PARTIES IN CYBERSPACE
THE CHARACTER AND EFFECT OF CYBER-CAMPAIGNING IN
2005 IN DENMARK AND NEW ZEALAND

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Parties in Cyberspace. The Character and Effect of Cyber-Campaigning in 2005 in Denmark and New Zealand

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Elections is the crucial time in representative democracies, and in advanced industrial countries parties play a major role in candidate nomination and thereby also in electioneering. The advent of new information and communication technologies (ICT) provides parties with new opportunities in their election campaigns; hence also a potential change in the impact on the electorate. This calls for analyses of how parties actually apply ICT and what the implications are for their election campaigns. Parties standing for election in the 2005 general elections in New Zealand and Denmark are included in the analysis based on interviews with party representatives, party web pages, pamphlets, television broadcasts, newspaper advertisements, posters/hoards, budgets and accounts. Parties apply ICT when providing information, encouraging participation and mobilizing resources. Some of this usage takes on another form than traditional campaigning whereas some facilitates traditional electioneering. A distinction between four types of cyber-campaigning shows that parties vary from simple application of ICT, over cyber-campaigning with emphasis on how ICT facilitate information provision – and for some also participation encouragement – to the more advanced type where parties integrate their application of ICT into their overall campaign strategy. The application of ICT has at present only a limited impact on the character of party campaigning. In general, parties do not spend many resources on their cyber-campaigns, and few parties integrate online and offline campaigning.
The application of ICT in parties’ campaigns – integrated or haphazardly?

Elections are crucial in representative democracies, and in democracies across the globe political parties play a decisive role in candidate nomination and thereby also in electioneering. Party campaigning studies show that campaigns have become longer and more permanent, more personalized, professionalized and both centralized and localized (Bowler & Farrell 1992; Butler & Ranney 1992; Farrell 2002; Farrell & Webb 2000; Gibson & Römmele 2001; Norris 2000). The advent of new information and communication technologies (ICT) such as emails, internet, text messages and other web-based technologies provide parties with new opportunities within electioneering; thus also potential changes in the impact on the electorate. This calls for analyses of how parties apply ICT and what the implications of this application are. Hence the purpose of this paper is to contribute to a better understanding of the character and effect of cyber-campaigning; i.e. political parties’ application of ICT in their election campaigns.

Cyber optimists argue that ICT revitalize democracies. The new technologies enable new channels of political communication, information and participation hence create supplements to traditional and established political actors and institutions such as political parties, interest organizations, and social movements. However, ICT also provide established political institutions the means for change, improvement and renewal. For example, ‘cyber parties’ may through the application of ICT revitalize their relationships with the electorate and hence minimize their dependence on the party organization (Margetts 2006: 531). Parties may also experiment with virtual branches, hold virtual meetings and establish virtual networks (Bieber 2000). Cyber pessimists, on the other hand, argue that the result will be status quo or maybe even inferior democratic political systems (see e.g. Bimber & Davis 2003). In the status quo perspective ICT has no impact on the political system since it is ’the usual suspects’ that make use of the new channels of information, communication
and participation. The internet is ‘preaching to the converted’ (Bimber & Davis 2003: 6; Norris 2003). In the deteriorating perspective of the cyber pessimists the political gaps are even enlarged because the established, integrated and resourceful actors and institutions obtain more means of making an impact.

In order to enhance the understanding of the character and effect of political parties’ cyber-campaigning this paper presents analyses of, first, how parties apply ICT in election campaigns and, second, what the implications of this application are for the party campaign. Cyber-campaigning may have an effect in several ways. A simple distinction is between internal and external effects. Internal effects refer to the impact within the party, i.e. on the party internal and parliamentary arenas; e.g. impact on party activities and the power balance within the party organisation. External effects refer to the impact in the electoral arena, that is, e.g. on electoral turnout, election result and party identification among the electorate. Even though it is hard to precisely assess the impact of ICT, several studies have indicated that they may have an effect. Tkach-Kawasaki (2003), for example, finds that the Internet to some extent had an impact on the call for reform in the media system in Japan. Similarly, Gibson and McAllister find that in Australia in the beginning of the twentieth century, cyber-campaigning is part of a successful campaign (2005). Also, Hague and Uhm show that at the presidential election in South Korea in 2002, the turnout among young voters rose and the challenger, Roh, won, primarily due to web-campaigning (Margetts 2006: 531).

Focus here is upon the interchange between the electoral and the party internal arena, namely on party campaigning. Campaigns are organized within the party but carried out mostly in the electoral arena in order to obtain votes. Studies within this field have analysed the character of party and candidate election web sites since the advent of the application of ICT. However, these studies have
mainly dealt with the online aspects with less emphasis on the importance of online campaigning and the link between online and offline campaigning (besides some notable exceptions such as Gibson & McAllister 2005). Hence, the contribution of this analysis is that focus is on the impact of the application of ICT on the character of party campaigning.

The second section of this paper presents the case studies, parties and methodology. The character of parties’ cyber-campaigning is presented in the third section, whereas the fourth section focuses on the implications for party campaigning as such. The final and fifth section concludes on the character and effect of cyber-campaigning and discusses the consequences of these findings for parties and representative democracy.

**Cross-national, most-similar-system comparative research design**

The purpose of this paper is to provide an increased understanding of how parties apply ICT in election campaigns and the implications of this application on the character of party campaigning.

In order to exploit variation among parties it is necessary to include parties with different amounts of resources available, number of parliamentarians, ideology, culture etc. that act within similar institutional contexts. Hence, a most-similar-systems comparative research design is applied. Parties standing for election in the 2005 general elections in New Zealand and Denmark are included in the analysis. Even though placed opposite each other on the globe, these two country cases are of similar size, both with proportional election systems and multiparty systems. A large number of parties ran for election thus providing a sufficient number of cases within the two countries to warrant firm conclusions on cyber-campaigning in smaller democracies.
The general elections in 2005 saw 19 parties in New Zealand and 10 in Denmark. These constitute a heterogeneous mix of parties varying in size, age, ideological profile, parliamentary representation and organizational characteristics. Yet parties within the two cases all act within the same context, leaving the institutional framework, political culture, and media environment constant. The comparative analysis of these parties thus yields insight into differences among parties that are caused by their individual characteristics and country specific characteristics. Since many parties are included in the study, the expected variation is maximized. In addition, differences between major and minor parties are larger in election campaigns than between campaigns (Gibson & Ward 1998, 2000; Gibson et al. 2003a).

A broad range of data has been collected using various sources. However, the analysis of the character of cyber-campaigning is based mainly on content analysis of party web pages and interviews with party representatives (such as web editors and party secretaries). The analysis of the impact of the new technology on party electioneering is based on analyses of parties’ pamphlets, television broadcasts, newspaper advertisements in all major newspapers and posters/hoards at the 2005 national elections, as well as party budgets and accounts.

This study contributes with two up-dated, advanced industrial, Western country cases to the already existing research on party websites. However, more importantly, the study analyses whether and how the application of ICT has an impact on parties’ election campaigns. Thus seeking answer to the intriguing question how important online campaigning is and whether it is integrated into party campaigning as such at present. Hence, this paper contributes to an increased understanding of the character of party campaigning.
The character of cyber-campaigning

The analysis of how Danish and New Zealand parties apply ICT in their 2005 national campaigns is based on an analytical framework with three dimensions, namely information provision, participation encouragement and resource mobilization. This framework is developed on the basis of Gibson and Ward’s distinction between five functions in their party web site surveys: Information provision, resource generation, networking, participation and campaigning (Gibson et al. 2003a: 68-69). Political parties provide a unique linkage between the elected representatives and the electorate at large (cf. Lawson 1980), and these three aspects are essential parts of this linkage; hence also three essential electoral assignments of parties when they seek to make an impact on the electorate.

The analysis of the character of web campaigning has the character of ‘thick description’; it is more informative than mere scores on a number of dimensions since this latter leaves aside certain ‘depth’ necessary in order to grasp not the extent but how parties apply ICT. To provide a couple of examples before commencing on the analytically informed description: Whether parties provide information on party policies or not does not indicate whether all policy fields are covered or only those on the party’s election agenda. Similarly, fundraising may both be a simple payment on an electronic payment system, or it may be integrated into games such as the Danish Social Democrats’ stock campaign; it may be attached to the party as such, or to the party leader as in the Danish Liberals’ ‘Support Anders – web site’.

The first three sections show how parties apply ICT in their information provision, participation encouragement and resource mobilization, whereas the fourth section sums up the characteristics in four types of party cyber-campaigning.
Information provision – a digital shop front

Political parties provide information on their opinions, activities and personnel in order to swing voters, inform and mobilize members and supporters and in general evoke a sense of belonging to the party. Compared to leaflets handed out in the street and punch line interviews, one of the advantages of a party web site is that it may provide much information without limits in time and space. Moreover, the internet allows parties to bypass traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television and thus communicate without the interference or filter of journalists. They get to present the information and image which they prefer. They may be present at all times and react instantly to any other inputs into the political agenda. Whereas pamphlets and posters are limited in space, the web site provide a lot more room for comprehensive and detailed descriptions and explanations of policies, positions, etc. Furthermore, all this information is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week from around the wired world; i.e. it is accessible across time and space. Hence ICT provide parties with flexible channels of unmediated information and communication.

Parties may provide all sorts of information on their website and via text messages. Some of this is targeted pupils and journalists in order to free administrative resources to other party tasks. However, focus is here on material targeted the electorate, including party members and activists. All Danish and New Zealand parties provide information about their values, ideology or policies. Thus, the online electorate may compare party policies on the issues they find to be most important. However, parties may choose to emphasize some issues more than others. Even though there is not that much of a limit in the amount of information parties can provide on their web site, they may try to target their visitors’ attention, more so at election time than between elections. The Danish Liberals and Social Liberals, e.g., limited the information provided at their web sites in order to try
to set the election agenda with specific issues. Hence, the electorate could only find information on the party policies that these parties had chosen to focus on in this campaign. Hence, party web sites to different extents contribute to parties’ streamlining of messages and strategies of agenda-setting at election time.

Besides the information provided on the web site the new technology makes it faster and cheaper for parties to send out newsletters by emails. This feature is used by most of the parties; however, the scope of this is rather limited. The Danish party with the largest email list is the Social Democrats who sent their newsletter to 10,000 candidates, members and voters. The largest party, the Liberals had 3,500 on the newsletter list prior to the election campaign, 6,000 in the campaign and 5,500 after the election. The other parties have even fewer recipients. Out of a membership base of around 180,000 and an electorate of four million, out of which 3.3 million voted in 2005, these are rather moderate figures. Hence, parties are not reaching a large amount of voters this way.

It is not only the amount of information but also the kind of information provided on web sites that differ from traditional information tools such as leaflets, hoards and advertisements. One of the advantages of ICT is that the parties may inform and communicate in new ways such as through sound bites, video clips, games and gimmicks.

Even though journalistic controlled media cover party activities and events, far from everything is given the coverage parties desire. Parties may therefore on their web sites, for example, give the electorate access to live coverage or taped versions of significant speeches and conferences – or at least a printed version. New Zealand National, for example, enables voters to watch video clips of key speeches by Don Brash and other party representatives in the party. Similarly, the web sites
give parties the option of making their television spots or commercials more widely accessible. New Zealand parties do not have anywhere near equal access to television due to the electoral regulations. Some parties therefore find that they spend a lot of money on commercials that are not seen by that many (potential) voters. The web sites enable potential voters to review these commercials and allow party supporters to disperse the knowledge of the commercials to friends and acquaintances.

Political commercials are not allowed on nationwide television in Denmark, where parties instead are allocated time with the public national broadcaster. Hence, television commercials are a rather rare phenomenon in Denmark. However, the advent and development of the new technology allows parties to experiment more with moving images. Some of the parties used video: Beginning a couple of days after the election was called the chair of the Danish People’s Party, Pia Kjærgaard, daily uploaded a video with her personal comments to the campaign and political agenda. The Liberals presented video clips from the party leader and Prime Minister’s, Anders Fogh Rasmussen’s, tour around the country on their site. The Danish Social Liberals used the video medium in another way, namely to create attention to a particular topic. The Social Liberals are in marked opposition to the government’s immigration and integration policies and made this point very clear by a professional video combining harsh citations from the current minister of integration, telling pictures and music. A link to the 70 second video was emailed to members and the email list, not to other media, in order to evoke a sense of exclusiveness in dispersion of the message; an idea imported from the US. However, the video quickly appeared in and got attention from other media and the party is therefore not able to say whether it is the personal, exclusive dissemination or the mass media attention that got people to visit their web site. Nevertheless, the video was downloaded by 45,000, and four out of five also viewed the background material for the
citations; something that the party was trying to achieve. The party had a ‘two-legged’ strategy and deliberately used the character of ICT: The video was flashy, provocative, and caught attention whereas the web site provided easy access to in depth material and proof for the video’s case.

In sum, ICT enables parties to provide a wealth of information to the electorate at large as well as to members and supporters. Not only is the access easier; the information is also provided in new forms. Even though some of the information on the web sites and newsletters is edited to correspond with the style of ICT, most of what can be found on the web site can be found elsewhere as well.

*Participation encouragement – plugged-in participation?*

Political parties provide one among several channels for political participation. Traditional party activities between elections have hitherto been party meetings with discussions of political and administrative issues. In election campaigns party members are useful for putting up hoardings, canvassing, participation in street corner meetings and handing out leaflets. However, ICT allows parties to both revitalize their existing party activities and add new colours to the pallet.

Both citizens and parties could be assumed to be interested in the new possibilities provided by the new technology (Newell 2001). Citizens may be attracted by the less formal, more ad hoc, potentially less time consuming, more individual and more focused forms of political participation allowed by the new technologies. However, citizens should be aware of the risk that easy and less cost-full participation becomes mindless as well (Saglie & Pedersen 2005). Parties may hope that the new technologies reinvigorate their well-documented declining relationship with the voters as indicated by declining levels of party identification, party membership, and increasing electoral

In a participatory perspective one of the major advantages of ICT concerns its interactive potential. One way in which parties encourage participation is by providing email addresses to party headquarters, politicians, staff and the party leader. This is supplied by all parties; however the provision varies from a single address to the full span. Party websites in this way function as phonebooks and make it easy for journalists, members and others to contact a party. More importantly, the extent to which this develops into communication depends on the extent to which parties actually respond to these enquiries. Whereas smaller parties get only a handful of emails easily responded to by the party chair, the largest parties need to put some effort into responding. The two biggest Danish parties, the Liberals and Social Democrats, had 15 and 8 volunteers responding to 300-400 and 150 emails, respectively, in the three week long campaign period. Since the Social Democrats, for example, usually gets three emails a day, there is a huge increase in activity at elections. On the basis of the easiness with which emails are written, it seems plausible to argue that at least some of these email writers would not have contacted the party had they not had this easy accessible option; hence ICT has an impact.

If democracy is about participation and deliberation and not solely about decisions taken under competition, the new technology possibly improves democracy since it facilitates interactivity. ICT enables political debate across time and space in open debate forums, intranets, chat rooms and email lists. These are applied widely within party organizations but parties are in general reluctant to establish public online discussion forums. Some parties have, due to the harmfulness of the character of the debate, chosen to shut down their public forums (see also Roper 1998: 78; Pedersen
& Saglie 2005; Pedersen 2007). Other parties have simply refrained from establishing such forums. The major drawbacks are, according to these parties, that they will need to spend time and money on moderating the debate. All parties agree that moderation is necessary. However, except if the surveillance is on 24 hours a day it is not sufficient to avoid the risk that offline media will cite the party for inadequate remarks on their debate forum. Furthermore, some of the parties’ experience from their members-only debate forums indicate that the value added by the debate is limited since the participants are mostly the few ‘usual suspects’ discussing their hobby horses. Hence, the drawbacks do not make up for the rewards in the form of input that may arise in the discussions and the image of openness promoted in the public.

However, a couple of parties did in the 2005 election open up for the comments from the electorate. First, the Danish Socialist People’s Party has an open discussion forum and they are very surprised at how successful it is. It is, of course, moderated; however, the web editor has only deleted on average five submissions a year. This is impressive since both party-supporters and other voters – including ‘village fools’ – participate. Hence, they argue that the other parties are exaggerating the problems entailed in public online discussions. Second, the Danish Liberals had a weblog with commentator option. Even though they moderated the debate, they still deliberately attempted to separate the party from the debate by organising the comments in a pop-up window disassociated with the design and logos of the party and party web site. In total, the party got 800 comments, where 20-30 were deleted due to their content. In addition, in both New Zealand and Denmark some party leaders and other prominent party people ran weblogs.

Email addresses, online forms and chatrooms to different extents encourage feedback from the electorate on the political and personnel matters about which they care but parties may also try to
target the topics on which they get feedback. One way in which parties do this is by having a (weekly) opinion poll on their web site; something that a third of the New Zealand parties and none of the Danish parties have. Whether and how parties make use of the input they get remains to be seen. The opinion polls may serve more as part of the image parties try to convey on their web sites than to reality. However, weblogs and feedback on email may serve as some kind of input to the parties that party leadership may use just as they use what they hear at election meetings, street corner meetings, etc. Parties may get useful arguments and can sense what supporters and others find provocative enough to react upon.

Furthermore, in the 2005 campaigns the parties on their web sites encourage party supporters to promote the party among friends and relatives. Party members and supporters are advantageous to parties if they through their presence in neighbourhoods, local communities and workplaces promote their party. Everyday contact with ordinary people provides opportunity for favourably influencing their opinions towards the party. Members and supporters are in this way ‘ambassadors to the community’ (Scarrow 1996: 43). Through various gadgets on the web sites parties may facilitate members’ and supporters’ online promotion of the party. For example, New Zealand Labour encouraged visitors to forward a video promoting party policy on student loans to friends, and the Danish Social Liberals, as mentioned above, sent a link to their provocative video to their email list and encouraged people to forward it. Electronic postcards are also popular among some of the parties. New Zealand National’s successful billboard campaign was converted into electronic postcards that voters were encouraged to forward. The Danish Socialist Party has electronic postcards at as well as between elections. The Danish Liberals also developed electronic postcards; however they regard this feature as unsuccessful since only 200 postcards were forwarded from the
web site. Similarly, when parties send out emails, they encourage rank-and-file members and officeholders to forward these emails to friends and relatives.

Besides allowing for new online activities ICT also contributes towards traditional, offline party activities. Supporters that purchase party merchandise are ‘living billboards’ for the party. The web sites also allow for inexpensive dissemination of party logos, pamphlets, etc. Both the Danish Red-Green Alliance and the New Zealand Greens, for example, uploaded information, pamphlets, etc. on their web site, as they found this to be really useful. It stipulates that electorate candidates and party organizations have the technical tools necessary for printing this material. This is easier for party headquarters and may also streamline the party message to a larger extent; an important element of modern campaigning. If electorate candidates and party branches are serviced with election material, they will feel less compelled towards producing these themselves.

Besides hard core political matters parties may use their web sites for more entertaining elements. Some parties, e.g. Danish Liberals and Social Democrats, have chosen to provide games, quizzes and gimmicks in order to attract visitors and show that politics is not all boring. Other parties, such as the Danish Socialist People’s Party and Conservatives, abstain from such features either for financial reasons or because they find that games could hurt the seriousness of their image.

Hence, overall the parties do use ICT to enable online participation and advertising of the party in their 2005 campaigns; however, the usage is rather limited. Thus, there is a large potential in developing party web sites if the parties are interested in advancing their online campaigning.

*Resource mobilizing – join, donate, get active!*
The prominent and often cited example of ICT facilitated campaign resource mobilization is Howard Dean’s in the run up to be the American Democrats’ presidential candidate in 2002 since it shows how the new technology was a very useful tool for mobilizing activists, supporters and money. However, Dean did not succeed, and John Kerry even matched Dean’s online accomplishments in regard to fundraising.

In New Zealand and Denmark, parties also encouraged visitors on their web site to become active. Some parties systematized their mobilization in systems like meetup.com in addition to mobilization occurring when volunteers email party headquarters to offer their assistance. For example, New Zealand ACT very deliberately tried to engage citizens in a way similar to that of Howard Dean’s campaign. Through their ‘Get Involved’ campaign they, for example, encouraged supporters to join the debate, form their own groups and support the party through yahoo groups, meetup.com and blogger.com. The Danish Socialist People’s Party created the ‘activist network’; an exchange central for people who want to contribute with activity and parts of the party that needs activists. Even though a number of the parties are positive towards the idea of mobilization and emphasize that it is an important aspect of their web site at elections (whereas emphasis is more on information provision between elections) only limited use was made of it in the 2005. Hence, parties may want to mobilize members and supporters via ICT but they have so far not been that successful. Overall, Danish and New Zealand parties did not reach the hype of Dean’s campaign in regard to mobilization of campaign workers at their 2005 campaigns. The primary reason for this seems to be that New Zealand and Danish party activists are mobilized through the party organization, whereas American party organizations are mere ‘empty vessels’ (Katz & Kolodny 1994) and therefore to a larger extent rely on ad hoc campaign mobilization.
Simpler ways of using ICT for mobilization is by providing an updated calendar of election events. The web site grants easy access to information about party events in various localities. The flexibility of a web based calendar is particularly useful in elections where electioneering activities are planned and realized within a short time span.\textsuperscript{xiii} It is of particular relevance when parties shift election strategy, for example, from emphasis on a nationwide campaign for the party vote to emphasis on an electorate campaign, as was done by New Zealand ACT. Nonetheless, even though most Danish and New Zealand parties have event calendars, many of these were not up to date in the 2005 campaign; hence parties are not integrating this useful tool in their campaigns. The major reason seems to be that an updated calendar is a resource demanding feature and unless local party organisations are able to upload information and activities themselves, it is not useful enough for party headquarters to spend time on. However, parties are in general trying to get their calendar functions up and running.

Political parties need a lot of resources when campaigning. As New Zealand ACT puts it on their web site: “Donate. The easiest of all! Talk is cheap, but election campaigns are expensive”. Parties vary in the extent to which they rely on the skills, esteem and financial resources of the party leadership and their supporting circuit, the manpower and smaller financial resources of numerable members, support from affiliated organizations and state funding. Most parties rely on a mix of contributions (Katz & Mair 1994). However, a general trend among political parties is that they increasingly rely on capital-intensive and less on labour-intensive campaign tools and activities. This enhances their demand for financial contributions whereby fundraising has become more important. ICT provides not only yet another expense in parties’ (campaign) budgets but is also a tool by which parties may raise money.
Donations are widely encouraged on both New Zealand and Danish party websites even though fundraising among the public at large has not been a prominent feature of Danish campaigning. However, due to changes in the organizational linkages (especially for the Social Democrats), the declining membership figures and advancement of professional and expensive electioneering in general, the Danish parties increasingly emphasize the importance of fundraising. Some parties are not merely asking for donations: The Danish Social Democrats raise money through a fictive ‘stock campaign’ where people can buy stocks within various policy fields, such as the elementary school, hospitals and the environment. The web site was an important aspect of this initiative. It was a good story for the party because they reached their goal of 500,000 DKK [10 million yen] and this creative idea brought the party publicity. Hence, one thing is that the web site contributes to easier fundraising; another thing is that the party may get positive publicity when they fundraise in innovative ways and reach their goals. The Danish Liberals had a specific site ‘support Anders’ (the first name of the Prime Minister) linked to at their main web site. They regard this as a success since they collected 50,000 DKK [1 million yen]. However, the cost of the site also amounted to around 50,000 DKK according to the web editor; hence there is no net surplus. In sum, parties may and do use their web sites for campaign fundraising but the potential is far larger than what has been achieved so far.

In New Zealand party membership is included in the formula for the allocation of broadcast funding by the electoral commission; hence most parties are interested in membership enrolment. Danish parties have traditionally been membership parties (Bille 1994). Practically all Danish and New Zealand parties standing for election in 2005 encourage enrolment on their website. Some New Zealand parties and all Danish parties allow for online enrolment. This not only relieves the parties of an administrative burden, it may also potentially attract more party members than other kinds of
enrolment, since it is easier and may be done in private. In addition, parties may target specific groups thus enhancing the chance of enrolling a more diverse membership base. Besides the common target groups of younger voters and women, target groups may be homosexuals as in New Zealand ‘Rainbow Labour’ and ‘PrideAlliance,’ or disabled as in New Zealand Labour’s ‘Kirk Branch.’ Hence, more and possibly other kinds of members may be attracted due to the more targeted enrolment strategy; a strategy that is inexpensive to implement due to the character of the internet.

Even though party member enrolment has been the traditional way of mobilization in political parties, there is also a trend towards mobilization of supporters or more ad hoc attachment to the party. Parties are to some extent blurring the distinction between members and other supporters (cf. Katz & Mair 1995). This is done in two ways on party web sites. First, parties encourage voters to enrol as supporters. Second, parties encourage their supporters to become active in the campaign. For example, as mentioned above, New Zealand ACT mobilized supporters through the ‘Get Involved’ campaign, and other parties similarly encourage campaign activism. Hence, they may reach potential activists not otherwise reached. Or more importantly, parties may here reach supporters that would not have become active otherwise.

In sum, parties are applying ICT for resource mobilization. Danish parties represented in parliament are advanced when it comes to online resource mobilization whereas the variation among New Zealand parties is larger.
Types of party cyber-campaigning

The purpose of this short section is to summarize by suggesting how party cyber-campaigning may be divided into types on the basis of the three dimensions in the characterization of parties’ online campaigning in the 2005 general elections in New Zealand and Denmark presented above.

The first type of cyber-campaigning is the simplest type as exemplified by most of the unrepresented New Zealand parties. Parties that belong to this group do not use ICT much for either information provision, participation encouragement and resource mobilization. This type is characterized by simplicity. There is no online strategy, offline material is simply uploaded on the web, and members and supporters are target groups, not the electorate at large. The web site works mostly as a phonebook (cf. Hansen & Kosiara-Pedersen 2012).

In the second type of cyber-campaigning parties are using the technology to disseminate information to both activists, members and the electorate at large. The strategy of the online presence is to inform as much as possible, and it does take the character of the technology into account. Parties conducting this type of cyber-campaigning use ICT for information provision and resource mobilization but not for participation encouragement. United Future and the Danish Conservatives are examples of this type.

In the third type of cyber-campaigning parties apply ICT for both information provision, participation encouragement and resource mobilization. Parties’ online strategy is similar to type two in regard to information provision but these parties also take advantage of the participatory potentials of the new technologies. Hence, they emphasize features such as interaction and
feedback. Examples of these parties are New Zealand Labour and Greens, and the Danish Christian Democrats.

The fourth type takes cyber-campaigning yet another step upward on the ladder of sophistication. In this type parties’ online strategy not only takes the character of the technology into account; the application of ICT in regard to information provision, participation encouragement and resource mobilization is integrated into the overall campaign strategy. The content of the web site is edited to correspond with the campaign message, and the design of online campaigning is matched with the party image. The Danish Liberals and Social Liberals provide examples of this type of cyber-campaigning.

The purpose of this division of party cyber-campaigning is to show that even though parties vary in their online campaigns, certain trends may be discerned. Even though this ‘typology’ needs further attention and development we now turn to the effect of cyber-campaigning.

**The effect of cyber-campaigning on party campaigning as such: Replacement, supplement or curiosity?**

In a cyber optimistic perspective traditional electoral channels of information, communication and participation may be replaced by those enabled by ICT. However, these new channels of information, communication and participation may also remain a mere supplement to traditional channels and hence purely result in some but not major revisions of electioneering. Or, even more moderately, ICT may yet be applied more as a curiosity: only to a limited extent and simply to show that parties are modern and upbeat while the true impact is rather small. In order to assess whether cyber-campaigning has made an impact on the character of party campaigning as such, the analysis
here focuses on the importance attributed to online campaigning. Several indicators might provide some insight into how important online campaigning is for political parties. One such indicator could be whether party representatives say that the virtual campaign is important to the party or not. This may provide insight into the strategic thinking of the party leadership and give an idea on the importance of online campaigning.

No matter whether a party web site converts voters or not, a web site is by most parties regarded as indispensable. First, it is important to be present and let people know that the party is part of the campaign. Hence, it is like putting up hoards and posters: The electorate might think that the party is not part of the campaign if there is no party web site. In addition, not having a web site might affect the party image since it might be seen as a technical savage or the like. Furthermore, the new technology allows parties to convey the image they prefer on the party web site. As argued by one of the Danish web editors: “It is self promotion that you are in complete control over; it is your only opportunity for designing the presentation of your party.” On the other hand, the web site image must correspond to the image created elsewhere; otherwise both the web site and party are discredited. It is not only the general image but also specific aspects of content and deliverance that must correspond. For example, newspaper articles and parts of the public regarded it paradoxical that the Danish People’s Party in the campaign promoted a ‘language-law’ to ensure that the Danish authorities do not communicate with people in other languages than Danish when they themselves on their web site provided information in ten other languages, including Russian, Arabic and Turkish; a service they removed from their web site when it was covered by the media.

Secondly, it is important to have a party web site since web sites and their various features possibly create publicity and party coverage in traditional mass media. In the 2005 election New Zealand
voters learnt about National’s tax calculator, where visitors could work out how much they would save with National’s fair tax plan and Labour’s Brash Flip-Flop-O-Matic, that made fun of statements from National’s chair Don Brash, even without logging on to the internet. Similarly, the Danish Social Liberals’ video hit the offline media and got the party attention. Thus, ICT is a tool by which parties can ‘make headlines’. In addition, it is important to be included in newspapers’ evaluations of websites and to do well in these assessments as this creates positive coverage.

Even if party representatives do say that a party web site is important this may not have had an impact on the character of the party campaign. Hence, in the following the impact of cyber-campaigning on party campaigning as such is assessed on the basis of three indicators: First, the character of party web sites, secondly, the money spent on online campaigning, and thirdly, parties’ offline advertising for their online presence. This enables firmer conclusion on the extent to which online campaigning was part of party campaigning as such in 2005 in New Zealand and Denmark.

*The more advanced the web site, the more important is online campaigning?*

One indicator of the extent to which online campaigning makes an impact on party campaigning as such is the character of parties’ cyber-campaigning. Based on the argument that the more advanced the application of ICT, the more emphasis the party puts on cyber-campaigning.

Political parties are expected to differ in the character of their online campaigning and several factors may contribute to an understanding of this variation. Focus within this research field has been on the resource argument based on size and representation of the parties. Research on the character of party websites commonly analyzes two competing hypotheses: the ‘levelling-of-the-playing-field’ and ‘business-as-usual’ hypotheses. Cyber-optimists support the ‘levelling’
hypothesis, arguing that ICT provide all parties with inexpensive modes of communication that allow direct, tailored communication to the electorate at large. Cyber-pessimists, on the other hand, argue that the new technologies do not level the playing field; it is business as usual. Major parties have more resources available to develop their websites, make them attractive to visitors and fund advertisements in order to attract visitors. The economic advantages enjoyed by the richer parties in respect of accessing the mainstream media are thus replicated on-line. Support has mainly been found for the ‘business-as-usual’ hypothesis (Gibson et al. 2000, 2002, 2003: 50; Ward et al. 2003: 24; Margolis et al. 1997: 59-78, 1999: 24-47; Barker 2004; Hestvik 2004; Hansen & Kosiara-Pedersen 2012). However, the ‘levelling-of-the-playing-field’ hypothesis has been supported as well (Norris 2003; Tkach-Kawasaki 2003; Miller 2005; cf. Gibson et al. 2003a). This explains why, in more than a few cases, some smaller parties are found to be more enthusiastic about the (potential) value of ICT than larger and more established parties (Margolis et al. 2003; Copsey 2003; Cunha et al. 2003; Newell 2001; Pedersen 2005; cf. Ward et al. 2003: 23).

To allow for systematic comparison all parties are scored on the three dimensions in the characterization above (Information provision, participation encouragement and resource mobilization) as well as on ‘delivery aspects’ such as glitz, access and navigability. This is a simplified version of Gibson and Ward’s analytical framework (2003).

Among all parties represented in parliament New Zealand Labour and Greens score high across the two countries, whereas the Maori Party scores low. In the New Zealand case there is a more marked division between parties scoring high and parties scoring low, whereas in the Danish case parties are to a larger extent scoring both high, average and low in a mix. In New Zealand, Labour and the Greens are the high scorers, whereas the Maori Party in general scores low. In Denmark, all parties
except the Danish People’s Party are among the high scorers on some dimensions. And all but the Liberals, Social Democrats and Conservatives (three of the four largest parties) are also among the low scorers on at least one dimension. Hence, the picture is more mixed in the Danish case.

If the number of parties is increased from the 15 represented parties to the 27 parties who fought the 2005 elections, the general picture is that the represented parties have more advanced web sites than parties not represented. However, that general picture covers up variation within the two groups that might be explained by whether party elites are cyber-optimists and parties expect their electorate to be online: In New Zealand, ACT and the Greens expect that their voters are more web literate than the average voter whereby the web site becomes particularly important for them. Conversely, New Zealand First and the Maori Party find that since their (potential) electorate is unlikely to be familiar with the internet, they do not find their web site to be an important electioneering tool.

In sum, based on this indicator, New Zealand Labour, Greens and ACT as well as Danish Christian Democrats, Conservatives, Liberals and Social Democrats find cyber-campaigning to be more important than the other parties, in particular New Zealand One New Zealand and Aotearoa Legalise Cannabis Party, and the Danish Minority Party.

*It’s all about money!* xiii

Based on the argument that the more money spent on ICT in the campaign, the more important is cyber-campaigning, another indicator of the impact on party campaigning as such is the amounts of money spent on the campaign web site. In absolute figures, the Danish parties fighting the 2005 parliamentarian election spent between no money and DKK 300.000 [6 million yen] on their election web site. xiv The level of distinction of party web sites as indicated above is to some extent
related to the sums of money spent on them in the Danish case. The Liberals, Social Democrats and Conservatives spent the most and are also among the high scorers. Similarly, the Danish People’s Party spent no extra money on their web site in the campaign and is also the lowest scoring party represented in parliament.

Furthermore and more importantly, parties differ in regard to financial resources available for campaigning. The richer parties may easily spend money on a fancy web site even if they do not find it important since these costs make up a relatively small share of their overall campaign spending. Other parties must ‘count every penny’ and target their electioneering expenditures to where they get the most votes for the dollar. Hence, a more adequate indicator is the share of the campaign budget spent on party web sites: There is little variation in the share of Danish parties’ campaign budgets spent on web sites as this is mostly around 1-1.5 percent; with the exceptions of Danish People’s Party (0) and the Red-Green Alliance (2.5).xv Danish parties do not spend much money on their election web sites; hence this indicates that they are not an important part of their overall campaigning.

In sum, based on the financial indicators Danish parties do not vary markedly in the importance ascribed to online campaigning and they do not find online campaigning important. Without budgets for the New Zealand parties it is difficult to form any firm conclusions. However, since New Zealand parties differ more markedly in high scorers and low scorers, and since both minor and major parties score high, it could be expected that they vary more in money spent on ICT.
**Offline advertisement of online presence**

A third indicator of the importance of cyber-campaigning is whether parties advertise their party web site. Based on the argument that it is practically cost-free for parties to include their web address in election material such as pamphlets, posters, newspaper advertisements and presentation programs on television, we expect that they include this address if they regard their web site as an integrated part of their overall campaign.

Hoards that until the day of the election are found on green strips of land in the cities and on the fields in the countryside is a traditional feature of New Zealand campaigning. However, only the Democrats for Social Credit put their web site address on their hoards in a marked size. Other parties, such as ACT and Libertarianz, also include their www address but with much smaller print. In Denmark there is a tradition of posters in lamp posts etc. at election time and as in the New Zealand case, parties and candidates are not consistently promoting their web sites. Thus, in neither country are parties using this traditional campaign tool to promote their online presence.

Parties are much keener on promoting their web site in other kinds of election material. All Danish parties refer to their web site in their primary election pamphlet, and in New Zealand party web sites are often but not always refereed to in election material such as pamphlets, election papers, stickers, etc. In addition, some of the parties explicitly emphasise that more information can be found on their web sites.

Parties are split in regard to whether they promote their party web site in newspaper advertisements. Some parties, such as the New Zealand Greens, Democrats for Social Credit and ACT, as well as the Danish Social Democrats, Socialist People’s Party, Red-Green Alliance and Danish People’s
Party always include their web site address. Other parties, such as New Zealand Labour, Danish Social Liberals and Danish Conservatives include their www in some advertisements but not in others. Yet other parties, such as New Zealand First and Danish Liberals, never include any reference to their web site.

Access to television is by party leadership in general emphasized as an important means for a successful election. The airtime granted the parties by the national broadcasters are therefore supposedly important for the parties and thus a good indicator of whether or not parties seek to promote their web sites. It turns out that only half the New Zealand parties make a reference to their web site in the opening statements on TVNZ and that oral references to the web site are only made by Labour and the 99 MP Party. In the closing statements only Labour and National refer to their web sites and only in writing. Similarly, less than half the Danish parties refer to their web site at the presentation programs on DRTV.

In sum, parties are not to a large extent encouraging the electorate to visit their web site by putting their web site address in their offline campaigning. Hence, this indicates that online and offline campaigning are not integrated and that cyber-campaigning is not important to the parties.
Conclusion

The large number of parties running for election in New Zealand and Denmark in 2005 and a wealth of data such as interviews with party representatives, party web pages, pamphlets, television broadcasts, newspaper advertisements, posters/hoards, budgets and accounts, provide a solid base to warrant conclusions on the character and effect of political parties’ cyber-campaigning (i.e. political parties’ application of ICT in their election campaigns) in smaller democracies; hence contribute to an increased understanding of the character of party campaigning.

First, the analyses show how parties apply ICT in election campaigns when providing information, encouraging participation and mobilizing resources. Information provision, participation encouragement and resource mobilization are essential elements in political parties’ unique linkage between the elected representatives and the electorate at large; thus also central in party electioneering.

Parties are providing a range of information on web sites and in newsletters to voters, supporters and members. The access to information is easier and it is also provided in new forms. Even though some of the information on the web sites and newsletters is edited to correspond with the style of ICT, most of what can be found on the web site can be found elsewhere as well.

In regard to participation encouragement, parties use ICT both to enable newer kinds of online participation and advertising of the party and to facilitate traditional party activism in their 2005 campaigns; however, the usage is rather limited when compared to the participatory potential of ICT. There is a large potential in the application of ICT if parties are interested in encouraging participation and advancing online campaigning.
Parties are also applying ICT for resource mobilization such as fundraising and member enrolment. Danish parties represented in parliament are advanced when it comes to online resource mobilization whereas the variation among New Zealand parties is larger.

In sum, New Zealand and Danish parties are in general taking small steps rather than major leaps into cyberspace. However, most of them are applying ICT in a way and to an extent that does not completely warrant the label “old wine in new bottles”. A distinction between four types of cyber-campaigning based on the analysis of how parties apply ICT when electioneering shows that parties vary from simple application of ICT, over cyber-campaigning with emphasis on how ICT facilitate information provision – and for some also participation encouragement – to the more advanced type where parties integrate their application of ICT into their overall campaign strategy.

Secondly, the analyses show whether the application of ICT affects overall party campaigning. Party elites argue that online presence is necessary – and that it is an (electoral) advantage. Hence, all parties standing for election in New Zealand and Denmark in 2005 had party web sites (except two minuscule New Zealand parties). Assessed on the basis of a quantification of the character of party web sites New Zealand Labour, Greens and ACT and Danish Christian Democrats, Conservatives, Liberals and Social Democrats find cyber-campaigning more important than the other parties. This indicates that there is a tendency towards more advanced application of ICT by the major parties than minor parties and hence support for the ‘business-as-usual’ hypothesis. However, there are minor parties among the high scorers as well thus also supporting the ‘levelling-of-the-playing-field’ hypothesis.
Since larger parties are financially better off it might be expected that they have a more sophisticated application of ICT. Most Danish parties do not vary in the share of campaign budgets spent on web sites in the election campaign. This shows, first, that since web sites vary in their characteristics it is not only the absolute or relative amount of money but how they are spent that matters. Second, since only around 1-1.5 percent of campaign budgets are spent on web sites, Danish parties in general do not find web sites useful for electioneering purposes. Since New Zealand parties differ more markedly in how sophisticated their web sites are, it would be expected that these parties vary more in money spent on ICT.

Furthermore, parties are not consistently advertising their web sites in their offline campaign material which indicates that their online and offline campaigns are not integrated. The extent to which parties find their online presence a useful electioneering tool must be rather limited. Cyber-campaigning is not in general an integrated part of party campaigning as such. Without this integration cyber-campaigning is making only limited impact on the overall character of election campaigns. Cyber-campaigning has not replaced traditional campaigning. To some parties, ICT supplements the ‘traditional’ campaign. However, to other parties cyber-campaigning is only haphazardly applied. In sum, parties are applying ICT when electioneering but the importance of cyber-campaigning is still limited in these two cases.

The analyses show how parties apply and integrate ICT in their campaigning. However, why parties apply and integrate these technologies in their campaigning needs further examination. The above-mentioned hypotheses on the ‘levelling-of-the-playing-field’ and ‘business-as-usual’ point to resources such as the size of parliamentarian representation and money. But these analyses point towards other explanations as well such as whether parties think that their potential voters are
online, whether there are individuals within the party familiar with ICT, and whether the party culture facilitates innovation in general and more specifically participation encouragement, information provision and resource mobilization. Nevertheless, a more comprehensive analysis is needed for firmer conclusions.

In addition, at the end of the day what matters to parties are votes; these are the means by which parties pursue their policy objectives and acquire governmental offices. Even though some research has shown how cyber-campaigning may matter to turnout and electoral results, this topic is not exhausted. Parties’ application of ICT allows for new ways of acquiring information, donating resources and political activism; i.e. electioneering. The impact on voters, supporters and members remains to be seen. Furthermore, ICT focused upon have been web sites, emails and text messages but electorate databases, software and other web based technologies may also assist in parties’ campaigning efforts. Hence, in order to assess the effect within the electoral arena, more research must be done not only on the electoral effect but also on the internal organization and strategic choices of the campaign; the new technology may have a larger and more wide-ranging impact than assessed here.

In sum, both the character of cyber-campaigning and the extent to which parties integrate online and offline campaigning indicate that the importance of electioneering in cyberspace is still rather limited in the two smaller democracies Denmark and New Zealand. However, the full effect of this phenomenon remains to be seen and we here have a unique chance to see how the introduction of and increased application of a new medium have an impact on central political actors and institutions as well as the political systems as such.
References


Gibson, Rachel and Stephen Ward (1998) ‘The first Internet election? UK Political Parties and


Notes

1 Some of this research was carried out while visiting the Victoria University of Wellington in September-December 2005. Thanks go to the School of History, Philosophy, Political Science and International Relations at Victoria University of Wellington, in particular to Nigel Roberts and Paul Brooker, and to the Danish Research Council for Social and Business Studies for financial support towards the project. Thanks are also due to Robert Kosiara and Frederik Hjorth for thorough research assistance, and to Kasper M. Hansen for comments on a previous draft. This paper was presented at IPSA in Fukuoka, Japan, July 2006, in session RC06-1: Comparative Campaign Communication: Bringing Political Parties Back In. Please note that work on this paper was finished in 2006.


3 The New Zealand party web sites were analyzed online in the period 7-14 September 2005, whereas the Danish web sites were analyzed in the parliamentary library in May 2006.

4 The interviews with Danish web editors were conducted Spring 2005 by Kasper M. Hansen and Dorit Wahl-Brink, whereas the interviews with the New Zealand party secretaries, presidents, leaders and others were conducted in October-November 2005 by Karina Pedersen.

5 Thanks to Geoff Kemp, Auckland University, for organizing my access to a tape recording of the New Zealand opening and closing statements.

6 In New Zealand the four major morning papers were included in the analysis: Dominion Post, the Press, the New Zealand Herald and Otago Daily Times. In Denmark the three major papers, Jyllandsposten, Politiken and Berlingske Tidende, as well as the two tabloids, BT and Ekstra Bladet, were included in the analysis.

7 Besides this, Gibson et al. also include delivery aspects such as the design, accessibility and navigability (see e.g. Gibson et al. 2003a; Gibson & Ward 1998; Gibson et al. 2003b; Newell 2001). See also Norris’ distinction between the provision of comprehensive information and opportunities for interactive communication (2001: 149).

8 However, previously the Danish parties also offered opinion polls.

9 The Socialist Peoples’ Party was, together with their Norwegian sister party (and possibly others), offered Howard Dean’s system of mobilization. But it is too costly and they therefore chose to create their own system.

10 Danish elections are usually held three weeks after they have been called and are sometimes called at unexpected times; hence, the planning and execution of campaigns become very intense.

11 Parties are scored as follows: Information provision – party history, party structure, values/ideology, party policies, manifesto, media releases, speeches, people, candidate profiles, election statistics, event calendar, FAQ and archive (1 point for each). Participation encouragement has three dimensions: 1. Openness – email addresses of party leader, politicians/candidates and party headquarters (1 for each), 2. Feedback – general (1), general political (2), specific
feedback encouraged (3), and 3. Interactive – online Q&A (1), weblog with comments or discussion forum (3).

Resource mobilization has two dimensions: 1. Donations, and 2. Membership (both are scored 1 for encouragement, 2 for postal address listed, 3 for postal form available, and 4 for possible online). Delivery has three dimensions: 1. Glitz – sound, video, live streaming (1 for each), 2. Access – text only option, text only documents, foreign language translation and software for the blind/visually impaired (1 for each), and 3. Navigability – navigation tips, search engine, fixed menu on lower pages, site map (1 for each).

xviii Due to disinterest in disclosing information on party financing on part of the parties it is not possible to conclude on the New Zealand case. Also, I still miss data on the Danish Social Liberals, Christian Democrats, Centre Democrats and Minority Party.

xix Interviews with party web editors.

xv Based on campaign budgets as published in the newspaper article ’Valgkamp: Det dyreste valg nogensinde’ in Berlingske Tidende, October 5th 2004.