



Political Parties in the Digital Age: A Comparative Review of Digital Technology in Campaigns Around the World

Edited by Jan Surotchak and Geoffrey Macdonald

Source: IRI



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- Ensure respect for the application of impartial legal frameworks and compliance by political actors.

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INTRODUCTION

Parties, Technology and the Changing Nature of Political Campaigns

Jan Surotchak and Geoffrey Macdonald

In most Western democracies, political parties increasingly use digital technology during campaigns. From mobilizing voters to organizing volunteers, new technologies have revolutionized election campaigns. Among these technologies are smartphones, tablets and internet platforms and applications (“apps”), such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Periscope and others. Mass mailings, lawn signs and television and radio advertisements are no longer enough to win an election. A campaign’s digital strategy is often just as important for victory, if not more so. A strategist from Barack Obama’s 2012 U.S. presidential campaign wrote recently, “The internet and social media have fundamentally changed how campaigns strategize and communicate with their constituents.”¹

Recent elections in the United States exemplify this trend. Obama’s 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns were lauded for their digital savvy, while his opponents were derided for failing to grasp new approaches. Donald Trump has utilized social media extensively, particularly Twitter, both as a campaigner and as president.² The internet also has emerged as a key battleground for political competition in many other Western countries, including Germany, the United Kingdom and Canada, where digital platforms are becoming vital to campaign strategy.

It is less clear how digital technology has affected political campaigns in the developing world, where many countries lack open political environments and advanced digital infrastructure. In repressive political systems, the government can restrict opposition parties’ access to digital tools. In less developed countries, which often have low internet penetration and high levels of illiteracy, digital digital campaigns are often not feasible or effective.

¹ James, Dominique. “How Social Media Is Changing Political Campaigns.” *Global Risk Insights*, 11 Mar. 2016, globalriskinsights.com/2016/03/how-social-media-is-changing-political-campaigns/.

² This was not without controversy. During the 2016 election, the Donald Trump campaign hired a political consulting firm called Cambridge Analytica, which acquired information on up to 87 million Facebook users that it then used in an effort to influence voting behavior. This data usage violated Facebook policy. News of this sparked multiple federal and state investigations into Facebook and Cambridge Analytica. See Kang, Cecilia, and Sheera Frankel. “Facebook Says Cambridge Analytica Harvested Data of Up to 87 Million Users.” *The New York Times*, 4 Apr. 2018, nytimes.com/2018/04/04/technology/mark-zuckerberg-testify-congress.html.

Few studies have examined how parties use technology in diverse political and technological settings. This volume attempts to fill that gap through case studies from Germany, Tunisia, Ukraine, Venezuela, India and Tanzania. Each chapter investigates how, why and to what extent political parties use digital technology to pursue campaign goals, taking into account the impact of differing access to technology and varying political contexts.

This study makes an important contribution to the theoretical and empirical understanding of political-party behavior and to policy formulation. The use and effectiveness of digital technology during political campaigns is a new and understudied topic, particularly in the developing world. This comparative, cross-national study, which spans developed and developing contexts, fills an important knowledge gap. Democracy-assistance providers, such as the United Nations, the European Union, foreign development agencies and international nongovernmental organizations, focus on building the capacity and effectiveness of political parties in new and struggling democracies. As digital infrastructure expands in more parts of the globe, the use and importance of digital technology in political campaigns will grow.

This study's focus on how and why parties do or do not use digital tools in challenging environments illuminates both the impediments facing parties and the successful tactics available to them. These lessons learned can be used to inform new programs to enhance parties' digital sophistication. However, while digital technology will almost certainly profoundly reshape how parties campaign and govern, it remains unclear whether these tools will improve or undermine the quality of democratic performance overall.

The State of the Literature: Political Parties and Digital Technology

The existing academic and policy literature on political parties' use of digital technology tends to revolve around three core theories, which progressed sequentially: equalization, normalization and hybridization. Early equalization perspectives focused on the democratizing potential of the internet and emphasized the capacity of digital technology to undermine traditional political institutions, including parties, and replace them with new forms of participation. In response, empirical studies of the first wave of digital campaigns tended to find that digital technology reinforced existing institutions and inequalities, a perspective that became known as the normalization hypothesis. Most recently, with the rise of social media and other Web 2.0 technologies, the literature has converged on the hybridization framework. While parties have retained traditional forms of organization and membership, they have adopted digital technology in ways that allow new forms of participation at varying levels of engagement.

Within these three broad frameworks, the literature provides little systematic insight into how, when or why parties adapt to particular technological innovations. There are three main reasons for this gap in the literature. First, theoretical arguments about how digital technology would affect political parties, especially early optimistic equalization accounts, are mostly speculative and untested. Second, while the body of empirical work on parties' use of digital technology is large and growing, it has tended to focus on single case studies as opposed to cross-national comparisons. Third, empirical studies have been geographically limited, restricted primarily to the global North — countries with both high levels of technology and well-developed party systems. These limitations have impeded the development of general arguments about the circumstances under which emerging digital technologies undermine, reinforce or change political parties.

Equalization: The Internet Revolution

Studies on the decline of political parties in developed democracies demonstrate the beginnings of this process predate the digital age.³ However, with the emergence of the internet in the 1990s, an early wave of digital optimists emphasized the democratizing potential of this new technology. They argued that the easy availability of information, potential for instantaneous communication, and reduced barriers to entry and organization would undermine traditional, hierarchically organized political institutions.⁴ Applied to political parties, this equalization hypothesis implied that emerging digital technology would empower weaker parties at the expense of stronger ones, or undermine parties in favor of less centralized, more horizontal, less mediated movements and organizations.



³ See, for example, Katz, Richard, and Peter Mair. "Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy." *Party Politics*, vol. 1, no. 1, Jan. 1995, pp. 5-28, doi:10.1177/1354068895001001001; Dalton, Russell J., and Martin P. Wattenberg. *Parties without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Oxford University Press, 2000; Whiteley, Paul F. "Is the Party Over? The Decline of Party Activism and Membership across the Democratic World." *Party Politics*, vol. 17, no. 1, Jan. 2011, pp. 21-44, doi:10.1177/1354068810365505; Van Biezen, Ingrid, et al. "Going, Going, ... Gone? The Decline of Party Membership in Contemporary Europe." *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 51, no. 1, Jan. 2012, pp. 24-56, doi:10.1111/j.1475-6765.2011.01995.

⁴ See, for example, Rheingold, Howard. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. MIT Press, 2000, mitpress.mit.edu/books/virtual-community-revised-edition; Negroponte, Nicholas. *Being Digital*. Vintage Books, 1996; Corrado, Anthony, and Charles M. Firestone. *Elections in Cyberspace: Toward a New Era in American Politics*. Aspen Institute, 1996; Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society*. 1st ed. Wiley-Blackwell, 1996, doi:10.1002/9781444319514; Dahlberg, L. "The Internet and Democratic Discourse: Exploring the Prospects of Online Deliberative Forums Extending the Public Sphere." *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2001, pp. 615-33; all quoted in Rachel K. Gibson and Ian McAllister. "Normalising or Equalising Party Competition? Assessing the Impact of the Web on Election Campaigning." *Political Studies*, vol. 63, no. 3, Aug. 2015, p. 529, doi:10.1111/1467-9248.12107.

Normalization: “Politics as Usual”

This initial optimism was followed by a first wave of political campaigns drawing on emerging digital technology that seemed to demonstrate the opposite trend. Political scientists Michael Margolis and David Resnick argued the emergence of the internet reflected “politics as usual” during campaigns: Established parties won.⁵ Rather than empowering previously marginalized parties or groups, the internet served as a new arena for contestation among established parties, candidates and interest groups.⁶ From this normalization perspective, powerful political parties with superior organization, resources and expertise are best positioned to capture any competitive advantages from emerging digital technology.⁷ Furthermore, “politics as usual” in the digital age operate on the demand side: The people most likely to take advantage of new forms of engagement in digital media are partisans and activists already highly engaged in offline politics.⁸ In sum, the normalization hypothesis contends that rather than disrupting parties and politics, the emergence of digital technology has tended to reinforce existing hierarchies and power inequalities.

Hybridization: Parties Adapt

The rise of Web 2.0 technologies in the 2000s, including social media, created the opportunity for the emergence of a third way between the equalization and normalization perspectives. Tech-savvy insurgent campaigns in the United States — such as Howard Dean’s presidential campaign in 2004, Barack Obama’s presidential campaign in 2008 and the Tea Party movement’s in 2010 — led analysts of digital politics to theorize that political parties would persist and adapt to technological changes by incorporating new innovations in a way that allowed expanded participation at varying levels of engagement.⁹ That is, rather than replacing parties with new forms of organizations or movements, or just replicating “politics as usual,” parties would adapt to technological change primarily by reconfiguring avenues for participation without radically changing the centralized organization, infrastructure and resources necessary for traditional campaigning.



Source: IRI

⁵ Margolis, Michael, and David Resnick. *Politics as Usual: The Cyberspace “Revolution.”* Sage, 2000.

⁶ Ibid. For a review of this literature, see Gibson and McAllister. “Normalising or Equalising Party Competition? Assessing the Impact of the Web on Election Campaigning.” pp. 530-32.

⁷ Ibid.; Farrell, David M., et al., “Parties and Campaign Professionals in a Digital Age.” *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2001, pp. 11-30, doi:10.1177/108118001129172314; Lilleker, Darren G., and Nigel A. Jackson. “Elections 2.0: Comparing E-Campaigns in France, Germany, Great Britain and the United States.” *Das Internet Im Wahlkampf*. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2011, pp. 96-116, doi:10.1007/978-3-531-92853-1_3; Jungherr, Andreas. “Four Functions of Digital Tools in Election Campaigns.” *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2016, pp. 358-77, doi:10.1177/1940161216642597.

⁸ Norris, Pippa. “Preaching to the Converted?” *Party Politics*, vol. 9, no. 1, Jan. 2003, pp. 21-45, doi:10.1177/135406880391003.

⁹ Anstead, Nick, and Andrew Chadwick. “Parties, Election Campaigning, and the Internet — Toward a Comparative Institutional Approach.” *The Routledge Handbook of Internet Politics*, edited by Nick Anstead and Andrew Chadwick. Routledge, 2009, pp. 56-71, handbook-of-internet-politics.com/pdfs/Nick_Anstead_Andrew_Chadwick_Parties_Election_Campaigning_and_Internet.pdf; Gibson, Rachel K. “Party Change, Social Media and the Rise of ‘Citizen-Initiated’ Campaigning.” *Party Politics*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2015, pp. 183-97, doi:10.1177/1354068812472575; Agarwal, Sheetal D., et al. “Grassroots Organizing in the Digital Age: Considering Values and Technology in Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street.” *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2013, pp. 326-41, doi:10.1080/1369118X.2013.873068; Chadwick, Andrew. “Digital Network Repertoires and Organizational Hybridity.” *Political Communication*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2007, pp. 283-301, doi:10.1080/10584600701471666; Anstead and Chadwick. “Parties, Election Campaigning, and the Internet — Toward a Comparative Institutional Approach.” pp. 56-71; Gibson, Rachel K., et al. “Party Organizational Change and ICTs: The Growth of a Virtual Grassroots?” *New Media & Society*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2013, pp. 31-51, doi:10.1177/1461444812457329; Sorrow, Susan E. *Beyond Party Members: Changing Approaches to Partisan Mobilization*. Oxford University Press, 2015; Gibson and McAllister. “Normalising or Equalising Party Competition? Assessing the Impact of the Web on Election Campaigning.”; Gibson, Rachel, et al. “Friend or Foe? Digital Technologies and the Changing Nature of Party Membership.” *Political Communication*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2017, pp. 89-111, doi:10.1080/10584609.2016.1221011; Vaccari, Cristian, and Augusto Valeriani. “Party Campaigners or Citizen Campaigners? How Social Media Deepen and Broaden Party-Related Engagement.” *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, vol. 21, no. 3, July 2016, pp. 294-312, doi:10.1177/1940161216642152; Chadwick, Andrew, and Jennifer Stromer-Galley. “Digital Media, Power, and Democracy in Parties and Election Campaigns.” *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2016, pp. 283-93, doi:10.1177/1940161216646731.

The literature on political parties' use of digital technology has largely converged around this perspective, which might be termed a hybridization hypothesis.¹⁰ This perspective includes two broad approaches. The first focuses on organizational hybridization — that is, the various ways in which parties selectively integrate emerging technology for specific campaign functions (especially recruitment, targeting, mobilization and fundraising) with existing forms of organization and campaign activities.¹¹

The second argues that hybridization is cyclical; digital technology may undermine or reinforce existing parties according to the nature of the innovation.¹² For example, the emergence of the internet in the late 1990s tended to reinforce existing parties because the capacity to develop and operate centralized campaign websites was generally reserved for parties with an established infrastructure and resources.¹³ In contrast, Web 2.0 technologies in the middle and late 2000s lowered barriers to participation, forcing parties to reconsider traditional forms of membership.¹⁴ The emergence of big data and the development of enormous voter databases have facilitated the turn to microtargeting voters for persuasion or mobilization. This most recent innovation again favors established parties with the resources and scale to collect data and recruit the expertise necessary to analyze and apply it.¹⁵

Knowledge Gaps

The early debate on the effect of emerging digital technology on political parties centered on the equalization hypothesis and the normalization hypothesis. On one hand, equalizers expected digital technology to be democratizing, undermining centralized and hierarchical political institutions, including parties, in favor of decentralized, horizontal and unmediated forms of participation. On the other hand, normalizers illustrated how established parties, campaigns and interest groups were able to capture the gains from innovation and use them to reinforce their relative power. More recently, the literature has converged on a hybridization hypothesis, demonstrating how established political parties have drawn on emerging digital technology to respond to new demands for participation, while maintaining centralized control.

The existing literature suffers from three limitations. First, theoretical work on the effect of digital technology on political parties, especially from the more optimistic equalization perspective, has tended to be speculative. Early equalization arguments generally took the form of think pieces, generating hypotheses or predictions about how digital technology would disrupt established political institutions. Although some of those expectations were later disconfirmed in a general sense by the wave of normalization studies, there has been little effort to explicitly lay out specific predictions for later testing, either by the original authors or by the literature as a whole.

¹⁰ Chadwick. "Digital Network Repertoires and Organizational Hybridity."; Vaccari and Valeriani. "Party Campaigners or Citizen Campaigners? How Social Media Deepen and Broaden Party-Related Engagement."

¹¹ Chadwick. "Digital Network Repertoires and Organizational Hybridity."; Lilleker and Jackson. "Elections 2.0: Comparing E-Campaigns in France, Germany, Great Britain and the United States."; Gibson, et al. "Party Organizational Change and ICTs: The Growth of a Virtual Grassroots?"; Agarwal, et al. "Grassroots Organizing in the Digital Age: Considering Values and Technology in Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street."; Gibson, "Party Change, Social Media and the Rise of 'Citizen-Initiated' Campaigning."; Scarrow. *Beyond Party Members: Changing Approaches to Partisan Mobilization.*; Vaccari and Valeriani. "Party Campaigners or Citizen Campaigners? How Social Media Deepen and Broaden Party-Related Engagement."; Chadwick and Stromer-Galley. "Digital Media, Power, and Democracy in Parties and Election Campaigns."

¹² Gibson and McAllister. "Normalising or Equalising Party Competition? Assessing the Impact of the Web on Election Campaigning."

¹³ Ibid.; Lilleker, Darren G., et al. "Informing, Engaging, Mobilizing or Interacting: Searching for a European Model of Web Campaigning." *European Journal of Communication*, vol. 26, no. 3, Sept. 2011, pp. 195-213, doi:10.1177/0267323111416182.

¹⁴ Gibson and McAllister. "Normalising or Equalising Party Competition? Assessing the Impact of the Web on Election Campaigning."

¹⁵ Chadwick and Stromer-Galley. "Digital Media, Power, and Democracy in Parties and Election Campaigns." pp. 284-285.

Furthermore, despite the recent empirical turn in work on digital politics, arguments about the transformative potential of digital technology are still largely hypothetical. Predictions about emerging digital technology are rarely explicitly tested against data. Of course, due to the nature of technological development, the authors of any analysis of political parties' adaptation to emerging digital technology will be forced to rely on some speculation. As several analysts have noted, there is no clear consensus on the role of television in politics some 60 years after the widespread adoption of that technology.¹⁶

Second, empirical studies have tended to focus on single case studies.¹⁷ Political parties' and campaigns' uses of emerging digital technology in developed democracies, especially the United States, have provided fertile ground for a large and developing body of empirical work. However, this work has tended to focus on single cases, limiting the extent to which the conclusions might be applied to others. These studies focus on a single country, single party or movement within a country or particular technological innovation, and analyze qualitative and/or quantitative data to demonstrate the effect of the innovation in question on a party's campaign activities.¹⁸ While this approach helps illustrate how parties adapt to particular innovations under specific circumstances, the conclusions tend not to be generalizable to other circumstances.¹⁹

Third, empirical studies to date have been geographically limited. Both single case studies and comparative studies are generally restricted to the global North, including the United States and Canada, Western and Northern European countries, Japan, New Zealand and Australia. These countries are often compared because of what they have in common: high levels of technological development and strong party systems.²⁰ Such comparative studies are likely to generate conclusions that might apply to similar countries, but it is unclear whether those conclusions would apply in cases with lower technological capacity and/or developing party systems. As new digital technologies are applied in new development contexts, it is increasingly important to arrive at generalizable conclusions about how these innovations might affect newly developing political parties and party systems.

¹⁶ Ward, Stephen, and Thierry Vedel. "Introduction: The Potential of the Internet Revisited." *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. 59, no. 2, 2006, pp. 210-25, hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01475868/. Quoted in Vaccari, Cristian. *Digital Politics in Western Democracies: A Comparative Study*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013, pp. 50.

¹⁷ Important exceptions include Ibid.; Kluver, Randolph, et al., editors. *The Internet and National Elections: A Comparative Study of Web Campaigning*. Routledge, 2007; Lachapelle, Guy, and Philippe J. Maarek. *Political Parties in the Digital Age: The Impact of New Technologies in Politics*. De Gruyter, 2015; Scarrow. *Beyond Party Members: Changing Approaches to Partisan Mobilization*. However, as noted below, cross-national comparative work tends to be limited to the industrialized democracies.

¹⁸ On single countries, see Kanungo, Neena Talwar. "India's Digital Poll Battle: Political Parties and Social Media in the 16th Lok Sabha Elections." *Studies in Indian Politics*, vol. 3, no. 2, Dec. 2015, pp. 212-28, doi:10.1177/2321023015601743; Gibson and McAllister. "Normalising or Equalising Party Competition? Assessing the Impact of the Web on Election Campaigning."; Neyazi, Tabereh Ahmed, et al. "Campaigns, Digital Media, and Mobilization in India." *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, vol. 21, no. 3, July 2016, pp. 398-416, doi:10.1177/1940161216645336. On single parties, see Chadwick. "Digital Network Repertoires and Organizational Hybridity."; Casero-Ripollés, Andreu, et al., "Old and New Media Logics in an Electoral Campaign: The Case of Podemos and the Two-Way Street Mediatization of Politics." *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2016, pp. 378-97, doi:10.1177/1940161216645340. On campaign websites, see Lilleker, et al. "Informing, Engaging, Mobilizing or Interacting: Searching for a European Model of Web Campaigning." For a comparison of blog content to official party sources, see Gibson, et al., "Party Organizational Change and ICTs: The Growth of a Virtual Grassroots?" On voting-advice applications, see Alvarez, R. Michael, et al., "Party Preferences in the Digital Age: The Impact of Voting Advice Applications." *Party Politics*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2014, pp. 227-36, doi:10.1177/1354068813519960.

¹⁹ See Anstead and Chadwick. "Parties, Election Campaigning, and the Internet — Toward a Comparative Institutional Approach." A few studies conduct cross-case comparisons, often using the United States as a reference point. However, as Vaccari points out in *Digital Politics in Western Democracies*, using the United States as a comparison case is problematic because the United States is exceptional both in its level of technological development and in the nature of its political parties. Therefore, comparisons of single cases to the United States may be similarly limited in their ability to draw generalizable conclusions.

²⁰ See, for example, Vaccari. *Digital Politics in Western Democracies: A Comparative Study*; Anstead and Chadwick. "Parties, Election Campaigning, and the Internet — Toward a Comparative Institutional Approach."; Randolph, et al. *The Internet and National Elections: A Comparative Study of Web Campaigning*; Lachapelle and Maarek. *Political Parties in the Digital Age: The Impact of New Technologies in Politics*; Scarrow. *Beyond Party Members: Changing Approaches to Partisan Mobilization*.

Research Design and Methodology

This study looks at how political parties around the world use digital technology during campaigns through a structured, focused comparison of six countries with varying levels of information and communications technology (ICT) capacity and democratic quality. In order to ensure comparative insight across cases, each case study is structured around a common theoretical framework of party activity. Each case study includes in-depth interviews with party strategists, elected officials, journalists and other experts.²¹

HISTORICAL CASE STUDIES: AN ANALYTICAL NOTE.

Importantly, each chapter focuses on a retrospective case study of an election cycle in each country. The bulk of the research was conducted in 2017, and each case study was revised in late 2019 and early 2020 to include updates based on more recent electoral cycles. The rapid rate of technological development means that ICT availability and party capacity to employ it may have increased dramatically between the period of research and when practitioners employ this guide. The Ukraine case study is a clear example. While ICT use by political parties in the 2014 election cycle was relatively limited, it became a central feature of Volodymyr Zelensky's successful campaign for president in 2019. With that in mind, practitioners should compare and contrast their context to the election cycles detailed in the case studies, not necessarily the state of the countries today.

Case Selection

This study sought a cross-section of countries that represented variation along key factors that might impact technology during campaigns. This study theorizes that a political party's use of digital technology is constrained by two primary factors: regime type and ICT infrastructure, particularly domestic internet access via smartphones, computers or other electronic devices. These two factors constitute a country's techno-political environment. Parties in open democracies with strong ICT infrastructure have few, if any, restrictions on their ability to use technology to organize, target or mobilize voters. In contrast, parties that operate in partially democratic societies or in countries where ICT is weak often face significant — though not insurmountable — barriers to using digital technology.

This cross-national study reflects a range of political and technological environments in which political parties operate. In order to develop proxies for democratic quality and ICT infrastructure, existing datasets were consulted. For democratic quality, this study used the 2016 data from the Center for Systemic Peace's Polity IV index.²² Polity rates countries on a 21-point scale (-10 to 10) of democratic quality and uses the scores to code each as either a "democracy," "anocracy" (semi-democratic) or "autocracy" (nondemocratic). This study includes only countries coded as either democracies or anocracies (excluding autocracies) because it is focused on party behavior within at least minimally open political spaces.

²¹ The only exception was the research on Venezuela, which was conducted outside the country because of security concerns. Skype and phone interviews were used instead of in-person interviews.

²² "Polity IV, 2016 Annual Data." *Center for Systemic Peace*, systemicpeace.org/polityproject.html.

For ICT infrastructure, the study used World Bank 2016 data on internet users.²³ The World Bank defines internet users as “individuals who have used the internet (from any location) in the last three months. Internet can be used via a computer, mobile phone, personal digital assistant, games machine, digital TV, etc.” This broad definition conveniently includes the two primary mechanisms a party would use to engage voters: the phone and the computer. The top one-third of countries are coded “high tech,” the middle third “middle tech” and the bottom third “low tech.” Each of those categories is represented in the case studies selected.

Combining these two variables creates a six-part typology of techno-political environments: high-tech democracy, high-tech partial democracy, middle-tech democracy, middle-tech partial democracy, low-tech democracy and low-tech partial democracy. High-tech partial democracies are extremely rare. Only Russia fell into this category, according to this study’s analysis of the data. Most countries in the top one-third of internet users are either fully democratic or fully autocratic, such as Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Kazakhstan. This study therefore did not include a high-tech partial-democracy category. Instead, in addition to the middle-tech democracy, this study includes a middle-tech partial-democracy category.

This volume includes six case studies: Germany (high-tech democracy), Tunisia (middle-tech democracy), Ukraine and Venezuela (middle-tech partial democracies), India (low-tech democracy) and Tanzania (low-tech partial democracy). These country categorizations are limited to 2016, the year these two datasets were published. For some of the countries selected, the regime type or ICT capacity has changed since 2016. For example, Venezuela has undergone a rapid decline in political freedom and is no longer considered democratic, according to many analysts.²⁴ However, any such shift does not impact the analysis in the chapters, which examine elections between 2014 and 2017.

TABLE I. SIX-PART TYPOLOGY OF REGIME TYPE AND INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT) INFRASTRUCTURE

<p>High-tech democracy</p> <p>(Polity IV democracy and first tertile of internet users as a percentage of population)</p> <p><i>Germany</i></p>	<p>Middle-tech democracy</p> <p>(Polity IV democracy and second tertile of internet users as a percentage of population)</p> <p><i>Tunisia</i></p>	<p>Low-tech democracy</p> <p>(Polity IV democracy and third tertile of internet users as a percentage of population)</p> <p><i>India</i></p>
<p>High-tech partial democracy</p> <p>(Polity IV anocracy and first tertile of internet users as a percentage of population)</p> <p><i>No cases in this report</i></p>	<p>Middle-tech partial democracy</p> <p>(Polity IV anocracy and second tertile of internet users as a percentage of population)</p> <p><i>Ukraine and Venezuela</i></p>	<p>Low-tech partial democracy</p> <p>(Polity IV anocracy and third tertile of internet users as a percentage of population)</p> <p><i>Tanzania</i></p>

²³ “Individuals Using the Internet (% of Population).” *The World Bank*, 2016, data.worldbank.org/.

²⁴ For example, Freedom House rated Venezuela as “not free” in its 2018 report. “2018 Freedom in the World.” *Freedom House*, <https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/FreedomintheWorld2018COMPLETEBOOK.pdf>.

Theoretical Framework

A uniform theoretical framework guided the research in each case study. The framework outlines six primary goals for political parties, during both campaign and non-campaign periods, for which digital technology could be important:

- **Mobilizing Citizens:** Mobilize citizens to attend rallies and protests, and to vote.
- **Promoting Party Ideas:** Promote the policy platform and ideas to the public.
- **Interacting with Citizens:** Interact directly with voters to solicit feedback and ideas.
- **Fundraising for Party Activities:** Raise money to support the party, campaign and candidates.
- **Building Party Infrastructure:** Build the party apparatus to recruit members, volunteers and candidates.
- **Internal Communication:** Communicate internally between leadership, branches, activists and general membership.

Methodology

Each case study primarily uses qualitative methods, specifically semi-structured elite interviews and desk research conducted during the summer and fall of 2017.²⁵ Each researcher selected at least two political parties (or a coalition of several parties) to study during the most recent national election cycle. When applying the theoretical framework, each researcher explored the following questions:

- How has the party used digital technology to pursue this goal?
- How has the country's techno-political environment impacted the party's ability to use digital technology?
- How does the party plan to use digital technology during future campaigns?

To answer these questions, key informants were identified for each activity in the theoretical framework, including party strategists, elected officials, consultants, journalists and academics. Interviews and desk research often were conducted in the local language because each primary researcher was native to or spoke the local language of the country under investigation.

²⁵ Quotes from interviews are cited with varying degrees of specificity in the chapters, depending on the sensitivity of the context. The Tanzania case study partially departs from this approach. The researcher also implemented a survey with party representatives on digital-technology use during campaigns. This data supplements the qualitative interviews in the chapter.

Expanding Existing Literature

This project is designed to build on existing studies and to address deficiencies in the current literature on digital tools in political campaigns. It does so in three ways. First, it uses a structured, focused comparison of six countries chosen with a defined set of selection criteria and examined with a uniform theoretical framework. Unlike isolated case studies, this comparative study can produce generalized conclusions across cases that have relevance to other countries under similar conditions.

Second, this study expands the breadth of cases beyond Europe and the United States and includes countries from Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Eurasia and Latin America. It contributes to the understanding of how digital tools are used by parties in different technological and political settings.

Third, this study focuses on the campaign tasks for which digital tools can be used, rather than on the specific tools themselves. If a party in a particular country is not using new technology, it can be compared to parties in other countries to understand what about the techno-political context or actors explains this outcome. In sum, this rigorous approach to studying this topic will advance understanding of digital tools considerably beyond the current academic and policy literature.

Chapter Overview

This volume proceeds with six case studies that are structured around the theoretical framework of party goals and digital technology outlined above.

Germany: High-Tech Democracy

The 2017 German federal elections saw the highest adoption and use of digital technologies in the country for political purposes to date. Parties took full advantage of digital technology and thus were able to make themselves available to voters around the clock by: using chatbots; effectively communicating internally by creating comprehensive databases; and gamifying canvassing to encourage volunteers to produce higher turnouts. Parties adopted best practices from campaigns abroad and modified them to fit within the context of German society. Parties of all sizes used digital technology to connect with voters and deliver their messages. This allowed smaller parties to create campaigns that rivaled the largest parties' efforts. Despite these advances, digital technology was not always the best method. For fundraising, parties often preferred direct-mail campaigns. Overall, the major focus of German political parties in the 2017 election was making access easier for voters.

Tunisia: Middle-Tech Democracy

In Tunisia's nascent democratic system, digital media had a major impact on the 2014 parliamentary and presidential elections. In a race to build party support, Tunisia's two major political parties — the Islamist Ennahdha Movement (Renaissance Movement) and the secular Nidaa Tounes (Tunisia's Call) — along with other smaller parties, embraced new techniques to deliver their respective messages, reach new voters and retain their established supporters. The Ennahdha Movement built its 2014 digital strategy on outreach, using phone calls, text messages, Facebook pages and targeted digital ads to disseminate its party platform. Nidaa Tounes' digital strategy employed technology to strengthen internal communication within the party.

Ukraine: Middle-Tech Partial Democracy

During the 2014 election cycle, political parties in Ukraine generally preferred traditional forms of campaigning to digital tactics. During and after the 2014 parliamentary election campaign, use of digital technologies focused mostly on political advertising and voter mobilization. Overall, parties commonly employed online tools to promote their agendas, disseminate messages on social media and magnify the role of traditional mass media. During election campaigns, they advertised themselves and their policies with populist slogans or provocative messages, both online and in traditional media. The parties' ultimate goals with digital tools were generally voter mobilization on Election Day or for protests and targeting political opponents. Ukrainian parties' use of digital technology to fundraise or to build party infrastructure was limited. The internet was generally free of censorship and heavily used by all parties, but it was not fully utilized.

Venezuela: Middle-Tech Partial Democracy

Despite the economic, social and political crisis that has afflicted Venezuela in recent years, the parliamentary elections held in December 2015 became an example of the democratic potential of new technology. With public and private media censored, hundreds of journalists persecuted and limited communication space available for opposition parties, the internet, social media and new applications created by opposition parties became the primary communication channels with the electorate and between candidates, party staff and volunteers.

Social media — such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and the more traditional SMS — were all essential campaign tools, as were new digital platforms developed by the opposition parties, such as the System of Organization and Electoral Registration (SORE) and FARO (applications and databases that allowed the parties to organize internal and external communications).²⁶ Digital technology propelled the coalition of nongovernment parties to victory, winning two-thirds of the National Assembly for the first time since Hugo Chávez came to power in 1999. The 2015 parliamentary elections are seen as a milestone in Venezuelan politics, with the digital environment presenting new ways for the opposition to campaign effectively. These elections turned the Venezuelan opposition into a pioneer in the use of apps, the internet and social media in a repressive political system.

²⁶ SMS stands for short-message service.

India: Low-Tech Democracy

The 2014 elections for the Indian parliament are widely referred to as India's first "social media elections."²⁷ With internet penetration growing and smartphones becoming more popular, political parties latched onto the immense possibilities in political communication offered by these digital tools. Some parties, including the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party or BJP) and the Aam Aadmi Party (Common Man's Party or AAP), got off the block quickly, while others, such as the Indian National Congress (INC or Congress), took longer to recognize the potential of the digital technology and consequently missed out on its political benefits in 2014.

One of the most important goals achieved with digital tools involved recruiting new party members. Parties such as the BJP and AAP used mobile phones and tools such as WhatsApp to fill the party ranks with new members. In an election where "muscle men" were "replaced ... by the machine men," SMS was used as a tool to attract large numbers of volunteers.²⁸ The BJP used digital technologies not only to recruit new members, but also to build a network of digital workers who used the technologies to target efforts in every constituency, down to the last polling booth. The Congress Party's limited social media efforts were top-down communications, and party leaders have admitted in hindsight to not utilizing digital technology effectively.

Tanzania: Low-Tech Partial Democracy

Use of social media in party activities has steadily increased in Tanzania. The benefits of social media have made it the preferred media in conducting party activities, particularly during elections. Individual rights of expression — including through social media — enshrined in Tanzania's constitution have been seriously limited by the Cybercrimes Act of 2015, which was introduced shortly before the 2015 general elections. Uncertainties about enforcement of the act and its specific requirements and limitations have led to high-profile arrests and curtailment of social media use by political parties. In spite of the potential legal repercussions, political parties continued to use social media in the 2015 general elections. Social media were most extensively used in political mobilization, spreading party ideology, intra-party communication and obtaining feedback from party members, voters and the general public. There is evidence that social media have transformed previously existing party structures, rendering them into more flat, inclusive, real-time and interactive forums.

Conclusion

The concluding chapter compares the six case studies, drawing insights into how and why parties use digital tools during campaigns and the positive and negative implications of this new trend for democratic functions.

²⁷ Ali, Idrees. "Social Media Played a Big Role in India's Election." *Voice of America*, 6 June 2014, voanews.com/a/social-media-emerges-as-a-key-tool-in-indias-election/1931238.html.

²⁸ Sardesai, Rajdeep. 2014: *The Elections That Changed India*. Penguin Random House, 2014.



Source: IRI

CHAPTER I

GERMANY

Juri Schnöller

Introduction

The 2017 elections in Germany were marked by an unprecedented use of digital technology.²⁹ Political parties adopted best practices from campaigns abroad and modified them to fit within the context of German society. While traditional analog methods of outreach — such as the beloved billboard campaign and direct mail — remained prominent, digital technologies allowed parties big and small to engage in interactive and personalized communication with voters. Digital technology also made analog voter outreach, such as door-to-door (D2D) canvassing, more effective.

Though German political parties adopted digital technologies, both to complement analog campaign efforts and in innovative fashions, they also exercised restraint and were cautious about moving too quickly with certain available features. This was the result of both legal and normative restraints on parties.

This chapter provides a case study of the use of digital technology during Germany's 2017 federal election, focusing on the country's six top parties. It summarizes the techno-political environment in Germany, provides an overview of German politics in the run-up to the 2017 federal election, discusses the ways in which the parties used technology and outlines potential developments for use of digital technology in future elections. This case study emphasizes the roles played by citizen norms, legal frameworks and interparty cooperation in limiting the pernicious effects of technology on democratic campaigns. It also highlights the issue of insurgent parties willing to deploy negative messaging on these new platforms.

The Techno-Political Environment

For the purposes of this book, Germany is classified as a high-tech democracy.³⁰ It was classified as a democracy by Polity IV, and more than 84 percent of citizens used the internet in 2017.³¹ Restrictions on gathering certain personal information, a 2017 regulation that imposes a fine on social media platforms for posting content deemed illegal, and citizen norms surrounding the collection and use of personal information present some of the only restrictions on the use of digital technology by political parties.³²

²⁹ The research and writing for this chapter were completed during the summer and fall of 2017.

³⁰ "Digital Economy and Society Statistics — Households and Individuals." *Eurostat Statistics Explained*, June 2018, ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Digital_economy_and_society_statistics_-_households_and_individuals.

³¹ "Individuals Using the Internet (% of Population) for Germany." *World Bank*, 2017, databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=IT.NET.USER.ZS&country=.

³² "Freedom on the Net 2017 — Germany Country Profile." Freedom House, 2017; "Digital Economy and Society Statistics — Households and Individuals."

Overview of Party Politics

Germany's top six political parties are the Christian Democratic Union and its sister party the Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Free Democratic Party (FDP), the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the Greens and Die Linke.³³ The incumbent CDU/CSU campaigned on a pro-Europe liberal-conservative program; the allied SDP and the FDP campaigned on a similarly pro-Europe center-left platform and liberal platform, respectively. The Euro-skeptic AfD campaigned on a far-right platform. The Greens campaigned on a pro-environment, social-justice platform, and Die Linke campaigned on a social-justice and poverty-reduction program.

Election 2017: The Campaign and Outcome

As suggested above, two competing messages were presented during the 2017 German federal election cycle. On one side, the governing CDU/CSU argued that Germany needed more of the stability and prosperity the country had experienced under its rule. On the other hand, Euro-skeptic parties like the AfD suggested that the country needed to radically alter its course. Parties ideologically and politically aligned with the CDU/CSU in the past took aim at the incumbent party, seeking to gain a plurality of seats.

On Election Day, September 24, 2017, Germans voted all six major parties into the *Bundestag*. Though the CDU and CSU were widely regarded as underperforming, the parties won the lion's share of votes and led the subsequent talks to form a coalition. Many observers saw the AfD as the real winner of the elections, as it received enough votes to enter the *Bundestag* for the first time.

Digital Technology Use

The 2017 general election was the first in Germany in which a substantial part of the parties' budgets went to digital advertising campaigns for specific purposes such as fundraising or get-out-the-vote efforts. The parties engaged in different styles of advertising; some used digital technology to promote in-person interactions, whereas others saw the internet as a forum in and of itself. All parties, however, used digital technology to strengthen core party functions.



Mobilizing Citizens

Perhaps the most revolutionary digital advancement of the 2017 German federal election campaign was the implementation of country-wide canvassing apps to assist in robust D2D efforts. This use demonstrates how digital tools can complement more traditional forms of voter mobilization or make them more effective. The use of technology to this end was shaped by German privacy laws. Parties must abide by the “four-household” rule, meaning that the smallest allowable level of aggregation of data collected is from four households (as opposed to an individual or a single household) and it is illegal to collect personal information from voters without consent. Because of this restriction, voter names and addresses were never recorded in

³³ SPD stands for *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (Social Democratic Party of Germany) and AfD stands for *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany). “Jahresbericht 2016.” *Bundesnetzagentur*, Federal Republic of Germany, 5 May 2017, [bundesnetzagentur.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Allgemeines/Bundesnetzagentur/Publikationen/Berichte/2017/JB2016.html](https://www.bundesnetzagentur.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Allgemeines/Bundesnetzagentur/Publikationen/Berichte/2017/JB2016.html); “Individuals Using the Internet (% of Population) 2017.” *World Bank*, 2017, data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS; “Polity IV Annual Time Series, 1800-2017.” *Center for Systemic Peace*, systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html.

the app. Mario Voigt, the CDU's adviser for mobilization, said, "There is no big data campaign in Germany, just a well-organized direct-appeal campaign."³⁴

TRADEOFFS OF EFFECTIVENESS AND SOCIAL COSTS

The Connect17 program evolved into the behemoth program that drove the CDU's 2017 federal election mobilization strategy, led by the party's youth wing, the Junge Union. Germany has a decentralized federal election process, so a centralized app coordinated from the CDU headquarters in Berlin presented a unique opportunity to synchronize efforts and ensure that regional resources were implemented most efficiently. Using a mobile phone or tablet, a volunteer canvasser could log in and receive data-based information about where to knock on doors, while the headquarters could receive real-time feedback on the quality of interactions and potential policy concerns. With permission from the voter, an email address to sign up for CDU updates could also be added to the app. Gamification of the canvassing process increased competitiveness among volunteers and encouraged them to frequently engage with the app. At the close of the campaign, the Connect17 app had been downloaded more than 10,000 times and was active in 204 constituencies.³⁵

Despite the cautious use of this technology, public complaints about the Connect17 app regarding perceived illegal data collection led to multiple audits from data-privacy agencies across Germany. Ahead of its watershed debut in Saarland, the app was audited by the state, which subsequently requested adjustments so the app would fully comply with German privacy laws. Although parties would not openly divulge that they purchased data from third-party sources, it is known that the CDU used data from the German postal service to aid in its Connect17 operation.³⁶ That information was combined with internal data to predict that a certain geographic area would vote for the CDU/CSU. The CDU led the way in using digital technology to complement D2D canvassing with its massive Connect17 effort.

Other parties also used digital technology to improve their D2D campaigning, with varying degrees of success. Both the SPD and the Greens used their own digital systems to make canvassing more efficient and easier for volunteers. Though these efforts were a boon to party objectives, training older volunteers and managing suspicions about party headquarters overreaching their authority limited the degree of effectiveness. The SPD's experience with its app, *Tür zu Tür* (Door to Door), which initially lacked gamification features and which conflicted with norms about regional party powerbrokers knowing the landscape of voters better than Berlin, highlights that the design of digital campaign technology must not only be designed to engage voters, but also to galvanize volunteers and be cohesive with the party's norms.

While the three aforementioned parties used digital technology to mobilize in-person contact with voters, the AfD leveraged technology to produce online forums and platforms for mobilization. Party strategists relied heavily on social media, seeing it as a tool that enabled them to communicate unfiltered messages to supporters and potential voters.

³⁴ Essif, Amien. "CDU, SPD and Greens Use Big Data to Target Bundestag Voters." *Deutsche Welle*, 26 Aug. 2017, www.dw.com/en/cdu-spd-and-greens-use-big-data-to-target-bundestag-voters/a-40244410.

³⁵ Telephone interview with the author, 1 Dec. 2017.

³⁶ Keller, Gabriela and Kai Schlieter. "Microtargeting Im Bundestagswahlkampf Nah Am Wähler Und Anfällig Für Manipulation." *Berliner Zeitung*, 9 Aug. 2017, www.berliner-zeitung.de/politik/bundestagswahl/microtargeting-im-bundestagswahlkampf-nah-am-waehler-und-anfaellig-fuer-manipulation-28137412.



Promoting Party Ideas

Though all parties used similar tools and platforms during the 2017 elections, parties varied in the tone that they struck in their digital communications. Whereas Angela Merkel's popularity allowed the CDU to make authentic appeals (including through her personal social media), whereas other parties such as the FDP took a more youthful approach and the AfD often took an outright confrontational tone. In the 2017 elections, digital tools played two roles: complementing traditional methods of political campaigning and strengthening in-person mobilization efforts, as well as helping parties overcome the limitations of traditional media technology.

Complementary Digital Technology

Though traditional, analog campaign posters remain perhaps the most important aspect of German campaigning, social media presented another way for political parties in Germany to promote their platforms and ideologies with voters.³⁷ Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and party websites all played vital roles in explaining policy stances and making voters feel that they were a part of the campaign. Facebook was an especially valuable social media platform, with more than 30 million Germans on Facebook as of December 2017.³⁸

German privacy laws don't allow for the direct targeting of specific persons, but it is still possible to use third-party data to build profiles and personas of voter types, which can then be parlayed into custom-targeted audience groups on platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Google AdWords.

Across the board, party websites remained important during the 2017 election cycle and served as a virtual home for party platforms. Although some parties were clearly shifting the focus of their digital strategy to other platforms such as Facebook, websites still served as the base to which many social media advertisements directed voters. Some parties, like the SPD, used digital tools to capitalize on analog events like broadcasted debates. When certain topics were discussed during the debate, SPD staffers turned on relevant Google AdWords advertisements meant to capture anyone who was searching for more information.³⁹

³⁷ Nelson, Soraya Sarhaddi. "In German Election, Campaign Posters Are More Important Than TV Ads." *NPR*, 23 Sept. 2017, npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/09/23/552583400/in-german-election-campaign-posters-are-more-important-than-tv-ads.

³⁸ "Internet Stats and Facebook Usage in Europe, December 2017 Statistics." *Internet World Stats*, internetworldstats.com/stats4.htm.

³⁹ "Schulz-Sieg im TV-Duell? SPD-Anzeige geht nach hinten los." *B.Z.*, 3 Sept. 2017, bz-berlin.de/deutschland/schulz-sieg-im-tv-duell-spd-anzeige-geht-nach-hinten-los. This tactic backfired on at least one occasion, when an eager contractor hired by SPD made live an advertisement proclaiming Martin Schulz had won the debate before it had even begun.

FIGURE 1: FDP ADVERTISEMENT USING A REFERENCE TO AMERICAN TELEVISION SERIES “BREAKING BAD” TO ADVOCATE FOR FASTER INTERNET SPEED.



One of the most important developments in the 2017 elections was the adoption of negative campaigning. Digital technology alone is not responsible for the rise of this phenomenon; however, in this complementary role it has perhaps made this style of campaigning more accessible. Many of the AfD's ads, both digital and non-digital, seemed designed to elicit a response through provocative images and text.⁴⁰ The tone of interactions between the party and its supporters was unsurprisingly negative, consisting of derogatory comments about the current government and deep frustration with existing policies and political figures. Supporters viewed the AfD as the only solution against the *Altparteien*, or “old parties,” and sharing party content was seen as a duty, meant to transmit the truth to supporters' own networks.

Together with the American firm Harris Media, the AfD developed a website, separate from the AfD party website, called *Merkel die Eidbrecherin* (Merkel the Oath Breaker) blaming Merkel for a rash of terrorist attacks that occurred in Germany during her time as chancellor. Released one month before the election, the website was a milestone in negative campaigning within Germany, which started a debate on authorship and transparency of political parties' digital mobilization.

BRIDGING ONLINE AND OFFLINE

Mixing digital strategy with real-world promotion, the CDU opened a “program house” inside a former department store in the heart of Berlin. A physical manifestation of the party's platform, the house featured interactive technologies focusing on different elements of party policy. At the center of the building was a giant stuffed heart labeled “the beating heart of the German economy.” Giant screens surrounding the heart splashed numbers heralding the positive economic growth and comfort of average German families, alluding to the strength that the German economy enjoyed under the governance of the CDU/CSU. The program house was more than a hands-on exhibit. Merkel herself would visit the house from time to time, to deliver a speech or participate in one of the events. Communications products produced at the house were then easily packaged and cascaded across the party's social media channels, at little to no cost.

⁴⁰ Wildman, Sarah. “The German Far Right is Running Islamophobic Ads Starring Women in Bikinis.” *Vox*, 31 Aug. 2017, [vox.com/world/2017/8/31/16234008/germany-afd-ad-campaign-far-right](https://www.vox.com/world/2017/8/31/16234008/germany-afd-ad-campaign-far-right).

Innovative Digital Technology

Digital technology also allowed for new forms of communication. A number of political parties used hashtags to generate interaction with potential voters and start conversations about the party and its platform. The hashtags that parties used helped them cultivate and cement their party identity. Using the hashtag *#DenkenwirNeu* (*#WeThinkNew*), the FDP made space for debates around policy topics such as digitalization, education and the economy on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. In the last three weeks leading up to the election, the hashtag *#traudich* (*#DoYouDare*) was created as the foundation of AfD's mobilization strategy and digital get-out-the-vote efforts. Due to critical coverage in traditional media, the hashtag enabled people to demonstrate their support by declaring that they "dared" to vote for the AfD. The *#MerkelMussWeg* (Merkel Must Go) hashtag also proved central to the AfD's campaign strategy.

Video content was influential on German political parties' Facebook pages. Parties used the relatively inexpensive medium to broadcast everything from rallies to casual, almost intimate, addresses from candidates.⁴¹ These videos reached massive audiences; the SPD, for example, produced eight videos that received more than 1 million views each and one video that received more than 2 million views. Inexpensive and accessible video technology thus shifted how parties communicated with voters.

Though digital technology and advertisements were relatively inexpensive, this should not suggest that such activities did not constitute a significant portion of parties' (particularly smaller parties') budgets. The Greens spent one-third of the party's budget (2 million euros, or \$2.2 million) on its digital efforts, and it is estimated that the AfD spent somewhere between 25 to 50 percent of its total campaign budget on digital promotion.⁴²



Interacting with Citizens

Digital technologies, as discussed in the previous section, gave parties hitherto impossible opportunities to engage with citizen reaction to their campaigns and solicit feedback cheaply and quickly. Though many of these parties used similar tools, their style of engagement varied in accordance with party norms. An analysis of the reactions to the political parties' posts reveals that each of these parties sought different emotional responses from their posts. "Anger" was the most common reaction to AfD's posts, whereas the CSU's posts were overwhelmingly responded to with "haha," and "love" comprised a higher proportion of reactions to other parties' posts.⁴³

In addition to soliciting feedback and engagement with hashtags (as discussed in the previous section), some parties experimented with automated voter interaction, particularly through chatbots. In March 2017, the CSU launched its Facebook chatbot Leo as an interactive way for voters to learn more about the CSU's policy platform. During its initial launch, Leo attempted to mimic a casual conversation by sending voters satirical memes and GIFs of CSU rival parties.⁴⁴ Using a rule-based software backend, CSU communications staffers could receive feedback, implement new terminology or add responses to the bot. If feedback showed that

⁴¹ Telephone interview with the author, 30 Nov. 2017.

⁴² Scherfig, Leon. "Bundestagswahl: Das sind die Trends im digitalen Wahlkampf 2017." *Berliner Morgenpost*, 19 Sept. 2017, morgenpost.de/politik/article211974713/Das-sind-die-Trends-im-digitalen-Wahlkampf-2017.html.

⁴³ Serrano, Juan Carlos Medina, et al. "Social Media Report: The 2017 German Federal Elections." *German National Library*, 2018, p. 39, mediatum.ub.tum.de/doc/1452635/1452635.pdf.

⁴⁴ GIF stands for Graphics Interchange Format.

certain messages were not effective, or even offensive, the team could replace or remove them. On May 3, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* (Frankfurt General) newspaper reported that many of the initial memes and GIFs had been removed.⁴⁵

Other parties that were initially skeptical of this technology, like the SPD, eventually adopted it. The SPD received positive feedback from the tool and, according to Kevin Tiedgen, the head of marketing for SPD during the campaign, even skeptical party members grew to love the chatbot, suggesting that this technology may spread to other political parties and become a more central part of German digital campaigning.

Parties were constrained in their efforts to engage with citizens by norms in German culture about privacy. Concerns about dark advertisements (advertisements that can only be seen by specific intended recipients and are not publicly accessible anywhere else online) prompted regulators to audit the D2D application platforms. Whether or not such transparency will continue among all competitive political parties will be a function of norms and legal restrictions.



Fundraising for Party Activities

Given the availability of public funding that a party receives per vote obtained, parties have not relied on digital fundraising to build operational capacity. Although the use of digital tools for fundraising has increased in Germany, it remains somewhat limited. From the perspective of party leaders, the administrative costs associated with small donations generally outweigh the benefits. Direct-mail campaigns are also a well-established practice with which older party leaders are more comfortable. Despite these constraints, parties did adopt some digital fundraising practices. Parties sent out email blasts, ran Facebook campaigns to solicit donations, and even used WhatsApp to solicit donations. The AfD was especially effective at generating donations through digital solicitation. Via its Twitter account, the AfD claimed that more than 10,000 donations, averaging 117 euros (\$131) per donation, were received. This was the largest number of individual donations that any party in Germany had accumulated via digital channels to date. Direct-mail campaigns, however, remained the most successful method of capturing and converting individual donors among all parties.

FIGURE 3. AfD ADVERTISEMENT CALLING FOR SMALL DONATIONS TO SUPPORT DIGITAL CAMPAIGNING.



"Make the AfD Number 1 on the Internet." This advertisement states that if 4,720 100-euro donations were given, the AfD would meet its goal of a 1,000,000-euro digital budget. The Greens attempted to fundraise through their public WhatsApp channel.

⁴⁵ Steppat, Timo. "Die CSU Hat Einen Neuen Chat-Roboter." *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 3 May 2017, faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/wahlkampf-die-csu-hat-einen-neuen-chat-roboter-14996490-p2.html.



Building Party Infrastructure

Reflecting their different campaign styles, organizational cultures and resource bases, German political parties used technology differently to build party infrastructure. The rise of digital technology has meant that parties can communicate more effectively with constituent regional parties and offices, and that training materials no longer need to be delivered in person but can be distributed efficiently through digital systems.



Internal Communication

Large, institutionalized parties like the CDU were able to use technology to bolster the capacity of their regional parties and improve the quality and frequency of communication between headquarters and regional parties. The CDU's digital team and the Connect17 lead team also regularly released tutorial videos and instructional documents that regional campaigners could access via an online database. An additional Facebook group and a WhatsApp channel also provided the coordinating teams in Berlin easy means to update campaign staff and volunteers across the country. Even smaller parties, with less robust party infrastructure, were able to store training materials online. The Greens set up an online handbook that included material on everything from talking points to financial-planning models, to a special section on digital campaigning. The AfD did not build a separate party digital infrastructure, relying instead on local Facebook groups to coordinate its campaigners on the ground. In most cases, this was limited to disseminating shareable content in groups, with a request to cascade it with the regional or local party-chapter pages.

The Future of Digital Technology during Campaigns

Threats

The 2017 German federal elections were not marked by the same degree of Russian interference as other Western countries' recent elections. Nevertheless, Germany must grapple with the implications of Russian active measures in cyberspace. Part of the reason for the relatively low degree of Russian involvement in the elections may be the proactive stance that the German government took and the "gentlemen's agreements" brokered between political parties, including an agreement not to leverage any negative information gained as a result of an illegal cyberattack.⁴⁶ Spurred by then-Justice Minister Heiko Maas, in June 2017 the government passed the Network Enforcement Act (dubbed the Facebook Act), aimed at combating fake news on social media platforms by fining platforms up to \$50 million for failing to remove harmful content.⁴⁷ Furthermore, following AfD's announcement that it would employ social bots to boost its campaign, the CDU/CSU, SPD, Greens and FDP responded by pledging that they would not use bots.⁴⁸ Such agreements may prove critical in the future. Already in the 2017 elections, Facebook declined to enforce its own regulations concerning advertising content, suggesting platforms will not provide guardrails for political campaigns.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Schwartz, Michael. "German Election Mystery: Why No Russian Meddling?" *The New York Times*, 21 Sept. 2017, [nytimes.com/2017/09/21/world/europe/german-election-russia.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/21/world/europe/german-election-russia.html).

⁴⁷ Bentzen, Naja. "'Fake News' and the EU's Response." *European Parliamentary Research Service Blog* (blog), 2 Apr. 2017, [epthinktank.eu/2017/04/02/fake-news-and-the-eus-response/](https://www.epthinktank.eu/2017/04/02/fake-news-and-the-eus-response/).

⁴⁸ "Etablierte Parteien verzichten auf 'Social Bots.'" *Deutsche Welle*, 22 Oct. 2016, <https://www.dw.com/de/etablierte-parteien-verzichten-auf-social-bots/a-36119916>.

⁴⁹ Dodt, Stephanie, et al. "Facebook Allowed Questionable Ads in German Election Despite Warnings," *ProPublica*, 18 Oct. 2017, [propublica.org/article/facebook-allowed-questionable-ads-in-german-election-despite-warnings](https://www.propublica.org/article/facebook-allowed-questionable-ads-in-german-election-despite-warnings).

Though Russian active measures did not affect the German elections to the degree that other elections have been targeted, this is not to suggest that no such interference took place. The run-up to the 2017 elections was marked by an increase in spear phishing and other forms of cyberattacks.

According to Kaspersky, “Spear phishing is an email or electronic communications scam targeted towards a specific individual, organization or business. Although often intended to steal data for malicious purposes, cybercriminals may also intend to install malware on a targeted user’s computer.” Solicitation often comes via an email “apparently from a trustworthy source, but [which] instead it leads the unknowing recipient to a bogus website full of malware.”⁵⁰

The election period also witnessed increased activities by the Russian cyberespionage group Fancy Bear.⁵¹ In late 2016, the *Bundestag* was once again targeted although, from what is known, the hackers failed to access the servers. Hackers also sought to target the CDU, trying to steal account names and passwords of its party members.⁵² In the final weeks of the campaign, these activities increased, with CDU Vice Chair Julia Kloeckner claiming that there were 3,000 attacks on her website in just one day, most traced to Russian Internet Protocol (IP) addresses.⁵³ Similarly, the rise of online mobs or “Sifftwitter” (which translates “filth-Twitter”), presents a significant threat to the freedom of discourse in German politics.⁵⁴

It is worth noting that the types of interference witnessed ought not to be perceived as isolated incidents, but part of an increasing trend of Russian active measures resulting from the crisis in Ukraine and subsequent deterioration of wider Russia-West relations.⁵⁵ The gentlemen’s agreements brokered between political parties and the constraining characteristics of German norms regarding privacy may have stymied Russian objectives in 2017; however, the durability of these guardrails is unclear. The German government has sought to pass laws to make it easier to deal with misinformation and disinformation campaigns, including the Act to Improve Enforcement of the Law in Social Networks, which went into effect in 2018, and the establishment of the Cyber and Information Domain Service. Despite these shifts, IT analysts have found serious gaps in Germany’s election infrastructure; though these were not exploited in the 2019 elections (in which there was surprisingly few Russian active measures).

As Politico Europe reported, German security officials face another significant hurdle in lawmakers’ unwillingness to practice basic cyberhygiene, such as creating more secure passwords or installing antivirus programs on their private devices, which remain widely used in political campaigning.

⁵⁰ “What is Spear Phishing?” Kaspersky, usa.kaspersky.com/resource-center/definitions/spear-phishing.

⁵¹ “German Spy Agency Warns of Rise in Russian Propaganda and Cyber-attacks.” *EurActiv*, 9 Dec. 2016, euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/german-spy-agency-warns-of-rise-in-russian-propaganda-and-cyber-attacks/.

⁵² Delcker, Janosch. “Germany Fears Russia Stole Information to Disrupt Election.” *Politico Europe*, 20 Mar. 2017, politico.eu/article/hacked-information-bomb-under-germanys-election/.

⁵³ “Merkel Ally Cites Thousands of Cyber Attacks from Russian Cyber Addresses.” *Reuters*, 4 Sept. 2017, reuters.com/article/us-germany-election-cyber/merkel-ally-cites-thousands-of-cyber-attacks-from-russian-ip-addresses-idUSKCN1BF1FA.

⁵⁴ “The Kremlin’s Amplifiers in Germany.” *Medium*, 22 Jun. 2017, medium.com/dfirlab/the-kremlins-amplifiers-in-germany-da62a836aa83.

⁵⁵ Stelzenmuller, Constanze. “The Impact of Russian Interference on Germany’s 2017 Elections.” *Brookings*, 28 Jun. 2017, brookings.edu/testimonies/the-impact-of-russian-interference-on-germanys-2017-elections/.

Future Use of Digital Technologies

Using the 2017 federal election campaign as a benchmark, the future of digital campaigning in Germany will entail more creativity, more personalization and more presence.

During this campaign cycle, parties sought to make themselves available to voters around the clock by creating mobile-optimized content and using artificial chatbots. As the internet continues to permeate the daily lives of voters, new opportunities for continuous interaction will appear. Parties will continue to develop ways to deliver personalized messages to voters and voter groups on a large scale. Topics that resonate with niche groups or proactive issue messages will be cascaded to target groups in an effort to give all voters ownership over a campaign. The AfD experienced massive success with this tactic in 2017, when it created and delivered niche-shareable content specific to nurses, policemen, students and teachers. As parties in Europe continue to seek out ways to reengage and motivate voters, speaking directly to their individual needs, concerns and aspirations will be paramount. The oncoming implementation of digital and automated tools will make this a reality.

A trend that emerged in 2017 and is likely to continue is the use of negative campaigning. In this election, the AfD tapped into anti-government sentiment and successfully deployed a slew of anti-Merkel messages.

In previous German elections, political parties understood they needed to maintain strong digital campaigns in order to reach voters. Party websites reigned supreme in that regard. Digital campaigns were entirely built around funneling voters to party websites through emails, online advertisements and social media. With the 2017 federal election, parties began to move entire portions of their digital campaigns to social media platforms and app technology. Instead of simply enticing voters to click through to the party website to receive information, information was disseminated in different formats across various channels. Parties wanted to make it easier for voters to access content. Reducing the number of clicks necessary to access content or register for an email newsletter usually resulted in higher conversions.

The most visible element of the 2017 campaign was the use of data to drive resources. Although parties have previously based decisions on metadata, in the 2017 federal elections metadata was implemented and used at a speed not before possible. The penetration of apps and solid information-and-communications-technology (ICT) infrastructure gave way to the use of D2D canvassing apps that both supplied regional campaigns with information and fed immediate data back to party headquarters.

Socio-demographic targeting was openly used to more efficiently deliver online advertisements to certain groups of people, though parties did not delve into the much-feared — and illegal — use of personal targeting without prior consent. Given the country's past, it is no surprise that Germans have a deep fear of a government that collects data on individuals. That being said, as parties continue to enjoy success with online advertising tools and social media platforms continue to refine their targeting services, there is no doubt that future campaigns will include savvier use of these tools.

Digital technology is now a mainstay within Germany's campaigning landscape. To remain relevant and connected to voters, any meaningful campaign strategy must include a serious and focused digital component. As technology continues to alter how people access news, entertainment and information, parties are adapting to ensure that they remain at the forefront of voters' minds. Recognizing people's ever-shorter attention spans in the digital age, parties are



Source: USAID

constantly seeking ways to make access to information or conversion to support as simple as possible.

The 2017 German elections served as a cautious playground in which parties began to experiment with the digital tools available to them and built on best practices from previous election cycles. At the same time, parties tried to manage the public perception of their digital activities and avoid offending voters with overly complex targeting strategies.

The fear of microtargeting and its potential effects on democracy may hold sway in the public's consciousness, but political parties are well aware that the benefits of using digital tools far outweigh the potential losses if they are not used. The 2017 elections clearly illustrated that even parties with small budgets can have digital campaigns that — when executed properly — can rival the largest parties' campaigns. The FDP's meager campaign budget, for instance, did not stop the party from triumphantly reentering the *Bundestag* on the back of a focused, consolidated digital campaign. Christian Lindner's charisma, combined with the party's daring use of catchy media through digital platforms, captured the minds and hearts of voters, ultimately helping garner the FDP a victory.

Using a mix of populist trigger ads and websites, the AfD was able to cut through traditional media gatekeepers and speak directly to its supporters, contributing to its successful entry into the *Bundestag*. The implementation of live video — such as AfD leader Alice Wiedel's real-time Facebook Live response to the televised debate between Merkel and Martin Schulz — gave the party unfiltered access to voters, at little to no financial cost.

In the future, there will be plenty of opportunities for German political parties to exploit new platforms and methods of reaching voters. Sites such as LinkedIn and Pinterest present opportunities to reach niche demographics and send tailored messages that resonate more efficiently and ultimately convert voters. Though digital technologies have reshaped the political campaign landscape in Germany, it is ultimately the ability of a party to package and deliver its message in a holistic and meaningful way that will win over potential voters.



Source: IRI

CHAPTER 2

INDIA

Vidhanshu Kumar and Prakhar Sharma

Introduction

The 2019 general elections in India were notable for two reasons. The first, and the more obvious one, was electoral; the *Bhartiya Janta Party* (BJP) became the first national political party in 35 years to win an absolute majority in the elections. Through the elections, Indian voters gave an unprecedented mandate to the BJP, which further entrenched cultural majoritarianism in Indian politics. The second, and less scrutinized reason, was the role of cheap mobile data and low-priced cellphones that augmented the use of digital technology in the election process.

The shift toward digital was remarkable. Since the last general elections in 2014, the number of internet users in India went up nine fold: from 65.3 million in May 2014 to 581.51 million in May 2019.⁵⁶ More than half of the voting population in India had access to the internet in 2019.⁵⁷ About one-third of Indians had access to Facebook, WhatsApp and YouTube in 2019, up from only 9 percent in 2014.⁵⁸ India also enjoyed the highest average data usage per smartphone, which reached 9.8 gigabytes (GB) per month at the end of 2018.⁵⁹ This transition to digital and social media was enabled primarily by the availability of cheap data on mobile phones since 2016 through the launch of Reliance Jio phone network.⁶⁰ The impact of this wasn't limited to elections, but applied to broader politics.

Powered by cheap mobile data, social media ushered significant changes in the way politics are organized in India. This democratized politics by reaching out to those who were traditionally excluded from politics because of their social status or geography, which heightened public engagement and energized the political landscape by inviting and mainstreaming a diversity of perspectives. Yet social media also created avenues for a new public discourse, punctuated by fake news, deliberate misinformation by major parties, and a systematic flouting of ethical norms of political communication.

This chapter addresses the techno-political environment in India. It outlines the various ways in which the BJP, the Indian National Congress party, and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) employed digital technology, with particular reference to the 2019 elections. It specifically explores the use of technology for mobilizing citizens, promoting party platforms, interacting with voters, fundraising, building party infrastructure and facilitating internal communication. In highlighting the proliferation of digital technology in politics, this chapter also flags certain issues that are relevant as more political parties embrace social media as the preeminent vehicle to shape conversation about politics.

⁵⁶ Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, accessed 16 Feb. 2020, trai.gov.in/.

⁵⁷ Election Commission of India, accessed 19 Feb. 2020, eci.gov.in/.

⁵⁸ "Lokniti. Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, accessed 26 Feb. 2020, csds.in/lokniti.

⁵⁹ "Data Usage Per Smartphone Highest in India — Ericsson Mobility Report." Ericsson, press release, 19 Jun. 2020, ericsson.com/en/press-releases/2/2019/6/data-usage-per-smartphone-is-the-highest-in-india--ericsson.

⁶⁰ Iyengar, Rishi. "The Future of the Internet is Indian." *CNN Business*, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2018/11/business/internet-usage-india-future>.

Most of the data gathered and used in elections falls outside the regulatory frameworks. Current regulations, for instance, do not address the use of sensitive personal data and information in the context of elections.⁶¹ The chapter also points to the challenges of fake news, alternative facts and cybersecurity.⁶² These developments raise pertinent questions about the ethics of political conversations and the role of governments, media and citizens in shaping that discourse.

The Techno-Political Environment

Techno-politics generally entail the conduct of politics, especially party management, political communication and political action through technology. The Polity IV score for India in 2018 was nine, meaning that it is a democracy. For the purposes of this book, India is classified as a low-tech democracy; approximately 36 percent of India's population had internet access in 2019.⁶³ The digital divide shrunk from one in every five people having access to digital media in 2014 to one in every three in 2019. The country has the second-largest internet user base in the world, trailing only China.⁶⁴ The access to internet is, however, skewed; internet penetration is only 15 percent in the rural areas where a majority of Indians reside.⁶⁵

Since its independence in August 1947, India's democratic trajectory as a multiethnic, multilingual constitutional republic has been remarkable. The sole exception to that has been the 18-month period between June 1975 and January 1977 when then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi imposed emergency measures, suspended elections and curbed civil liberties. In 2019, however, India appeared to be drifting away from its democratic past, through a series of anti-democratic policies enacted by the state. The institutional and intellectual resistance to those policies has been feeble at best.

It is crucial to situate techno-politics within this broader context. The ruling party (BJP) has access to unparalleled resources. As it blunts the criticism of traditional media through co-option or coercion, the role of social media becomes more prominent, especially for opposition parties that seek to challenge and reshape the narrative around the idea of India. Increasingly, the ruling party exhibits authoritarian tendencies such as silencing dissent by force. The main opposition (the Congress Party) is reduced to irrelevance on the national stage, and thus increasingly defines itself in opposition to the policies of the BJP, rather than crafting an independent agenda. AAP, despite its participation in politics in two general elections, still operates more like a social movement than a political party in power in the nation's capital.

⁶¹ "India: Digital Platforms, Technologies and Data in the 2014 and 2019 Elections." *Tactical Tech*, 24 Aug. 2018, ourdataourselves.tacticaltech.org/posts/overview-india/.

⁶² Pasricha, Anjana. "Fake News Inundates India Social Media Ahead of Election." *Voice of America*, 3 Apr. 2019, voanews.com/south-central-asia/fake-news-inundates-india-social-media-ahead-election; Rebelo, Karen. "Inside WhatsApp's battle against misinformation in India." *Poynter*, 18 Dec. 2018, poynter.org/fact-checking/2018/inside-whatsapps-battle-against-misinformation-in-india/.

⁶³ Mandavia, Megha. "India Has Second Highest Number of Internet Users After China: Report." *The Economic Times*, 26 Sept. 2019, economictimes.indiatimes.com/tech/internet/india-has-second-highest-number-of-internet-users-after-china-report/articleshow/71311705.cms?from=mdr.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Bansal, Samarth. "How the BJP Used Technology to Secure Modi's Second Win." *Centre for International Governance Innovation*, 12 Jun. 2019, cigionline.org/articles/how-bjp-used-technology-secure-modis-second-win.

Overview of Party Politics

The Congress Party was founded in 1885 and led India's struggle for independence from the British Empire, under the leadership of Mohandas Karamchand (Mahatma) Gandhi. The party has emphasized social inclusion while looking at market-based wealth generation and distribution. It embraces multiethnic, multireligious secularism and is generally considered to be left of center. In 2014 and 2019, Congress suffered searing defeats at the hands of the BJP.

Formed in 1980, the BJP has close ideological and organizational links with the right-wing Hindu nationalist organization Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Organization or RSS). From 2004 to 2014, the BJP was the main opposition party. In the 2014 and 2019 general elections, the BJP scored thumping wins in the *Lok Sabha* elections.

The AAP was launched in a popular protest against corruption in public life. It was the first mass movement of its kind in India in which social media were instrumental in mobilizing people. In the most recent *Lok Sabha* elections in 2019, the AAP failed miserably, winning only one seat across the country.

Digital Technology Use

The main political parties in India use digital technology for a variety of functions, including mobilizing citizens, promoting policy positions, interacting with voters and citizens, fundraising and building party infrastructure. The BJP has the most advanced digital-technology strategy, backed by heavy investment in advertising its messages on social media.⁶⁶ The AAP has been a pioneer of digital technology use but operates on a much smaller scale than the BJP. The Congress Party was a slow starter, but increasingly seeks a more active digital presence.



Mobilizing Citizens

Digital mobilization can be understood as the deployment of existing digital technologies to mobilize citizens for a range of purposes, such as voter registration, turnout and demonstrations, and for specific calls to action (CTAs) for signing petitions, contacting a representative, etc. It can also entail tactics to suppress participation in these activities. Digital technologies and platforms commonly used during elections in India include websites, web portals, email and social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and YouTube.

Certain key themes emerge from a survey of the engagements led by the three parties. The most prominent of these is the structure of communication and the relationship between social media and local outreach. The reason why BJP was most effective in mobilizing its supporters in both 2014 and 2019 wasn't simply because it had a more compelling story to tell, but also because it was able to decentralize its messaging to a hyper-local level. By doing so, it also empowered its army of volunteers at the local level to use the information from social media to identify and engage people for the campaign. Another theme that stands out is the manner in which social media was used to not just communicate party ideas, but also gather information to inform party strategy. By creating WhatsApp groups, each of the parties was also able to conduct online audits on the local community-level grievances and tailor its messaging to address those grievances.

⁶⁶ Chaturvedi, Anumeha. "BJP Top Spender on Political Ads on Digital Platforms." *The Economic Times*, 16 May 2019, economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/elections/lok-sabha/india/bjp-top-spender-on-political-ads-on-digital-platforms/articleshow/69351792.cms?from=mdr.

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

Among all the parties, the BJP seemed to best appreciate the importance of synergy between its online and offline realms; i.e., understanding voter sentiment on the ground to inform its social media strategy. Its astute use of a diverse range of platforms and highly structured dissemination of messages across multiple layers of communication were instrumental in its mobilization. Its top-down model to disseminate its messages also generated an agenda-setting effect; topics discussed on social media informed narratives on traditional media.

In 2019, BJP created hierarchical structures to disseminate its messages and mobilize political support. For instance, in Uttar Pradesh — the most populous state in India — BJP's information-technology department deployed a social media team of 11 members in each of the six zones in the state.⁶⁷ It further deployed members at different levels, through the last point of contact with voters.⁶⁸ This tight network of groups enabled the grassroots workers to share hyperlocal information, and empowered the party foot soldiers who used the digital information for their on-the-ground outreach to communities. Each of these members shared the messages of the party command through WhatsApp groups, bypassing the editorial filters of traditional news media. On days leading up to elections, the frequency of WhatsApp messages intensified, helping to get people to the polls. The BJP also used a “missed call” campaign, a popular marketing technique in India.⁶⁹

Aam Aadmi Party

The AAP used social media as a major tool in political mobilization. Initially, it used SMS texts and emails.⁷⁰ It engaged with digital media such as official Facebook and Twitter pages to rally people around themes such as “the drive against corruption” and to remind people to come out and vote. The party created a number of WhatsApp groups, which were used to disseminate updates and calls for action. WhatsApp also helped parties evade government surveillance carried out to spy on political opponents.⁷¹

Congress Party

As the oldest political party in India, Congress was slow to catch on to using social media. Until the start of the 2014 election campaign, Congress did not have a proper website. This changed in 2019. The Congress Party relaunched its website, opened Facebook and Twitter accounts, and started YouTube and WhatsApp channels. Through its *Shakti* app, Congress assigned tasks to workers for campaigning and organizing protests. Although the party made progress, its efforts were always reactive. Its organizational inefficiencies limited its digital effectiveness.

While the BJP had a coherent narrative, the Congress was more engaged in countering trolls than on scripting a narrative of the party's revival. Notably, Congress also failed to appreciate the seamless transition between the online and offline realms for mobilization, which necessitated pairing digital campaigns with purposeful action on the ground. For instance, it advertised its NYAY program (i.e., minimum-income guarantee scheme) aimed at lifting poor families out of poverty, in high-end shopping malls where the intended beneficiaries were

⁶⁷ Bansal. “How the BJP Used Technology to Secure Modi's Second Win.”

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Making a “missed call” is a popular technique employed in political and marketing campaigns in India. It entails dialing a number and disconnecting before the call is answered. It is, therefore, a way to signal interest in an idea or a campaign without incurring the cost of the phone call. The technique is economically effective in India because a large segment of the population is on pre-paid phone plans with limited talk time.

⁷⁰ SMS stands for short-message service.

⁷¹ D'Monte, Leslie, and Joji Thomas Philip. “How the World's Largest Democracy Is Preparing to Snoop on Its Citizens.” *Live Mint*, 3 Jul. 2013, livemint.com/Politics/pR5zc8hCDI5n3NwQwa7cQJ/The-new-surveillance-state.html.

unlikely to visit. It thus failed to situate its digital messaging in the context for which it was most appropriate.



Promoting Party Ideas

The first decade of the new millennium saw a sharp rise in television advertising and promotion for political goals. But it was only in 2012 that political parties began to seriously promote their activities through the use of digital technologies and platforms. This shift was notable not only because it broadened the scale of engagement, but also because it enabled parties like the AAP to mitigate their disadvantage in resources relative to bigger parties. Traditional media in India have also traditionally acted as watchdogs for the incumbent, rather than for the citizens. Social media allowed parties to overcome, to a large extent, these constraints by engaging directly with citizens.

Bharatiya Janata Party

The BJP used multiple issue-based Facebook pages to promote its candidates, showcase party videos and run counter-messaging campaigns against opponents. It used mobile radios to broadcast Narendra Modi's speeches so pedestrians in rural areas could hear them. This allowed the party to reach people who did not have access to newspapers and television. The BJP also made innovative use of computer-mediated communication to widen its reach. During campaigning, Modi used hologram technologies to address multiple rallies at the same time without being physically present. The BJP's digital and social media strategists also introduced a variety of memes, designed to evoke urgency to elect Modi as the prime minister. Modi also used social media to broadcast his views on important issues. These messages were picked up by mainstream media and reported to wider audiences. The BJP thus bridged the gap between internet users and non-users with a mix of digital and traditional media.

Aam Aadmi Party

The AAP used thematic, informative messages through mobile-phone devices to reach large numbers of people. Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp also helped the AAP in promotions and campaigns, including in countering the opposition's messages. Without these inexpensive technologies, the AAP would have needed more resources to campaign effectively. Social media helped the AAP overcome a lack of coverage by traditional media, especially on television. It used Twitter to deliver breaking news, with the aim of creating a narrative about its ideology. The party used its website as a bulletin board for announcements. It also launched a number of mobile applications for door-to-door surveys, which allowed its followers to share stories on social media.

Congress Party

The centralized and high-command structure of the Congress Party did not translate well on social media, which is very much shaped by the users. With its reluctance to use social media until very late in the election campaign cycle in 2014, Congress also missed the opportunity to maximize the synergy between social media and traditional media, something very successfully exploited by the BJP and, to some extent, by the AAP.



Interacting with Citizens

During the 2019 election, most political parties deployed regional-language platforms to connect better with voters. For instance, Rahul Gandhi used Hindi to reach out to first-time voters. Modi had used similar tactics in the elections in 2014, and he repeated them in 2019.

The launch of the Jio internet network shrunk the digital divide significantly by expanding access. This invited new regional content platforms such as ShareChat and Helo that catered to regional languages, and were more effective than Facebook and Twitter in reaching communities that resided outside the urban areas.

Bharatiya Janata Party

Despite the fact that other parties caught up on the social media game since 2014, the BJP still had the most structured and creative digital media campaign, involving multiple layers of communication, a central vision and coordinated information flows.⁷² Ministers were expected to retweet Modi's messages. The party used WhatsApp as a central means for communication. It set up a multi-step distribution model of official networks, state units and local influencers. The BJP invested heavily in advertisements and outreach on digital platforms and spent more than \$6 billion.⁷³

Narendra Modi is the second-most-followed political leader on Twitter after U.S. President Donald Trump. While Donald Trump follows only 47 accounts, Modi follows back a large number of people — more than 2300 — many of whom are ordinary citizens who aren't directly affiliated with him but actively retweet his messages. This turns his followers into ardent supporters, who would defend him furiously and bash the opposition. This practice of rewarding followers by following them has permeated the BJP party apparatus, as many other BJP leaders used the same tactic, inspired by Modi's example.⁷⁴

The BJP used its Facebook and Twitter pages to receive feedback from citizens. The BJP also used WhatsApp to interact with citizens. The party identified thousands of WhatsApp groups that were monitored by a member of the party's information-technology (IT) cell who would share the party's posts and also identify active members who could later be made administrators allowed to post. The party also used software to extract the group members' contact numbers, thus building a pool of verified phone numbers.⁷⁵ BJP is also known to reach out to professionals on LinkedIn to develop a cadre of supporters among professionals who work for influential organizations in India and abroad.

Aam Aadmi Party

The AAP's use of multiple digital media platforms to connect and interact with voters evolved over time. Yet a consistent theme in its messaging is the substantive emphasis on the interests of the common man. Its communication strategy thus relies on appealing to the personal identity of its audience, invoking their concern for fairness and transparency. In the initial stages, the emphasis was on using emails and SMS. The party also used Facebook and Twitter messages to conduct opinion polls, explain party policies and get its points across. The AAP later began using more "live" connections, such as Facebook Live, Periscope and Google Hangouts to stream press conferences and other events. The party also used microblogging sites to interact with voters and listen to their issues, which in turn shaped the party's electoral policies. Its messages seek to reinforce group identification and tap into the collective grievance against corruption by seeking personal stories about abuse of power.

⁷² Naumann, Katharina, et al. "The Impact of Digital Media on the 2019 Indian General Election." *Konrad Adenauer Stiftung*, 19 Dec. 2019, kas.de/en/web/politikdialog-asien/single-title/-/content/the-impact-of-digital-media-on-the-2019-indian-general-election.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Thaker, Aria. "How Modi's Twitter Strategy of Following His Supporters — Even Trolls — Worked in his Favour." *Quartz India*, 3 June 2019, qz.com/india/1630274/modis-twitter-strategy-of-following-common-indians-worked/.

⁷⁵ Bhardwaj, Amit. "How BJP's IT Cell Waged War and Won in UP." *NewsLaundry*, 17 Mar. 2017, newslaundry.com/2017/03/17/how-bjps-it-cell-waged-war-and-won-in-up.

In the months prior to the Delhi state elections, volunteers developed IT tools for call management, using functions such as call recording and call forwarding managed through a digital cloud-based platform. Using these tools, the AAP tried to bring in party supporters to interact with each other and to campaign directly for the party.

Congress Party

While opposition parties used interactive social media tools such as Google Hangouts, Congress was hesitant to do so. Until April 2014, Congress conducted just one Google Hangouts session. It featured senior leader and former Chief Minister of Delhi Sheila Dixit.⁷⁶ One possible reason for this was that the Congress Party's social media efforts were carried out mostly in reaction to rival parties' messages. The party had a top-down approach in social media communication, and there was a paucity of interaction on social media. Even after the party embraced social media in the aftermath of its defeat in the 2014 elections, its strategy seemed focused on debunking myths that were propagated by the BJP, instead of crafting its own narrative. Even a cursory glance at the party's website attests to this practice, where the focus seems to be exclusively on pointing out policy failures of the incumbent BJP government.



Fundraising for Party Activities

Political-party funding in India is a complex, largely nontransparent process.

Bharatiya Janata Party

In the 2014 election cycle, the only digital channel the BJP used to receive donations was the party website. Since the election, the Modi government has been a big proponent of using digital technology, including for fundraising. One of the IT cell's main jobs is to perform data analysis that identifies potential donors. The BJP is aware of the data-security issues involved with this approach, as donor lists could be poached by rival political parties.

Aam Aadmi Party

AAP was the first party in India to develop a payment-gateway system for accepting online donations. Close to 90 percent of its donations were received through the site.⁷⁷ Initially, the party also published details such as who donated and in what amount, but this practice was later discontinued. As Arvind Jha explained, "Our donors were getting noticed and either poached by other parties or targeted for supporting us. So we stopped displaying donors' names on our website. This also meant that we compromised somewhat on transparency."⁷⁸ He also said people used to take screenshots of their donations and show them as a badge of honor, but no longer have the opportunity to do so.

AAP developed mobile applications for donations, such as the *Aap Ka Daan* (Your Donation) app. The AAP also claimed to be the first party to use Unified Payment Interface (UPI), which allows for transfers to be made from one mobile device to another for donations. The party also used telecom service-provider fund transfer platforms such as Airtel Money and Vodafone MPesa to collect funds, and also used digital media to promote traditional fundraising events such as dinners.

⁷⁶ Rajwani, Hitesh. "Social Media Strategy Review: Indian National Congress (INC)." *Social Samosa*, 17 Apr. 2014, socialsamosa.com/2014/04/social-media-strategy-review-indian-national-congress/.

⁷⁷ Interview with the author, 10 July 2017.

⁷⁸ Interview with the author, 13 July 2017.

Congress Party

The Congress Party used traditional methods of fundraising throughout the 2014 election cycle. Since then, it has provided the option to donate on its website. The party doesn't have a culture of asking for donations on public platforms and sees donations as a byproduct of its success.



Building Party Infrastructure

India is a multi-party system, and most political parties function as mixed types, falling somewhere between the two extremes of oligarchic and democratic models.⁷⁹ The political parties in India demonstrate certain levels of democratic practices in their organizational structures but are susceptible to individual dominance within the party (BJP) and to family-centric characteristics (Congress).⁸⁰ Membership in most parties in India is either free or requires a nominal fee.

Bharatiya Janata Party

The BJP attempted to build a strong digital technology arm that runs from the top of the organization to polling stations. The organization and structure of the BJP's digital team became more layered after the 2014 elections. For example, during the state elections for Uttar Pradesh, the BJP built a strong digital team that was divided into central and state teams. At the state level, the team was further divided into regional, district, block and booth-level teams.⁸¹ Across all states, approximately 5,000 party members were working with the IT cell during the election.⁸²

Aam Aadmi Party

AAP leaders resorted to groundwork and door-to-door campaigns. The party used digital tools such as Google Share and online calendars during the campaign, and used WhatsApp for virtual party meetings. The party also used WhatsApp groups at the booth levels. These digital technologies enabled the party to promote its policy positions, coordinate campaigns and build and maintain databases of voters and funders. AAP strategists also recognize the downside of using technology to build infrastructure: The party is becoming porous, and data theft is becoming a big concern.

Congress Party

The Congress Party did not use digital technologies as a primary means to build party infrastructure. Since, 2014, however, it has started recruiting for party membership on its website.

⁷⁹ Daron Acemoglu provides a neat distinction between the two models. He characterizes an oligarchic society as one in which political power is concentrated in the hands of a few producers, and where the society erects significant barriers to entry for new entrepreneurs. A democratic system, conversely, is characterized by diffused political power, redistributive taxes on producers and no discriminatory entry barriers. To read more, see: Acemoglu, Daron. "Oligarchic Versus Democratic Societies." *Journal of the European Economic Association*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2008, 1-44.

⁸⁰ Suri, K.C. "Parties Under Pressure: Political Parties in India Since Independence." *Project on State of Democracy in South Asia*, Lokniti, Center for the Study of Developing Societies, 2005, citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.631.5&rep=rep1&type=pdf.

⁸¹ In Uttar Pradesh, for example, there was a core team of 25 members, six regional centers with 20 members in each team, 92 district centers with 15 people per district, 403 assembly-level teams with 10 members each and a team of seven members at each of 822 block levels.

⁸² Bhardwaj.



Internal Communication

In India, political parties have an amorphous base with weak grassroots units, both ideologically and organizationally. These local units are tied to the party through personal ties with an activist or a local politician, not through ideological conformity. The BJP upended this dynamic by recruiting party loyalists on the basis of their declared ideological commitment. The general authority in BJP today is vested in Modi, the party leader. This affects inner-party communication. Since information converges at the center, the leader is in a unique position to disseminate information selectively and strategically, which enables the creation of a centralized agency for political action. Communication among party members in the BJP runs vertically from top to bottom. At the AAP, too, the party structure, which revolves around the leader, shapes patterns of inner-party communication. In the Congress Party, on the other hand, indirect representation is used widely. With a few exceptions, the higher echelons in the party are not elected by the lower echelons, but rather by elected delegates at the local level. This implies that communication is not centralized. This hinders its ability to calibrate strategies for social media that would be implemented uniformly across constituencies.

Bharatiya Janata Party

WhatsApp was the preferred digital platform for the BJP's internal communication. The BJP regularly circulated internal messages on WhatsApp. The party also formed closed groups on WhatsApp and social media sites such as Facebook where party members communicated with each other.

Aam Aadmi Party

Email was the preferred mode of internal communication for AAP members in the party's early years. The party has since moved on to use WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, Facelink and other forms of digital technology. The party is becoming more sensitive to protecting privacy by relying on more secure networks that use encryption, such as WhatsApp. The party believes that the use of digital technology has reduced eavesdropping.

Congress Party

In 2013, the Congress Party launched the *Khidkee* portal and app, a platform for every party member and volunteer to directly communicate with senior leadership, exchange ideas, share thoughts and voice grievances. The idea behind *Khidkee* was to promote openness and strengthen internal communication between ordinary party members and senior party leadership. By April 2014, the *Khidkee* application was downloaded on mobile phones only 5,000 times, and the website had monthly traffic of approximately 11,300 unique users. Compared to the scale of India's population, these figures suggest the *Khidkee* app was not effective.⁸³

⁸³ Rajwani. "Social Media Strategy Review: Indian National Congress (INC)."

The Future of Digital Technology during Campaigns

With internet penetration rising, smartphones becoming cheaper and more people logging on to social media, all political parties in India are likely to increase their use of digital technologies.

The BJP wants to be at the leading edge of technology and political communication, particularly in terms of messaging. The party aims to improve mobilization and promotion, using technology to give filtered and distilled content to the public. As the number of smartphone users is projected to rise, the BJP is looking to connect with more of them to spread its campaign messages. The party also wants its ministers to create social media profiles and seek people's feedback on their work.

The AAP is looking to build a digital tool that brings party workers and senior leaders onto one platform, allowing party managers to track which worker is doing what job at a given time.

The Congress Party, which admitted it had missed the bus in the 2014 elections on social media engagement, has gone into overdrive in strengthening its digital media division. Since 2014, the Congress Party has revamped its social media cell.

Conclusion

Social media played a vital role in increasing awareness about political platforms and party-specific initiatives among the electorate. Those who were active on social media were more aware of party positions than those who weren't. Yet it is simplistic to draw a straight line between social media presence and electoral outcomes. The BJP won elections in states where it had low social media presence. Thus while the role of social media is unclear in the electoral outcome, its impact on campaigning cannot be denied.

From a candidate-centric view of party systems, the BJP seems to have the most cohesive organizational structure, which impacts its ability to retain politicians and voters. Literature suggests that organized parties increase voter coordination around parties rather than around candidates. This also has bearing on party strategies for social media. Parties that are more organized are also more coordinated in their messaging. The use of digital technologies helped Modi appeal to diverse sectors of society. Despite being 20 years older than his rival Rahul Gandhi, Modi used technology that helped him connect to younger, tech-savvy voters. Social media and digital technology helped increase interaction with the public throughout the 2019 campaign. In interviews, party representatives stressed that the use of social media brought them closer to the people and that they used people's feedback in formulating party policies.

Yet despite its positive impact on mobilization and broadening the conversation on politics, the influx of digital technology has also ushered concerns about cybersecurity, disinformation and fake news.

On the heels of the 2019 general elections in India, social media were rife with misinformation about the key political actors and the major political parties. About half of Indian citizens did not believe the information that they received on WhatsApp. Facebook took down hundreds of pages and accounts in 2019 by identifying them as inauthentic, deployed with the intent to tarnish the opposition political parties. While the focus was on proliferation of disinformation on global social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, there was little scrutiny of the local, vernacular open-broadcasting platforms like ShareChat and Helo (backed by Chinese conglomerate ByteDance). Both the platforms were littered with misinformation, and deliberately polarizing content aimed at inciting latent tensions among different religious groups

and castes. The manner in which the two leading parties and their supporters engaged in systematic disinformation also brought to the fore the issue of cybersecurity and the ability of the Indian state to safeguard the integrity of the elections.

There are two prevailing narratives on cybersecurity in India. The first focuses on the technological innovations that have improved the strength of democratic institutions through more precise and efficient voting processes. The use of electronic voting machines is a case in point. Since 2001, when the electronic voting machines (EVMs) replaced paper-ballot systems across India, there is strong evidence that this shift enhanced the integrity of the election process in a number of ways.⁸⁴ It led to a notable decline in electoral fraud. Because machines registered only five votes per minute, those who wanted to commit electoral fraud would have to capture the polling booth for longer periods (as compared to the paper ballot, for which ballot boxes would be stuffed to engineer fraud).

The shift to electronic voting machines also led to the strengthening of the traditionally vulnerable sections of the society. Their lack of education would result in error-prone paper ballots, which election officers would often dismiss. Electronic voting machines changed that by eliminating the need to interpret thumb impressions or signatures. This not only encouraged vulnerable people to participate but allowed for proper counting of their votes. In doing so, the EVMs have made the electoral process more competitive and broadly representative.

Related to this narrative of technology strengthening democracy in India is India's policy on net neutrality (approved in 2019), which prevents any form of discrimination with data, including blocking, slowing down or giving preferential speed to any content. While the policy is widely hailed as the most progressive net-neutrality policy in the world, its enforcement is now a challenge, with debates focusing on whether a multistakeholder institution or the industry should monitor the enforcement.

Despite these positive developments, the second narrative on cybersecurity in India focuses on a spate of concerns including data breaches in 2018 and 2019 that affected hundreds of millions of Indians and continuous misinformation by major political parties on major social media platforms, which the Indian state demonstrated little capacity to address. The Indian state needs to lead and convene an all-party initiative with the aim of developing a code of conduct for social media platforms, focusing especially on electoral campaigning and political advertising. In addition to a code of conduct, the Indian state should develop a code of content that addresses the proliferation of fake news and deliberate misinformation.

Over the last two decades, India has used technology to reform its electoral system and taken ambitious steps towards net neutrality. Its challenge now is to create a policy framework to enforce net neutrality, widen the conversation on disinformation, and engage all major political parties in formulating codes of content and conduct around political conversations on social media.

⁸⁴ Ravi, Shamika. "How Electronic Voting Machines Have Improved India's Democracy." *Brookings*, 6 Dec. 2019, [brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2019/12/06/how-electronic-voting-machines-have-improved-indias-democracy/](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2019/12/06/how-electronic-voting-machines-have-improved-indias-democracy/).



Source: IRI

CHAPTER 3

TUNISIA

Dhia Ben Ali and Kathleen Doody

Introduction

Seven years after the Arab Spring swept across the Middle East and North Africa, Tunisia is the most successful, though still imperfect, democratic transition in the region.⁸⁵ This chapter focuses on the October 2014 parliamentary elections — Tunisia's first democratic elections — and the November 2014 presidential election. In a race to build party support, Tunisia's two major political parties — the Islamist Ennahdha Movement (Renaissance Movement) and the secular Nidaa Tounes (Tunisia's Call) — along with other smaller parties, embraced new techniques to deliver their respective messages, reach new voters and retain established supporters. This chapter emphasizes how the proliferation of modern information technology played, and continues to play, an important role in shaping the political culture of newly democratic Tunisia.

The Techno-Political Environment

During the 2014 elections, Tunisia was classified as a democracy by Polity IV and approximately 46 percent of individuals in the country had internet access.⁸⁶ Digital technology facilitated the protests that toppled the Zine El Abidine Ben Ali government in 2011 and continues to shape post-revolution politics in Tunisia.

The past decade has seen significant shifts in the Tunisian political landscape. The use of the internet, and social media in particular, was an important aspect of the country's 2011 revolution; these technologies allowed Tunisians, particularly youth, to vent their grievances and mobilize. Digital media have continued to be relevant in the years since the transition.⁸⁷

Overview of Party Politics

Only nine parties existed before the revolution of 2011 and most functioned as only nominal opposition within a system dominated by Ben Ali. The rise of issue-based political parties facilitated Tunisia's democratic transition after the 2011 revolution, and Ennahdha and Nidaa Tounes quickly emerged as the two strongest political parties. Nidaa Tounes branded itself as the party with experience, while Ennahdha branded itself as the Islamist party focused on practical problems.⁸⁸

Nidaa Tounes, primarily composed of Ben Ali-era ministers and businessmen, ran on a platform of economic improvement and national reconciliation, contending that the only way to move forward after Ben Ali's removal was to reconcile with the past and allow established experts to drive policy. Ennahdha is one of the oldest and most organized political parties in Tunisia. It espouses Islamic principles and has a moderate-Islamist platform that focuses on the economy and social issues. Although Nidaa Tounes and Ennahdha emerged as the two major players, several smaller political parties were established and enjoyed popular support, meaning that coalition building was necessary for either major party to push through its agenda in parliament.

⁸⁵ The research and writing for this chapter were completed during the summer and fall of 2017.

⁸⁶ "Individuals Using the Internet (% of Populations) – Tunisia," *The World Bank*, data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?end=2018&locations=TN&start=1960&view=chart.

⁸⁷ Delany, Colin. "How Social Media Accelerated Tunisia's Revolution: An Inside View." *Huffington Post*, 25 May 2011, huffingtonpost.com/colin-delany/how-social-media-accelera_b_821497.html.

⁸⁸ Fakir, Intissar. "Tunisia's Election: Ennahda vs. Nidaa Tounes." *Carnegie Middle East Center*, 23 Oct. 2014, carnegie-mec.org/diwan/57010?lang=en.

In Tunisia's October 2014 parliamentary elections, Nidaa Tounes won a plurality — 85 out of 217 — of seats in the parliament, while Ennahdha lost seats, controlling fewer than 70 seats in the new parliament.

Context of the 2014 Elections

The 2014 parliamentary and presidential elections marked a milestone in the Tunisian political transition. Ennahdha won the plurality of the seats in the 2011 elections (held to elect an assembly that would draft the country's constitution and elect an interim president), the first free election following the revolution. The 2014 elections came after years of political negotiations and debate over the country's political future.⁸⁹

Although conventional forms of campaigning were effectively restricted to the short period legislated, the lack of effective regulations on digital media undermined this campaigning timeline. Digital technology allowed the parties to effectively promote activities, mobilize, interact and communicate with constituents, in ways not directly attributed to the parties themselves. As a result, they ran campaign operations outside of the three-week period with few repercussions or penalties.⁹⁰

Digital Technology Use

The 2014 parliamentary and presidential elections took place in an atmosphere in which social media, and particularly Facebook, played an increasingly prominent role in politics and everyday life. For Tunisians, Facebook was not only a social media platform; it was also an important source of news. In response to this, political parties made Facebook their primary social media platform for targeted messaging, using Facebook to promote their activities, mobilize, and interact and communicate with supporters. Other social media platforms, such as Snapchat, WhatsApp and Viber, were also used. Overall, parties quickly learned to leverage digital media to strengthen their infrastructures and rapidly incorporated these technologies into their operations, to great effect. According to one study, the 2014 elections show “the important role of social media in determining the electoral decision of the Tunisian voter. Indeed, it was found that social networks are an essential source for information and form an opinion with respect to parties and candidates.”⁹¹



Mobilizing Citizens

During the 2014 parliamentary elections, major political parties used social media to mobilize their supporters. Nidaa Tounes, Ennahdha and other political parties started hundreds of Facebook pages to encourage citizens to attend party events or register to vote.⁹² They also purchased a large number of established Facebook pages and other established social media accounts, expanding their targeted audience. This method of digital campaigning turned out to be an influential and cost-effective strategy for both leading parties.⁹³

⁸⁹ El Amrani, Issandr. “Tunisia’s National Dialogue Quartet Set a Powerful Example.” *International Crisis Group*, 10 Oct. 2015, crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/tunisia/tunisia-s-national-dialogue-quartet-set-powerful-example.

⁹⁰ “Final Report on the 2014 Legislative and Presidential Elections in Tunisia.” *National Democratic Institute*, 2014, [ndi.org/sites/default/files/Tunisia%20Election%20Report%202014_EN_SOFT%20\(1\).pdf](http://ndi.org/sites/default/files/Tunisia%20Election%20Report%202014_EN_SOFT%20(1).pdf).

⁹¹ M'Barek, Melika Ben, et al. “Impact of Social Media on the Behavior of Tunisian Voters: 2014 Elections.” *British Journal of Marketing Studies*, vol. 3, no. 4, May 2015, p. 40.

⁹² “Tunisia Elections Dispatch No. 1: Voter Registration.” *International Republican Institute*, 2014, iri.org/sites/default/files/2014%20July%2029%20Tunisia%20Elections%20Dispatch%20No.%201-Voter%20Registration_0.pdf.

⁹³ Interview with the authors, 8 June 2017.

Hatem Boulabyar, a member of the Shura Council of Ennahdha, argued that digital communications technology was the greatest factor facilitating Ennahdha's ability to reach and mobilize many supporters all over the country. According to Boulabyar, Ennahdha embraced the use of digital technology and social media platforms such as Facebook as a primary campaigning tool in the 2014 parliamentary elections.⁹⁴ This strategy was not only a recognition of changing media diets, but also a reflection of the constraints the party faced.

There was very limited traditional media coverage of Ennahdha, so Facebook pages were the main source of information about the party's activities. Many of Tunisia's private television and radio channels are owned by businessmen associated with old-guard elites who have deep political ties to government leadership dating back to Ben Ali's rule, and who thus gave positive coverage to Nidaa Tounes' candidates and ideological platforms.⁹⁵

Though Nidaa Tounes enjoyed this advantage, the communications channels between the party and supporters were less organized than Ennahdha's. The party relied more heavily on traditional media such as television and field meetings to disseminate information. Though digital was not a cornerstone of the party's communication strategy, Nidaa Tounes used Facebook pages mainly to interact with members, gather supporters and launch attacks aimed at the other parties.⁹⁶

As more and more Tunisians turn online for political news, the importance of social media for political parties in future elections will only increase.⁹⁷



Promoting Party Ideas

During the last three weeks of the 2014 parliamentary elections campaign, Ennahdha shifted toward digital technology to communicate with citizens while Nidaa Tounes took a mixed approach, employing digital and traditional forms of campaigning and communication. Nidaa Tounes focused more on mainstream media, texts, phone calls and regional fieldwork to promote its message among voters. Even though it was not the centerpiece of the campaign, Facebook was a highly influential way for Nidaa Tounes to interact with young voters, especially in large constituencies.⁹⁸

Both parties used innovative digital techniques to communicate their message, and both began posting photos on social media to tout large crowds and growing support. Ennahdha used drones to film its rallies and then broadcast video and pictures on social media. Nidaa Tounes leader Beji Caid Essebsi held a two-hour live chat on Twitter to discuss major problems the youth faced.

Parties also promoted their platforms through low-technology, labor-intensive platforms during the 2014 elections. Particularly common was the use of text messaging and phone calls to promote their platforms and ideologies. Overall, although the digital infrastructure exists for parties to promote the ideas and platforms, digital platforms are underutilized in comparison to traditional communication means.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Reporters Without Border's Media Ownership Monitor initiative rated political control over news agencies in Tunisia as being "medium to high" risk to media pluralism in 2016. "Tunisia." *Media Ownership Monitor*, Reporters Without Borders, 2016, mom-rsf.org/en/countries/tunisia/.

⁹⁶ Interview with the authors, 1 June 2017.

⁹⁷ Kavanaugh, Andrea, et al. "The Use and Impact of Social Media: Tunisian Elections 2014." *Middle East Studies Association Annual Conference*, 2016, eventsarchive.org/sites/default/files/MESA%20Tunisia%2011.20.16.ppt.

⁹⁸ Interview with the authors, 1 June 2017.



Interacting with Citizens

Political parties in Tunisia are working on developing new techniques and adopting new strategies to communicate their programs to new voters. These plans are shaped by demographic trends among voters and their use of technology. According to Boulabyar, Ennahdha is planning to focus more on the use of photography and short videos to communicate with young voters. “Young voters who will be 18 in 2019 are still 15 today, and they don’t use Facebook as much as they use other social media platforms. So we are moving from using people who can write good Facebook posts to using photographers who can communicate specific messages through pictures or short videos,” he added.⁹⁹ Both parties are trying to bridge the generational gap in media use to communicate their messages, recognizing that younger voters are turning to social media for news while older voters remain more comfortable with traditional media.



Fundraising for Party Activities

Tunisian political parties were hesitant to adopt digital technology as a fundraising tool. There are two main reasons Tunisian political parties generally eschew fundraising. The first is to avoid a government audit. Long-standing legislation strictly regulates fundraising activities and requires political parties to provide complete documentation of the fundraising process. In the post-revolution era, legislators passed a number of new decrees and laws to regulate civil society and political parties’ funds; since the revolution, transitional and elected governments have feared that if political parties had freedom to raise funds, a number of national and international factors could corrupt the process.¹⁰⁰ The new regulations give political parties more flexibility to acquire funds, but fundraising is still heavily restricted. For example, parties are banned from receiving foreign donations.¹⁰¹ It is difficult for fundraising to be cost effective and meet legal requirements, especially for relatively small donations.¹⁰²

Due to these restrictions, the parties do not have significant digital fundraising strategies. While Ennahdha and Afek Tounes (Tunisian Aspiration) — a small, center-right political party — are now exploring new approaches for digital fundraising, Nidaa Tounes leaders appear to be content with their network of private donors. Most political players interviewed in this study said that fundraising could be critical in future elections, but it would require a change in the current law in ways that would not benefit the most influential and powerful donors.

⁹⁹ Interview with the authors, 8 June 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with the authors, 8 June 2017.

¹⁰¹ Kausch, Kristina. “‘Foreign Funding’ in Post-Revolution Tunisia.” *Afa, Fride and Hivos*, 2013, files.ethz.ch/isn/167265/WP_Tunisia.pdf.

¹⁰² Interview with the authors, 8 June 2017.

POLITICAL CULTURE CONSTRAINTS ON DIGITAL FUNDRAISING

The second reason for the lack of fundraising is that Tunisian citizens are unfamiliar with the process of fundraising and budgeting for campaigns. Strategists and media experts noted that Ennahdha tried for a short period to fundraise using text messages.¹⁰³ Unsolicited SMS messages asked supporters to reply with the amount of money they wished to donate to the party. This fundraising strategy failed for a few reasons. To begin, the party was losing money at the margins because the phone carriers charged high fees for mass SMS delivery. Further, Tunisians preferred to donate money in person, valuing the opportunity to be in the same room with their representatives and other party leaders. Potential donors felt that they would be missing the prestige and advantages (real or perceived) their donations provided if they donated via text.

Some parties targeted Tunisians abroad, where there was a greater comfort with using debit and credit cards, and with online fundraising generally.¹⁰⁴ Ben Said from the political office of Afek Tounes said the party fundraised only in France, where efforts targeted Tunisian expatriates. The only political movement that systematically used digital technology to fundraise *inside* Tunisia during the 2014 elections was Moncef Marzouki's. His presidential campaign sent millions of text messages to people asking for donations of 2 dinars (\$1). According to Elloumi, the primary purpose of Marzouki's text-messaging donation drive was not to raise money, but to demonstrate that Marzouki's allegiance was to voters — not business or foreign governments.¹⁰⁵



Building Party Infrastructure

During the 2014 parliamentary elections, political parties realized that it is easier, cheaper and more practical to recruit supporters through social media than in person. Parties used social media sites to communicate their programs and recruit volunteers and party workers in different regions and with different demographic groups. Ennahdha and Nidaa Tounes already had regional offices in all states and were working on establishing field offices in minor constituencies. Other parties such as Afek Tounes and Congress for the Republic focused more on establishing strong regional offices, with the objective of keeping followers engaged. For instance, Afek Tounes used polling data to determine the geographic areas in which its base of support was most concentrated, and then focused its resources on maintaining regional offices in those strongholds. Nidaa Tounes relied on social media to strengthen the party infrastructure and engage supporters in campaign activities. Through Facebook, the party advertised daily events at Nidaa Tounes' regional offices, inviting supporters and non-party-affiliated citizens to join in community volunteer activities such as cleaning streets, painting school walls or attending practical training and lectures.

¹⁰³ Interview with the authors.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with the authors, 6 June 2017.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with the authors, 30 May 2017.



Internal Communication

Political parties in Tunisia do not have a long history of operating as cohesive bodies because they were heavily restricted during the Ben Ali regime. Some, including Ennahdha, functioned from exile, while others, such as Ettajdid, worked within the country with very limited resources. Only the ruling party maintained a field presence. The other parties functioned from small offices in the capital. This changed after the revolution as dozens of political parties emerged, and several grew to hundreds of thousands of supporters all over the country. Many political leaders realized that strong communication was essential to connect their regional offices and unify them around the same programs and messaging.

Nidaa Tounes and Ennahdha had large resources to support the opening of offices in every state and constituency and build strong communication platforms to keep party members connected. Smartphone use, internet coverage, and new platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp have all had an impact on how political parties communicate internally. During the 2011 election, Ennahdha provided the members of its political office and regional representatives with mobile phones so they could receive daily texts and phone calls from the headquarters. Boulabyar said that Ennahdha's internal communication has developed significantly since 2011. "We equipped Ennahdha's headquarters with fiberoptic, equipped every single regional office with high-speed internet, and now rely mainly on video conferences with our regional representatives," he said.¹⁰⁶

Major parties used Facebook and WhatsApp groups to communicate with members. Regional activities were coordinated through private groups on Facebook.

Afek Tounes created a department to manage digitalization. Marouen Ben Said, who is responsible for the party's digitization process, said that Afek Tounes used the same techniques as other parties in the 2014 elections but is now in the process of creating a more secure communication platform. He said the party shifted from using personal emails to party emails and stopped sharing party-related information on non-secure networks. He also said that technology helped communicate with new members by "sending party information, sharing regular newsletters, inviting them to presentations, and sharing training [via] PowerPoints."¹⁰⁷

The Future of Digital Technology during Campaigns

Digital technology shaped the strategies of all major political parties in 2014. Today, all major parties have clearly defined strategies to use technology in future elections and recognize the diversity of ways technology can be deployed during campaigns. Party strategists from Nidaa Tounes, Ennahdha and Afek Tounes all said they are building up their parties' digital capacity, hiring experts and emulating the practices of political parties in other countries.¹⁰⁸ Afek Tounes is studying how to implement digital strategies used in countries such as France and the United States. Ennahdha is recruiting experts to make the most of digital campaign tactics and using the data obtained from social media to specifically target potential voters.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with the authors, 8 June 2017.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with the authors, 6 June 2017.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with the authors, 2017.

Because many Tunisians get their daily news from Facebook, future campaigns will likely include more targeted ads, known as display ads, which fit smartphone screens.¹⁰⁹ Nidaa Tounes and Ennahdha are considering using this technique, which will allow for easier volunteer recruitment and distribution of targeted messages to specific groups.

Both Ennahdha and Afek Tounes have ambitions to harness big data and artificial intelligence during future elections. They have both created strong structures focused mainly on the use of technology, and aim to use the data obtained from emails, social media, phone calls and texts to send tailored messages. Boulabyar said that Ennahdha is working on implementing these techniques, and that the party plans to move from “mass marketing” to “targeted marketing” and apply marketing theories to influence voters’ behavior.¹¹⁰ Because Ennahdha lost many of its supporters after the 2014 parliamentary elections, the party plans to use the data it already has to reestablish connections with its former backers and use digital platforms to explain planned major shifts in the party’s policies. According to Ben Said, his goal is to position Afek Tounes to take advantage of still-underutilized data to benefit the party’s communications and outreach.

Boulabyar said Ennahdha is also using technology in its recruitment efforts focused on young voters. The party recognized that youth were using technology to communicate, and that it needed to adapt its tactics if it was going to reach those potential voters. He said the use of technology in the 2019 parliamentary and presidential elections is “a must” and that while Facebook is still an important tool, “if we want to reach young voters, we have to start communicating with them via Instagram and Snapchat.”¹¹¹ Boulabyar also said the party is using other ways to reach specific demographic groups. “For example, instead of contacting all Facebook users [in Arabic], if certain individuals always post on Facebook in French, we send them our communications in French.”¹¹² In contrast to other parties, Nidaa Tounes does not seem to have a desire to modify its digital campaign strategy or to improve its use of technology in the coming elections.¹¹³ Party leadership seems to believe that its current techniques are enough. While the party will continue to use some social media, it will focus most of its efforts on field work.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with the authors, 2017.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Interview with the authors, 8 June 2017.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Interviews with the authors, 2017.

FOCUS ON CYBERSECURITY

Some parties are recognizing the importance of digital security and working to mitigate the vulnerabilities presented by new technology. In 2012, Ennahda's website was hacked by a group that claimed to be affiliated with Anonymous; the hackers wrote on the website, "As long as there is no justice, there will be no peace, Nahdha This is you our message to you! Degage (leave)! Your time is over! You have done nothing to the Tunisian people! out Now!"¹¹⁴ The threat that digital vulnerabilities present to electoral integrity (in addition to party reputation) was made clear in 2014 when voter registration via SMS and the internet was suspended after hackers compromised the system. Afek Tounes emphasizes secure internal communications. The party ensures that its leadership uses only the official party email account for internal communication. This may sound like a small step, but it is significant, especially considering that the other parties are still communicating internally via text messaging and Facebook groups, which presents myriad security vulnerabilities.¹¹⁵ A challenge facing parties and other organizations is a provision in the 2001 Telecommunications Code that criminalizes the "unauthorized use of cryptology," which many fear could be used to prosecute those who use encrypted communications services.¹¹⁶ Additional legal restrictions may be on the horizon. After remaining dormant for years, a draft cybercrime bill was approved by the Tunisian Council of Ministers and referred to parliament in 2018. It is unclear whether some troubling aspects of a version of the bill leaked in 2014 (which included "broad discretionary powers" for the government and the criminalization of certain content) have been amended.¹¹⁷

Threats to Tunisian Democracy

Though digital technologies were hailed for their role in ushering in democracy in Tunisia, recent elections have been marked by an increase in misinformation campaigns.¹¹⁸

In the 2019 elections, parties were confronted with misinformation and disinformation campaigns, including by "cybertroops" on Facebook.¹¹⁹ Fake polls and false reports of candidates' withdrawal were also circulated on social media.¹²⁰ One of the disinformation campaigns ahead of the 2019 elections tried to convince voters that the pens at polling stations were filled with invisible ink — undermining the credibility of the voting process.¹²¹ The rise of unofficial political pages (in particular, their activity ahead of the election) made it difficult to trace responsibility for these efforts.¹²²

¹¹⁴ Ajmi, Sana. "Tunisia: Anonymous Hacks Website of Political Party Ennahda." *AllAfrica*, 24 Mar. 2012, allafrica.com/stories/201203260723.html.

¹¹⁵ Interview with the authors, 6 June 2017.

¹¹⁶ "State of Surveillance Tunisia." *Privacy International*, 14 Mar. 2019, privacyinternational.org/state-privacy/1012/state-surveillance-tunisia.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Michaelson, Ruth and Michael Safi. "#Disinformation: The Online Threat to Protest in the Middle East." *The Guardian*, 15 Dec. 2019, theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/15/disinformation-the-online-threat-to-protest-in-the-middle-east; Gibaja, Alberto Fernandez. "Protecting Tunisian Elections for Digital Threats." *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance*, 10 May 2019, idea.int/news-media/news/protecting-tunisian-elections-digital-threats.

¹¹⁹ Jouini, Yosr. "Ahead of Tunisia Elections, Social Media was Flooded with Mis- and Disinformation." *Global Voices*, 22 Oct. 2019, advox.globalvoices.org/2019/10/22/ahead-of-tunisia-elections-social-media-was-flooded-with-mis-and-disinformation/.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

These shortcomings have not prevented platforms (particularly Facebook) from becoming important sources of news for many Tunisians. According to Boulabyar, “too much technological freedom” is making it hard to find credible sources of information.¹²³ Though there have been efforts to improve domestic fact-checking capabilities, this remains a significant vulnerability in Tunisian politics.¹²⁴ Civil-society groups have raised concerns about the prominence of hate speech and disinformation online, but did not cooperate to monitor these trends.¹²⁵

Conclusion

Tunisia’s sudden democratic transition forced political parties to quickly adopt new strategies to become competitive, and effective technology usage was a major driver of campaign success. The emergence of digital technology changed the way Tunisian voters access political news. Political leaders quickly transitioned to digital-first, social-media-heavy campaigns to advance their ideologies and platforms. Early in Tunisia’s democratization process, the major political parties — Nidaa Tounes, Ennahdha, Afek Tounes and others — began using social media to communicate with their supporters and mobilize them to attend their rallies. In the 2011 elections, parties competed to purchase popular Facebook pages and reach potential voters online. Digital technology played a much greater role in the 2014 elections. Established parties adapted to the new digital reality, while Tunisia’s new political parties embraced and rapidly developed even more sophisticated methods of putting available technologies and available digital-media platforms to use.

The move to online campaign management and social media outreach in 2014 represented a radical shift in campaign orthodoxy. Political parties started relying on social media, smartphones, emails and other digital platforms to communicate with members, promote their activities, mobilize voters, recruit volunteers and target opponents. Ennahdha and Nidaa Tounes leaned heavily on Facebook to mobilize supporters and promote party activities. Significantly, although all major parties employ digital media to some extent, they have all followed their own paths in the use of these technological tools and social media based on their own particular needs, previously established networks and constituency bases.

The explosion of digital campaigning in Tunisia has worrying aspects, as even some of its proponents acknowledge. Boulabyar argued that digital tools in Tunisia need to be regulated and that the government should have the ability to hold people accountable. In spite of these challenges, the growth of digital tools in Tunisia holds the potential to positively transform how political parties relate to citizens.

¹²³ Interview with the authors, 8 June 2017.

¹²⁴ Jouini. “Ahead of Tunisia Elections, Social Media was Flooded with Mis- and Disinformation.”; “Civil Society Leaders Struggled to Curb Tide of Disinformation During 2019 Tunisian Elections and Demand Greater Transparency from Social Media Platforms.” *Oxford Internet Institute*, 23 Mar. 2020, oii.ox.ac.uk/news/releases/civil-society-leaders-struggled-to-curb-tide-of-disinformation-during-2019-tunisian-elections-and-demand-greater-transparency-from-social-media-platforms/.

¹²⁵ Elswah, Mona and Philip N. Howard. “The Challenges of Monitoring Social Media in the Arab World: The Case of the 2019 Tunisia Elections.” *Oxford Internet Institute*, 23 Mar. 2020, comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/2020/03/Tunisia-memo-English.pdf.



Source: IRI

CHAPTER 4

UKRAINE

Introduction

This chapter outlines the use of digital technology by political parties in Ukraine, focusing on mobilization, promotion, interaction, fundraising, infrastructure and communication during the country's 2014 elections. It provides a brief background of Ukrainian politics and discusses the prospects for digital technology use by political parties. It demonstrates how Ukraine's dynamic politics and high levels of internet penetration provide fertile ground for the creative use of digital technology by political parties.¹²⁶ It also unpacks how Ukraine's geopolitical position renders it vulnerable to cyberattacks from Russia.

The Techno-Political Environment

Ukraine is defined as a middle-tech partial democracy for the purposes of this project, meaning that at the time of the elections, the country was in the middle third of global internet users and classified as an anocracy by Polity IV. An unfortunate reality of politics in Ukraine is the looming threat of Russian interference. In the 2014 elections, for example, "Russia-linked cyber hackers infiltrated Ukraine's central election commission, deleting key files and implanting a virus that would have changed the results of the election in favor of a fringe ultra-nationalist party, Right Sector," an effort that was described as "one of the most brazen, malicious, and grand-scale attempts to manipulate a national election ever."¹²⁷ Russia continued to interfere with Ukrainian elections ahead of the 2019 elections, adopting new tactics in response to Ukrainian efforts to patch cybersecurity vulnerabilities.

Overview of Party Politics

The 2013-2014 Euromaidan protests and the 2014 Revolution of Dignity strongly influence the nature of Ukrainian party politics. The protests began in the fall of 2013 in response to then-President Viktor Yanukovich's decision to back out of an association agreement with the European Union. The protests culminated in February 2014 when Yanukovich departed the country for Russia after attempting to violently repress the protests. Subsequently, in an attempt to maintain its political interests in Ukraine, Russia invaded, occupied and annexed Crimea, and supported separatist movements in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk with personnel, weapons, supplies, financing, intelligence and ideological support.

Subsequent parliamentary elections in October 2014 led to a government of a coalition of pro-European parties. Parties both within the coalition and in the opposition distinguish themselves from one another in two major ways. First, in the 2014 elections and since, parties differentiate themselves by their leaders, who are extraordinarily important in Ukraine's personality-driven politics. Ukraine's major political parties have been described as "virtual" — political umbrellas for a small number of oligarchs and their commercial, financial, industrial and media conglomerates. These individuals use mass-media holdings, political patronage and, in some cases, bribery and coercion to mobilize voters, rather than policy appeals. Second, however, geopolitical orientation is one salient political cleavage in Ukraine. The parliament that was elected in 2014 was roughly divided into pro-European parties and former members of Yanukovich's Party of Regions, which took part in the election as a part of the Opposition Bloc party. This geopolitical cleavage is also linked with ethnic, linguistic and religious affiliations.

¹²⁶ The research and writing for this chapter were completed during the summer and fall of 2017.

¹²⁷ Polyakova, Alina, and Spencer P. Boyer. "The Future of Political Warfare: Russia, the West, and the Coming Age of Digital Global Competition." *Brookings*, March 2018, [brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/the-future-of-political-warfare.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/the-future-of-political-warfare.pdf).

While this cleavage around geopolitical orientation continues, the ongoing conflict in the east of the country — including Russian occupation and annexation of Crimea, and the presence of Russia-led forces in the so-called “people’s republics” of Donetsk and Luhansk — have made legitimate elections impossible in these territories.

This case study focuses on parties’ digital strategies from August 24, 2014 — the date when the president dissolved the parliament in preparation for the October elections. A short update on the 2019 electoral cycles is provided at the end of the chapter. It is important to note that the adoption of digital technology by political parties and candidates in Ukraine increased significantly between the 2014 election cycle featured in this case study and the time of writing. In particular, digital technology played a key role in Volodymyr Zelensky’s successful 2019 presidential campaign. Therefore, for the purposes of drawing lessons for similar cases, readers should compare their context to Ukraine’s techno-political environment in 2014, and not necessarily the present context.

Digital Technology Use

As of 2017, when the primary research for this case study was conducted, political parties in Ukraine were skeptical of online campaigning, meaning that digital communication was not a priority. Instead, they mostly relied on traditional mass media — first and foremost, national TV channels — along with offline campaigning in regions. When digital communication was used, it is primarily for political advertising and voter mobilization during election campaigns. Parties generally used online messages to promote certain agendas, create a snowball effect in social media and amplify the impact of traditional mass media. Digital communication was often used to attack political opponents or counterattack.



Mobilizing Citizens

In the 2014 elections, digital technologies increased in relevance but remained marginal. Social media acted as a useful way of garnering support for the party through public displays that engaged social networks. Political parties attach great significance to rallies, and seem to value that sort of mass public display of support in digital contexts as well. Whether advertising microtargeting was used to mobilize voters is an issue of contention among experts. Party representatives avoid the topic because microtargeting is perceived as an unethical tactic by voters; experts are torn about whether and which political parties used microtargeting. Also unclear is whether such advertisements were effective.

Regardless of whether microtargeting is at play, demographic realities shaped the campaigns’ digital strategies. Digital technologies were more effective for mobilizing urban populations, where internet penetration rates are higher.¹²⁸ Because of these demographic realities and budget constraints, smaller and newer parties targeted political messages in social networks toward a narrow, politically active audience that is young or middle aged, more educated and more urban. The Democratic Alliance and Self-Reliance (another liberal reform party based in Lviv) are sometimes called “Facebook parties” by political consultants because they so heavily rely on Facebook to rally their supporters.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹²⁹ Interview with the author, 2017.

A hurdle that parties confronted in 2014 was the fact that many Ukrainians did not consider the internet a political space. The Revolution of Dignity in 2014 suggests that the success of online mobilization ultimately depended on the salience of the message itself.¹³⁰



Promoting Party Ideas

Digital media are appealing not only because of their low cost, but because they are seen as less susceptible to pressure from influential political and economic elites than traditional forms of media. Though parties have started to develop digital media strategies, during the period under study many of these parties engaged in broadcasting, rather than using these technologies to interact with voters.

The primary way political parties in Ukraine used digital technology in 2014 was to promote their platforms; this was done by circulating political advertisements through Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, party websites and personal pages on social media. Digital technology is an affordable means of reaching a target audience, particularly in urban contexts. Though affordable and flexible, in Ukraine online news platforms are not neutral. Many sites apply their own standards and regulations; in some instances, they've refused to publish negative material about parties to which they are sympathetic, or even positive information about parties of which they are critical.

Some parties hire public-relations (PR) firms to help them cultivate consistent and effective messaging — the result is that there is a thin and often unclear line between genuine and paid online support for a party. Digital manipulation for political purposes is a sensitive and much-debated topic in Ukraine. Some politicians and political parties are reported to have hired commercial firms to generate “likes” and comments or to repost party content with the aim of artificially increasing popularity. All major parties enjoy strong support from famous bloggers who are either party members or closely linked with parties. Using bloggers who are public-opinion leaders is more strategic than utilizing writers posting online from fake accounts.¹³¹ Such image-grooming practices do not end once political parties are elected; incumbents also use these strategies as government representatives to cultivate international political support.¹³²

The personalization of politics in Ukraine means that politicians' personal webpages and social media channels are more widely read, and sometimes even more informative, than party websites. They are typically managed by either in-house or external professional copywriters. Though interaction isn't the primary function of Ukrainian political parties' websites, they have begun cultivating such activity (or at least the appearance of interaction) with voters. Mykola Davydiuk, head of the think tank Politics, said that to prove their loyalty, BPP-Solidarnist party members — from the leadership to local divisions — are supposed to make approximately 10 comments in support of the president per day on social media.¹³³ In addition to these efforts to produce the appearance of widespread support, parties are also trying to create synergy across different platforms, using their digital presence to amplify party material also broadcast through other media like television or newspapers.

¹³⁰ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹³¹ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹³² Horsey, David. “Yanukovich: PR Firms and Nice Suits Hide Authoritarian Intentions.” *The Los Angeles Times*, 1 Oct. 2012, latimes.com/politics/la-xpm-2012-oct-01-lat-na-tt-yanukovich-20120930-story.html.

¹³³ Interview with the author, 2017.

UNCERTAIN EFFECTS OF ARTIFICIAL ENGAGEMENT.

Use of political bots is a common digital tactic in Ukraine, although the effect of this tactic on political attitudes and behavior is uncertain. A bot “is a human or an algorithm which is deliberately leaving comments intended to influence their readers in a particular way.”¹³⁴ Petro Poroshenko’s social media success is credited in part to the so-called *porokhoboty*, pro-Poroshenko professional commenters comprising paid bots, paid bloggers, loyal commenters and supporters.¹³⁵ Davydiuk said that the core group of *porokhoboty* includes approximately 100 writers, but the total number of writers may be as high as 1,000. According to Davydiuk, these *porokhoboty* first confronted Russian President Vladimir Putin’s army of commenters online and later switched to focus on internal politics in Ukraine.¹³⁶

One interview respondent, an advisor for the presidential administration of Ukraine, said that *porokhoboty* are a heterogeneous group comprising those who strive to join the presidential orbit, solve particular issues or become visible on television.¹³⁷ According to one study, 98 percent of users commenting on Poroshenko’s Facebook account are real people, while only 2 percent are bots.¹³⁸ However, these bots accounted for some 15 percent of all comments.¹³⁹ A member of BPP-Solidarnist argued that the party’s army of bots is weaker than all of its rivals’ combined and that the party’s bots are sincere adherents to the party who don’t use fake accounts.¹⁴⁰ A representative of the nongovernmental organization *Chesno* said that *yuliaboty* (pro-Yulia Tymoshenko, pro-Fatherland bots) are trained, are informed and comment in mass. On the other hand, a representative of PlusOne DA, a communications agency, believes that bots are inefficient and almost obsolete.¹⁴¹ He says effective digital campaigning requires a substantial budget but has unproven effects.

¹³⁴ Lozovoi, Vladimir and Boris Davidenko. “Pole Bitvy — Facebook. Skolko Botov ‘Zhyvet’ na Stranitse Petra Poroshenko/Facebook as a Battlefield. Counting the Number of Bots ‘Living’ on Petro Petrosenko’s Page.” *Vox Ukraine*, voxukraine.org/longreads/bots/article-ru.html. Accessed 9 Sept. 2017.

¹³⁵ Kryukova, Svetlana, and Anastasia Patsyutina. “Territoriya Botov/Territory of Bots.” *Strana.UA*, longread.strana.ua/territoriya_botov.

¹³⁶ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹³⁷ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹³⁸ Lozovoi and Davidenko.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁴¹ Interview with the author, 2017.



Interacting with Citizens

During the 2014 elections, political parties used online feedback forms and read Facebook comments to gather qualitative data, including on how the public reacts to certain messages. Quantitatively, they tracked the number of “likes” and “shares.” Online forms were used to gather names and email addresses, which parties later used for promotional purposes. The degree to which political parties integrated this into their operations and planning is uncertain.¹⁴²

BPP-Solidarnist also used online technology to monitor and react to voter mobilization in a strategic manner. Shamrai explained that on Election Day in 2014, instant election results were reported online by party observers (for example, via closed Facebook groups or Facebook Messenger). This information helped the party identify where results looked suspicious and to send its lawyers to contest the outcome.¹⁴³

Despite this novel use of digital technology, party interactions with citizens online are generally limited. Parties seldom use full-scale online surveys to measure public opinion. A representative of SIC Group Ukraine said that internet surveys only provide biased samples, given that internet penetration is substantially lower in smaller towns and rural areas compared to urban centers.¹⁴⁴



Fundraising for Party Activities

In Ukraine, most political parties are personally financed by a small number of influential individuals and fundraising among the general public is weak. Thus, in spite of some efforts to widen their pool of financial contributors, online fundraising provided a negligible share of overall political financing in 2014. Savanevsky of PlusOne DA estimates that the cost of soliciting donations in Ukraine is greater than the amount that could be raised.¹⁴⁵

The relatively minor role that internet financing played in 2014 is a function of the broader culture, in which political parties are largely mistrusted and not considered worthy recipients of donations.¹⁴⁶ One interview respondent said that in exchange for their financial support, many voters expect parties to offer them money, food or gifts, such as branded hats, coats or umbrellas.¹⁴⁷ Additionally, the infrastructure for accepting and processing these donations did not exist in many parties; one reason that this infrastructure hasn't been developed is because Ukrainian legislation requires extensive financial reporting on donations.¹⁴⁸



Building Party Infrastructure

In Ukraine, digital technology is rarely used to build party apparatus, register new members or recruit volunteers. Shamrai of BPP-Solidarnist said the party used online advertising or emails to attract new members, whereas Korniyenko of the Democratic Alliance said they used an online form to encourage people to volunteer and to apply for party membership in the 2014 elections.¹⁴⁹ But overall, neither party conducts systematic infrastructure development using digital tools.

¹⁴² Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁴³ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁴⁴ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with the author, 2017.

One of the few known instances of parties using digital tools to support party infrastructure is the customer-relationship-management (CRM) system used by Nash Krai (Our Land), a party with just one representative in the parliament.¹⁵⁰ Nash Krai publishes print and online newspapers that include quick-response (QR) barcodes. The party analyzes reader data to develop a more targeted communication strategy and to identify potential volunteers and party members. A special team calls readers to persuade them to engage in party activities. All party members also have paper party cards with scannable QR barcodes, allowing the party to easily identify members in an online database.



Internal Communication

Ukrainian political parties used several platforms to improve intraparty communication and bolster connections between party leadership, regional chapters, activists and general members during the 2014 campaign.

One interview respondent said political parties routinely used email lists, closed Facebook groups and Facebook chats for internal communication and coordination of activities, especially at the local level.¹⁵¹ According to one interview respondent, BPP-Solidarnist had a well-developed CRM system since 2014, with task lists, digital literature and even rankings of performance of local units.

Such digital systems can be quite elaborate. Andriy Valchyshyn, an independent political consultant, recalled that the Democratic Alliance had an organizational management system that allowed users to access the party's Facebook page via their personal accounts.¹⁵² Once on the page, the user could pay membership fees and participate in party polls online. While emailing and using Facebook communication may be easier, communication using a CRM system is much safer in terms of cybersecurity. Korniyenko of the Democratic Alliance said that the party created 10 moderated Facebook groups and conducted wide public discussion around the party platform.¹⁵³

The Future of Digital Technology During Campaigns

The domain of digital promotion is underdeveloped in Ukraine. There have been purposeful efforts by political parties to carry out social media marketing in house or to hire external public-relations agencies to provide content for party websites. But small budgets have limited the scope of such efforts, young audiences have not been reached and microtargeting usage is controversial. Despite this, the election of President Zelensky in 2019 has been linked to his effective use of digital technologies.¹⁵⁴

As Politico noted, throughout his campaign, Zelensky “did no face-to-face campaigning, made no speeches, held no rallies, eschewed travel across the country, gave no press conferences, avoided in-depth interviews with independent journalists and, until the last day of campaigning, did not debate,” instead relying heavily on digital campaign tactics.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Notably, Nash Krai implemented this CRM system in the July 2016 constituency by-elections.

¹⁵¹ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁵² Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁵³ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁵⁴ Karatnycky, Adrian. “The World Just Witnessed the First Entirely Virtual Presidential Campaign.” *Politico*, 24 Apr. 2019, [politico.com/magazine/story/2019/04/24/ukraine-president-virtual-campaign-226711](https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2019/04/24/ukraine-president-virtual-campaign-226711).

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Parties plan to apply several innovative digital techniques, some imported, and some developed in Ukraine. BPP-Solidarnist plans to provide more content for regional websites and to use a CRM system in regional branches to attract, analyze and understand sympathizers. One respondent, an adviser for the presidential administration of Ukraine, boasted that his firm has developed a system of automated content analysis that is able to monitor the social media posts of 500 key opinion makers.¹⁵⁶ He also discussed the “info-cocoons” technique, whereby a dozen or so people-like bots become Facebook friends with public-opinion leaders in order to influence them, and said his firm plans to introduce a reputation-management mobile application so that customers would be able to monitor their images on Facebook.

New strategies are likely to emerge as parties become better versed in which digital tactics resonate with Ukrainian voters and which platforms provide the most effective engagement. Korniyenko says the Democratic Alliance plans to add more content to a YouTube channel in a strategic effort to target a future generation of voters aged 16 to 25.¹⁵⁷

SPONSORED POLITICAL CONTENT.

One new technique is to employ writers under false names to write seemingly nonpartisan articles that include partisan messaging (often called *konservy*, literally “canned food”). Under fake names, writers provide articles for popular online websites such as *Obozrevatel* or *Segodnia* (Today). The articles include subtle partisan cues (often called *vbrosy*, literally “throw-ins,” meaning intentional injections of a desired agenda). Consulting agencies sometimes use these articles to bring political topics into the public discourse. Political operatives will employ multiple writers to write on different topics to avoid any single writer being identified as partisan. Readers often cannot distinguish this paid content from objective journalism.

Because of Ukraine's geopolitical position, it must be conscientious about Russian active measures. In 2014, Russia actively compromised the Central Election Commission (CEC) network.¹⁵⁸ During the 2014 elections, CyberBerkut hacked into the CEC “disabling core CEC network nodes and numerous components of the election system. For nearly 20 hours, the software, which was designed to display real-time updates in the vote count, did not work properly. On 25 May – Election Day – 12 minutes before the polls closed (19:48 EET), the attackers posted on the CEC website a picture of Ukrainian Right Sector leader Dmitry Yarosh, incorrectly claiming that he had won the election.”¹⁵⁹ Though this attack did not target the integrity of the voting itself, it became a potent demonstration of the threats posed by hacking and the country's cybersecurity vulnerabilities. These issues have relevance outside of Ukraine's borders; Kyiv has been described as a “laboratory for Russia's information warfare tactics.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁵⁸ “Foreign Interference in Ukraine's Democracy.” *Atlantic Council*, May 2019, atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Foreign_Interference_in_Ukraines_Election.pdf.

¹⁵⁹ Koval, Nikolay. “Revolution Hacking.” *NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence Tallinn, Estonia*, 2015, ccdcoe.org/uploads/2018/10/Ch06_CyberWarinPerspective_Koval.pdf.

¹⁶⁰ Jankowicz, Nina. “Ukraine's Election Is an All-Out Disinformation Battle.” *The Atlantic*, 17 Apr. 2019, theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/04/russia-disinformation-ukraine-election/587179/.

Ukrainian measures, such as banning Russian websites in an attempt to limit Russian disinformation campaigns, have limited effectiveness.¹⁶¹ The country is considering additional legislative measures, but is facing the difficult question of how to balance cybersecurity with freedom of speech. The efforts to disrupt Ukrainian elections are a part of a larger Russian cyberattack campaign against Ukraine that “has systematically undermined practically every sector of Ukraine: media, finance, transportation, military, politics, energy.”¹⁶² Learning from these measures, Ukraine set up a more robust cybersecurity program to prevent Russian interference. The country established the Ministry of Information Policy in 2015, in an attempt to counter threats to Ukraine’s “information space.”¹⁶³ Russian tactics have changed in response to these new defenses; during the 2019 elections for example, Russia tried to circumvent new safeguards established by Facebook by paying Ukrainian citizens for access to their personal pages.¹⁶⁴ The Russian campaign did not target any individual candidates, but rather sought to undermine the electoral process generally.¹⁶⁵

Conclusion

In the 2014 elections in Ukraine, political parties targeted different audiences with distinct communication approaches. Older, bigger parties with substantial human and financial resources focused on traditional media, especially television, to reach older citizens who have a high voter turnout, while working at the same time to expand their digital influence to win over younger voters. Newer, smaller parties with modest teams and funding were more reliant on and experimental with digital technology, seeking to reach young and middle-aged voters who have not been particularly active during elections.

In years since, many of the characteristics of party politics in Ukraine have remained the same. Traditional television still plays a decisive role in nationwide elections for parliament, especially in big cities. Face-to-face interaction with voters remains the key to success in local elections, particularly in smaller rural settlements. The battleground for digital campaigns has expanded. Urban areas, especially the capital city of Kyiv in the 2014 election cycle had the highest internet penetration and the biggest concentration of middle-aged, educated voters.¹⁶⁶ Between that electoral cycle and this writing, internet connectivity and infrastructure have improved significantly across the country, as has the distribution of educated voters. While these changes present new opportunities for national campaigns, they carry associated risks. Russian active measures and disinformation campaigns, for example may increasingly present a significant challenge to future Ukrainian elections, as digital technology continues to lower barriers to information exchange and communication between political parties and citizens.

¹⁶¹ Notably, Ukraine banned Russian social media outlet *V Kontakte* in 2017. See “Ukraine Bans Its Top Social Networks Because They are Russian.” *Economist*, 19 May 2017, [economist.com/europe/2017/05/19/ukraine-bans-its-top-social-networks-because-they-are-russian](https://www.economist.com/europe/2017/05/19/ukraine-bans-its-top-social-networks-because-they-are-russian); and Helmus, Todd C., et al. “Russian Social Media Influence.” *RAND Corporation*, 2018, [rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2200/RR2237/RAND_RR2237.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2200/RR2237/RAND_RR2237.pdf).

¹⁶² Greenberg, Andy. “How an Entire Nation Became Russia’s Test Lab for Cyberwar.” *Wired*, 20 June 2017, <https://www.wired.com/story/russian-hackers-attack-ukraine/>.

¹⁶³ Jankowicz. “Ukraine’s Election Is an All-Out Disinformation Battle.”

¹⁶⁴ Schwirtz, Michael, and Sheera Frenkel. “In Ukraine, Russia Tests a New Facebook Tactic in Election Tampering.” *The New York Times*, 29 Mar. 2019, [nytimes.com/2019/03/29/world/europe/ukraine-russia-election-tampering-propaganda.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/29/world/europe/ukraine-russia-election-tampering-propaganda.html).

¹⁶⁵ “Foreign Interference in Ukraine’s Democracy.”

¹⁶⁶ Albrecht, Erik. “Low Prices, Good Connectivity – Ukrainian Internet Infrastructure Allows Usage to Grow Rapidly.” *Deutsche Welle*, 1 July 2019, www.dw.com/en/low-prices-good-connectivity-ukrainian-internet-infrastructure-allows-usage-to-grow-rapidly/a-49266786; “Individuals Using the Internet (% of Population) — Ukraine.” *The World Bank*, data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=UA.



Source: IRI

CHAPTER 5

TANZANIA

Christopher Awinia

Introduction

In Tanzania, political parties make widespread use of websites and social media, especially WhatsApp and Facebook, for core functions from voter mobilization to the development of party infrastructure.¹⁶⁷ Such activity will increase as access to the internet and mobile technology continues to rise.¹⁶⁸

This chapter provides an overview of the use of digital technology by political parties during Tanzania's 2015 general elections. It outlines the political and digital environment for the 2015 campaign, summarizes party politics in Tanzania, describes the ways political parties used digital technology, and offers some thoughts on the use of digital technology in future political campaigns.

The Techno-Political Environment

Given Tanzania's low level of technological development (20 percent of the population was connected to the internet in 2015) and governance characteristics (Tanzania is classified as an anocracy by Polity IV), it is classified as a low-tech partial democracy for the purposes of this book. While democracy continues to struggle in Tanzania, digital technology is increasingly used by ordinary citizens and political parties for a variety of purposes. However, the digital and political environments in Tanzania have soured following the enactment of the controversial Cybercrimes Act passed by parliament in February 2015.

Beyond the general techno-political environment, one specific regulation constrains the use of ICT in politics. The Cybercrimes Act adopted in April 2015 enables broad regulatory power in several spheres, including espionage, obscenity, disinformation, hate speech and intellectual-property rights. This broad discretion has the effect of enabling political incumbents to restrict civic and political freedoms, including the capacity of opposition parties to use digital technology in elections.

This use of state authority to restrict political and civic freedoms increased the relative importance of social media — especially Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram — in political-party activities. A member of CHADEMA (Party for Democracy and Progress) said, "There is no other way available [to reach voters] given the position taken by the government to use the police force to suspend public rallies and internal meetings of political parties."¹⁶⁹

Restrictions imposed by the Cybercrimes Act of 2015 impinged on core functions of political parties during the 2015 general elections. "The Cybercrimes Act has negatively affected the ability of my party to communicate its opposition to government policy and to reach out widely to our voter base. There is no freedom for a political party leader to express his feelings," a member of the CHADEMA National Secretariat said. The law has affected how political parties navigate the internet and, because of prosecutions of individuals under the act, will likely impact the degree to which citizens feel comfortable engaging in politics online. "Community members are not free to use social media for interactions in politics because of the law that was passed to regulate digital platforms," a CHADEMA ward women's wing chairperson said. A number

¹⁶⁷ The research and writing for this chapter were completed during the summer and fall of 2017.

¹⁶⁸ "Measuring the Information Society Report." *International Telecommunications Union*, 2016, itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Documents/publications/misr2016/MISR2016-w4.pdf; Cross, Charlotte. "Tanzania's Social Media Policing Increases the Risks of Government Abuse." *The Conversation*, 30 Oct. 2016, theconversation.com/tanzanias-social-media-policing-increases-the-risks-of-government-abuse-67478.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with the author, 2017.

of CHADEMA members referenced fears about the safety of their members as a reason for avoiding the use of social media to interact with supporters. Political parties continued to use SMS, posters and public rallies to promote interaction because they found them to be safer platforms for doing so.

The law has already been used against opposition political parties. On Election Day, October 25, 2015, the opposition UKAWA (*Umoja wa Katiba ya Wananchi* or **Coalition for the People's Constitution**) coalition's exit-polling center was raided by police, and 38 people were detained. During the arrests, police confiscated the opposition coalition's laptops and intimidated members of the media. As a result, eight CHADEMA staff members were charged under Section 16 of the Cybercrimes Act for publishing "inaccurate and unverified data" on Facebook, Twitter and the party's election-management system.

Limitations on the use of digital technology most severely affected intraparty communication and the ability of political parties to conduct campaigns. Other areas affected were long-term party strengthening, dialogue with voters and fundraising. As a CCM (*Chama cha Mapinduzi* or **Revolutionary Party**) ward-level youth secretary said, "I just can't go to my social media account and express my political views freely." A CHADEMA ward secretary said, "We are aware that some of our political party leaders' phones are being tapped and monitored." Members of the opposition parties found ways to circumvent the fears surrounding use of digital media by using social media coordinators. As a social media coordinator from CHADEMA explained, "Individual party members who were afraid to share information critical of the government's policy were told to share the information with the coordinator of social media at party headquarters. The coordinator then posted it on behalf of the party, while the individual remained anonymous."¹⁷⁰

Overview of Party Politics

Tanzania had a checkered history of democratic development prior to the 2015 general elections. The first multiparty elections were held in 1995.¹⁷¹ Since then, the ruling party, CCM, has maintained the presidency and a majority in parliament. Though Tanzania is a one-party state, divisions within the CCM prompted the party to broker a series of pacts; "this allows little room for the inclusion of views from outside high-ranking political circles."¹⁷² The party also maintains its position through patronage, using access to resources and opportunities to reward supporters and punish those who oppose the party.¹⁷³ However, beginning in 2005, CCM experienced a gradual decline in its electoral performance.

Opposition parties have not been able to leverage patronage relationships to generate support to the degree that the CCM has. Though these parties have taken aim at the patronage systems that sustain the main party and have largely skirted the threat of individual, charismatic leaders dominating the party, they remain deeply influenced by a small group of elites.¹⁷⁴ Tanzania's 2015 presidential election was the most competitive since the start of multiparty elections in the country. The main opposition parties — CHADEMA and the Civic United Front (CUF) —

¹⁷⁰ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁷¹ Shaba, Richard. "State of Politics in Tanzania." *Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung*, July 2007, [kas.de/wf/doc/kas_17338-1522-2-30.pdf?090831100514](https://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_17338-1522-2-30.pdf?090831100514).

¹⁷² Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁷³ Weinstein, Laura. "The Politics of Government Expenditures in Tanzania: 1999-2007." *Department of Political Science University of California-Los Angeles*, cega.berkeley.edu/assets/miscellaneous_files/wgape/18_Weinstein.pdf.

¹⁷⁴ Whitehead, Richard L. "The Institutionalisation of the Tanzanian Opposition Parties: How Stable Are They?" *Michelsen Institute, Development Studies and Human Rights*, 2000, [cmi.no/publications/file/1038-the-institutionalisation-of-the-tanzanian.pdf](https://www.cmi.no/publications/file/1038-the-institutionalisation-of-the-tanzanian.pdf).

united to form the UKAWA coalition, with CHADEMA fronting a single presidential candidate on the mainland and CUF's candidate running for the presidency of the archipelago of Zanzibar, a semiautonomous region.¹⁷⁵

The CCM presidential candidate, John Magufuli, won the election with 58.46 percent of the vote; CHADEMA's UKAWA candidate, Edward Lowassa, who garnered 38.97 percent, was the runner-up. Support for smaller political parties ranged from 0.6 percent to a mere 0.05 percent. Nearly 70 percent of the members of parliament (MPs) elected were from CCM. The opposition parties held 31 percent of the seats in parliament, with 61.4 percent of those for CHADEMA, 36.8 percent for CUF and 0.87 percent for NCCR (**National Convention for Construction and Reform-Mageuzi**) and ACT-Wazalendo (**Patriots**).¹⁷⁶

Digital Technology Use

During the 2015 elections, there was little difference between major parties in how they used digital technologies to campaign. Social media were mostly used in intraparty communication, political mobilization and communication with voters; there was less use of digital technology for fundraising purposes.



Mobilizing Citizens

Major parties used ICT to mobilize party members and voters. “We used social media in the 2015 elections to mobilize our party members to get out and vote, to ask for votes and to remind voters of the election date,” a CCM party branch leader said.¹⁷⁷

Social media platforms were particularly useful in mobilizing members to attend campaign rallies or party meetings. Party representatives said they used digital technology to mobilize voters to get out and vote (CCM member); to remind voters about the election date (CCM branch youth secretary); to broadcast news about upcoming meetings (CUF ward youth secretary); and to quickly share news about emergency meetings (CHADEMA ward treasurer).¹⁷⁸

A smaller number of party officials said they only minimally used digital technology, either because they struggled to use it or chose other means to mobilize voters. A particular barrier preventing some parties from leveraging digital technologies is a lack of familiarity with these platforms among some party elites.¹⁷⁹ Both party leader limitations and strong norms of in-person political mobilization limit ICT use; such features may render digital technologies irrelevant or complementary to other forms of mobilization.

Factors such as age, education and access to technology all had an impact on the way voters (and party representatives) reacted to the parties' embrace of social media. ICT use is pronounced among youth. “I prefer to use Telegram to share documents with young members,

and Instagram and Snapchat to share pictures. This helps me to share information to our social

¹⁷⁵ UKAWA comprises the parties CHADEMA, CUF, NCCR and Tanzania Democratic Alliance (TADEA); Collord, Michaela. “An Improbable ‘Liberation’ — How Tanzania’s Ruling Party Lost a Rural Stronghold.” *Africa Research Institute*, 19 Oct. 2015, africaresearchinstitute.org/newsite/blog/an-improbable-liberation-how-tanzanias-ruling-party-lost-a-rural-stronghold/.

¹⁷⁶ For statistics, see “*Taarifa ya Tume ya Taifa ya Uchaguzi Kuhusu Uchaguzi wa Rais, Wabunge na Muhiwani 2015.*” 2016, <https://www.nec.go.tz/>.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with the author, 2017.

media group in a timely manner," a young branch member of CHADEMA said.¹⁸⁰

Of course, many Tanzanians, especially in rural areas, lack access to the technology that supports the use of digital media, such as smartphones, and to information related to signing up for and utilizing social media apps. Political-party representatives without social media accounts said they used more traditional means to conduct party campaign activities, such as making phone calls, sending text messages (SMS), putting up posters and holding public meetings. "We prefer to use radio, television and newspapers [to communicate] when we have a big event in our area," a party representative from ACT-Wazalendo said.²⁴



Promoting Party Ideas

During the 2015 general elections, political parties in Tanzania increasingly adopted social media to promote their agendas, including party ideologies, campaign manifesto statements and party positions on issues. "We used social media to promote party activities by sharing pictures of events and activities and video clips from party leaders," a CUF ward secretary said.¹⁸¹ CUF and CHADEMA used social media platforms to promote their political ideologies and manifestos more than other parties did.

Across several parties, WhatsApp is an especially popular technology because it comes preinstalled on a number of popular mobile phones in Tanzania.¹⁸²

Unfortunately, the popularity of WhatsApp has not made it an especially productive forum. A Tanzanian strategist noted that "WhatsApp is a preferred tool of choice for propaganda, mudslinging, and negative messaging," often serving as a home for "messaging [that] you can't say yourself that surrogates can do for you."¹⁸³

Some political-party leaders refrained from using social media to promote party ideology for various reasons. Another CCM representative pointed to privacy concerns: "We refrained from using social media to share sensitive party information because social media is not safe or secure."¹⁸⁴ Then there was the challenge of the digital gap between urban and rural areas. As a member of CHADEMA's national secretariat put it, "The problem is many people in rural villages do not have smartphones."¹⁸⁵



Interacting with Citizens

Political parties also used digital platforms as a medium for conducting research. Party strategists assessed public opinion and obtained feedback from members, voters and citizens. "We also used social media as a means to informally interact with our friends and to learn what voters' expectations were," a CUF ward chairperson said.¹⁸⁶ This is important within the context of the Cybercrimes Act because party representatives do not seem to assume that the government will apply the act to restrict online research and opinion polling as a means of interaction between political parties, party members and the general public.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁸¹ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁸² Mohammed, Omar. "WhatsApp is Now the Primary Platform for Political Trash Talk in Tanzania's Election Campaign." *Quartz Africa*, 27 Sept. 2015. qz.com/africa/510899/whatsapp-is-now-the-primary-platform-for-political-trash-talk-in-tanzanias-election-campaign/.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁸⁵ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with the author, 2017.

Tanzanian political-party representatives were most likely to interact with fellow party members and the public through mobile-phone SMS services. These services require less expensive phones, do not require internet access, are affordable and can be paid for in bulk bundles. SMS communication is also a popular form of communication because it does not fall under the cybercrimes laws and thus presents less of a risk to party members and supporters.

Public rallies were the second-most-preferred media for interaction between party representatives and citizens/voters. A CCM ward-level party official said, “No matter what technology comes along, it cannot totally replace political rallies and public meetings.”¹⁸⁷ Party leaders, especially in rural settings, preferred to use these tried and tested means of communication, noting that many of their party members and supporters did not use social media. To a lesser extent, political parties sometimes issued surveys to obtain feedback from voters. “We used surveys to obtain feedback from party members, general citizens and voters. We asked them to give their opinion on whether our candidate was acceptable,” a CCM representative said.¹⁸⁸

Overall, political parties shied away from social media when it came to interacting with the public. Parties employed both traditional and digital means of communication to avoid excluding low-income or senior citizens who did not have access to digital technology.



Fundraising for Party Activities

Fundraising has been a difficult and controversial issue for political parties in Tanzania.¹⁸⁹ Parties receive subsidies or operational grants based on the percentage of presidential and parliamentary votes received. There have been concerns both domestically and internationally over transparency and corruption when it comes to party fundraising. These include questions regarding accountability measures taken by political parties in handling contributions (for example, how donations are documented internally) and whether funds provided to party officials are used for their intended purposes, particularly at subnational and party branch levels.

The Tanzanian public lacks enthusiasm for contributing to political activities, especially for using digital platforms to do so.¹⁹⁰ It is therefore no surprise that social media were least used for conducting fundraising activities compared to other party activities. “People cannot easily appreciate your party’s financial needs via phone. They need to see a detailed presentation of your campaign financial proposal and needs,” a CCM youth secretary said.¹⁹¹

This lack of enthusiasm is perhaps especially acute among opposition supporters, who fear legal persecution. “Because of the 2010 Elections Act [enacted to control financing of political parties during party nominations], some contributors to opposition parties preferred to remain anonymous and to donate cash instead of sending money via a mobile phone app,” a CUF member said.¹⁹² Among those who fundraised, mobile phones and social media were

¹⁸⁷ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁸⁹ Babeiya, Edwin. “Electoral Corruption and the Politics of Elections Financing in Tanzania.” *Journal of Politics and Law*, vol. 4, no. 2, September 2011, pdfs.semanticscholar.org/629d/80e1ec75428649b5e2ffb712a25984569eb.pdf; Magolowondo, Augustine, et al. “Regulating Political Party Financing: Some Insights from the Praxis.” *International Institute for Democracy and Legislative Assistance*, 2013, idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/regulating-political-party-financing-insights-from-praxis.pdf.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁹¹ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁹² “Tanzania: Party Funding and Finances.” *African Democracy Encyclopaedia Project, Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa*, May 2010, eisa.org.za/wep/tanparties2.htm; Babeiya. “Electoral Corruption and the Politics of Elections Financing in Tanzania.”; Interview with the author, 2017.

the leading platforms for doing so. Mobile money services were the most preferred media for fundraising.¹⁹³ The CHADEMA example illustrates a linkage between social media and older forms of technology for fundraising, whereby political parties appeal for funds through social media, then money is transferred through MMS. The CUF was a particularly effective adopter of digital fundraising efforts; this is in part a function of the CUF's support base in Zanzibar, where mobile money services are widely used.

In summary, although web-based applications were used for fundraising purposes, digital technology was not a primary means by which parties fundraised. This was driven by regulations, as well as a general public skepticism toward political donations.



Building Party Infrastructure

All political parties in Tanzania used social media to conduct political campaign activities. They used mobile phones for several purposes, such as sending instructions to implement party directives, sharing invitations to party meetings, facilitating meetings, and even sending payments to party members.¹⁹⁴

Those parties that adopted social media reported that they were able to cut down on the number of meetings, share information within the party, get results from polling areas and monitor polls for fraud. Parties used Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram during the 2015 election campaigns.

Social media facilitated new forms of virtual meetings, allowing for additional participation by people who were not statutory members of certain party structures. For example, a CUF ward chairperson said that his party used to make decisions solely in face-to-face meetings but now also uses social media to conduct online meetings.¹⁹⁵

Most party officials and members interviewed said that the new structures created by digital technology and social media for organizing and implementing political campaigns were informal, auxiliary and an extension of statutory structures. Many said that the informal structures allowed for inclusive and flexible participation that deviated from formal structures and rules, helping recruit new bases of support. In some instances, social media transformed structures by merging national and local party representatives into one group that worked to organize a big local event. "For the first time, we were in the same working group with national-level representatives. In the past, we would work separately and only plan together at the last moment. Through the WhatsApp groups, we worked together with headquarters from the beginning. This improved coordination and impact," said a branch secretary of CUF.¹⁹⁶

A CHADEMA ward organization secretary said that social media helped improve the perception of privacy of party meetings: "An additional advantage of social media was that we could hold 'secret meetings.' In the past if we met physically our competitors would know that we had met at a certain place and second-guess or preempt our strategies."¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with the author, 2017. It is important to note, however, that "virtual" meetings carry their own privacy risks. Practitioners working with political-party partners should carefully weigh the risks and opportunities of virtual meetings against those of traditional in-person meetings, and should ensure that digital-security measures are in place.



Internal Communication

Several Tanzanian party representatives reported that social media increased the amount of intraparty communication. “We used social media for practical things such as sending announcements of our key events or where the next campaign rally would be held,” a CHADEMA party branch official said.¹⁹⁸ Social media also made intraparty communication, which used to include letters and in-person meetings, more interactive. “We had discussions, and sometime even serious disagreements, via social media,” a CUF representative said.¹⁹⁹

Facebook and WhatsApp were the leading social media platforms for communicating intraparty messages. Social media did not replace more traditional platforms; parties reported using standard communications technologies, including telephone and SMS, written letters, face-to-face meetings, and public rallies. In this sense, in low-tech partial democracies, ICT may facilitate better intraparty communication, but is not likely to replace more fundamental communications tools.

The Future of Digital Technology during Campaigns

Future technology use by political parties in Tanzania will depend on opposition-state relations over the next few years. In particular, how the government enforces the Cybercrimes Act of 2015 will be an important factor in the use of digital technology in Tanzania going forward. The country’s continued authoritarian slide suggests that the incumbent CCM will make use of such legal provisions to curtail the effectiveness of the political opposition and reduce the ability of citizens to use the internet as a space for political organizing.

In March of 2020, nine members of CHADEMA were convicted of making seditious statements, suggesting that the 2020 campaign will be characterized by legal repression. The 2015 elections may have shifted the ruling party’s incentive structure and approach to campaigning. As a representative from ACT-Wazalendo noted, “There was never any fear from the ruling party that they can be defeated in the ballot box and that’s why they didn’t resort to heavy-handed tactics until now.”²⁰⁰ The local elections held in 2019, in which the opposition party boycotted the polls because of concerns over the integrity of the elections, suggest that the 2020 elections will see the CCM use all of the resources at its disposal to maintain its grip on power.²⁰¹

Digital technology will likely continue to be used during elections; with the 2020 elections on the horizon, democracy promotion advocates should be attentive to the use of digital technology in the campaign. In addition to monitoring how political parties use digital technologies, policymakers should be attentive to the ways in which civil society is using digital platforms to improve election-monitoring and information-sharing efforts.²⁰² It is likely that social media users will increasingly assert their freedom of expression in cyberspace. The government’s treatment of political discussion, dialogue and satire as a cybercrime will continue to be strongly opposed by civil society. Social media and digital technologies will likely become all the more important as the government reduces the freedom of press, restricting

¹⁹⁸ Interview with the author, 2017.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with the author, 2017.

²⁰⁰ Collins, Tom. “Tanzania’s ACT Party Gunning for 2020 Despite Government Crackdown.” *NewAfrican*, 5 Dec. 2019, newafricanmagazine.com/22026/.

²⁰¹ “Landslide Win for Tanzania Ruling Party in Boycotted Local Polls.” *Al Jazeera*, 26 Nov. 2019, aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/landslide-win-tanzania-ruling-party-boycotted-local-polls-191126052300259.html.

²⁰² Shayo, Deodatus Patrick. “Citizen Participation in Local Democracy Online: A Snapshot of Trends and Challenges in Adoption of Crowdsourcing Methods in Tanzania.” *Journal of Social and Political Sciences*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2019, papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3482264.

the topics and events that journalists can safely cover.²⁰³ Already, CHADEMA members have used their smartphones and digital infrastructure to record videos of parliamentary procedures, skirting limitations on such broadcasts.²⁰⁴ Political-party officials, activists and citizens who are members of social media groups are eager to protect their freedom of speech online. In one such example, when Isaac Abakuki Emily was found guilty of cybercrimes, within hours, 7 million Tanzanian shillings (\$3,190) was raised through crowdfunding on social media to cover his fine.²⁰⁵ The possibility that disinformation and misinformation campaigns will mar Tanzanian elections and campaigns looms large. Political parties will be forced to contend with the rise of these tactics, both by government and party-affiliated groups. Political parties, increasingly reliant on digital technologies, must also grapple with government ramifications of engaging in politics online.²⁰⁶

Conclusion

The rapid adoption of social media by Tanzanian political parties, particularly by the opposition, has prompted the government to restrict its use. Even so, digital tools helped both ruling and opposition political parties perform their key functions during the 2015 election cycle and could help the country prevent democratic backsliding.

A survey of party representatives across the Tanzanian political spectrum suggests that digital technology was mostly used to disseminate party ideology, mobilize voters and facilitate intraparty communication. It was least used for fundraising. Among respondents, WhatsApp and Facebook were the most widely used social media platforms. They preferred multimedia communication approaches that combined traditional tools such as posters, loudspeakers and SMS with the use of digital tools. One of the key factors limiting the use of digital tools is access to smartphones and related digital technology. Given Tanzania's high levels of poverty, many citizens do not have access to the devices needed for digital tools to function. The use of SMS services and other mobile-phone-based programs helped parties circumvent these issues.

The opposition will have to continue to develop innovative approaches to digital technology, both to overcome low levels of access to such technology and repressive government regulation of these forums.

²⁰³ "As Long as I Am Quiet, I Am Safe." *Human Rights Watch*, 28 Oct. 2019, hrw.org/report/2019/10/28/long-i-am-quiet-i-am-safe/threats-independent-media-and-civil-society-tanzania.

²⁰⁴ Dwyer, Maggie, and Thomas Molony. *Social Media and Politics in Africa*, London, Zed Books, 2019, books.google.com/books?id=XouxDwAAQB-AJ&pg=PT229&lpg=PT229&dq=chadema+social+media+campaign&source=bl&ots=BkTCj7tbwp&sig=ACfU3U17Hulzh98Q4DuilvOpQu6-GzpAAA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj12JrD5qToAhUCIXIEHTZQAdUQ6AEwAHoECAoQAQ#v=onepage&q=chadema&f=false.

²⁰⁵ Cross. "Tanzania's Social Media Policing Increases the Risks of Government Abuse."

²⁰⁶ Mwesigwa, Daniel. "Africa in the Crosshairs of New Disinformation and Surveillance Schemes That Undermine Democracy." *The Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa*, 9 Dec. 2019, cipesa.org/2019/12/africa-in-the-crosshairs-of-new-disinformation-and-surveillance-schemes-that-undermine-democracy/.



Source: IRI

CHAPTER 6

VENEZUELA

Inés Royo Oyaga

Introduction

Since 2014, the political, economic and human-rights situation in Venezuela has deteriorated at unprecedented rates. Under Hugo Chávez's successor, Nicolás Maduro, the country's political system has deteriorated into autocracy, sliding from "partially free" to "not free" in the Freedom House rankings.²⁰⁷ *Mesa de Unidad Democrática* (MUD) won parliamentary elections in a landslide victory.²⁰⁸ Since then, the Venezuelan National Assembly (*Asamblea Nacional de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela* or NA), where the opposition political parties have maintained representation, has continued to highlight injustices and violations committed by the Maduro regime.

This chapter will analyze MUD's 2015 electoral campaign, specifically how MUD obtained its unprecedented victory in that year's legislative elections.²⁰⁹ This success was due to the opposition's messaging strategy and the population's strong desire for change. It was also the result of digital technology playing a role as a means of directly and reliably reaching all sectors of the population in every corner of the country. The digital environment allowed MUD to overcome some of the censorship and controls exercised by the government, as well as problems of information-technology connectivity in Venezuela.

This chapter will describe the 2015 techno-political environment in Venezuela; provide a brief overview of party politics in the country; outline how the opposition party used digital technology during the 2015 campaign; and discuss how the use of digital technology during campaigns is likely to evolve in the future.

The Techno-Political Environment

For the purposes of this report, Venezuela is classified as a middle-tech partial democracy. According to annual data published by the World Bank, internet penetration in Venezuela in 2015 was 61.8 percent, placing the country at a medium technological level, above the average penetration of the network both worldwide (44 percent) and in Latin America and the Caribbean (55 percent).²¹⁰ This classification is restricted to 2015, when the country was classified as an anocracy by Polity IV. The year of the election under examination does not reflect the recent democratic recession in the country.

Though telecommunications capacity has improved in Venezuela, many Venezuelans remain excluded from those improvements. Despite fairly widespread access to the internet, World Bank data indicates that only 8.2 percent of internet subscriptions in Venezuela are to a broadband line (256 kilobits per second (kbps) or more), a level similar to countries such as Jamaica or Vietnam.²¹¹ This limits the use of the internet when greater data consumption or a faster connection speed is required. For example, watching online videos on YouTube or broadcasting a live event through Instagram is often beyond the internet capacity of an average Venezuelan internet user. Political parties had to take this reality into account during the 2015 parliamentary election.



Source: IRI

²⁰⁷ Derived from Freedom House "Freedom in the World" reports in 2014 and 2019.

²⁰⁸ Trinkunas, Harold. "Why Venezuela's Opposition Has Been Unable to Effectively Challenge Maduro." *Brookings*, 8 Jan. 2018, [brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/01/08/why-venezuelas-opposition-has-been-unable-to-effectively-challenge-maduro/](https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/01/08/why-venezuelas-opposition-has-been-unable-to-effectively-challenge-maduro/).

²⁰⁹ MUD stands for Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (Democratic Unity Roundtable).

²¹⁰ "Individuals Using the Internet (% of Population)." *The World Bank – Data*, accessed 15 Aug. 2017, data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS.

²¹¹ "Fixed Broadband Subscriptions (per 100 people)." *The World Bank – Data*, accessed 15 Aug. 2017, data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.BBND.P2?locations=VE.

Overview of Party Politics

At the time of the 2015 election, politics in Venezuela were polarized between two opposing groups: the government party of Nicolás Maduro, who succeeded Chávez, and the opposition parties that formed MUD. Both coalitions included parties of different ideologies and political principles, and were defined primarily by their stance toward the ruling *Chavismo* ideology.

On December 6, 2015, the Venezuelan parliamentary elections were held to elect members of the unicameral legislative body, known as the National Assembly. These elections gave the opposition 112 seats in the National Assembly, compared to 55 for the pro-government political forces. It was the first time in Venezuelan history that a coalition of parties achieved two-thirds of the National Assembly, and only the second electoral event in which the party of the government lost — the first being the 2007 referendum on constitutional reform.

While this change in power was largely unexpected, the opposition was able to capitalize on widespread hopelessness and insecurity among citizens to produce this electoral victory. MUD moved to adopt a more unified election strategy for all the parties in the coalition. “We realized that the only option we had if we were going to win was to run all the opposition parties united, with a single ballot and a single campaign strategy. Otherwise, it would be very difficult to convince people to give us their vote and to see us as the change they so craved,” Vanessa Sánchez, executive secretary of the Justice First parliamentary faction, said.²¹² Digital technology played a key role in this strategy and ultimately proved essential to MUD’s victory. Despite MUD’s leading role in the 2015 elections, it was disqualified by the Supreme Court of Justice from appearing on the ballot in the 2018 presidential election.

Digital Technology Use

The 2015 elections are an example of how the digital environment allowed a coalition of parties to successfully reach all corners of the country with a limited budget, limited access to traditional media and many obstacles that prevented the normal development of a campaign. MUD had already started to develop a digital strategy during the 2012 and 2013 presidential campaigns (the latter held following Chavez’s death). Marco Trejo, communication and political strategist for MUD’s 2015 campaign, said, “The campaign we developed in 2015, ‘Venezuela Wants Change,’ emerged from a multidisciplinary analysis of what was happening in Venezuelan society after 16 years of a political and economic model that had begun to show flaws and divide the people.” Thus, Trejo went on, “Our objective was to synthesize, in a simple and very clear phrase, the desire of a people that for years — especially after the installation of the government of Nicolás Maduro — had experienced deficiencies, humiliations and abuses.”²¹³

MUD faced two challenges: overcoming scarce access to mainstream media and communicating as a united coalition rather than several different parties. As Trejo recalled, “Integrating and confronting the different actors of the MUD was a challenge because each group defended their ideas, but that process did lead us to an expedited consensus. We found social networks and different digital communication tools provided the means of reaching more people, with a very small investment. The platforms also helped make our candidates more visible in more parts of the country.”²¹⁴

²¹² Interview with the author, 18 Apr. 2017.

²¹³ Interview with the author, 25 July 2017.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

During the 2015 parliamentary campaign, the opposition lacked access to public television and had to search for new media (internet or social media) to connect with the electorate. This repression of traditional media increased the importance of digital media. During the 2015 campaign, Venezuelans migrated to digital media because they did not find the information they were looking for on television. "In the 2013 presidential elections, [the private] Globovision was the main TV outlet for citizens to follow the opposition campaign, but in the 2015 parliamentary elections that outlet closed," according to Venezuelan journalist and cyberactivist Luis Carlos Díaz. As a result, Venezuelans "searched for information where they could," proving "very efficient" and "very creative" in finding alternative sources of information. However, Díaz continued, this was the case in part because "Venezuela was an open society that was gradually closed, so Venezuelans were aware of the tools and technology and knew how to use them."²¹⁵

The Venezuelan government has recognized the role that the internet plays and sought to control the digital media space. According to the Crisis Group, the Venezuelan government controls 92 percent of in-country media sources. More than 1,000 webpages were blocked during the first half of 2015.²¹⁶



Mobilizing Citizens

MUD's YouTube channel, Venezuela Wants Change, served as a cornerstone for the campaign's mobilization efforts.²¹⁷ During the campaign, a two-minute video titled "The Force of Change is You" mobilized supporters with the following message: "When it seems that the only solution is to surrender, remember that there is still much to fight for. See the strength that characterizes you as Venezuelan, it infects others with a spirit of change. We can be part of the solution. Mobilize your community to build the country we all deserve. The force of change is you."²¹⁸ Such campaign videos were distributed through Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp.²¹⁹

The party also needed a safe, accessible tool to effectively organize activists on Election Day. Several engineers assisting in MUD's efforts created a new platform, FARO, to manage the contact information of citizens interested in transporting voters to voting centers and participating as "controllers" (party observers) in polling stations. The database was organized by sectors, zones, neighborhoods, localities and parishes. Macro-mobilizers were designated to lead teams of five micro-mobilizers who had another 10 people working for them, who each had another 10, and so on, until the whole database was reached.²²⁰

On Election Day, although the same outreach/communications tools were used throughout the country, the mobilization plan was independently executed in each state to effectively respond to the unique needs of each zone.

Anticipating that Election Day communications could be blocked through purposeful internet outages, MUD sent information via text message (SMS) rather than WhatsApp, Telegram or System of Organization and Electoral Registration (SORE).²²¹ These secure SMS messages

²¹⁵ Interview with the author, 26 June 2017.

²¹⁶ "Crisis Group: The Shadows Over the Elections in Venezuela are Very Thick," *CNN Español*, 2 Nov. 2015, cnnespanol.cnn.com/2015/11/27/crisis-group-las-sombras-sobre-las-elecciones-en-venezuela-son-muy-espesas/.

²¹⁷ As of 2017, Venezuela Wants Change had 12,000 subscribers.

²¹⁸ "La Fuerza del Cambio Eres Tú/The Force of Change Is You." *Primer Justicia*, 26 Aug. 2015, [youtube.com/watch?v=FMcewUrN3w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FMcewUrN3w).

²¹⁹ Interview with the author, 25 July 2017.

²²⁰ Interview with the author, 18 Apr. 2017.

²²¹ SMS stands for short-message service.

notified database contacts of where to vote and ideal times to get in line at voting centers. Activists who had previously expressed interest in serving at voting centers received additional messages indicating what time and where to monitor the election sites. This strong SMS campaign contributed to the coalition's electoral victory.

In some areas, digital technology could not overcome practical impediments. "There were states where distances between polling stations and voters' homes were longer than average or there were no roads, and we had to use a horse cart to get people to the voting place," Ñañez said. "In southern parts [of] the country, the connections with the voting centers were made by canoes and boats because there was no way to do it with vehicles."²²²



Promotion of Party Ideas

Venezuelan citizens' use of digital technology is driven by a lack of alternatives. Venezuela's repressive political environment undermined the opposition's ability to promote its platform and vision through traditional media channels. Faced with a lack of independent mass media to broadcast campaign messages, present the candidates or even run ads, the opposition found that social media offered the best means of crafting successful campaign messaging. Parties and political leaders are still learning how to develop their messages and deliver them to communities quickly and effectively. According to Alejandro Vivas, national director of communications of Justice First: "Fortunately, the [opposition] political parties in Venezuela understood that the use of new technologies would allow them to show their position on topics that are 'censored' without going through the informational blackout that the government imposed. It also allowed them to establish the approach and the emergence of the dialogue between political parties and the community."²²³

In this context, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Periscope, WhatsApp and Telegram became the best allies of the MUD's campaign. Facebook remains the most-used social network in Venezuela. According to June 2016 data from Internet World Stats, Facebook penetration in the country is 40.7 percent, and it is the network with greatest reach, cutting across socioeconomic lines.²²⁴ It also allowed the party to share status updates of substantial length (unlike Twitter) and offered the option of including photos and videos. These advantages made Facebook a useful platform for promoting the opposition's proposals, the activities and meetings organized in each neighborhood, the electoral programs, the profiles of candidates and the information campaigns on how and where to vote. Trejo said the party used "the advertising and segmentation tools of the network" to directly target potential supporters.²²⁵ Facebook also provided the option to create micro-campaigns for segments of the population determined by place of residence, interests, age, sex, educational level and other demographic characteristics. MUD also used Facebook for civic education and to help voters identify how they could vote for the opposition. On the ballot, MUD was deliberately placed in a location uncomfortable for right-handed voters to select and given a color similar to another party. Trejo claimed that this was done "to create confusion so we had to dedicate more messages to clarify how to choose MUD on the ballot."²²⁶

²²² Interview with the author, 18 Apr. 2017.

²²³ Interview with the author, 18 Aug. 2017.

²²⁴ "South America Internet and Facebook Users." *Internet World Stats*, accessed 25 Aug. 2017, internetworldstats.com/south.htm#ve.

²²⁵ Interview with the author, 25 July 2017.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

Twitter has become an increasingly prominent political tool in Venezuela. Aline dos Reis, a journalist and part of the MUD campaign's communications team, explained MUD's daily Twitter messaging strategy: "Following daily meetings, party strategists wrote a memorandum specifying what, why, how and when to disseminate this or that message." Dos Reis said the party's Twitter campaign was successful "thanks to the definition of daily hashtags that allowed us to position our approaches as trending topics," which were then replicated in the profiles of thousands of party members.²²⁷ According to Alejandro Vivas, national director of communications for Justice First, "Being able to express our opinion on a topic of the moment in 140 characters and reach hundreds of thousands of people without having to wait for a radio station call to make the statement was extremely beneficial. Twitter certainly offers a competitive advantage when you are fighting against a regime that seeks absolute control of the media."²²⁸

YouTube also played an essential role in party promotions. MUD created the YouTube channel Press Room to transmit information related to the elections, including interviews with MUD leaders, instructions on how to vote and control the recount, party proposals, and irregularities denounced by citizens. Press Room became especially relevant when the government delayed the publication of partial and final results once the polls began to show the opposition as the winner. According to one interview respondent, "Society turned to that channel and waited for the results. Even though we are a small country and there are major problems connecting to the internet, thousands of people were able to follow the live broadcast and avoid the lack of information provided through traditional media."²²⁹

While digital technologies have enabled the political opposition to circumvent government-controlled media to spread its message, these technologies have also been used by the government to spread misinformation. There are reports that, in recent years, social media accounts spreading disinformation in Venezuela were linked to both the Venezuelan and Russian governments.²³⁰ The Venezuelan government has been particularly innovative and proactive about developing an infrastructure to spread pro-government misinformation and disinformation. The government is undertaking a concerted effort to produce a digital militia, enrolling internet "trolls" by promising them access to scarce resources.²³¹



Interacting with Citizens

According to one respondent, during the 2015 campaign, a plurality of opposition supporters (26 percent) said social media were their main source of information. In comparison, a plurality of government supporters got their information from public television (36 percent), with only 8 percent from social media.²³² Other information sources included, cable television, the internet, newspapers and public campaigns events.

²²⁷ Interview with the author, 25 July 2017.

²²⁸ Interview with the author, 18 Aug. 2017. Until 2017, when the cap was increased to 280 characters, Twitter allowed a maximum of 140 characters per tweet.

²²⁹ Interview with the author, 23 May 2017.

²³⁰ Jakes, Lara. "As Protests in South America Surged, So Did Russian Trolls on Twitter, U.S. Finds." *The New York Times*, 20 Jan. 2020, [nytimes.com/2020/01/19/us/politics/south-america-russian-twitter.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/19/us/politics/south-america-russian-twitter.html).

²³¹ Riley, Michael, et al. "A Global Guide to State-sponsored Trolling." *Bloomberg*, 19 July, 2018, [bloomberg.com/features/2018-government-sponsored-cyber-militia-cookbook/](https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2018-government-sponsored-cyber-militia-cookbook/); Nyst, Carly and Nick Monaco. "State-Sponsored Trolling." *Institute for the Future*, 2018, [iftf.org/fileadmin/user_upload/images/DigIntel/IFTF_State_sponsored_trolling_report.pdf](https://www.iftf.org/fileadmin/user_upload/images/DigIntel/IFTF_State_sponsored_trolling_report.pdf).

²³² Interview with the author, 23 May 2017.

The opposition candidates made a great effort to listen to citizens, understand their concerns and try to offer solutions. This was done mainly through face-to-face meetings with groups of 10 to 20 people. Although this interaction was person to person, digital technology enhanced its utility. Once these meetings were held, the leaders used SORE to share information on the topics covered, issues people were most concerned about, photos and videos from the meetings and the contact information of people who had decided to join the campaign.

The opposition also used digital technology to shape the media narrative in traditional venues. Both domestic and international journalists used messaging apps like WhatsApp to get updates from MUD. "In this way, we sent them the content we wanted to transmit, and we guaranteed that they received it immediately without any problems," said León Vera, a member of the network team of the MUD campaign in Carabobo.²³³

MUD also used digital technology to communicate directly with voters. This direct contact with citizens and the press allowed MUD to inform voters, gather information and express opinions on a multitude of subjects, while simultaneously overcoming censorship. The party organized so-called 2.0 Conversations, which were meetings that brought together candidates for the National Assembly and 10 to 20 citizens. These conversations took place on Friday afternoons throughout the campaign and were broadcast by Periscope, an application that allows live video feed. Candidates listened to needs and concerns voiced both by the citizens present and those who followed the Periscope live talks and commented electronically. However, this tool had its limitations. Vera pointed out that limited internet capacity hindered the widespread use of 2.0 Conversations. "We could only organize this type of meeting in areas with a good internet connection, which were normally in medium and high-income areas," he said.²³⁴



Fundraising for Party Activities

Restrictions on party financing, alongside the controls carried out by the National Financing Office of the National Electoral Council, limit the collection of funds for political purposes in Venezuela, whether to develop campaign activities or to maintain party infrastructure.²³⁵ Therefore, the parties were not able to develop any innovative techniques for raising funds for the 2015 campaign.²³⁶ MUD obtained resources through more traditional practices such as internal promotions, raffles, bond sales and some private donations. The fear of government retribution deterred MUD from taking donations from individuals.

This scenario created great inequality between the opposition and the government party. The incumbent United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV) obtained most of its resources from party members who donated the equivalent of one day of their monthly salary three times a year. Seventy percent of the more than 7.6 million party members made such a contribution.²³⁷ As journalist Díaz commented, "The state cannot finance parties by law and private financing is complicated. However, the opposition faced a coalition that used public resources without any

²³³ Interview with the author, 24 Apr. 2017.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ For relevant regulations, see: "Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela of 1999." UN Women, constitutions.unwomen.org/en/countries/americas/venezuela; Bolivian Republic of Venezuela. "Reglamento General de la Ley Orgánica de Procesos Electorales General/Regulation of the Electoral Processes Organic Law." *Politika UCAB*, politikaucab.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/reglamento_general_lopre.pdf; Perez, María Fernanda. "Who Finances the Electoral Campaigns in Venezuela?" *El Impulso*, 29 Nov. 2015, elimpulso.com/noticias/regionales/quien-financia-las-campanas-electorales-en-venezuela.

²³⁶ Perez. "Who Finances the Electoral Campaigns in Venezuela?"

²³⁷ Ibid.

problem. It was not possible to compete against that."²³⁸ Venezuela Transparency, a national chapter of Transparency International, reported that during the 2015 parliamentary campaign there were more than 20 allegations about the use of public resources for the campaign.²³⁹



Building Party Infrastructure

As the number of MUD's supporters grew, the coalition faced the challenge of how to communicate and interact with them. One year before the election, with a tense atmosphere and with traditional media censorship already evident, Justice First recognized the need for a system to manage and access party information in an organized, easy and safe way. David de la Cruz, MUD's councilor in Maracaibo municipality in the northwestern state of Zulia, created a digital platform to achieve that goal.

The digital platform was initially tested in one state to help manage the party's territorial organization there. Months later, in August 2015, the platform was officially launched as SORE. It was adopted first by Justice First at the national level, and later by MUD coalition parties at the state level. Quite simply, SORE is an online database where candidates, campaign teams, members of the MUD and volunteers can access all campaign strategy and implementation information. SORE became one of the key contributing factors in the coalition's Election Day success.

SORE streamlined party-member registration documents and compiled information on campaign activities, including number of voters reached, photos and videos from meetings, social media posts, key messages and talking points, and contact information for coalition leaders. Any party activities carried out by MUD members were documented and centralized in SORE, and campaign-team members could access that information at any time.

Through the SORE mobile app, WhatsApp and Telegram, all key campaign materials could be easily accessed in almost all parts of the country. Using such messaging platforms allowed the opposition candidates to take advantage of higher levels of mobile-phone access than internet penetration.



Internal Communication

MUD also used SORE to communicate internally. Campaign teams shared candidates' daily agendas, the activities planned for each week, the messages to be disseminated in meetings, and photos and videos documenting activities. This streamlining of coalition communications allowed any MUD member to easily see what was being done across the country, in nearly real time. This system also gave all members access to critical information that could then be shared on social media and other public platforms.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ Interview with the author, 26 June 2017.

²³⁹ "Third Report Denounces Parliamentary Electoral Process 2015." *Transparency Venezuela*, 2015, transparencia.org.ve/project/campanas/.

²⁴⁰ Interview with the author, 18 Apr. 2017.

The Future of Digital Technology Use During Campaigns

The 2015 election was a turning point for the use of digital technology in political campaigns. One interview respondent argued, “The main difference between the two elections is that in 2006, television, radio and newspapers were the most consumed media to keep abreast of political news, while in 2015 the internet became the main information vehicle” for the opposition.²⁴¹ Internet communication offered the opposition parties three advantages: an ability to communicate with a lower budget (advertising in traditional media is more expensive); an ability to reach segments that are unreachable via other mediums; and an ability to overcome the government’s control of the media.

The internet became the place for conversation, information sharing and debate in the political world — particularly for the opposition parties and their supporters. As the number of users of social media increased, so has the number of prominent political leaders seeking to reach potential supporters through social media. Today, nearly all of Venezuela’s political leaders have social media profiles. Twitter was one of the most-used platforms in Venezuela in 2015, with more than 24 percent of the population using the platform.²⁴² Social networks are likely to become a forum for political battle.²⁴³

On April 20, 2017, during a ceremony celebrating the seventh anniversary of the creation of Hugo Chávez’s Twitter account, Venezuela’s then-Communications Minister Ernesto Villegas announced the creation of the “digital militia” to win the “digital battle” with the opposition. As previously discussed, these efforts serve as a counter to the political opposition’s ability to use digital forums to circumvent government censorship and misinformation. At the same ceremony, then-Minister for University Education, Science and Technology Hugbel Roa stressed the importance of understanding new communication tools. “In this new digital war, the handling of new technologies such as social media has become the new combat rifle,” he said.²⁴⁴ Given the lack of access to traditional media, the digital environment will continue to be important to the opposition’s activities, especially for communication and mobilization.

In addition to barring MUD from competing in the 2018 elections, the Venezuelan government has also stepped up its efforts to suppress the political opposition online. For example, in spring 2019, following increased pressure from the political opposition, “Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Periscope, YouTube and Google services were difficult to access on the country’s major internet service providers — Digitel, Movistar and the state-controlled company CANTV.”²⁴⁵

This form of internet censorship has been described as “nimble,” as it avoids some of the perils of total internet shutdowns.²⁴⁶ The Venezuelan government has also adopted cutting-edge surveillance, misinformation, and disinformation tactics, potentially through partnerships with China and Russia.²⁴⁷ Because roughly 70 percent of internet service is provided by CANTV, the government has the ability to surveil and control internet activities.²⁴⁸ The gains

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² “Penetration of Twitter in Venezuela: 2015.” *Statcounter Global Stats*, gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/venezuela/2015.

²⁴³ “The Chavista Regime Launched the Digital Militia to ‘Win the Battle’ in Social Networks.” *Infobae*, 28 Apr. 2017, www.infobae.com/america/venezuela/2017/04/28/el-regimen-chavista-lanzo-la-milicia-digital-para-ganar-la-batalla-en-las-redes-sociales/.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Venezuela, IPYS. “Censura y violencia contra periodistas vulneraron el derecho a la información en Venezuela.” *IPYS* (blog). Accessed July 31, 2020. <https://ipysvenezuela.org/alerta/balance-especial-ipysve-30abril-censura-y-violencia-contra-periodistas-vulneraron-el-derecho-a-la-informacion-en-venezuela/>.

²⁴⁶ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/03/playing-cat-and-mouse-with-venezuelas-internet-censors/>

²⁴⁷ <https://www.csis.org/analysis/internet-venezuelas-lifeline>

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

that the opposition made in 2015 are threatened by the closing of digital space under the Maduro government.

Conclusion

In spite of Venezuela's political, economic and social crisis, the legal limitations for party funding and the government's censorship and control of traditional media, the opposition very effectively used new technologies during the 2015 parliamentary election campaign. The Venezuelan opposition became a pioneer in cyberpolitics, including the use of apps, the internet and social media. The electoral results speak to this success: For the first time in 17 years, the opposition defeated *Chavismo* in legislative elections. The digital environment presents a new opportunity for the opposition during campaigns. In a complex environment, the Venezuelan opposition has become a pioneer in cyberpolitics, including the use of apps, the internet and social networks. While it is difficult to measure the exact impact of digital technology during the 2015 election, the effectiveness of these new tools to inform, collaborate and mobilize is clear.

Digital technologies provided a fast, secure and cost-effective way for the opposition to communicate with voters, while evading the constant blocking and control of more traditional communications by the government. As MUD's Marco Trejo said, "We started with a clear understanding that communication and outreach through traditional media would be very limited and costly."²⁴⁹ Without discarding the traditional media completely, the opposition designed a strategy based on the use of social media and the web to spread its "Venezuela Wants Change" campaign messages using platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, the campaign website, Periscope and SMS.

The government's total control of traditional public mass media and censorship of most private media through intimidation had previously insulated citizens from a complete awareness of Venezuela's problems. Using social media, the opposition based each phase of the campaign on problems, needs and deficiencies that had been ignored or minimized by traditional media. New technologies were also used to inform the international community of the myriad problems Venezuelan citizens and opposition parties faced. These new technologies also facilitated the internal organization and mobilization required to successfully carry out an electoral campaign, most notably the online platform SORE.

The Maduro regime has continued to tighten its grip on independent media channels by intimidating, threatening and even prosecuting media outlets and journalists. Access to independent and accurate news sources has become particularly limited for low-income populations in Venezuela — meaning that it may be more difficult for the opposition to leverage these technologies to mobilize politically in the future.

The use of digital technologies in 2015 provided a way for millions of Venezuelans to realize the political, economic and social realities of their country and how they could act to change them. This became the window for billions of people around the world to see how a previously strong democracy had descended into autocracy. As Venezuela's political crisis continues to unfold, digital technology will likely continue to play an important role for political parties and citizens alike.

²⁴⁹ Interview with the author, 25 July 2017.

CONCLUSION

The Rise of Digital Campaigns

Jan Surotchak and Geoffrey Macdonald

Digital political campaigns are rising across the globe. In each country examined in this volume, political parties recognize the utility of digital tools, deploy them with purpose and effectiveness and plan to expand their use. The case studies of specific election cycles in six countries looked at six key goals of election campaigns: voter mobilization, fundraising, internal communication, message promotion, infrastructure building and voter interaction. Only fundraising, which was not a common goal among parties in general, lacked consistent digital components.

Digital campaigns have transformed the tools of the trade for parties. Facebook, Google, YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter and Periscope are now often just as common as lawn signs and bumper stickers. A variety of factors shape the extent to which parties use these tools. The case studies showed that while the techno-political environment — a country's level of ICT capacity and democracy quality — is influential, it does not entirely determine which parties use digital tools, or to what extent. Three other key factors need to be considered: political norms, regional influence and the nature and history of party competition.

Although the short-term effect of these digital tools for political parties appears positive, the long-term implications remain unclear. Whether “digital democracy” will be responsive and inclusive, or divisive and chaotic, will be partly determined by how digital tools are wielded and regulated moving forward.

Digital Campaigns: A Cross-National Comparison

Across Germany, Tunisia, Ukraine, Venezuela, India and Tanzania, there were striking similarities in the goals political parties most often pursued with digital technology (see Table I). Voter mobilization and internal party communication were the two goals for which parties most commonly utilized digital technology. Promoting party ideology, interacting with voters and infrastructure building were digitized to a lesser, but still large, extent. In contrast, digital fundraising tools were least common. A country's techno-political environment — though an important factor in explaining the nuances of technology use — had no consistent impact across cases: Digital tools were deployed in consolidated democracies and partial democracies, and in high-tech and low-tech settings.

TABLE I. CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISON OF POLITICAL PARTIES' DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY USE FOR CAMPAIGN GOALS

Campaign goal*	Germany: high-tech democracy	Tunisia: middle-tech democracy	Ukraine: middle-tech partial democracy	Venezuela: middle-tech partial democracy	India: low-tech democracy	Tanzania: low-tech partial democracy
Communication	High	High	Medium	High	High	Medium
Mobilization	High	Medium	High	High	High	Medium
Promotion	High	Medium	High	Medium	Medium	Medium
Interaction	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Low
Infrastructure	High	Medium	Low	High	Medium	Medium
Fundraising	Low	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Low

*The level of technology use for each goal was assessed as follows: High = All major parties used digital technology extensively for this purpose during the campaign; Medium = At least one major party used digital technology extensively for this purpose during the campaign or all major parties used digital technology for this purpose but did not do so extensively; Low = One or more political parties used digital technology for this purpose during the campaign, but did not do so extensively; Not Used = No major political parties used digital technology for this purpose. Within each coding category, "extensive" is defined as the party using digital technology as a key component of its strategy to achieve the goal.



Mobilizing Voters

The use of digital technology for voter mobilization was widespread across cases. Digital tools were applied most commonly to achieve this goal, along with internal communication.

German political parties deployed sophisticated digital strategies for voter mobilization during the 2017 federal election. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the Greens used interactive web-based platforms that guided street volunteers as they met with voters.²⁵⁰ The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) collaborated with an American media firm to create its party

²⁵⁰ SPD stands for Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany).

website, on which it posted often-inflammatory videos and messages to gain and mobilize supporters.²⁵¹

The Christian Democratic Union's (CDU) mobilization strategy was likely the most sophisticated and effective use of digital tools for voter outreach. The party used the Connect17 app, which steered party volunteers to households identified as likely CDU voters. Volunteers would then input the quality of their interaction and the voters' policy positions and concerns back into the app. Although the utility of Connect17 was limited by Germany's privacy laws, which restrict the amount and type of data that can be collected on citizens, the app helped CDU efficiently target resources, mobilize key supporters and ultimately prevail in the election.

In India's 2014 general election, the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party or BJP) and the Aam Aadmi Party (Common Man's Party or AAP) used digital technology extensively for political mobilization. The BJP's IT cell was charged with wielding social media and the internet to the BJP's electoral advantage. Narendra Modi, the party's candidate for prime minister, joined Facebook and Twitter in 2009 and had 1.4 million Facebook "likes" and 4.27 million Twitter followers by 2014.

The BJP and the AAP used a "missed-call campaign," where people made calls to designated mobile numbers (missed calls are free) to become party members. These missed calls put the callers' numbers on the parties' member lists and would be returned by the campaigns. The AAP extensively used its website and Facebook and Twitter accounts to mobilize people to register and turn out to vote. It also launched mobile apps that allowed the public to contact the party with personal stories. Opposition parties also used WhatsApp to contact potential voters, which provided the added advantage of avoiding government surveillance. The ruling Congress Party was slow to recognize the importance of social media and only began strategically utilizing Facebook, Twitter and other mobile apps in 2013, one year prior to the elections. Many analysts believe this strategic blunder contributed to its rout in 2014.

The 2015 parliamentary elections in Venezuela demonstrated digital approaches to mobilization under repressive conditions. The opposition coalition, the Democracy Unity Roundtable (MUD), used short-message service (SMS), WhatsApp, Telegram and other mobile apps to avoid the government's purposeful internet outages, which were used to stifle the opposition's online campaigning.²⁵² To mobilize voters, MUD created a YouTube channel to promote inspirational videos advocating change. The coalition also created FARO, an online platform to organize voter-mobilization efforts by sector, zone, neighborhood and other locations. It also promoted online its "1 by 10" mobilization campaign, which encouraged each supporter to rally 10 additional votes. In rural and other areas where internet penetration was low, MUD also used rudimentary forms of mobilization — such as transporting voters by horse cart to the polls — to supplement its digital work.

In Ukraine's 2014 election cycle and post-election political competition, digital technology played an important role in mobilizing citizens to vote, rally and protest. In Ukraine, Facebook has far more users than Twitter. Political candidates used branded cover photos and reposted party messages and news on Facebook. Parties used Facebook ads to promote ideas and encourage voting and other forms of political participation.

²⁵¹ AfD stands for Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany).

²⁵² MUD stands for Mesa de la Unidad Democrática (Democratic Unity Roundtable).

Of the countries under investigation, Ukraine appears uniquely prone to misinformation in the digital space: Parties use fake polls and misleading news articles to mobilize their own supporters or demoralize opponents. Similar to other countries, digital literacy among the electorate varies by age. Ukrainian youth use social media the most but vote at low rates. In contrast, middle-aged and older citizens are more likely to vote but use the internet less than youth. The internet and mobile apps are therefore less integral to adults' daily social lives. Traditional media such as television and newspapers thus remain a key part of Ukrainian parties' campaign strategies.

In Tanzania and Tunisia, political parties' digital mobilization efforts are constrained, in part, by lack of widespread internet penetration, particularly in rural areas. Digital technology was a key component of Tanzania's political parties' mobilization strategies in 2015, albeit in less sophisticated forms. The ruling CCM used text messages to remind people to vote, and CHADEMA used WhatsApp groups to contact voters and send party news.²⁵³ In Tunisia's 2014 parliamentary and presidential elections, both major parties — Nidaa Tounes (Tunisia's Call) and Ennahdha (Renaissance Movement) — utilized Facebook extensively for mobilization efforts. Both parties started dozens of Facebook pages and purchased already-established pages to target supporters. Nidaa Tounes's digital mobilization was less organized than Ennahdha's. As the old-guard regime party linked to former dictator Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Nidaa Tounes had firm support among established media, which in part compensated for its lackluster digital-mobilization strategy. Many political strategists argue that the large number of rural Tunisians without internet access reduces the efficacy of digital mobilization.



Communicating within the Party

Parties often utilized digital tools for internal-communication techniques during campaigns. New technologies such as Facebook and WhatsApp made it easier for parties to digitize their intraparty interaction.

In recent elections, German and Venezuelan parties pioneered innovative techniques and platforms for internal communication. In Germany, to train members on the new Connect17 app, the CDU held online training sessions and maintained a web-based database to post tutorial videos. The CDU also used Facebook groups and WhatsApp channels to coordinate volunteers. The Greens created an online handbook and website for party branches and volunteers that included talking points, financial planning trainings and detailed instructions for creating and using social media accounts. The AfD relied heavily on Facebook groups to coordinate activities of its campaigners on the ground. In Venezuela, the System of Organization and Electoral Registration (SORE) platform, which was integral to transforming MUD's infrastructure in 2015, was also used for internal communication during the campaign. The digital platform allowed supporters, volunteers and candidates to share agendas and document activities in nearly real time.

Indian and Tunisian parties both focused on digital communication, but India's parties made use of more creative approaches. In India, digital technology has enhanced horizontal communication within parties. During the 2014 campaign, the BJP created private groups on WhatsApp and Facebook for party members to communicate. The AAP utilized WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, Facelink, Google Hangouts and other forms of technology for internal communication. For example, AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal held monthly Google Hangouts

²⁵³ CCM is an acronym of Swahili words *Chama cha Mapinduzi*, meaning Revolutionary Party; CHADEMA is an acronym for the Swahili words *Chama cha Demokrasia* and *Maendeleo*, meaning Party for Democracy and Development.

meetings with volunteers. The Congress Party launched the *Khidkee* (Window) portal and app to allow members and volunteers to communicate directly with senior leadership, exchange ideas, share thoughts and voice grievances. That being said, internal party communication in India remains mostly top down. In the 2014 elections in Tunisia, Nidaa Tounes, Ennahdha and smaller opposition parties all utilized digital communication. Ennahdha provided cell phones to party members who would receive text messages from headquarters on party strategy and messaging. The party also equipped its branch offices with high-speed internet. All parties also used private Facebook and WhatsApp groups for internal communication.

Tanzania and Ukraine had the weakest levels of digital internal communication, but parties still used digital technology to some degree. In Tanzania in 2015, parties mixed digital technology with low-tech approaches to communication. While parties used Facebook to advertise events to members and WhatsApp for fast and streamlined communication within the party, party strategists also emphasized the importance of face-to-face meetings, letters and verbal announcements on rallies and events. New digital techniques were deployed and served an important function for parties, but the country's low ICT capacity also required the use of traditional forms of communication. In Ukraine's 2014 elections, the main parties often used email lists, private Facebook groups and Facebook chats for internal communication and coordination of activities, especially on the local level. However, internal communication remained limited and poorly digitized.



Promoting Party Ideas

Digital technology was commonly used across cases to promote parties' ideology and policy positions. Digital promotion was a key element of election strategy across all major parties in Germany. Facebook is enormously popular in Germany, which made it a focal point for digital promotion in 2017. In addition to conventional social media advertising, the CDU opened a "program house" inside a former Berlin department store that featured themed rooms with interactive displays promoting the party's agenda. The program house was also used to hold events, which were broadcast live on social media. The Greens created YouTube bumper advertisements (video advertisements that plays before a user's chosen video) tailored to the user's geographic location. The SPD broadcast its rallies on Facebook Live and used Google AdWords advertisements, which link advertisements to specific search terms. The Free Democratic Party (FDP) used Facebook Live to broadcast videos of its leader casually talking from his apartment or car. The AfD also effectively used Facebook advertising, Google AdWords and other online platforms to aggressively promote its positions on the refugee crisis and European Union bailouts.

In Ukraine's 2014 election, political parties made effective use of digital technology for campaigning. The digital space for promotion in Ukraine revolves primarily around party websites, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. Many parties and individual candidates employ public-relations firms to manage their social media accounts. Digital promotion in Ukraine includes significant elements of manipulation. Parties often have staff assigned to post pro-party comments throughout the day, and they hire external firms to fabricate likes, comments or reposts. They also deploy bots to promote party messages. Parties have at times also co-opted independent journalism: Ostensibly nonpartisan journalists are often paid by parties to promote their ideology or positions. Digital technology appears to be muddying political competition in Ukraine, injecting new tactics for self-promotion as well as attacking opponents.

In India, the BJP and the AAP were the most ambitious with digital promotion. The BJP used issue-based Facebook pages to promote candidates, showcase party videos and run counter-messaging campaigns against opponents. It also used WhatsApp groups to send daily messages to supporters and created caller tunes that played pre-set, pro-BJP messages to the caller. One of the BJP's most creative digital promotion efforts was its use of holograms to simulcast Narendra Modi's campaign speeches. The BJP recognized that only a small percentage of Indians use social media, so the party purposefully and successfully generated traditional media attention to its online content. The AAP also used Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp to promote its campaign messages. In contrast, the Congress Party's digital promotion lagged behind its competitors' efforts.

In Venezuela, even with large portions of the country not on social media, in the 2015 elections, MUD made good use of digital tools to promote its ideology. The government controlled traditional media outlets, which undercut the opposition's ability to promote its platform and vision. In response, the MUD took to apps and online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Periscope, WhatsApp and Telegram. The most-used platform was Facebook, where the opposition coalition promoted its proposals, activities, meetings, electoral programs, candidate profiles and information on how and where to vote. MUD would often target its social media efforts at civic and community leaders, who could transmit the opposition's message to the large number of citizens without internet access. MUD strategists wrote a daily memo on how to promote the opposition's messages on Twitter and maintained a YouTube channel that aired interviews with its leaders and instructions on how to understand Venezuela's deliberately complicated ballot. The channel was widely watched during the vote count as the government kept the tally from being aired on state-run television.

In Tanzania and Tunisia, digital tools were used for promotion activities, but efforts were more reliant on traditional campaign approaches than in the other countries studied. In Tanzania, party officials from the Civic United Front (CUF), CCM and CHADEMA all said their parties shared pictures, quotes and videos from rallies on social media. However, many party officials said limited internet access and smartphone use in the country constrained digital promotion in the 2015 elections. In Tunisia, Facebook is widely used, which made it central to digital promotion in 2014. Several parties eschewed formal websites in favor of Facebook pages, on which they promoted their ideologies and platforms. However, call centers were still a critical dimension of voter targeting.



Interacting with Citizens

Across all case studies, digital interaction with voters was less common than other strategic goals. Although tools such as Twitter and Google Hangouts allow parties to get feedback directly from voters, most online interaction is one way. Parties push messages to voters but are less invested in receiving feedback from voters.

German and Indian parties made progress in digital interaction during recent elections. In 2017, Germany's political parties used innovative techniques for digital interaction, but digital tools appeared less widely used for this purpose than for other campaign goals. Both CDU and SPD used a Facebook chatbot to promote and test messages. A user would engage the bot, which would mimic a conversation on the party's policy. Programmers would gauge the responses of users to particular messages and adjust them accordingly. Chatbot users also would then receive emails and Facebook advertisements for the party. This demonstrates a close link between interaction and promotion activities. In India's 2014 elections, the BJP and the AAP

creatively deployed digital technology for interaction with voters. The BJP used Twitter to crowdsource parts of its manifesto and received feedback from voters during Google Hangouts and Twitter chats. The AAP used online surveys and microbloggers to get feedback from citizens on the party's issues and ideas.

In Tunisia and Ukraine, parties were similarly lackluster in their use of digital interaction. In Tunisia's 2014 elections, there was a shift from traditional media to social media for interaction between voters and parties. For example, Nidaa Tounes's leader held a two-hour live chat on Twitter to discuss issues with voters. Parties also broadcast their events on Facebook and other digital platforms. In Ukraine's 2014 elections, parties often closely monitored online comments and used them to shape party strategy. Parties reviewed online discussion boards and comments and tabulated the number of "likes" and "shares" to gauge support for policy positions. The Petro Poroshenko Bloc-Solidarity reportedly documented all Facebook requests and made it policy to respond to them within five days. Yet in both countries, traditional forms of in-person interaction were still more common.

Political parties in Venezuela and Tanzania — the two most repressive environments under investigation — deployed digital tools for interaction to differing degrees. Venezuela's opposition used novel types of digital interaction. On Friday afternoons, MUD held the so-called 2.0 Conversations between candidates and 10 to 20 citizens, which were broadcast on Periscope. The meetings allowed voters, both in person and online, to see candidates respond to voters' concerns. The videos often went "viral," which expanded viewership to areas where broadband capacity could not support live broadcasts. MUD also used WhatsApp to interact with journalists, whose access to the opposition was restricted by the government. In contrast, Tanzania's restrictive legal environment and underdeveloped rural areas pushed parties to traditional forms of interaction in 2015. Parties preferred text-message alerts and rallies to interact with voters. This was driven partly by the Cybercrimes Act of 2015, a law that made parties wary of online communication, and by low ICT penetration in many parts of the country. However, as part of their strategy, party leaders used social media and monitored voter feedback.



Building Party Infrastructure

Digital technology was less used for building party infrastructure than for other strategic goals. Parties in the countries studied often lack extensive party infrastructure to begin with, so digital technology has little to transform. However, several parties are using digital tools to build more integrated and inclusive party structures.

Given the challenging political situation, the most impressive effort to build party infrastructure with digital technology was in Venezuela. MUD had an impressive digital approach to recruiting and coordinating its volunteers, members and candidates. By creating SORE, the opposition effectively moved key dimensions of party infrastructure online. It created an electronic database that allowed candidates, campaign teams, party members and volunteers to access campaign strategies. SORE streamlined party-member registration and included key information for campaign activities, such as the number and names of voters reached, photos and videos from meetings, audiovisual material to share on social media, key messages and talking points, and contact information of leaders within the coalition. All of this information could be accessed online or with a smartphone. Similarly, German parties, in particular the CDU, used apps and online platforms to effectively organize volunteers and manage campaign information.

In recent elections, parties in India and Tunisia began to develop their infrastructure with digital tools. In India, the BJP and the AAP made some use of digital tools to build party infrastructure, but their efforts were small. The BJP's infrastructure building came after the 2014 election. The party has made an effort to better integrate its central and regional offices, as well as build a digital team that operates throughout the country. The AAP used Google Share and online calendars to coordinate volunteers, and held virtual meetings on WhatsApp. It also began keeping electronic databases of workers and voters. Party-infrastructure development in Tunisia has increasingly utilized digital technology. During the 2014 elections, parties used Facebook accounts to recruit and coordinate volunteers and advertise party events. The two leading parties' national-level headquarters used digital tools to communicate party strategies to the branch level.

In contrast, parties in Tanzania and Ukraine made less use of digital technology for infrastructure building. Although digital technology has not yet had a transformative effect on Tanzanian political parties' infrastructure, it has reshaped many party functions. In 2015, parties often held virtual meetings, which facilitated wider participation across the party. Virtual meetings also allowed opposition parties to evade government surveillance. Digital technology enhanced coordination between national and local party branches, increasing comradery among party members. In Ukraine, parties have not extensively digitized their infrastructure. While some parties use digital tools such as online magazines or website sign-up forms to recruit volunteers, few have fully embraced digital technology in infrastructure building.



Fundraising for Party Activities

Private fundraising for political parties was rare across cases. In the countries studied, political parties either receive state funding or lack enough public trust to solicit citizen donations. Consequently, all fundraising efforts — both digital and traditional — were comparatively less frequent than other strategic party activities studied.

Among the cases examined, recent elections in India and Germany featured the most advanced digital fundraising efforts, but even those parties did not fully utilize available digital tools. In Germany, government funding makes fundraising less imperative for parties. It was therefore a less important dimension of most parties' digital strategy in 2017. That being said, email, Facebook and WhatsApp were used to solicit donations. The AfD had the most ambitious digital fundraising effort. The party claimed to receive more than 10,000 donations through online channels — the largest digital fundraising haul for any party to date. In India, the election law permits political parties to take donations from private sources, but digital fundraising remains limited and generally confined to party websites. The AAP also developed a mobile app in 2014 to allow citizens to donate directly to the party.

The oppressive political environments in Venezuela and Tanzania shaped digital-technology use for fundraising. In Venezuela, party donations are closely regulated. State funding of parties is prohibited, and private funding of parties is heavily regulated. This deters donations from opposition supporters who want to avoid state detection. Party members are allowed to donate, which is an advantage for the ruling party, which can pressure its fearful members to contribute. In the 2015 election, despite sophisticated digital use for other strategic goals, MUD focused on traditional fundraising practices such as member donations, raffles and bond sales. In Tanzania, parties rarely used digital fundraising. The public generally distrusts political parties and elected officials given past instances of corruption, abuse of resources and little accountability. Party donors prefer private and clandestine contributions to avoid political

retribution. Some parties created WhatsApp groups for contributors in 2015. The CUF used mobile money services to transmit remittances from its supporters in Zanzibar. Overall, though, digital and traditional fundraising were minimal in both Venezuela and Tanzania.

Digital fundraising also was marginal in Tunisia and Ukraine. Tunisian parties are reluctant to use digital tools for fundraising. Since the fall of Ben Ali, new regulations prohibit party financing from foreign or unknown sources and mandate burdensome reporting requirements. Moreover, many Tunisians are unfamiliar with the concept of party fundraising; even those who are comfortable with it often prefer the political benefits of interacting with the candidates that face-to-face donations bring. In 2014, Ennahdha tried a text-message fundraising campaign, but it yielded little. Afek Tounes (Tunisian Aspiration), a small opposition party, used PayPal to fundraise among its expatriate supporters in France, who had better internet access and were more comfortable with making political donations than their counterparts in Tunisia. In Ukraine, party fundraising is similarly small. Political parties are often personal political vehicles financed by the leader or key figures within the party. Furthermore, the public generally distrusts political parties and is reluctant to donate money. In the 2014 elections, some parties did solicit funds online, but their efforts were insignificant.

Changing Tools of the Trade

Political campaigns are increasingly utilizing digital technology to achieve political goals. Across cases, only digital fundraising tools were underused. All other vital campaign goals — voter mobilization, internal communication, message promotion, infrastructure building and voter interaction — were pursued with digital technology, to varying but significant degrees. The following apps and online platforms stood out as particularly consequential:

- Facebook groups, pages, and live video streaming;
- Google Hangouts;
- YouTube channels;
- WhatsApp groups and channels;
- Twitter hashtags and profiles; and
- Periscope live video streaming.

Other commonly used digital tools included Telegram, Instagram, party and candidate websites, online chatbots, and other tailored apps and platforms for campaigning (for example, Connect17 in Germany and SORE in Venezuela). These and other new digital tools have both supplemented and supplanted traditional approaches to party organization and mass engagement.

The Impact of the Techno-Political Environment and Other Factors

Across cases, in recent elections, digital tools constituted key elements of parties' strategies. A country's techno-political environment — its level of ICT capacity and regime type — influenced only the nature and extent of digital campaigning. When digital tools were unused or underused, other factors outside of techno-political conditions often were more critical than the techno-political environment.

The varying levels of ICT capacity across cases had no consistent impact on whether parties used digital technology. Parties in both low-tech and high-tech countries used digital tools for a variety of purposes. In India's low-tech democracy, parties creatively deployed digital tools for several purposes. Parties in Tanzania were as likely to use digital tools as parties in Tunisia, Ukraine and Venezuela, which have greater ICT capacity. ICT levels had the clearest impact on the breadth and sophistication of digital-technology use. In Germany, parties could use the most advanced apps and technology (such as smartphones and tablets) to pursue their campaign goals in most areas of the country.

By contrast, in countries with less or uneven ICT penetration, parties were forced to use digital technology in fewer parts of the country, often being restricted to urban areas. This problem was more acute in low-tech countries (India and Tanzania) than in middle-tech countries (Tunisia, Venezuela and Ukraine) but was nevertheless consistent across all studies. Basic access to technology was an additional challenge in low-tech countries, which had higher levels of poverty. For example, many Tanzanians, particularly in rural areas, do not own smartphones or computers, but own cell phones. Tanzanian parties therefore focused more on text-message campaigns than parties in other settings.

The political environment — specifically autocratic tactics to inhibit online dissent — had some chilling effects on digital campaigning. However, those efforts mostly backfired, pushing opposition parties to develop more creative or covert digital strategies. Tanzania and Venezuela — both "partial democracies" in this book's framework (during the elections under investigation) — illuminate this dynamic. Tanzania's Cybercrimes Act criminalized forms of online hate speech and spreading false information. The ruling party has used this law to arrest and intimidate members of the political opposition and silence civil society. The Cybercrimes Act was effective in deterring the opposition's use of some digital tools. Opposition members often expressed fear of publicly criticizing the government on Twitter or Facebook. But this did not stop the opposition from using other tools. WhatsApp groups were used to contact voters and organize party members. Parties also posted pictures, videos or statements from rallies on social media. Although less sophisticated, these digital efforts were nonetheless vital to the opposition's campaign. In Venezuela, all forms of political freedom are under assault. Rather than yield to autocratic tactics, the opposition used digital technology to fight back and win in 2015. Building on efforts to utilize digital tools during earlier elections, MUD's cutting-edge use of online platforms, social media and mobile apps to organize volunteers, coordinate and promote campaign messages and mobilize voters contributed to its victory.

Tanzania and Venezuela highlight the utility of digital campaigns for the opposition in closing spaces, as well as the difficulty of fully controlling digital tools. Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube and other apps and platforms are extremely effective mechanisms for message dissemination in political settings where conventional campaigning is closely monitored. Even explicit efforts to regulate online political speech, such as in Tanzania, generally cannot pierce encrypted mobile apps such as WhatsApp, which allow for nearly undetectable communication. The governments in Tanzania and Venezuela have continued to restrict political freedoms,

which will enhance the importance of digital tools for the survival of each country's political opposition going forward.

Several other factors beyond the techno-political environment were important in shaping the use of digital technology during campaigns, including political norms, regional influence and the nature and history of party competition. Every society has differing views on what it considers appropriate political behavior and varying levels of trust in political institutions. Political norms appear particularly important in explaining the lack of digital fundraising across cases. In all of the countries studied, political donations to parties are rare. Parties are either state funded or receive money from wealthy individuals or businesses; average citizens rarely donate.

This limited the utility of new digital fundraising tools. In several countries, political parties lack transparency and have a history of corruption, which undermines the public's willingness to contribute. Germany's political norm surrounding data privacy also inhibited digital-technology use. Unlike in the United States, where most citizen data is fair game, Germany's strict privacy laws restrict the amount of data that can be collected with or from digital tools.

Regional influence was particularly evident in Ukraine, where there was a much greater prevalence of misinformation and manipulative digital tactics than in other countries examined. Russia's interference and influence in Ukrainian politics likely partly explains this. Although Ukraine's pro-Western parties used digital manipulation — such as bots, co-opted bloggers and fake news — as much as pro-Russian parties, the political norms of party competition have been shaped by Russia, which has been at the forefront of a global campaign to reshape the digital space to its advantage by using misinformation and propaganda.

The nature and history of party competition also shaped whether parties harnessed digital technology. In Tunisia, Nidaa Tounes used digital technology less often and less effectively than Ennahdha. Nidaa Tounes and its leader Beji Caïd Essebsi have close ties to the former government of deposed dictator Ben Ali, which gives the party a strong patronage network and deep level of support among a certain segment of the population. This allowed the party to achieve some success while eschewing innovative digital tools in favor of traditional campaign tactics.

India's political history had a two-pronged impact on digital campaigning. The Congress Party's almost-uninterrupted dominance of elections since India's independence in 1947 made it unresponsive and overconfident. The party's late and half-hearted embrace of digital tools in 2014 — while its competitors digitized rapidly and creatively — contributed to its resounding defeat. The BJP and the AAP, looking to unseat a heavyweight incumbent, used all available digital tools to their advantage, which led both parties to surprise wins, nationally and in Delhi, respectively.

Overall, the extent of digital-technology use in Germany, Tanzania, Tunisia, India, Ukraine and Venezuela had several determinants. The techno-political environment was important but not decisive. While parties in low- or middle-tech democracies could not use the most advanced tools or reach all of their constituents through digital technology, they still used it for many campaign goals. The level of political repression generally only shaped how — not if — parties used digital technology. Other factors also proved significant. Political norms, regional influence, and the nature and history of party competition shaped the level and character of digital technology use. Yet despite the variation seen across countries, the clear trend emerging from these case studies is that digital tools are revolutionizing how parties campaign in nearly all political settings.

The Future of Digital Campaigning

The turn of the twenty-first century marked a transformation in how political campaigns are run. With U.S. presidential candidates leading the digital vanguard — particularly Howard Dean in 2004, Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012 and Donald Trump in 2016 — the rest of the world's political parties have taken notice. Wherever internet access exists, political parties are using digital tools to help win elections. In both developed and developing countries, citizens and political parties are tangled in a digital web that draws them closer together than ever before. This presents both opportunities and challenges for political parties, as well as for how democracies function.

The growth in ICT capacity and digital innovation will create numerous opportunities for parties to further digitize their campaign operations. Across the countries included in this study, nearly all political parties expect to use more digital tools in future elections. Germany's already-advanced digital campaign environment is likely to get even more sophisticated as parties test new techniques in machine learning and automation that will allow constant interaction with voters. While Germany's privacy laws cap the extent of digital data collection, parties are still seeking to gain more insight into voters' beliefs and craft more personalized appeals.

In India, the AAP and the Congress Party are looking to keep pace with the BJP's digital efforts. Party leaders are looking into online platforms to coordinate party activities and exploring more effective social media use. Ukraine's parties are likewise aiming to expand their use of bots and social media to target voters. Tunisia's parties, particularly Ennahdha and Afek Tounes, are looking to better utilize big data and emulate French parties' use of artificial intelligence.

Venezuelan and Tanzanian parties, particularly those in the opposition, face the largest impediments to expanding their digital toolkits. Tanzania's Cybercrimes Act gives the government an important weapon to blunt digital campaigning. The ruling party's use of this law will determine how creative and ambitious Tanzania's political parties can be in the future. In Venezuela, the ruling party has declared the creation of a digital militia to promote pro-government messages on social media and elsewhere online. Overall, both ruling and opposition parties in these two countries recognize the profound importance of digital technology and intend to revamp their campaigns to better suit the digital age.

International governmental and nongovernmental organizations that work on democracy assistance can help parties achieve these digital campaign goals. Democracy assistance often focuses on aiding political parties to be more responsive and effective. Digital tools offer new ways for citizens to shape party platforms, express opinions and concerns, respond to policy ideas and form pressure groups.

Democracy-assistance providers are uniquely positioned to translate their cross-national experience into lessons learned that can inform new digital techniques for voter outreach and party organization. This will be particularly impactful in developed countries, where traditional campaign activities require personnel and financial resources that parties often lack. In the digital age, parties need only a mobile device or internet connection — not thousands of volunteers and dollars — to publicize their message. Digital infrastructure holds the potential to more cheaply, efficiently and effectively build political-party capacity. Given the importance of political parties to democratic functions, democracy in the digital age has the potential to be more inclusive — with more informed and engaged citizens and more representative parties — than ever before.

Digital technology also presents challenges for political parties and democratic processes. At the moment, digital technology remains a tool of the elite. The devices on which Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and other apps operate require finances to purchase and a level of technological sophistication to use. While their use is rapidly growing, users — regardless of country — tend to be more urban, educated, young and wealthy than the rest of the citizenry. However, this “cosmopolitan class” represents a minority of the population, especially in the developing countries. Therefore, parties that overemphasize digital campaign tools will miss out on reaching a large number of potential supporters. More generally, digital tools can potentially exclude large swaths of the public who are not active online, potentially disillusioning them to a democratic process that fails to engage them.

Digital tools can also strengthen the opponents of political parties. Privacy settings create a veneer of secrecy for digital technology, but these are often easily bypassed or infiltrated by oppressive governments, political opponents or pernicious foreign powers. Online activities can be just as dangerous as in-person gatherings for political dissidents. Political parties must be wary of moving too much of their operations online. The internet provides an enormous megaphone to social movements that often advocate vociferously but have little organizational structure or political skill. Such social movements can undermine the popularity of political parties without replacing them with an alternate vehicle for political change. In repressive societies, this can fracture the opposition and empower the state.

Digital tools can also be used to manipulate the public. Online fake news has modernized classic forms of propaganda. The anonymity of the internet, reams of available information and prevalence of online “sharing” make sourcing facts and news extremely difficult. Political parties, issue-based social movements and governments have all abused this digital reality to influence public discourse to their benefit, using false or manipulated information. Evidence is mounting that digital propaganda has shaped election outcomes across the world. It is unclear whether digital technology expands citizens’ access to information, thereby empowering them to hold leaders accountable, or cloisters citizens into ideological clusters of groupthink and out-of-group animosity, thereby empowering leaders to hold them at bay.

Will digital democracy produce better processes and outputs? Only time will tell. The negative aspects of campaigning in the digital age — such as disinformation, hate speech, propaganda and privacy intrusions — are linked to an absence of established norms and regulations. Historically, elections in the United States and elsewhere included widespread fraud, corruption and propaganda. Over time, the emergence of new attitudes about fair play in politics and laws to regulate party behavior significantly lessened these pernicious dynamics.

Currently, the architecture of norms and laws to regulate digital campaigns is inchoate in most countries. It is therefore not surprising that political parties and other actors have at times unscrupulously used these tools to achieve their goals. Germany is an exception worth emulating. Its strict rules on data privacy have constrained party behavior. In order for democracy in the digital age to realize the enfranchising and equalizing potential of digital tools, a new code of conduct must emerge that sets the boundaries of acceptable online political behavior. Only then can digital technology be wielded to the benefit of both parties and citizens.

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