

Political Action on the Internet – The German Case

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Introduction:

The increasing institutionalisation of information and communication technology (ICT) especially during the 1990ies has altered the relations between citizens and politics. Initially, the rise of the internet has inspired high hopes among many commentators that the information, communication and networking opportunities provided by new media might help to revive political interest and civic engagement (cp. GROSSMAN 1995, NEGROPONTE 1996, RHEINGOLD 1995, DYSON 1997). Empirical research shows that a large proportion of the population in western democracies has an increasing demand for participation that can be satisfied by additional participation channels (cp. BARNES/KAASE et al. 1979, NORRIS 2002).

Unlike common forms of political participation, the empirical research on e-participation is just beginning to evolve. Basic knowledge on the impact of the internet on political participation still has to be acquired. We would like to contribute to the state of the art by analysing who uses the internet for political participation in Germany.

Theoretical background:

As a prerequisite, one of our major objectives is the integration of e-participation into the general framework of previous participation research. In order to achieve this, the basic concept of political participation and its relevance for the political system have to be clarified at first. Political participation can be defined as all voluntary activities citizens engage in, with the aim to influence or be directly involved in political decisions on different levels of the political system (cp. BARNES/KAASE et al. 1979: 42, see also GABRIEL/MÖSSNER 2002: 215). Based on this definition political participation has to be separated from other forms of participation. Social participation, as for example the membership in a sports club, is not politically orientated. Other political communication and support activities, such as reading political magazines, are not pursued with the intent to influence political decisions. Finally, the acts of professional politicians lack the voluntary character of citizens' political participation (GABRIEL 2002: 126ff).

In democratic theory, there is great deal of agreement on the role of political participation as a *core element of democratic order* (cp. DAHL 1971: 5, FUCHS 1989: 156). This evaluation is strongly suggested by the democratic principle of the sovereignty of the people. Therefore, the political participation of the citizen is also embodied in the constitution of many western countries (cp. for Germany GG art. 20 par. 2).

For both individuals as well as the political system, participatory theory of democracy attributes *significant functions* to the political participation of the citizen. On the *individual level*, citizens use their political involvement to articulate and put forth their specific interests as well as for self-realisation. In addition, it is argued that participation provides a sense of attachment to the political community due to the perception of successful participation in political decisions. Moreover, researchers claim that citizens gain political competence while being politically active (cp. PARRY/MOYSER/DAY 1992).

On the *systems level*, political participation serves as an instrument to provide legitimacy, as well as to control political power. Both functions are ensured by free, democratic elections and the general openness of the political process. Political participation also provides sufficient resources for the political system such as human resources, information, and political support. Therefore, the political involvement of the citizen contributes to the efficiency of the political system. Likewise, there is an integrative aspect to political participation due to the equal opportunity for all citizens to be involved in decisions that are collectively binding. As a consequence of political co-operation, a stronger identification with other individuals is achieved, and, ideally, this leads to a stronger identification with the political system. In summary, one can say that *legitimizing, controlling, mediating, and integrating* functions are attributed to the political participation of the citizen.

With the rise of ICT, there are new instruments at the disposal of the public to voluntarily get involved in politics. Thus, under the term *e-participation* all the activities are summarised, that citizens engage in with the aim to influence or be directly involved in political decisions on different levels of the political system *by using ICT*.

Traditional participation research was able to identify several participation systems which are structured by the following criteria: institutionalisation, legality and legitimacy. On this basis *conventional* and *unconventional* forms of participation are distinguished (cp. KAASE 1992: 147). Conventional forms of participation are institutionalised, legal and legitimate whereas unconventional ones tend to be less institutionalised, legal for the most part and of questionable legitimacy (cp. GABRIEL/HOLTMANN 1999: 458; DALTON 2001: 73). For we argue that *e-participation is a subclass of political participation*, we deduce that internet use is applied within the scope of both conventional and unconventional forms of participation. Therefore, e-voting and party cooperation via internet are examples for conventional e-participation, e-collaboration in non-

institutionalised groups such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and political protest via internet are forms of unconventional e-participation.

Concept of analysis:

In our empirical study, we were able to identify four systems of political e-participation:

1. *Party-related activities* such as using the internet for political party work
2. *Issue-related participation* such as signing e-petitions or expressing support/dislike electronically
3. *Communicative activities* such as contacting politicians or public officials via e-mail
4. *Protest participation* such as taking part in a 'virtual sit-in' or a 'virtual march' (cp. MAU 2003)

According to the analytical distinction mentioned above, party-related activities, issue-related and communicative activities can be regarded as a conventional form of e-participation whereas the remaining protest participation is considered to be a form of unconventional e-participation.

State of the art

In order to be able to fit in the findings of our work, we would like to subsequently give a rather concise account of the state of the art in the field of e-participation. The brief summary of empirically tested results available so far, will be structured according to the distinction *conventional vs. unconventional e-participation*, which has been introduced above.

Conventional e-participation

Mainly, the concept of conventional e-participation revolves around *e-voting* and *party-related activities* via internet. When we summarise vital outcomes of e-voting (also "online-voting" or "cyber-voting") research, we particularly refer to voting from home via internet. For now, it is generally safe to say that the use of internet technology to cast political votes is considerably less developed than using ICT for political information and communication (cp. BUCHSTEIN/NEYMANN 2002: 212). Empirical studies show that the introduction of internet elections seems to be a rather slow and cumbersome process (cp. CORRADO/FIRESTONE 1996, OTTEN 2002, SOLOP 2000, WELZEL 2001, WILL 2002). Still, many experts have high hopes for the impact of e-voting on democracy (specifically OTTEN 2002) which is due to the following arguments.

Firstly, it is argued e-voting would lead to an increase in voter turnout in western democracies because voting would be no longer confined to a specific location. Secondly, online-voting would allow for more complex voting procedures such as vote-splitting to be introduced more easily. It is claimed that more complex voting systems reflect the voter's choice more accurately. Thirdly, advocates of e-voting and e-referenda maintain that specifically direct-democratic elements within the scope of representative democracy can be strengthened via effective decision-making tools and therefore, democracy in general can be revived. Fourthly, e-voting is expected to be highly efficient, providing rapid results, improved precision, and cost reduction in the long run.

So far, no full-scale major political election was held with the option to cast a binding vote via citizens home PCs, which has to be taken into consideration while interpreting the results presented here. For now, empirical findings are confined to numerous e-voting projects in different countries (cp. ALVAREZ/NAGLER 2000, SOLOP 2000, LANGE 2002, NOVY 2003).

Those projects demonstrated clearly that major difficulties with respect to the implementation of electronic voting in political elections are due to the possible violation of voting regulations such as the secrecy regulation. In many countries voting regulations that guarantee free, equal, secret and general elections are added to the constitution. A widespread introduction of e-voting in western democracies would affect all of those regulations to a varying degree (cp. for further discussion BUCHSTEIN 2002). Therefore, election regulations need to be adjusted in order for e-voting to be compliant with the constitution. Obviously, this process is not a simple one and will not be completed quickly because effective voting regulations have been established for good reasons. Re-consideration is necessary but will take up a substantial amount of time.

Moreover, international pilot projects indicated that there are two dimensions of organisational and technical problems. On the one hand, there are those difficulties such as the accurate authentication of voters while still preserving their anonymity that can be solved by applying considerable technical efforts. On the other hand, there are problems such as denial-of-service attacks¹ targeting the election server or manipulation of election software that can *not* be ruled out entirely. These circumstances pose a serious threat to the legitimacy of political elections and therefore many experts argue that e-voting should - if at all - be only implemented as a supplement to other modes of election.

¹ Denial-of-service attacks cause the inability of a particular network service due to receiving a traffic overload.

Up until now, the expected increase in voter turnout by e-voting can not be confirmed by empirical evidence. Only very few projects, were able to measure a slight rise in voter turnout (cp. NOVY 2003). Often, this was accounted for by technical and organisational shortcomings of the respective e-voting system. Certainly, the impact of online elections on voter turnout can be measured legitimately only when a smooth election process without technical and organisational problems is ensured. In addition, internet diffusion has to proceed so that the group of internet users is largely representative with respect to the general population (for an in-depth discussion on the so-called 'digital divide' cp. NORRIS 2001).

Summing up the aspects mentioned above, it seems reasonable to argue that existing e-voting projects in the non-political sphere such as student elections etc. need to be further developed and additional projects should go underway in order to eliminate technical and organisational inadequacies of online voting. Furthermore, the dynamic development of internet diffusion in western democracies² will continually minimise the problem of the digital divide. It is only then, when the impact of e-voting on voter turnout can be analysed adequately.

Besides voting in political elections, the cooperation of citizens in political parties is considered to be a substantial element of conventional political participation. In representative democracies, political parties play a major role in mediating between citizens and the state. Parties fulfil many functions for the democratic system for example the aggregation and mediation of interests, mobilisation of activists, and recruitment of political personnel. They also participate in the competition for public offices and handle the organisation of government. In the past, citizen participation in political parties declined substantially which manifests itself by decreasing party membership numbers. As it is the case with political participation in general, ICTs are attributed a high potential to improve party cooperation and participation as well. Yet equally, empirical research shows that party use of ICT to enable citizen participation appears to be rather limited. Subsequently, significant findings of empirical research on party use of information and communication technologies are briefly summarised.

Firstly, the initiative to adopt the use of www and e-mail by political parties is scarcely based on an underlying strategy such as the aim to activate citizen involvement or the recruitment of new members (cp. LÖFGREN 2000: 13). Often the implementation of the

² Current information on internet diffusion and demographics please check <http://www.clickz.com/>.

new technology is due to the efforts of individuals or the perceived pressure to appear innovative, especially in times of campaigning.

Secondly, empirical analysis (cp. GIBSON/WARD 2002, GIBSON/RÖMMELE/WARD 2003) indicates that political parties use ICTs mainly to distinguish their political communication apparatus and for political advertisement rather than to trigger political participation of the citizen. Agenda setting in offline media can be described as one of the key issues in this context.

Thirdly, parties represented in national parliaments proved to offer more quality content and present it in a more professional fashion compared to non-parliamentary parties. Also, smaller parties pursue more modest aims with ICT use such as alleviating their existing organisational shortcomings (cp. *ibid*).

At the moment, the empirical tests of conventional e-participation opportunities seem to rather humble high hopes for improved political participation brought about by ICT use. Both e-elections as well as internet use by political parties do not give reason to expect a significant rise in political participation in the near future.

Unconventional e-participation

On the contrary, the field of *unconventional e-participation* appears to be rather promising which became apparent on various occasions. Most notably, since the World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle in 1999 it became very clear that the internet seems to be a particularly useful tool for unconventional forms of political participation such as political protest and the cooperation in groups such as NGOs (cp. among others CISLER 1999).

Subsequently, we will fit unconventional e-participation into the framework of traditional participation by defining significant characteristics of the so-called new social movements and illustrating the advantages internet use might bring to them. Afterwards we will briefly summarise the findings empirical research has produced on unconventional e-participation so far. We divided this section into two dimensions: The first part deals with how citizens use the advantages of internet technology to achieve *cooperation* more effectively. The second part revolves around what results sprang from improved group cooperation, namely the intensification of *political protest*.

During the 1970ies well established forms of political participation such as party work were supplemented by unconventional forms of political participation such as working in a

citizen action group, as well as the protest movement (cp. INGLEHART 1977, DALTON 2001). Those developments can be defined as a "(...) social movement trying to achieve the major goal of protesting against a certain political circumstance and in doing so, striving to get rid of the source causing disapproval" (translated from German original by SCHMIDT 1995: 783). In the narrower sense, they can be described as oppositional groups who deliberately set themselves apart from established groups like political parties and established associations as for example trade unions. Defining characteristics of unconventional groups are a lack of advanced organisation as well as postmaterialistic goals such as the preservation of the environment. Moreover, those groups mostly focus on a specific, singular topic.

Citizen action groups try to reach their aims by applying self-help, by addressing claims to public officials, and most importantly by articulating their interests in a fashion that causes considerable media attention (cp. SCHMIDT 1995: 179). The lack of advanced organisation is due to the short-lived existence of these groups and their limited financial resources.

Nowadays, internet tools provide the opportunity to inform activists and the interested public about issues relevant to the specific group cause and at the same time to coordinate their activities. Organizing events that would have taken up a lot of time and financial resources using traditional means of communication can now be implemented quickly and at a much lower cost. Social movements can achieve a substantial performance boost by using ICT which will be illustrated by empirical findings summarised below.

Firstly, empirical research shows that group cooperation via the internet established itself very well in the new social movements (cp. HAMMOND/LASH 2000, WELZEL/SCHIEFFLER 2002: 233). Secondly, aside from coordination, internet technology is used by citizen action groups for many other tasks. Mostly, the activation of supporters, fundraising, and networking with like-minded factions (cp. NORRIS 2002: 208). Thirdly, due to the lack of organisation, the advantages of internet information and communication tools strongly affect unconventional groups because ICT tones down their major weaknesses. Eventually, the performance boost for unconventional groups with respect to organizing and connecting the interested public which was induced by internal ICT usage, can be illustrated by prominent external activities, namely protest actions.

Today, there are numerous examples of *political protest* via the internet. In Germany for instance, the student strikes in the years 1997 and 2003 relied heavily on internet tools for organisation and mobilisation which proved to be decisive for the overall success of the protests (cp. BIEBER/HEBECKER 1998). Consequently, a refined issue-placement in traditional media was achieved with respect to shortcomings in the national education system. Particularly, in the year 1997, internet use itself proved to be of high information value with “old” media which provided additional support for the student cause to be recognised. Student activists used mass mailings, online chats and forums as well as the collection of signatures via the www to put forward their claims to the general population and specifically to place them on the agenda of public office-holders. Virtual lectures and extensive data collection on educational matters available on the internet proved to be effective tools to rally support and provide a solid foundation for the protest activities. In addition, the ability of activist groups to autonomously publish information did enable them to circumvent the “gatekeeper”-function of traditional media such as radio, press, and television (cp. *ibid.*).

Also on the international level, many protest activities in recent years were massively supported by internet technology. There is a great variety of examples to pick from and only enough space to name a few of them: the so-called “Blue Ribbon Campaign” against state censorship in the U.S. in 1997, the protest at the WTO summit in Seattle in 1999 (and all following similar events such as the G8 summit the Genoa) or demonstrations against the war in Iraq in the beginning of 2003.

By the term “Blue Ribbon Campaign” a host of various internet-supported protest activities to protect free speech online are summarised. In the year 1996, the Communications Decency Amendment was added to the U.S. constitution, strongly restricting the freedom of expression on the internet. Citizen action groups worldwide started public relations efforts using ICTs and in doing so putting so much pressure on the U.S. government that finally, the amendment in question was abolished (cp. LEGGEWIE 1998: 34f).

Political protest against the World Trade Organisation meeting in Seattle in 1999 which we already mentioned, turned to be a milestone in internet-supported political protest. Back then, an enormous alliance of around 700 NGOs from 80 countries co-ordinated their protest and mobilised their members using ICT (cp. OSTRY 2000, KREUTZ 2003). In doing so, they attracted substantial media attention to their respective causes.

On February 15, 2003 the peace movement was able to mobilise not less than 11,5 million people all over the world to protest against the imminent war in Iraq. One can not imagine organizing a protest event of this magnitude without using modern information and communication technology. Also in this case, internet tools were not only used to mobilise and organise political protest in the “real world” but also to express disapproval on the medium itself. This so happened on February, 26 in 2003 when [moveon.org](http://www.moveon.org)³ supported by Greenpeace and other organisations used the internet for their “Virtual March” to the White House. By way of synchronous mass e-mailing, faxing and phone calls peace activists blocked the secretariats of the Senate and the White House and thereby achieved substantial media attention for their criticism of the U.S. Iraq strategy. Again, one million U.S. citizens participated in those activities.

What we learn from these examples, is that three main categories of ICT use in non-institutionalised groups can be distinguished (cp. MAU 2003): ICT use for *mobilisation*, *organisation* and *action*. The third category differs from the first two in the sense that the *medium itself is used to protest* and not to support activities in the real world.

Moreover, we can sum up the empirical research available so far, by saying that the use of www and e-mail gave a decisive boost to protest politics which has led to some sensational protest performances. This is due to the international bundling of small group interests whose lack of organisation was also alleviated by ICT use. Unlike for example political parties, non-institutionalised groups seem to adopt internet technology with very little hesitation and therefore seize the opportunities available rather fully. Fundamentally, protest politics are strengthened by applying internet technology. Yet, initial empirical research (cp. NORRIS 2002: 211f) shows that there is little potential to activate the inactive public. Essentially, those citizens that use the internet for political protest, also have been using traditional means of participation available in the past. It seems that there is no new breed of online participants.

Internet Participation in Germany

E-participation research is still at an early stage and so the assumptions are not supported by broad empirical evidence. In addition, relevant literature mainly consists of case studies on e-participation. Yet, a wider approach is still missing which includes representative data from various countries. Basic questions which have been answered for traditional modes of participation time and again still need to be dealt with in the case of e-

³ <http://www.moveon.org/>

participation. In order to improve the state of the art we would like to take a research design from Pippa Norris (2002) which produced the results mentioned in the last paragraph and use it as a guideline for the case of Germany. Norris aimed to find out whether citizens who are using the internet for political information and participation belong to the same groups of the population that already strongly participate via traditional channels of participation. If so, the internet would have a reinforcing impact on patterns of political participation rather than attracting groups currently estranged from the political system. Therefore, the *participation hypothesis* holds that the opportunities for information, networking and communication via digital technologies might affect patterns of political activism, by either *reinforcing* those citizens who are already most active, or *mobilizing* new participants who are currently disengaged from the political process (e.g. the young) (cp. also NORRIS 2001a: 195). Using this approach we would like to answer the following questions:

1. What are the determinants of e-participation in comparison to traditional political participation?
2. What are the characteristics of e-participants such as their socio-demographic features, their attachment to politics and their norms and values? Are they different from other political activists?
3. What types of activities do e-participants prefer in contrast to traditional political participants?

The empirical analyses in this paper are based on data from the research project "Citizen, Involvement, Democracy" (CID) conducted in 11 European countries in 2001. Apart from basic issues in the area of attitudinal and behavioural political research like political interest, political efficacy and involvement in organisations, the study also focuses on various forms of conventional and unconventional participation and on the citizens' use of the internet. With respect to methodology, the survey is based on face-to-face interviews conducted with an identical core questionnaire in all participating countries at the same time. As mentioned above, we are focusing on the German sample with 3001 cases. Based on this data, we will answer our research questions and hope to contribute to the scientific discussion of new forms of participation by providing evidence for Germany.

The data set is particularly suitable for our focus of research insofar as it includes very detailed information on the political activism of the respondents. 17 actual forms of political participation are asked for, followed by the explicit question whether the respondent has used the internet for one of the mentioned activities. This structure

guarantees that only those activists are filtered out for further analyses on internet participation who actually use the internet for concrete political activities. The disadvantage, however, is that this group of internet participants is drawn from the larger group of political participants. Hence, it is debatable whether the question of the reinforcing or mobilizing function of the internet for political activism can be answered in an absolutely reliable way. Nevertheless, it should be possible to get a general impression on the potentials of internet use for political participation.

As mentioned before, empirical studies on internet participation are very rare. One reason is that this kind of political activism began to evolve only a couple of years ago. Although internet diffusion is constantly and rapidly growing, about half of the German households were without internet in 2002⁴. With regard to empirical research this implies that the actual number of political internet participants identified in surveys is often very small. This difficulty is also mirrored in the number of cases in this study.

Table 1: Political Internet Participation in Germany

Type of participation	Percentage	N
No participation	40	1191
Participation without internet	56	1688
Internet Participation	4	114
Total	100	2993

CID Population-Study, calculations by the authors

60 percent of the respondents state that they participate politically, only 4 percent use the internet for this purpose, i.e. almost 7 percent of the politically active in Germany are e-participants. This leaves us with 114 cases to analyse. We know that it is impossible to make generalisations about internet participation on this basis. This constraint constitutes the frame of the whole study and we are well aware of it, but nevertheless we would like to get some hints on what distinguishes these 114 activists from the other participants. However, this shows the necessity once more to put this area of research on a broader empirical basis in the future.

⁴ www.atfacts.de

The selection of variables

The aim of the empirical analyses is to develop an adequate model to explain internet participation in Germany and to describe in detail who the internet participants are and what types of participation they prefer. As argued before, we consider internet participation as a special form of political participation which can be integrated into the existing conceptual framework. Thus, the selection of independent variables in this paper is based on the major studies in empirical participation research.

In the Political Action Study (BARNES/KAASE 1979) social status, integration into networks, age, socio-political values, cognitive abilities of individuals and relative deprivation were analysed as predictors of political participation with political trust and political efficacy functioning as intervening variables. According to Verba/Schlozman/Brady (1995), there are three factors influencing political participation: resources, psychological engagement with politics and the integration into networks. On this theoretical background and in accordance with the operationalisation possibilities in the data set, the independent variables considered here can be classified into three categories: *resources*, *integration into networks* and *norms and values*. These factors are analysed in relation to their explanatory power for political participation in general and for e-participation in particular in order to find out whether the same indicators are relevant in both cases, or whether there are specific variables which are relevant for participation via internet.

Determinants of e-participation

In a first step, simple bivariate correlations are used to test which of the theoretically plausible indicators for political participation can be confirmed by empirical analyses with our data set⁵. Concerning resources, two indicators can be identified which are significant for both political participation with or without the internet: *education and media use*. Education is important for participation in general and also for e-participation. This confirms the results of previous studies where the amount of participation correlated with the level of education. It seems as if this effect is even more distinct when it comes to the political use of media like watching the news or reading the political part of a newspaper. The fact that this coefficient is higher for internet participation is not surprising. It seems plausible that people who use all kinds of media to get politically informed also tend to become active through a medium like the internet. Besides education and media use, two

⁵ For further methodological details and procedures please see appendix.

other factors in this category are significant for e-participation, but not for traditional activities, namely *age and gender*. The strong influence of age seems plausible as the use of the internet is a rather young phenomenon and the medium is especially popular among the younger generation.

Table 2: Test of possible predictors for political participation and internet participation in Germany (bivariate correlations)

	Political Participation	Internet Participation
Resources	Eta	Eta
Age		.21***
Gender		.11***
Education	.17***	.19***
Income		
Political media use	.26***	.36***
Integration into networks		
Employment		
Political discussion	.25***	
Religion	.15***	
Civic engagement	.37***	.09***
Values and norms		
<i>Psychological engagement with politics</i>		
Institutional trust		
Ideology	.13***	
Political satisfaction		
Political Interest	.34***	.14***
Importance of politics	.24***	.12***
Party attachment	.24***	.13***
<i>Personal norms</i>		
Modernisation	.12***	.12***
Interpersonal trust	.13**	
Norm of solidarity		
Personal satisfaction	.06**	
Internal efficacy	.14***	.13***
External efficacy	.10***	.08**

CID Population-Study, calculations by the authors; insignificant correlations not displayed; *** significant on the level of 0.001, ** significant on the level of 0.01, * significant on the level of 0.05

On the contrary to the assumptions by Verba/Schlozman/Brady, money operationalised by “family income” seems to be irrelevant for both forms of participation in this context. So the financial background of a family should not be the decisive factor when it comes to the

question whether to participate politically, with or without the internet. This is surprising insofar as internet use is often associated with higher levels of income in the sense that this medium is predominately used by citizens working in white collar jobs. One could argue, however, that this effect is already mirrored in the high correlation of e-participation and education, because people using the internet in their professional life usually have a higher educational background.

For the four items comprised under *integration into networks* the results for traditional political participation and internet participation depict notable differences. Whereas most indicators show high correlations in the first case, only one variable seems to be relevant in the second, namely civic engagement.⁶ It seems as if civic engagement helps to make people participate politically and additionally promotes activism via internet. It is worth mentioning, however, that the correlation for internet participation is much lower. This hints at the fact that usually civic engagement can lead to collective activity, but this is not the case for internet participation, which is per se an individual activity. Political discussion and church attendance do not provide an additional boost to e-participation, they are only relevant for activating people in general. It seems reasonable that the mobilising effect of going to church on a regular basis does not necessarily lead to more internet use for participation. One might have expected, however, that those who discuss politics might also use the internet for contacting political institutions or politicians, but obviously – if they do so – they use traditional communication channels. Employment is the only network indicator insignificant in both cases. Job-related forms of political activity apparently do not play an essential role here.

The indicators summarised under *values and norms* can be classified into two subcategories. The first six items of trust, ideology, political satisfaction, political interest, the importance of politics for one's life and party attachment thematically fall under Verba/Schlozman/Brady's category of *psychological engagement with politics*. The seven remaining factors rather express *personal norms*. They include Inglehart's modernisation items, norms of solidarity and interpersonal trust, which are essential components in the concept of social capital, the efficacy indicators mentioned before and the concept of satisfaction with one's personal life which constitutes the closest possible operationalisation of relative deprivation in the data set.

To sum up the results for this category, some variables which are relevant for political participation in general can additionally explain internet activism whereas others can not.

⁶ Participation in social or other groups was excluded from the index of the dependent variables „political participation“ and “internet participation” in order to prevent a twofold measurement of the same item.

Regarding the items belonging to psychological engagement with politics, *political interest* shows the highest coefficient for political participation, followed by the *importance of politics* for one's life and *party attachment*. These three factors are also the ones which are significant for internet participation. For party attachment this is not surprising, because the internet is a comfortable possibility to get in touch with the party you support or to pass on party information to potential voters. In contrast to political discussions, political interest in general and the importance of politics for one's life obviously do boost e-participation. As the internet does provide vast amounts of current as well as general political information it is particularly useful for getting or staying informed which can in turn lead to political activity. As these two indicators seem rather similar with regard to their content, only political interest is considered in further analysis.

Ideology, standing for left-right placement, is of minor relevance for traditional political participation, whereas *political satisfaction* and *institutional trust* are irrelevant for both types of activity. The irrelevance of political satisfaction and institutional trust is rather surprising, as it is often postulated that people who are dissatisfied with politics become politically active. In this case it could be due to a problem of operationalisation, as political satisfaction was only surveyed by the general question of satisfaction with the way democracy works in Germany. The respondents were not asked about their satisfaction with specific political institutions or politicians. Regarding political trust, trust in party-state institutions like parties, parliament and government was analysed separately from constitutional institutions like the police, the courts or the administration, but neither seems to have an effect on participation here.

Most items referring to *personal norms* show correlations for participation in general, the highest ones for *internal efficacy*, *interpersonal trust* and *modernisation*. For *external efficacy* and *personal satisfaction* the correlations are quite modest. Concerning e-participation, internal efficacy and modernisation and to a small extent also external efficacy turn out to be suitable predictors. The fact that both types of efficacy are relevant for both kinds of participation is quite plausible, as one has to have a certain feeling of self-confidence and the conviction that one can achieve something to get politically active in the first place and apparently this is also true for using a new medium like the internet. People who stick to postmaterialistic values like self-realisation and the expression of criticism are especially prone to get politically involved. As this group per se seems to be rather open for new things, it makes sense that postmaterialists also try new media for their purposes. Interpersonal trust and personal satisfaction only correlate with traditional forms of activity. This is no surprise as it is difficult to imagine how higher amounts of trust

in other people or (dis-)satisfaction with one's life can be reasonably linked to internet use for participation.

In conclusion, the bivariate analyses depict that most variables with high correlations regarding traditional political participation also have an additional effect in promoting internet activism, although the effect is smaller. One interesting exception to this general pattern is civic engagement which has the highest coefficient for traditional participation of all the measured indicators but is hardly relevant for e-participation. Hence, participation via internet does not seem to require much integration in collective networks, it is rather an activity of individuals. Age and gender are the two indicators which seem to be irrelevant for general activism but essential to distinguish internet participants. For the multivariate analyses only those indicators are considered which showed significant effects in the bivariate analyses.

As a first procedure in multivariate analyses, the three categories of resources, integration into networks and values and norms are analysed separately with the help of variance analyses (tables not given). For explaining participation in general, the integration into networks turns out to be the best model, whereas for internet participation resources are most prominent.

In the next step, the most significant indicators for internet activism in each of the three models are integrated into one model of analysis in order to explain internet participation most adequately. The specific *internet participation model* includes *age*, *gender*, *education* and *political media use* as resources, *civic engagement* as a factor of integration into networks and *party attachment* as well as *internal efficacy* as representatives of values and norms.

The results show that among these significant factors, *political media use* is the best predictor for internet participation, followed by *age* and *education*. This is not surprising as people who generally rely on the media to stay politically informed seem also plausible candidates to use the internet to participate politically. This impression is confirmed by the fact that the correlations for media use and traditional participation are also important but not to the same extent. The importance of age and education confirm the bivariate results. Furthermore, the influence of party attachment is quite recognisable, whereas the coefficients for internal efficacy, civic engagement and gender are not that high. As in the bivariate analyses, civic engagement is by far the best predictor for traditional participation but only of minor importance for internet activism. Hence, particularly media users with a

certain level of education and of a certain – probably young – age group seem to be prone to e-participate. The overall explanatory power of this model is higher for e-participation than for traditional participation which confirms its adequacy for explaining the latter.

Table 3: Model for Internet Participation in Germany

Variables	Internet Participation			Traditional Political Participation		
	R ²	Eta	Beta	R ²	Eta	Beta
Age	.07***	.27	.21	.01***	.12	.03
Gender	.01**	.06	.04			
Education	.02***	.19	.05	.01***	.15	.06
Political media use	.07***	.35	.28	.04***	.26	.18
Civic engagement	.003*	.08	.05	.08***	.33	.28
Party attachment	.02***	.13	.12			
Internal efficacy	.01*	.13	.08	.01**	.14	.08
r ²	.19***			.16***		

CID Population-Study, calculations by the authors; insignificant correlations not displayed
 *** significant on the level of 0.001, ** significant on the level of 0.01, * significant on the level of 0.05

Characteristics of internet participants

After having identified the relevant factors for internet participation, these indicators are examined in more detail and their *effects on e-participation* are compared to the ones they have on *traditional modes of political participation*. As the selected indicators are the best predictors for internet activism according to the statistical analyses, it should always be the case, that their effects are more prominent for this kind of participation. What remains to be analysed, however, is the actual extent. Therefore, a comparison to traditional participation is necessary.

As mentioned above, *age* is identified as the most suitable predictor of internet activism. But which age group is most active in internet participation? The figures show that those under 35 constitute more than half of the internet activists, the age group between 36 and 55 comprises 36 percent and those over 55 are only a very small minority. Hence, the assumption that internet use is a phenomenon of the younger generation is confirmed. The distribution among activists who do not use the internet for political participation is

more even. Here, the middle-aged group is the largest and the younger people represent the smallest unit. So one could argue that through the internet more people from the younger population strata can be mobilised for political participation which is a noteworthy perspective for the future.

What about *gender*? Whereas women are the majority among “ordinary” participants, men outnumber them when it comes to using the internet. About 67 percent of internet participants are male, only 33 percent female. This is not very surprising as the result mirrors the distribution among internet users. The question acquiring internet use in general shows that of the people who use the internet for gaining general or political information 30 percent are female and 70 percent male.

Concerning *education*, the effect is again more prominent for internet activism. More than half of the internet activists have higher education, only about 7 percent belong to those with lower education. Regarding general political participation, the largest group are those with an intermediate level of education, the highly-qualified are the smallest faction, more than a third are on the lowest education level. So the distribution of the respective education groups is almost reverse and participation via internet seems to strengthen the elitist character of participation, at least when education is concerned.

As mentioned before, political media use has very strong effects on both kinds of activism. For both types of participants over 90 percent of the activists belong to the two top categories concerning the frequency of political media use. Only the distribution among the two categories is different. Considering the high coefficients of the bivariate and multivariate analyses, it is no surprise that over 80 percent of internet participants belong to the group of the most regular media users, whereas only about 20 percent of traditional participants fall under this category. The majority of traditional activists is one step lower on the frequency scale of media use which confirms the previous results that this indicator is also essential for general participants but to a smaller extent.

Civic Engagement has always been considered to be a powerful predictor for political participation. This assumption is confirmed by the data. 80 percent of the general participants are involved in voluntary activities. Among the internet participants this number is higher: almost 95 percent of this group are civically active. This could be due to the fact that through the use of the internet people receive more information about various possibilities of becoming voluntarily engaged and are thus more likely to do so. Yet, the results of the correlation analyses should be kept in mind which clearly demonstrated that

civic engagement is a much better predictor for traditional political participation. So the additional effect of civic engagement on e-participation should not be overestimated.

In relation to *party attachment*, the use of internet for participation slightly augments the difference in numbers between supporters and non-supporters. About 60 percent of *ordinary* activists but over 70 percent of internet participants show attachment to a party. This gap is not as wide as for other variables, however. So the difference between traditional activists and e-participants is not that big with regard to whether they support a political party.

Concerning *internal political efficacy*, among both participating groups more than half show intermediate efficacy levels. The difference is, however, that for general participation only a small minority of 8 percent shows high efficacy levels, whereas this number is 20 percent for internet activists. Hence, you can conclude that internet activists show slightly more self-confidence when it comes to their chances on actually bringing about change.

Considering the indicators analysed above, one can say that particularly the effects of age, education and media use are more prominent for e-participation than they are for traditional political participation in the sense that the distribution of the respective groups is more extreme. In the case of gender, the effects are even reversed. For civic engagement, party attachment and internal efficacy the differences in effects are visible but not that strong. A rather simplistic conclusion to this part of the analysis would be that we have identified as the average internet participants the young, highly-educated males who use the media a lot, are civically engaged, attached to a party and self-confident about their influence on politics. In contrast, the traditional political activists are mainly middle-aged, well-educated females who hardly use the media, also do voluntary work and support a party but are only to a certain extent self-confident about their influence on politics. So the distinction is of a qualitative nature insofar as these internet participants further *reinforce the elitist character of political activity*. This does not have to trouble social scientists who are concerned about the representative character of political participation, however, as the fast distribution of the internet can help to overcome this current phenomenon.

Types of activities

After having established the characteristics of internet participants, the final question to be answered is what kinds of activities internet participants prefer in comparison to other

political activists. The political participants in the data files were categorised according to the distinction of conventional and unconventional forms of participation. 40 percent of all respondents undertake conventional activities, 41 percent conventional *and* unconventional forms of participation. Only one respondent is “purely unconventional”, that is why this category is neglected in the following.

Among traditional participants 70 percent are conventional activists, 30 percent additionally take up unconventional forms. This distribution is different for internet participants, where 50 percent belong to the respective groups. So there tends to be a higher percentage of “unconventional” people among internet activists. Considered from another perspective, one can state that only about 5 percent of conventional participants use the internet for participation whereas about 10 percent of conventional-unconventional participants do so.

With the help of a factor analysis four different systems of participation were identified (table not given): *party-related activities* (work in a party or political action group, attend political meetings, contact politicians, wear a badge), *issue-related activities* (purchase or boycott of products, sign petitions, donate money), *communicative activities* (contact solicitors, civil servants, the media, an organisation) and *unconventional activities* (illegal protest, attend demonstrations or strikes, raise funds). The category of communicative activities does not fit into the definition of political participation applied here. Yet, it will not be excluded from further analyses as is interpreted as a factor that definitely supports political activism, i.e. communicative activities are considered to be a preliminary stage of participation. The *ranking* of the four types of participation for internet activists is the following: issue-related, communicative, party-related and unconventional. Concerning traditional participation the order is a bit different: issue-related, party-related, communicative and unconventional. In both cases activities relating to a certain current issue are most common. Yet, it seems as if internet activism promotes communicative activities which are of course comparably easy through this medium, like for example via e-mail. This can in turn foster actual participation. Unconventional activities are not that common in both categories.

A closer look at the single categories shows that in all cases a higher percentage of internet participants undertake the activities than the other participants do. 93 percent of all internet activists are involved issue-relatedly, 82 percent communicatively, 79 percent take up party activities and 50 percent are engaged unconventionally. The percentages for ordinary participants are significantly lower for communicative activities, which are

taken up by 38 percent here, and party-related participation, which 44 percent of traditional participants stick to. For issue-related and unconventional forms, the difference is not that large. These results hint at the fact, that internet participants are more prone to apply different systems of participation at the same time. This assumption is confirmed by an analysis of cumulative activities. Traditional participants take up an average of two different participatory systems, whereas the mean for internet activists is three kinds of participation.

As a conclusion one can state that *internet activists are generally more open to use different forms of participation than traditional participants are*. They especially prefer communicative activities for which the internet is very suitable and potentially prepare the ground for actual participation. Furthermore, they have a slightly larger inclination towards unconventional forms.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to give a first impression on what characterises people who use the internet for political participation in Germany. As a theoretical background for this piece of research the main studies on traditional political participation were used, for it is argued that e-participation can be integrated into the existing framework of analysis. Hence, the selection of possible predictors for internet participation was tied up to these previous results. Age, gender, education, political media use, civic engagement, party attachment and internal efficacy were identified as significant indicators for e-participation. Age and gender are the two indicators that distinguish e-participants the most from traditional political activists. Males between 16 and 35 are the largest group of internet activists, in contrast to females between 36 and 55 for traditional participation. A closer analysis of the other indicators showed that their effects are more distinct for internet participants than for traditional activists. As this particularly applies for education, it leads to the conclusion that currently e-participation further strengthens the elitist character of political participation. Furthermore, it turned out that internet participants tend to take up activities from varying participatory systems whereas activists in general are rather restricted in that sense.

When evaluating these results, one has to keep in mind that they represent only a snapshot of the circumstances in 2001. There lies a lot of potential in the rapid distribution of the internet into private households. In 2002, 49 percent of German households had internet access, in 2003 this number increased to 55 percent, which implies 2 million new

users annually and a total of 35 million German internet users. A similar growth rate is expected for 2004⁷. As the analyses have shown that once people get online and start to get informed about politics, they are very likely to get politically active, this development can counteract the elitist nature e-participation has so far.

All in all, these results seem to support Norris' reinforcing hypothesis. Through the presence of the internet, people tend to use various forms of political participation at the same time, which is mainly due to the facilitating effect the medium has on communicative activities. However, as mentioned before, the layout of the used questionnaire does not allow absolutely reliable conclusions in this context. Despite the further restriction of a small number of cases, the results of the empirical analyses as a whole seem plausible and worthwhile to be tested on a broader empirical basis whenever possible.

⁷ www.atfacts.de

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Appendix

The analyses are based on data acquired with the “common core questionnaire” of the ESF-Network on “Citizenship, Involvement, Democracy” (CID).

Traditional Political Participation

There are different ways of attempting to bring about improvements or counteract deterioration in society. During the last 12 month, have you done any of the following? (1=yes, 2=no)

a. contacted a politician (v278), b. contacted an association or organisation (v279), c. contacted a civil servant on the national, regional or local level (v280), d. worked in a political party (v281), e. worked in a political action group (v282), f. worked in another organisation or association (v283), g. worn or displayed a campaign badge/sticker (v284), h. signed a petition (v285), i. taken part in a public demonstration (v286), j. taken part in a strike (v287), k. boycotted certain products (v288), l. deliberately bought certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons (v289), m. donated money (v290), n. raised funds (v291), o. contacted or appeared in the media (v292), p. contacted a solicitor or judicial body (v293), q. participated in illegal protest activities (v294), r. attended a political meeting or rally (v295), s. other activity (v296)

- Additive index for political participation with v278-v296, recode to 0=no (no activity at all), 1=yes (one or more activities)
- Factor analysis with v278-v296, identifying four systems of political participation: factor 1: party-related activities (v278, v281, v282, v284, v295); factor 2: unconventional activities (v286, v287, v294); factor 3: issue-related activities (v285, v288, v289, v290); factor 4: communicative activities (v279, v280, v292, v293)
- items < .500 excluded from the respective factors (v291, v283)

Internet participation

Did you use the internet in connection with any of these activities (v278-296, see above)?

– filter: only asked if the respondent has done any of the before mentioned activities;
recode 2=no to 0=no

Independent variables:

- *age*: In what year were you born? (v370);
recode to “age in 10-year-groups” (1=16-25, 2=26-35, 3=36-45, 4=46-55, 5=56-65, 6= over 65)
- *gender*: noted by interviewer (v369); 1=male, 2=female
- *education*: What is your highest level of education? (v377), Germany specific exams: 1=schooling not completed, 2=Volks-, Hauptschulabschluss, 3=Mittlere Reife, Realschule, 4=Polytechn. Oberschule bis Klasse 8, 5=Polytechn. Oberschule bis Klasse 12, 6=Fachhochschulreife, 7=Abitur, 8=other exam, 9=still in school;
recode: 1-2 to 1=low educational level, 3-4 to 2= intermediate educational level, 5-7 to 3=high educational level, 8-9=missing
- *money*: What is the total monthly income of all household members after tax? (v442)
- *political media use*: Now I would like to ask you some questions about newspapers, radio and television. How often do you a. read the political content of a newspaper? b. listen or watch to news programmes on radio or TV? c. listen to or watch other programmes about politics and social affairs on radio or TV? d. Use the internet? e. and how often do you use the internet to obtain information about politics and society?; 1=every day, 2=3-4 days a week, 3=1-2 days a week, 4=less frequently, 5=never, 8=don't know;
recode: 8=missing
→ creation of variable for “political internet use” out of d. and e. to f.
→ additive index out of a, b, c, f to “political media use” ranging from 0=never to 3=very often
- *employment*: Are you gainfully employed? (v379); 1=yes, full-time, 2=yes, part-time, 3=yes, but on a leave of absence for studies, 4=yes, but currently on parental leave of absence, 5=yes, but temporarily unemployed, less than 6 months, 6=yes, but not working at present for other reasons, 7=no, unemployed for a long period, over 6 months, 8=no, on disability pension, 9= no, on other early retirement arrangement, 10=no, retired pensioner, 11=no,

currently a student, 12=no, currently a pupil, 13=no, housewife/houseman, without other income, 14=no, not gainfully employed for other reasons;
recode 3-14 to 0=no, 1-2 to 1=yes

- *political discussion*: How often would you say you discuss political matters with others? (v12) 1=often, 2=sometimes, 3=rarely, 4=never, 8=don't know;
recode 4 to 0=no, 1-3 to 1=yes, 8=missing
- *religion*: Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, approximately about how often do you attend religious service these days? (v376); 1=several times a week, 2=once a week, 3=at least once a month, 4=several times a year, 5=once a year, 6=less than once a year, 7=never, 8=don't know;
recode 7 to 0=never, 4-6 to 1=sometimes, 1-3 to 2=often, 8=missing
- *civic engagement*: I will show you a list of different organisations, which I will read out to you one by one. For each of them please answer yes if you are a member of the organisation or if you at any time during the last 12 month have done any of the following things: participated in an activity arranged by this organisation, donated money to this organisation, done voluntary (unpaid) work for this organisation? 1=yes, 2=no;
sports club or outdoor activities club (v19), youth association (v25), environmental organisation (v31), association for animals rights/protection (v37), peace organisation (v43), humanitarian aid or human rights organisation (v49), charity or social-welfare organisation (v55), association for medical patients (v61), specific illnesses or addictions (v67), association for disabled (v73), pensioners' or retired persons' organisation (v79), lodge or service clubs (v85), political party (v91), trade union (v97), farmers' organisation (v103), business or employers' organisation (v109), investment club (v115), professional organisation (v121), consumer association (v127), parents' association (v133), cultural, musical, dancing or theatre society (v139), other hobby club/society (v145), automobile organisation (v151), residents', housing or neighbourhood association (v157), immigrants' organisation (v163), religious or church organisation (v169), women's organisation (v175), association for war victims, veterans or ex-servicemen (v181), other club or association (v187), the voluntary fire brigade (de4), a regional/traditions association (de10), hobby breeders (de16), association for displaced persons (de22);
→ additive index for civic engagement with these variables;
recode to 0=no if all of them were no, recode to 1=yes if one of them was yes
- *institutional trust*: I will now read out names of different institutions such as the police, government, civil service etc. Please tell me how strongly you personally trust each of these institutions. 0=not trust at all – 10=very strong trust;
the cabinet (v247), the parties (v248), the parliament (v249), the courts (v250), the civil service (v251), the police (v252);

→ indices for *trust institutions of the constitutional state*: trust in courts (v250), trust in civil service (v251), trust in police (v252) and *institutions of the party-state*: trust in cabinet (v247), trust in parties (v248), trust in parliament (v249) ranging from 0=no trust at all to 10=very strong trust

- *ideology*: In political matters, people talk of "the left" and "the right". How would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking? (v307) 0=left-10=right, 88=don't know;
recode: 0-3 to 1=left, 4-6 to 2=centre, 7-10 to 3=right, 88=missing
- *political satisfaction*: On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in Germany? (v256); 1=very satisfied, 2=fairly satisfied, 3=not very satisfied, 4=not at all satisfied, 8=don't know;
recode: 4 to 0=not at all satisfied, 3 to 1=not very satisfied, 2 to 3=fairly satisfied, 1 to 4=very satisfied, 8=missing
- *political interest*: In general, how interested in politics are you? Would you say you are very interested, fairly interested, not very interested, or not at all interested? (v235); 1=very interested, 2=fairly interested, 3=not very interested, 4=not at all interested, 8=don't know;
recode: 4 to 0=not at all interested, 3 to 1=not very interested, 2 to 3=fairly interested, 1 to 4=very interested, 8=missing
- *importance of politics*: How important is each of the following in your life? Here I have a card with a scale going from 0-10 where 10 = "very important" and 0 = "not important at all". Where would you place yourself on this scale? D. Politics (v7); 0=not important at all – 10=very important, 88=don't know;
recode: 88 to missing
- *party attachment*: Do you usually think of yourself as a supporter of a particular political party? (v308); 1=yes, 2=no, 8=don't know, 9=refused to answer;

Is there still some party that you feel closer to than the others? (v309); 1=yes, 2=no, 8=don't know, 9=refused to answer;

Do you consider yourself a strong supporter of this party? (v311); 1=yes, 2=no, 8=don't know, 9=refused to answer;

recode: for all 3 variables 2 to 0=no, 8 and 9=missing;

→ additive Index of v308, v309, v311, new variable "party attachment" with 0=no support, 1=attachment, 2=some support, 3=strong support

- *modernisation*: I will now read some statement about how society could look. Could you tell me for each of these statements whether or not you would like to live in
 - o a society which emphasises that people are self-confident and critical (v272)
 - o a society which emphasises that people can do whatever they want (v273)
 - o a society which emphasises that people can realise themselves (v276)?;

0=would not like at all – 10=would like very much;

→ additive index out of these 3 variables to "index postmaterialism" ranging from 0=not at all to 10=would like very much

- *interpersonal trust*: I would now like to ask you some questions about how you view other people. Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? (v232); 0=you can't be too careful – 10=most people can be trusted;

Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or that they are mostly looking out for themselves? (v233); 0=people mostly look out for themselves – 10=people mostly try to be helpful;

Do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance or would they try to be fair? (v234); 0=most people would try to take advantage of me – 10=most people would try to be fair);

→ additive Index out of these 3 variables to "index interpersonal trust" ranging from 0=low interpersonal trust to 10=high interpersonal trust

- *norm of solidarity*: As you know, there are different opinions as to what it takes to be a good citizen. I would therefore like to ask you to examine the characteristics listed on the card. Looking at what you personally think, how important is it
 - o to show solidarity with people who are worse off than yourself (v257)?
 - o to think of others more than yourself (v263)?;

0=not important at all – 10=very important;

→ additive index out of these 2 variables to "index of solidarity" ranging from 0=low level of solidarity to 10=high level of solidarity

- *personal satisfaction*: All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days? Here I have a card with a scale going from 0-10 where 0 = "very dissatisfied" and 10 = "very satisfied". Where would you place yourself on this scale? (v11); 0=very dissatisfied – 10=very satisfied, 88=don't know;

recode: 88=missing

- *internal efficacy*: Do people like you have greater or smaller possibilities than others to present your opinions to politicians ?(v267); 0=much smaller – 10=much greater, 88 don't know;

Do people like you have greater or smaller possibilities than others to make politicians take account of your opinions? (v268); 0=much smaller – 10=much greater, 88 don't know;

recode: 88=missing

→ additive index out of these 2 variables to "index internal efficacy" ranging from 0=much smaller to 10=much greater

- *external efficacy*: How large possibilities do ordinary people have to present their opinions to politicians? (v265); 0=none at all – 10=very large, 88=don't know;

How much weight do politicians attach to opinions presented to them by ordinary people? (v266); 0=none at all – 10=very large, 88=don't know;

recode: 88=missing

→ additive index out of these 2 variables to "index external efficacy" ranging from 0=none at all to 10=very large)