latest estimates, in spring 1999 about 20% of Europeans had Internet access, with highest access in Denmark, Sweden and Finland. In the United States about one half of the public is now online, with explosive growth since the mid-1990s. The social profile of European users confirmed the familiar disparities by age, education, socio-economic status and gender found in America. The most important evidence that this pattern might affect political activism concerns the generational pattern, since younger people are least likely to use the traditional news media, their preponderance among net users may have important consequences.

The extent of the news revolution caused by this growth in the United States becomes apparent if we compare regular use of conventional and online media. Precise estimates about use of Internet news vary over time, as both news events and the way people think about Internet 'news' continues to change. Nevertheless Pew surveys suggest that the percentage of Americans regularly getting news from the Internet (where 'regularly' is defined as at least once a week) more than tripled over two years, rising from 11 million users in June 1995 to 36 million in May 1998, or 20 percent of all Americans. As shown in Table 12.5, similar levels of use are evident among those who regularly go online to communicate with others via discussion lists and chat groups, while slightly fewer go online for entertainment news (14 percent) or financial information (10 percent). Within the space of just a few years, the regular audience for online news in America has become larger than many traditional media such as for mainstream news magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek* (15 percent), listeners to talk radio (13 percent), let alone viewers of minority outlets like PBS *NewsHour* or *C-Span* (4 percent).

[Table 12.5 about here]

The growth of the net in America provides a major rival to traditional news media outlets. The most common activities that engage about two-thirds of all Americans continue to be reading a daily printed newspaper and watching the local evening TV news. The majority also regularly catches radio news sometime during the day and listener-ship has expanded during the last decade. In contrast network news has suffered a dramatic hemorrhage of viewers due to the fragmentation of cable and satellite stations, and the Balkanization of the television

audience: today just over a third (38 percent) regularly tune into Jennings, Brokaw and Rather. To some extent this merely reflects the dispersion of the network audience to cable and satellite, as people may now find MSNBC or CNBC more convenient for their schedules than NBC News at 6.30pm. But this phenomenon, combined with the growth of the net, has clearly caused greater competition for the major American networks.

Why Do People Go Online?

In America, in terms of the *size* of its total audience, the Internet can increasingly claim to be a mass media. But is there a common experience of the net, so that we can talk about the effects of exposure to being online, much as we might discuss the influence of network news, violent movies, or talk radio? If so, then it is legitimate to generalize, as both sides of the debate often do, about the experience and attitudes of 'on-line users'. Yet the fragmentation and segmentation of the Web, and the myriad of uses which the Internet can serve, means that perhaps we need a more cautious approach. Given the choices about where to go and what to do in the digital world, the question arises whether we have a shared experience of the Web at all and therefore whether it constitutes a mass media in the conventional sense.

The need to refine our concepts of net users may be particularly important for types of net political activism. As argued earlier, political participation can best be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon. Following this approach, participation in virtual democracy on the net can be understood to involve many different types of activity. Someone checking the web pages of the Europa home page, or reading the BBC Online News, for example, may be engaged in a different sort of activity to someone discussing the l'affaire Lewinsky in users groups, or emailing colleagues about the time of a community meeting. To explore the dimensions of net use the Pew surveys asked American online users about how often, if at all, they engage in a wide variety of activities, such as getting information about movies, travel or the Dow Jones, chatting with people in on-line forums, and engaging in political discussion. People were questioned about ten types of activity in the 1998 survey and the overall pattern was mapped using factor analysis.

[Table 12.6 about here]

As shown in Table 12.6, the analysis revealed two distinct dimensions or types of activity on the net. On the one hand *general users* were most interested in using the net for news about current events, entertainment-related information about movies and hobbies, as well as financial information, using email, buying goods online, practical guidance about health, and communicating via online discussion groups. Just as many people turn mainly to the sports results or television listings or stock market results in traditional newspapers, so people seek a wide range of 'news', usually apolitical, on the web. While some of this activity may bring people in touch with public affairs, as people click from one topic to another, this process is more accidental than purposive. In contrast, *political activists* more often went online to engage in political discussions, to contact officials or groups about an issue, or to get specific information

about the 1998 campaign. Therefore net political activists who sought political information or communication can be categorized as a distinct group within the online user community, as in society.

[Table 12.7 about here]

Were the net political activists a small minority? We can compare the most common general types of net activity, defined as those which occurred 'at least one a week' among online users during the 1998 campaign. The pattern in Table 12.7 shows that the most popular general uses included email (regularly used by almost three-quarters of online users) and work-related research (regularly used by almost half). Searching for information about politics and current events was the next most popular activity, used by 38 percent at least once a week. Yet more active forms of civic engagement were used by far fewer of those online in the 1998 campaign, including political discussion (used by 4 percent) and contacting officials or groups about politics (4 percent). The comparison of the 1996 and 1998 campaigns shows that the greatest increase in use has been in emailing, and there has also been some increase in the use of the net to get entertainment-related and financial information. In contrast the proportions engaged in the more political types of activity hardly changed. Wider access to the web has expanded the audience for general interest subjects, such as information about the weather or movies, much more than the audience for political or international news.

[Table 12.8 about here]

The evidence shows a strikingly similar profile in Europe. The 1997 Eurobarometer asked people whether they would be interested in using a series of online services. Groups were also classified into *actual* users (who already accessed the internet), *potential* users (who did not currently use the internet but who remained interested in doing so), and *non-users* (who did not use and were not interested in using the net). The results in Table 12.8 show that across all groups the most popular uses of the Internet were for education and email. A third or fewer Europeans expressed interest in using the Internet to read newspapers, get health information, or go online for banking and financial services. In terms of broadly political activities, the most popular were consulting local town or council services for information (27%), and reading newspapers online (22%). In contrast, relatively few Europeans expressed any interest in the more demanding forms of political engagement, such as participating in group discussions or using the internet to contact politicians.

[Table 12.9 about here]

If we compare EU member states, Table 12.9 shows significant differences in the potential interest expressed in these different forms of political activity. Some variations probably reflected different national experiences, for example many Scandinavians expressed interest in accessing online newspapers, in a region where we have already observed relatively high readership of the traditional print sector. Yet potential interest did not necessarily reflect actual experience of Internet use, for example about a third of those living in Portugal, Spain and Greece expressed interest in consulting their

local council through these channels, far more than in Scandinavia, despite extremely low levels of access in the Mediterranean region.

[Table 12.10 about here]

What do we know about the minority of all online users in America (15%) who went online specifically to get political information during the 1996 and 1998 U.S. elections? If we look more closely at the type of activities among this select group we find that the most popular activities included getting information about a candidate's voting record, participating in an online poll, sending email supporting or opposing candidates, downloading election information, and providing information such as email or mailing addresses (see Table 12.10). But in all cases this activity involved less than 5% of the total online community, and therefore an even smaller proportion of the general electorate.

[Table 12.11 about here]

If the online community differs socially from the general public, as we have seen, do they also differ politically? If reinforcement theories were correct, we would expect to find that net users tend to be drawn from among the most politically knowledgeable and engaged. Table 12.11 compares the political attitudes of all online users with net political activists in the 1998 American mid-term election. Net activists are higher than average consumers of all types of media news, including television and radio. Net activists also displayed particularly high levels of reported turnout, confirming the association that we have already observed with users of traditional news media. This pattern is clearly reflected also in levels of political knowledge: when asked which party had control of the House of Representatives, net political activists were more likely than the average online user to get the answer right. There were no significant differences between net activists and general online users in levels of political and social trust. In the 1996 and 1998 American elections, the group of net activists proved similar to the online community as a whole in terms of their 1998 House vote. Nevertheless there was a significant difference between the online community and the general electorate in terms of approval of House Republicans, since online users proved more positive. Moreover the pro-Republican partisanship of online users was not simply the product of the gender, income and educational biases among the user community, since approval of Congressional Republicans remained a significant factor in predicting online news use even after controlling for social background.

Are similar patterns evident among the online community in Europe? The first two columns in Table 12.12 show the mean scores for the online community in Europe using a range of ten indicators of political attitudes, including scales for trust in government, trust in EU institutions, trust in the news media, satisfaction with democracy in one's own country and within the European Union, left-right ideology, political efficacy, support for the EU, voting participation, and political knowledge²⁸. The next column in Table 12.2 displays the zero order correlation between online use and the attitudinal scales. The last column shows the standardized coefficients (betas) in regression models monitoring the effects of online use on political

attitudes controlling for prior education, gender, income and age. The aim in the analysis was not to develop a comprehensive causal model explaining these political attitudes, which would require many additional factors, but rather to examine whether the political characteristics of online users proved distinctive on a wide range of indicators even after controlling for some of the social factors that distinguish this group.

[Table 12.2 about here]

The results indicate that across all the mean scores, those who went online were more likely to display positive attitudes towards the political system, including greater trust, efficacy, participation, and knowledge. The mean differences between net users and non-users were often only modest but in most cases (with the exception of satisfaction with democracy in the EU) they were in the positive direction for the online community and the zero order correlations (without any controls) confirmed a significant relationship. Lastly, after the social controls were introduced, the pattern became more mixed. Nevertheless net users proved significantly more positive towards the political system on six out of ten indicators, they were more significantly negative on two, and there was no difference on the remainder. This suggests that, just as in the United States, the online community in Europe is drawn from the pool of those already most predisposed to be relatively positive towards the political system. The pattern of the traditional news media serving to activate the active, which we have observed earlier, also seems evident in the online community.

Conclusions: Activating Activism

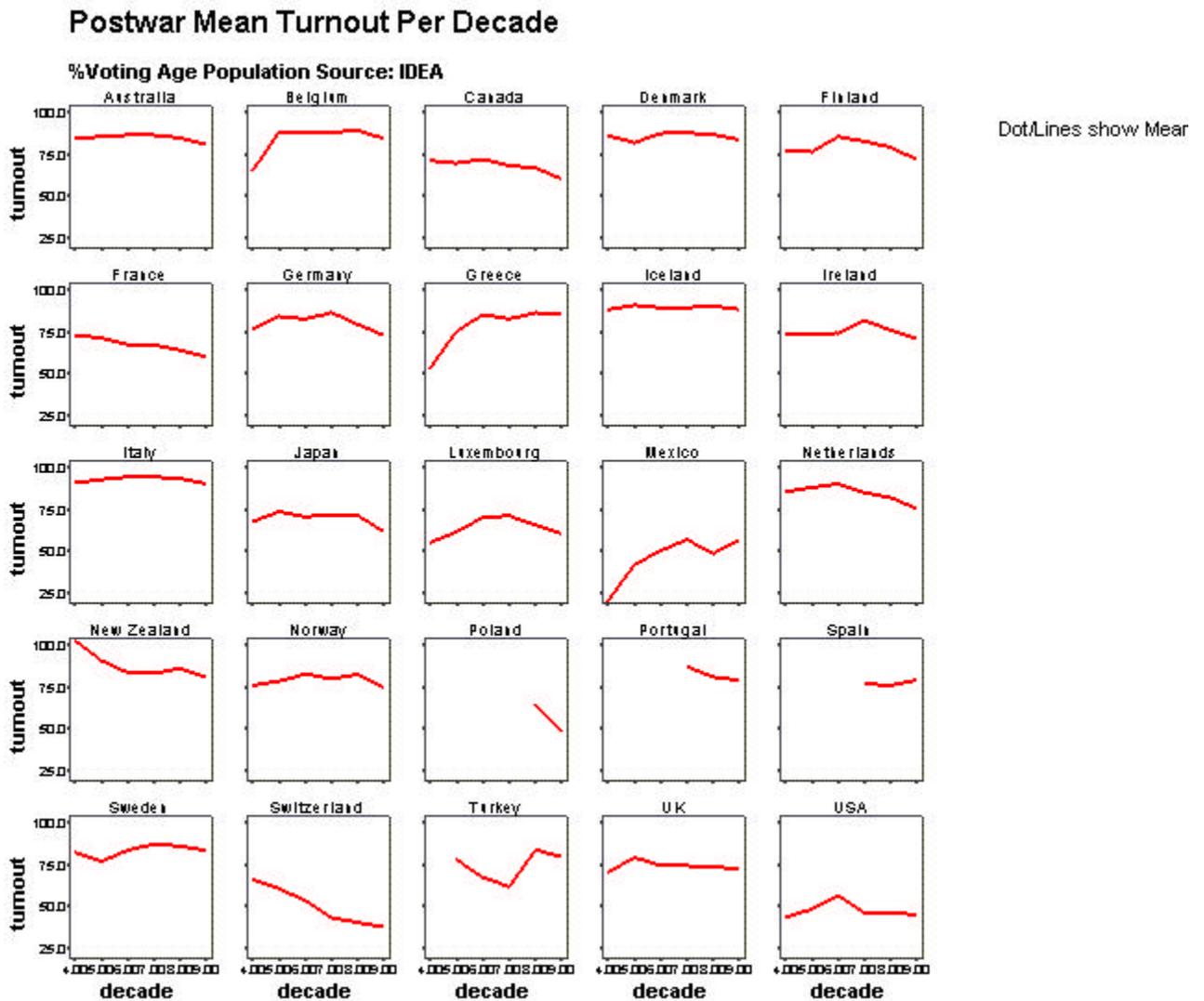
The videomalaise thesis is far from new, as there have always been those who fear that the press, and then television, and now the Internet, will have pernicious effects on the public. But the 1990s have witnessed another wave in which this view has again become fashionable, strongly reflecting the pervasive mood of skepticism about the political process in the United States, but also catching the wave of concern about cynicism with democracy in Europe. The popular claims are that the typical coverage of public affairs provided by newspapers and television have reduced public trust in traditional sources of authority in government, and served to disengage the electorate. The new media are often regarded as the saviour of democracy, galloping to the rescue to attract groups who might otherwise be uninvolved in conventional forms of activism, especially the younger generation who have low levels of voting turnout and civic engagement, and those who feel alienated from mainstream society.

The analysis presented in this chapter suggests that both the worst fears of the videomalaise claims, and the inflated hopes of the new media proponents, are misplaced and exaggerated. The evidence we have reviewed indicates that the public who paid most attention to campaign coverage in newspapers and television, as well as the messages from parties, were more likely to participate in the political process. And the message from our analysis of net users confirms a strikingly similar pattern. Admittedly access to the web is expanding by leaps and bounds, but, as in life, most people are checking their stocks or

paying their bills or reading their email from friends or downloading music, not engaged in public affairs, even by a generous definition. The people most likely to prove motivated to seek out election information on party web pages, or to communicate and organize via the net, are also those who probably would become most engaged in traditional forms of political activism in parties, groups and lobbying. The news media thereby serves primarily to activate activism, but there is little support for the optimistic belief that the media can either generate civic engagement, or the pessimistic view that it can dampen it down.

Clearly any definitive prognosis is foolhardy at this stage as use of the net in the next few years will clearly evolve further, broaden its user base, and normalize in subsequent elections. Analogous to the early years of radio or television, access will widen. Like the rapid evolution of ecommerce, parties and candidates will develop new ways to communicate interactively via the Web. It seems likely that the passive web page, where people get vertical access to 'top-down' information, much as they would from conventional political leaflets, will gradually be superceded by more active designs allowing horizontal communication among networks of citizens, and 'bottom up' feedback into the political process. Parties may find the most valuable use concerns 'intranets' connecting different levels and bodies within their organization, as much as internet communication with the outside public. Interactivity seems likely to appeal most to the small group of mobilized and interested activists, rather than reaching citizens with lower levels of political efficacy and interest. Online access and use has certainly expanded sharply in the last few years, and will expand further, but the proportion of net political activists remains far smaller. The proportion of Americans and Europeans currently involved in any form of online election activity strongly suggests the need for caution about the transformative capacity of the web for democracy, at least in the short term.

Figure 12.1:



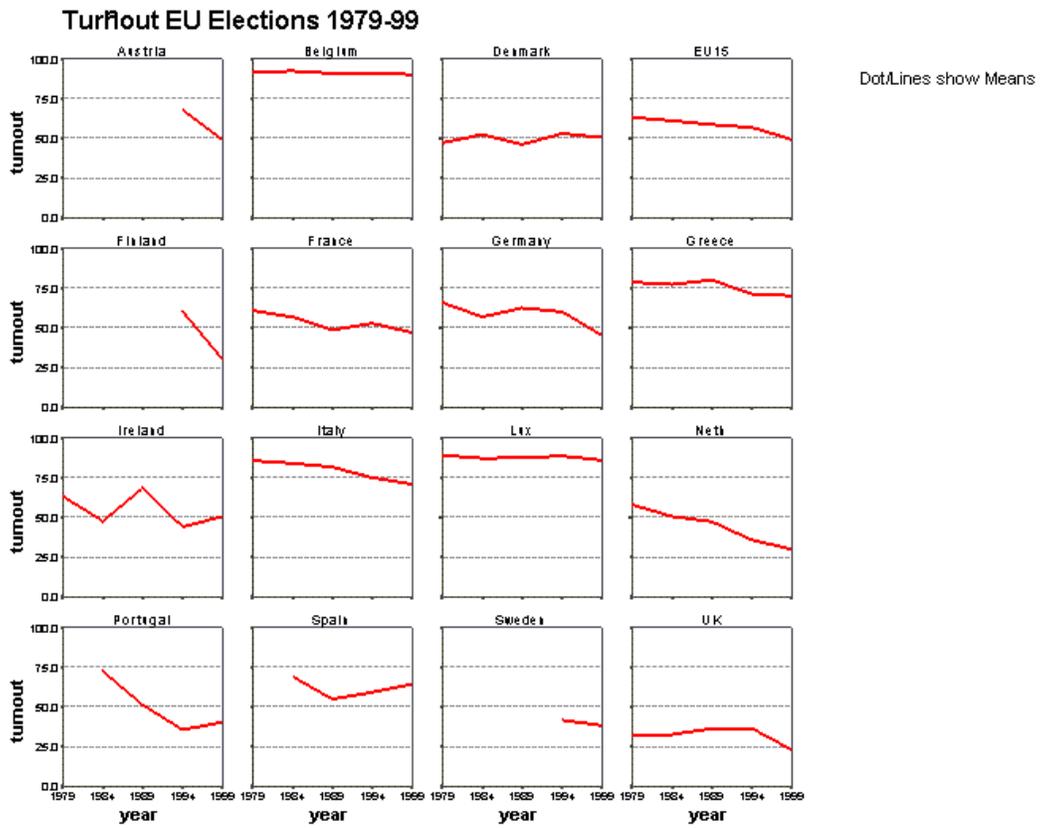


Table 12.1 Turnout in European Elections, 1979-1999

	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999	<i>Chg</i> 1994-99	<i>Notes</i>
Austria				67.7	49.0	-18.7	[1995]
Belgium	91.6	92.2	90.7	90.7	90.0	-0.7	
Denmark	47.1	52.3	46.1	52.9	50.4	-2.5	
Finland				60.3	30.1	-30.2	
France	60.7	56.7	48.7	52.7	47.0	-5.7	
Germany	65.7	56.8	62.4	60.0	45.2	-14.8	
Greece	78.6	77.2	79.9	71.2	70.1	-1.1	[1981]
Ireland	63.0	47.6	68.3	44.0	50.5	6.5	
Italy	85.5	83.9	81.5	74.8	70.8	-4.0	
Luxembourg	88.9	87.0	87.4	88.5	85.8	-2.7	
Netherlands	57.8	50.5	47.2	35.7	29.9	-5.8	
Portugal		72.2	51.1	35.5	40.4	4.9	[1987]
Spain		68.9	54.8	59.1	64.3	5.2	[1987]
Sweden				41.6	38.3	-3.3	[1995]
UK	31.6	32.6	36.2	36.4	23.0	-13.4	
<i>EU15</i>	<i>63.0</i>	<i>61.0</i>	<i>58.5</i>	<i>56.8</i>	<i>49.2</i>	<i>-7.6</i>	

Source: <http://europa.eu.int>

Chapter from Pippa Norris "A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Societies." (NY: Cambridge University Press, Fall 2000)

Table 12.2 Political Communications and Voting Participation

<i>% Who said campaign came to their attention via...</i>	<i>Not Voted</i>	<i>Voted</i>	<i>Zero order correlation [R]</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Discuss with friends/family	18	30	.13	**
Newspapers	35	45	.10	**
Television/radio	59	67	.07	**
Party advertising	35	40	.05	**
Election leaflet	38	41	.03	**
Party worker called at home	6	7	.01	

Source: European Election Study 1994, Eurobarometer 41.1 N. 13,095.

Table 12.3 Predictors of Voting Participation

	<i>Voted in the European Elections 1989</i>	<i>Sig</i>	<i>Voted in the European Elections 1994</i>	<i>Sig</i>
STRUCTURAL				
Education	-.04	*	.01	
Gender	-.01		.01	
Age	.21	**	.24	**
Income	.04	**	.05	*
ATTITUDINAL				
Political interest	.10	**	.17	**
Left-Right Ideology	-.02		.01	**
ATTENTION TO				
TV News	.13	**	.04	**
Newspapers	.11	**	.04	**
Party Communications	.07	**	.10	**
NATION				
Belgium	.13	**	.06	*
Denmark	-.04	**	-.11	**
Germany	.02		-.08	**
Ireland	.06		-.15	**
Italy	.11	**	.03	**
Luxembourg	.08	**	.05	**
Netherlands	-.02		-.16	**
Portugal	-.05	*	-.13	**
Spain	.01		-.01	
UK	-.10	**	-.21	**
Constant	.29		.17	
R2	.16		.18	

Note: The figures represent OLS standardized regression coefficients (betas).

Sources: European Post-Election Survey, June-July 1989, Eurobarometer 31A; European Election Study 1994 Eurobarometer 41.1. N.13095

Chapter from Pippa Norris "A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Societies." (NY: Cambridge University Press, Fall 2000)

Table 12.4: Evaluations of TV Campaign News by Turnout

<i>% Mentioned agreement with statement...</i>	<i>Not voted</i>	<i>Voted</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>Sig</i>
It showed me where my party stands on European questions	6	18	.16	**
It helped me make up my mind how to vote	3	12	.14	**
It helped me think about the future of Europe	10	15	.07	**
It brought out the differences between parties on European matters	6	10	.07	**
It told me how the European Commission is run	5	8	.07	**
It told me about the relationship between (my countries) parties and those in other countries	5	9	.07	**
It didn't tell me about the advantages...of being in the EU	16	16	.01	
It didn't show me why I should care about the European parliament	13	12	-.01	**
It left me feeling rather confused	19	15	-.04	**
It all seemed rather boring	21	15	-.06	**

Note: Q "Thinking especially how the campaign was covered on television, which of these statements would you say you agree with?"

(R) Zero Order Correlation between TV use and statement.

Source: European Post-Election Survey, June-July 1989, Eurobarometer 31A.

Chapter from Pippa Norris "A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Societies." (NY: Cambridge University Press, Fall 2000)

Table 12.5: Regular Use of the News Media, US 1998.

<i>% of all Americans who regularly...</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Read Daily Newspaper	68
Watch Local Evening TV News	64
Listen to Radio News	52
Watch Network TV News (CBS, ABC or NBC)	38
Watch TV News Magazines (eg 60 Minutes, Dateline)	37
Watch Weather Channel	33
<i>Go online at least once a week(*)</i>	—▶25
Morning TV News (eg Today Show, CBS This Morning)	23
Watch Cable News Network (CNN)	23
<i>Go online to get news at least once a week</i>	—▶20
<i>Go online to use discussion lists/chat groups (*)</i>	—▶20
News Magazines (eg Time, U.S.News, Newsweek)	15
Listen to National Public Radio (NPR)	15
Watch TV Tabloids (eg Hard Copy, Inside Edition)	14
<i>Go online to get information about entertainment (*)</i>	—▶14
Watch Daytime TV Talk Shows (e.g. Jerry Springer)	13
Listen to Talk Radio	13
Watch CNBC	12
Daytime TV Talk Shows	10
<i>Go online to get financial information (*)</i>	—▶10
Watch MSNBC	8
Watch Court TV	6
Watch MTV	6
Listen to Rush Limbaugh's radio show	5
Read Business magazines (e.g. Forbes, Fortune)	5
Watch PBS Newshour with Jim Lehrer	4
Listen to Howard Stern's radio show	4
Watch C-SPAN	4
Read Print Tabloids (e.g. National Enquirer, The Sun)	3

Note: Q: "Now I'd like to know how often you watch (or listen to or read)...Regularly, Sometimes, Hardly ever, Never". For online sources (*) the question was "Please tell me how often, if ever, you engage in each of the following online activities..." Regular use is defined as at least once a week.

Chapter from Pippa Norris "A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Societies." (NY: Cambridge University Press, Fall 2000)

Source: The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press Media Consumption survey using a nationwide sample of 3,002 adults f/w 24 April-11 May 1998.

Table 12.6: Factor Analysis of Online Activities, U.S. 1998

<i>% of online users who...</i>	<i>General Users</i>	<i>Political Activists</i>
Go online for news/information on current events, public issues or politics	.77	
Go online for news	.76	
Get entertainment-related information e.g. movies, hobbies	.59	
Get financial information such as stock quotes	.57	
Send or receive email	.52	
Purchased goods or services online	.49	
Get health or medical information	.46	
Communicate with others through on-line forums, discussion lists	.39	
Engage in online discussions about politics		.85
Contact or email groups or officials about political issues		.82
Go online for information about the 1998 elections		.55
% Variance	26	17

Note: The model uses Principal Component Factor Analysis with varimax rotation with Kaiser normalization suppressing coefficients below .35. See Appendix A for questions.

Source: The Pew Center for the People and the Press: Technology and On-line Use Survey 1998 Over-sample of on-line users N. 1993. F/w November 1998.

Table 12.7: Frequency of Activities among All Online Users, U.S. 1996 - 98

<i>% of all online users who...</i>	<i>% At least Once Every Week 1996</i>	<i>% At least Once Every Week 1998</i>
Send email	64	72
Do research for work	48	47
Get news on current events, public issues and politics	39	38
Get entertainment-related information e.g. movies, hobbies	30	35
Get financial information	23	28
Communicate via online forums, discussion lists, chat groups	23	22
Do research for school	22	14
Go online for information about the 1996 elections.	12	10
Get travel information	10	12
Engage in online political discussions	4	4
Contact groups and officials about political issues	2	4

Source: The Pew Center for the People and the Press: Technology and On-line Use Survey 1996. Over-sample of on-line users N. 1003. F/w October 1996. Technology and On-line Use Survey 1998 survey N. 1993 F/w November 1998.

Table 12.8: European Interest in Uses of the Internet, EU-15 1997

<i>% of each group interested in using internet to...</i>	<i>Use Internet</i>	<i>Does not use Internet but interested</i>	<i>Does not use internet and not interested</i>
Follow a training program from home	59	56	46
Email	41	34	16
Read news and magazines	36	27	17
Get a doctor's advice on a health problem	35	38	38
Banking and finance	35	36	25
Consult local town or council services	28	31	28
Travel information	28	28	25
Consult employment offices	22	28	25
Museum tour	21	20	15
Getting consumer information on products	20	21	14
Take part in group discussion	16	15	9
Contact a politician and taking part in political debates	10	10	8

Note: Q. "I am going to name several examples of services you could have access to by using one of these communication networks, for example, the Internet. For each of these services could you please tell me if it interests you or not?"

Source: Eurobarometer 47.0 Jan-Feb 1997. N. 16,362.

Table 12.9. Interest in Political Uses of the Internet, EU-15 1997

<i>% of pop. interested in using Internet to...</i>	<i>Consult local town or council services</i>	<i>Read newspapers and magazines</i>	<i>Contact Politicians</i>
Austria	36	22	14
Belgium	20	18	6
Britain	18	17	6
Denmark	25	35	12
East Germany	34	12	8
Finland	27	32	5
France	21	21	7
Greece	38	19	11
Ireland	14	10	5
Italy	29	19	7
Luxembourg	34	32	14
Netherlands	20	24	5
Northern Ireland	15	15	7
Portugal	37	25	20
Spain	33	25	8
Sweden	19	33	8
West Germany	33	14	10
All	27	22	9

Note: See Table 12.9 for details of the question.

Source: Eurobarometer 47.0 Jan-Feb 1997. N. 16,362.

Table 12.10: Online Election Activities, U.S. 1996 -98 (*)

	1996	1998
Get information about a candidate's voting record		30
Participate in an online poll	34	26
Get or send email supporting or opposing a candidate for office		22
Download election information	56	20
Provide information such as your email/ mailing address	31	18
Participate in online discussions	31	13
Get information about where and when to vote		12

Note: (*) As a proportion of those who went online to get news or information about the 1998 elections (15% of the online user community). Q80. "*When you went online to get information about the elections, do/did you do any of the following...*"

Source: The Pew Center for the People and the Press: Technology and On-line Use Survey 1996. Over-sample of on-line users N. 1003. F/w October 1996. Technology and On-line Use Survey 1998 survey N. 1993 F/w November 1998.

Table 12.11: The Political Profile of American Online Users, US 1998.

<i>% of each group who...</i>	<i>All Online Users 1998</i>	<i>Net Political Activists</i>	<i>Association</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Read the paper yesterday	70	76	.15	**
Watched the TV news yesterday	63	68	.11	**
Listened to radio news yesterday	47	51	.09	**
Voted in 1998	56	78	.46	**
Vote Republican 1998	42	44		
Vote Democrat 1998	41	40	.04	
Know GOP hold House	62	80	.41	**
Social trust: High	42	45	.04	
Political Trust: high	28	26	.02	

Note: 'Net Political Activists' are defined as those who engage in online discussions about politics, contact or email groups or officials about political issues or go online for information about the 1998 elections. The coefficient of the association was measured by gamma. **=.01 *=.05

Source: The Pew Research Center Online Technology Survey November 1998.

¹ See Ivor Crewe. 'Electoral Participation.' In *Democracy at the Polls*, edited by Austin Ranney and David Butler. Washington, DC: AEI Press; Arend Lijphart. 1997. 'Unequal Participation: Democracy's Unresolved Dilemma.' *American Political Science Review*. 91: 1-14.

² Robert W. Jackman and Ross A. Miller. 1995. 'Voter Turnout in the Industrial Democracies During the 1980s.' *Comparative Political Studies*, 27: 467-92. See also Richard Katz. 1997. *Democracy and Elections*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³ Mark Franklin, Cees van der Eijk and Erik Oppenhuis. 1996. 'The Institutional Context: Turnout'. In *Choosing Europe? The European Electorate and National Politics in the Face of Union*, edited by Cees van der Eijk and Mark Franklin. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

⁴ Raymond Wolfinger and Steven Rosenstone. 1980. *Who Votes?* New Haven: Yale University Press.

⁵ Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba. 1963. *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

⁶ See Sidney Verba, and Norman Nie. 1972. *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality*. New York: Harper and Row; Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

⁷ See, for example, Steven J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen. 1995. *Mobilization, Participation and Democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan.

⁸ Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

⁹ John Aldrich. 1995. *Why Parties?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Martin P. Wattenberg. 1996. *The Decline of American Political Parties: 1952-1994*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

¹⁰ Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld and William N. McPhee. *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp.246-248.

¹¹ See Angus Campbell, Philip Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes. *The American Voter*. New York: John Wiley. P.92. See also Sidney Verba, Norman H. Nie and Jae-On Kim. 1978. *Participation and Political Equality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Geraint Parry, George

Moyser and Neil Day. 1992. *Political Participation and Democracy in Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹² Brice E. Pinkleton, and Erica Weintraub Austin. 1998. 'Media and Participation: Breaking the Spiral of Disaffection.' In *Engaging the Public: How Government and the Media can Invigorate American Democracy*. Ed. Thomas J. Johnson, Carol E. Hays and Scott P. Hays. New York: Rowan & Littlefield; Hugh Culbertson and Guido H. Stempel III. 1986. 'How media use and reliance affect knowledge level.' *Communication Research*. 13:579-602; Alexis S. Tan. 1980. 'Mass media use, issue knowledge and political involvement. *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 44: 241-48.

¹³ See, for example, Kathleen H. Jamieson. 1992. *Dirty Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Kathleen H. Jamieson. 1984. *Packaging the Presidency: A History and Criticism of Presidential Advertising*. New York: Oxford University Press; Karen S. Johnson-Cartee and Gary A. Copeland. 1991. *Negative Political Advertising: Coming of Age*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

¹⁴ Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar. 1995. *Going Negative: How Political Advertisements Shrink and Polarize the Electorate*. New York: Free Press. P. 112.

¹⁵ Lynda Lee Kaid and Christina Holtz-Bacha. 1995. *Political Advertising in Western Democracies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

¹⁶ Joseph N. Cappella and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. 1997. *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹⁷ Thomas E. Patterson. 1993. *Out of Order*. New York: Vintage.

¹⁸ Joseph N. Cappella and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. 1997. *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. P.139.

¹⁹ Xinshu Zhao and Glen L. Beske. 1998. 'Horse-Race Polls and Audience Issue Learning.' *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*. 3(4): 13-34; Philip Meyer and Deborah Potter. 1998. 'Pre-election Polls and Issue Knowledge in the 1996 U.S.Presidential Election.' *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*. 3(4):35-43.

¹⁹ Denis McQuail. 1992. *Media Performance: Mass Communication and the Public Interest*. London: Sage. P.17.

²⁰ Anthony Heath and Bridget Taylor. 1999. 'Turnout and Registration.' In *Critical Elections: Voters and Parties in Long-term Perspective*, Edited by Geoffrey Evans and Pippa Norris. London: Sage.

²¹ See Pippa Norris et al. 1999. *On Message: Communicating the Campaign*. London: Sage. Chapter 9.

²² IDEA. *Voter Turnout from 1945 to 1998*. www.int-idea.se.

²³ IDEA. *Voter Turnout from 1945 to 1998*. www.int-idea.se.

²⁴ Mark Franklin, Cees van der Eijk and Erik Oppenhuis. 1996. 'The Institutional Context: Turnout'. In *Choosing Europe? The European Electorate and National Politics in the Face of Union*, edited by Cees van der Eijk and Mark Franklin. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

²⁵ Nicholas Negroponte. 1995. *Being Digital*. New York: Knopf; Michael Dertouzos. 1997. *What Will Be: How the New Information Marketplace will Change our Lives*. San Francisco: Harper.

²⁶ Richard Davis and Diana Owen. 1998. *New Media and American Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press. P.185.

²⁷ Fuller details of this argument and analysis are presented in Pippa Norris. 1999. 'Who Surfs? New Technology, Old Voters & Virtual Democracy.' In *democracy.com? Governance in a Networked World* edited by Elaine Ciulla Kamarck and Joseph S. Nye, Jr. New Hampshire: Hollis Publishers.

²⁸ The scales were constructed from the following standard Eurobarometer items. Factor analysis (not reproduced here) was used to determine the intercorrelations of items in the institutional trust scales:

Satisfaction with democracy scales: "On the whole, are you very satisfied (4), fairly satisfied (3), not very satisfied (2), or not at all satisfied (1) with...

The way democracy works in our country?

The way democracy works in the European Union?"

Support for EU scale: (Membership) "Generally speaking, do you think that our country's membership of the European Union is..A good thing (3), a bad thing (1), Neither good nor bad (2)" (Benefit) "Taking everything into consideration, would you say that our country has on balance benefited (2) or not (1) from being a member of the European Union?" (5 point Member + Benefit scale)

EU Voting Participation: "Did you vote in the last elections to the European parliament in June 1994?" + "Do you intend to vote in the next European elections this June?"

Left-right Scale: "In political matters people talk of the 'left' and 'the right'. How would you place your views on this scale?" Left (1) Right (10).

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Knowledge of the EU: "Have you ever heard of...The European parliament; the European Commission; the Council of Ministers of the European Union; the Court of Justice of the European Commission; the European Ombudsman; the European Central Bank; the European Court of Auditors; the Committee of the Regions of the European Union; the Social and Economic Committee of the European Union." (9-point scale)

Trust in EU Institutions: "And for each of (the institutions listed above), please tell me if you tend to trust it or not to trust it?" (9-point scale)

Trust in Government: "I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following, please tell me if you tend to trust it or not to trust it?... The national government; the national parliament; the EU; political parties; the United Nations; the civil service."

Trust in Media: Same question as above. The press; radio, television.