

This article was downloaded by: [University of Waikato Library]

On: 27 January 2009

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 907695917]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Australian Journal of Political Science

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title-content=t713404457>

The Australian public and politics on-line: Reinforcing or reinventing representation?

Rachel Gibson ^a; Wainer Lusoli ^b; Stephen Ward ^c

^a University of Manchester, ^b University of Chester, ^c University of Salford,

Online Publication Date: 01 March 2008

To cite this Article Gibson, Rachel, Lusoli, Wainer and Ward, Stephen(2008)'The Australian public and politics on-line: Reinforcing or reinventing representation?',Australian Journal of Political Science,43:1,111 — 131

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/10361140701842607

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10361140701842607>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

The Australian Public and Politics On-line: Reinforcing or Reinventing Representation?

RACHEL GIBSON

University of Manchester

WAINER LUSOLI

University of Chester

AND

STEPHEN WARD

University of Salford

Fears for the health of representative politics in advanced industrial democracies have gained prominence in recent years with observers pointing to a growing body of evidence that citizens are disengaging from formal politics. One of the solutions put forward to address these perceived problems is the incorporation, by politicians, of new communication channels, such as the Internet and the World Wide Web (WWW). To date, however, attention has focused largely on the supply-side of on-line engagement by politicians rather than on levels of demand and actual use among citizens. This article provides a ‘bottom – up’ perspective to the debate in the Australian context, looking at the e-democracy and, particularly, e-representation debate from the public’s viewpoint. Specifically, we address two questions: how much support do such e-initiatives attract? And can they bring about the mobilisation of less politically engaged groups? Our findings show that although Australians broadly support the roll-out of e-representation tools, current interaction levels are low. Second, although they may have the potential to engage some younger people in the political process, widespread mobilisation is unlikely to occur in the near future.

Rachel Gibson is Professor of Political Science at the Institute for Social Change University of Manchester. Wainer Lusoli is a Lecturer in Political Communication in the Social and Communication Studies Department, University of Chester. Stephen Ward is a Senior Lecturer in Politics at the European Studies Research Institute, University of Salford. The authors acknowledge the support of the UK Economic and Social Research Council [ESRC] Res 335-25-0029 in the conduct of this research.

Introduction

Much concern has been voiced about the apparent problems of representative politics in advanced industrial democracies (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Dalton 2004; Gray and Caul 2000). Survey evidence has consistently identified an increasingly disconnected citizenry with falling levels of interest, knowledge and trust in both parliamentary institutions and political representatives. This decline in the health of the body politic has given increasing urgency to the perceived need to modernise representative politics and ignite public interest in democratic institutions. Perhaps not surprisingly, the emergence of new media technologies over the past decade, notably the Internet and e-mail, has been seen as one potential solution to the disconnection problem. Across a range of countries, politicians have placed considerable emphasis on new media as a means of communicating with the public and reconnecting with their constituents (Campbell, Harrop and Thompson 1999; Åström 2001; Kingham 2003; Hoff 2004; Ward and Lusoli 2005). However, despite this apparent enthusiasm for technology, doubts remain about the ability of new media to engage the public in 'old style' politics. Many studies have pointed out that technology alone is unlikely to mobilise people who lack prior knowledge or interest in politics (Davis 1999; Margolis and Resnick 2000; Norris 2000a; Ward, Gibson and Lusoli 2003).

In Australia, debates about democratic disconnection and discussion of the role of new technologies in the democratic arena appear to be somewhat more muted than elsewhere. On the first point, some have even argued that Australian representative democracy is actually in comparatively good health (Norris 2000b; Goot 2002a). On the ICT front, despite having gained an early reputation for world-wide leadership in the use of new technologies for democratic purposes (Clift 2002), later empirical research has questioned this prominence, arguing that e-government ambitions have failed to produce concrete policy initiatives, particularly in terms of measures for citizen engagement (Chen 2002; Bishop and Anderson 2004; Ward, Gibson and Lusoli 2007).

Although it is, perhaps, premature to argue for an inter-connection between these two trends – with lower levels of concern about democratic performance producing a more relaxed approach to the e-democracy agenda – this apparent lack of momentum in government-sponsored political communication with voters does prompt questions as to how far Australians themselves actually need, or want, such initiatives. On this question little research has been done either in Australia or elsewhere to examine how citizens view the situation and what they want (Coleman and Spiller 2003). Much of the research informing the debate has proceeded from a top-down perspective, focusing largely on elite initiatives.

This article seeks to address this gap by examining the Australian public's use of, and attitude towards, new ICTs for communication and engagement with their elected representatives. It does so with two specific research questions in mind: (1) To what extent do Australians actually favour the harnessing of the representative system to Internet technologies – is there a demand for such an agenda? And (2) how far do such initiatives hold out the prospect for mobilisation of citizens by allowing MPs to reach out to new audiences on-line and/or re-connect to existing ones? In answering these questions the goal is to

shed some light on the broader debates about democratic performance and the role of new ICTs highlighted above. In particular, we hope to add some new 'bottom-up' empirical data to address the issue of the apparently arrested development of e-democracy agenda in Australia.

Disconnected Citizens and Representation in Crisis?

To understand the growing interest in the Internet as a mechanism for reviving democratic politics, one first needs to review some of the wider debates about the current health of representative democracies. An increasingly common theme has been the idea of a malaise in representative politics in many advanced democracies. Although the idea of a crisis in representative democracy is not a new one, such debates have assumed increased urgency in recent years. One central concern is the notion of an increasing gulf between citizens, their representatives and their governing institutions (Curtice and Jowell 1997; Klingemann 1999; Pharr and Putnam 2000; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2001). This disconnection thesis is often based on the evidence of a number of inter-related symptoms:

- Declining citizen knowledge and interest in representative politics.
- Declining levels of trust in politicians and representative institutions.
- Declining levels of efficacy amongst citizens – The public's belief that they can influence government is falling.
- Declining levels of public identification and engagement with representative institutions notably through electoral engagement or political activity through mainstream organisations, such as political parties. This, in turn, then erodes the overall legitimacy of representative institutions.
- Increasing participation divides – The problems of connection are exacerbated in areas of social deprivation and inequality; hence, trust, knowledge and engagement are falling most amongst the poorest. Additionally, many of these problems are more acute amongst younger people, raising fears of a generational switch-off from mainstream politics.

Australian Exceptionalism?

Despite the prevalence of this disconnection thesis in many liberal democracies, in Australia, the debate has been less pronounced and some have argued that the problems are less acute than in other comparable democracies. Norris (2000b), for example, comments that comparably 'the checklist for Australian democracy looks remarkably robust and healthy'. Similarly, Goot concludes his defence of the state of Australian democracy by arguing the idea that there 'has been a serious erosion of public confidence in the democratic and representative institutions built into the framework of society is difficult to sustain' (2002b, 34). Such an argument is echoed in research compiled for *Australian Social Attitudes Report*, which challenges the idea of a crisis of trust among Australians toward their governing institutions, with corporations showing some of the biggest declines in public confidence (Bean 2005). Other scholars in the volume draw attention to more behavioural measures of democratic health,

pointing to the very high rates of voluntary group and association membership in Australia, and its clear link to higher rates of political participation more generally (Passey and Lyons 2005). Despite such confidence, critics and, notably, politicians themselves have raised significant concerns about the health of Australian representative democracy, echoing the debates in other liberal democracies. MP Carmen Lawrence (2003) has described Australia as a withering democracy where ‘the fundamentals of the democratic contract have been corrupted’.

If we look more closely at the empirical evidence relating to the measures of knowledge, interest, trust and engagement the Australian picture is somewhat mixed. In terms of awareness, Australians factual political knowledge about representative institutions appears to be relatively high (McAllister 2002). Around 70% of Australians can correctly give the name of their MP and 61% know which party is in charge of the federal government (McAllister 2002), a significantly higher number than in than many other liberal democracies. Political interest also appears to be relatively high and even appears to have grown considerably between the 1960s and today, following the expansion of tertiary education (McAllister 2002, 2). Certainly, it has remained at least stable since 1984 (Goot 2002a).

On the more specific indicators of public confidence and trust, however, there is evidence that significant deficits exist (Walsh 1995). Australian Electoral Study data for 2004 reveals that more than half of the public believes (agrees or strongly agrees) that ‘politicians commonly rot the system’.¹ Lewis argues that between 1976 and 2000 there was a significant drop in the faith Australians place in their rulers’ ethical conduct. While in 1976 about one in five thought that federal and State politicians were ‘highly’ honest, only one in ten was as sanguine by 2000 (Lewis 2002, 132). Nevertheless, overall, long-term trends of support for the democratic system as a whole have remained fairly constant over time (Papadakis 1999; Bean 2005).

Often the catalyst for debates surrounding the notion of representative crisis in many countries has been declining electoral turnout and, in some cases, dramatic falls in electoral participation. This has also been associated with worries about the health of political parties, with significant falls in membership and activism (McAllister 2002). Yet, in Australia, the level of concern about engagement is arguably diminished by the use of compulsory voting, which ensures that turnout remains high regardless of the underlying attitudes towards parties and politicians amongst the public. Arguably, compulsory voting may simply be masking underlying problems that are comparable to other democracies. For example, research conducted for the Australian Democratic Audit reveals that a significant minority of young people are failing to register to vote and that if compulsory voting was not in place many would simply not bother (Edwards, Lawrence and Print 2005). Moreover, underlying attitudes of contempt towards institutional politics and politicians from young voters are in line with many other democracies.

¹Source: Australian Election Study 2004, QC14; data is available for academic use from ESSDA through NESSTAR.

Overall, therefore, it appears that the case for disconnection and crisis in the Australian context is not as clear-cut as elsewhere. Comparatively, Australia appears to score relatively well on various key attitudinal and behavioural measures of democratic support. Nonetheless, although Australian parliamentary democracy may not be compromised, there are signs of a lack of faith among significant portions of the public in the honesty and integrity of their political leaders and governing bodies (Lewis 2002). The question for this article is whether new ICTs offer any realistic prospect for these structures to strengthen and re-vitalise their connection to the body politic?

(Re)-connecting the Public via ICTs

Given how concerns about democratic institutions and representative politics and the emergence of the Internet have coincided, it is perhaps not surprising that the new media have been seen as a means of helping governments' reconnect with the public. It has been suggested that the Internet could assist this process in several respects:

- Increasing service efficiency and delivery – The longstanding hope of many ICT advocates was that through e-government initiatives one could produce efficiency gains, financial savings and increase availability and choice to the public (Dunleavy et al., this volume). Moreover, if the service relationship could be improved through ICTs then there were likely to be broader democratic benefits through increasing citizen satisfaction with government (Bellamy and Taylor 1998; Mechling 2002).
- Increasing transparency and information – In a hostile media environment, one of the apparent attractions of ICTs for representatives and governing institutions is the ability to communicate directly with their citizens. Additionally, the storage capacity of the Internet means that, theoretically, it is possible to provide citizens with access to greater amounts of information about institutions, policies and processes than previously. The combined ability to communicate directly and the provision of much greater levels of information could enhance transparency and produce an informed citizenry with a greater capacity to participate in the representative process (Bimber 2003).
- Increasing networking and linkages – One of the benefits of ICTs is the ability to communicate with large numbers of people across time and geographic boundaries. It also makes it easier to identify other individuals with common political interests and, thereby, creating links and networks on-line. At the local level, one might be able to foster social capital, producing greater degrees of community interest, trust and activity (Rheingold 1993; Best and Krueger 2006).
- Increasing and strengthening the channels for engagement – ICTs also open up the possibility of both modernising old engagement methods (e.g. introducing e-voting), as well as creating new opportunities for political engagement through on-line consultation and discussion techniques. On-line consultation is, arguably, a relatively low-cost mechanism for democratic institutions to open up the political process and target previously ignored or difficult to reach groups in society. A common complaint from voters is that

in between elections there are few mechanisms allowing one to engage in dialogue with representatives and representative institutions. The interactive elements of new technologies offer the possibility of creating what Coleman (2005) has referred to as *conversational democracy*.

None of these ideas has gone unchallenged, with sceptics arguing that this kind of techno-optimism is unlikely to deliver much more than short-term boosts to democracy. Three types of criticism are commonly voiced. First, even if we accept that ICTs produce efficiency gains, it will not necessarily produce any longer-term, deeper benefits. Indeed, observers have warned of the threat that new ICTs may pose to our democratic health by enhancing citizen passivity as we move toward a push-button culture of democracy (van den Hoven 2005). Others have worried about the prospects for civic harmony and social capital as individuals are able to opt into more specialist information and discussion environments, eschewing the broader public sphere (Putnam 2000; Sunstein 2001). Second, technologically deterministic approaches do not take into account underlying social and political attitudes or values. Simply providing more channels or gadgets with which to connect will not necessarily motivate people to use them. Third, ICTs might actually make some things worse. Most noticeably, ICTs might increase social and political divides and, far from lowering the cost of participation, use of technology could raise the bar. In Australia, there are still significant disparities in access to Internet technology. Although biases in gender and region appear to be receding, the influence of higher occupational status, income and education on access all remain relatively strong (Willis and Tranter 2006).

ICTs in the Australian Political Sphere: Leader or Laggard?

The Australian political sphere's adaptation to the Internet era has received mixed reviews. Some have suggested that the peculiarities of Australian geography might make democratic institutions receptive to the use of new technologies to overcome the so-called tyranny of distance (Capling and Nossal 2001). Initially, at least some of these expectations appeared to be borne out. The Australian government received enthusiastic praise for its e-government initiatives, in particular. For example, leading e-democracy advocate Steven Clift (2002) lauded the efforts of the Australian state arguing that Australia, along with New Zealand, were leading the way in the Asia–Pacific region and even globally with its clear support for ICT-enabled government. The establishment of the National Office of the Information Economy (NOIE) in 1997, along with Prime Minister John Howard's stated commitment to ensuring all appropriate government services would be on-line by 2001, clearly marked the federal government as a prime mover on the e-government front. What excited Clift, however, was the emergence of an e-democracy agenda within NOIE's remit and early talk of the need for on-line consultation and citizen engagement.

These federal initiatives were followed by even more sophisticated plans at the State level to utilise the Internet for participatory purposes. Initiatives from a number of States, most notably Queensland, attracted considerable international attention. The Queensland government set up an e-democracy agenda and a series of e-enabled policy initiatives – including an experimental

community e-consultation program, e-policy forums for citizen–government discussion, as well as the use of the Internet to sign and lodge e-petitions to the Queensland Parliament and the provision of audiobroadcast of parliamentary proceedings via the Internet (Hogan, Cook and Henderson 2004). Similarly, in 2004, the Victorian Parliament launched an official wide-ranging ‘Inquiry into Electronic Democracy’ (Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee 2005, v). Although the report did not go as far as to recommend the setting-up of a direct e-democracy initiative, it strongly exhorted the parliament to embrace the Internet for interaction, consultation and the dissemination of information. It also recommended the establishment of an electronic democracy coordinating body in charge of the strategic and day-to-day implementation of e-democratic practice.

Early research on the Federal Parliament also engendered cautious optimism, notably, highlighting the parliament’s adoption of several pioneering schemes to enhance transparency and accessibility, including e-petitions in the Senate, and the provision of web sites and e-mail to all representatives (Magarey 1999). Underpinning this, there was also apparent early enthusiasm from the politicians with a number of MPs suggesting that legislators could make effective use of ICTs to reconnect with Australian citizens (Bishop 2002; Lundy 2002).²

However, some of this early optimism has been questioned by subsequent research that has challenged the perception of Australia as a global leader in the area of e-government/e-democracy. Studies by both Chen (2002) and Ward and colleagues (2007) suggest that Australian federal legislators, for example, have been comparatively less active in their use of ICTs to increase openness, transparency, accountability and interactivity, whereas the Parliament as an institution has given little strategic attention to the role of ICTs in reconnecting with the public. It has been argued that, at the federal level, the narrower issues of e-government and the electronic delivery of citizen services have dominated legislators’ agenda (Geiselhart 2004; Dugdale et al. 2005), seemingly, to the detriment of the e-democracy perspective (Bishop and Anderson 2004).

Similar criticisms have also been levelled at other Australian political actors. For instance, Australian parties have been seen as being relatively slow to adopt ICTs creatively and have largely used ICTs to conduct a business-as-usual approach (Gibson and Ward 2002).

Outside the traditional institutions, however, some research indicates that citizen groups, NSMs and protest networks in Australia have been active in using new technologies creatively. Several studies have emphasised the increasing importance of e-mail, mobile phones and the World Wide Web in mobilising and organising protest, particularly in the areas of environment, anti-globalisation and asylum issues (Capling and Nossal 2001; Meikle 2002; Pickerill 2004).

²Kate Lundy noted: ‘While the current debate circulates around the value of the technologies themselves and their merits in a participatory democracy, broader issues regarding the nature, scope and use of an online environment and its accessibility must receive the attention they deserve. Only then can we create a political culture that will truly embrace the concept of an Australian cyber democracy’. Mark Latham, Lindsay Tanner and Carmen Lawrence voiced similar concerns.

Overall, however, academic study of the use of technologies in the Australian democratic context has tended to focus on elite level initiatives. Although there has been a received wisdom that Australians are enthusiastic adopters of technologies (Goggin 2005), outside general statistics on the uptake of, and access to, the Internet, relatively little is known about the Australian public on-line in terms of the representative nexus.

Australian Citizens and On-line Communication

Having examined the ways in which representatives and the representative process in Australia are currently using new ICTs, and the range of possibilities yet to be explored, we turn now to the empirical evidence regarding citizen attitudes' to the technology. How much demand actually exists and who is utilising and/or demanding such services?

Two questions of substantive interest are investigated specifically in this analysis. The first queries the extent to which government and parliamentary initiatives and public opinion are in step with each other. Although it may be the case that representatives are proving relatively slow to roll-out ICT-enabled opportunities for on-line communication, this may be not necessarily due to an inherent reluctance or inertia but based on perceptions of the lack of any clear demand for such innovations. Voters may already see that they have enough opportunities to influence the political process and regard the development of on-line capabilities as a useful but not necessarily 'must have' feature of a modern democracy. Looking at levels of public support for, and usage of, existing and prospective on-line governmental and parliamentary services can help us to judge whether Australian representative structures are struggling to maintain their leading position worldwide. Perhaps these judgements of underperformance are arrived at through the application of a technologically determined global yardstick that is essentially divorced from local context? Judged within, and by, its own national standards, might Australia's institutional performance on the 'e' stakes, in fact, prove to be quite satisfactory?

The second major question to be examined is: How wide is the range of individuals displaying interest in, and engagement with, on-line representation? Recent studies of e-participation have revealed signs of interest in on-line politics among some unlikely groups – the young and those from lower socioeconomic grades (Krueger 2002; Gibson, Lusoli and Ward 2005; Owen 2006). Whether these findings about e-participation more generally translate into the narrower and more formal arena of representative government, however, is an important question. Activities such as searching for on-line political news or contacting a political organisation to volunteer help or opinions may have an appeal to those outside the mainstream, whereas engagement with more institutionalised forms of politics via representatives and parliaments may see a preponderance of the better-resourced and educated middle classes.

Data and Analysis

To address these questions, we examine responses to a specially commissioned national opinion survey in May 2005, with the assistance of the Survey

Research Centre.³ The survey polled 1200 Australians regarding their current usage of and attitude toward new ICTs, in general, and toward the governing and parliamentary process, more specifically. Questions were asked about Australians' levels of political knowledge and experience in contacting their MP through a number of different channels, including the Internet. The types of on-line government services and political web sites individuals had used were established, as well as the types of e-democracy and e-government facilities and opportunities that respondents would like to see in the future. Additionally, we profile responses to these items according to standard demographic factors.⁴ Baseline results from the survey are reported in the findings section, below, under two headings: 'The On-line Audience' and 'Perceptions and Use of e-Representation Tools'.

We then report the results from a multivariate analysis of who is using and/or most interested in using new technologies to communicate with politicians. We specify four levels of engagement in on-line representation – from attitudinal to behavioural – and examine them as dependent variables in logistic regression models. Our goal is to establish how far traditional predictors of political engagement increase the likelihood of involvement at each level, and whether and how these predictors vary across levels of on-line engagement. The predictors examined are: individuals' levels of political knowledge, specifically in terms of representation; use of the Internet, access to broadband and use of political web sites; and extent of engagement in off-line or traditional forms of participation. In addition, we controlled for a range of socio-demographic resources, including age, gender, education, social class and residence, which have been linked to Internet access and rates of conventional political participation. Procedurally, the independent variables were entered together and then removed in a backwards manner as their significance levels and the overall difference in alternative models' significance decreased below commonly accepted levels. The final models, which are reported below, were those that maximised overall goodness of model fit and individual variable fitness at predicting on-line representation. We conducted tests for multi-collinearity and interaction effects between the remaining variables. These highlighted significant correlations between Internet use, frequency of use, length of use and home access to broadband. Length of Internet use was chosen for inclusion owing to its higher contribution to model fit when compared to other indicators. Interaction effects not contributing to overall model fit were found between education and social class, between education and political engagement, and between social class and political engagement. When significant, these variables were entered independently. No unexpected interactions were detected.

³The 'Internet and Parliamentarians Survey' was a self-contained study commissioned by the authors to the SRC, a market research institute based in Melbourne. Telephone interviews were conducted in Australia with 1200 adults aged >18 years during 2–15 May 2005; 7000 respondents were selected through a State-stratified sample of phone books where the Federal Electoral Seat could be identified; respondents were then selected randomly within households and not replaced.

⁴To view the complete questionnaire, see www.i-pol.org or contact w.lusoli@chester.ac.uk.

Findings

The On-line Audience

Overall, our findings show that the potential audience for on-line politics in Australia is high, with around 70% of respondents reporting use of the Internet. In addition, most users are relatively well experienced. As Table 1 shows, many have been on-line for five years or more (47%) and an additional 36% for between three and five years. Only a very small minority have on-line experience of less than one year (6%). When on-line, most people tend to spend around four hours per week or more using the Internet. Although some of this may be work-related, home usage is high, with 70% of respondents having an Internet connection in their home, half of whom have broadband. Based on these initial

Table 1. Socio-demographic Profile of Internet Users in Australia, 2005

Characteristic	% (n = 815)	
Internet use [intensity]	Up to 1 hour per week	19
	1–3 hours per week	23
	>4 hours per week	58
Internet use [length]	Up to 6 months	3
	About 1 year	3
	1–2 years	11
	3–5 years	36
	6–10 years	37
Gender	>10 years	10
	Female	48
Age (years)	Male	52
	18–24	18
	25–34	23
	35–44	24
	45–54	18
	55–64	10
Leaving education	>65	7
	Up to Year 10/4th Form/Intermediate	20
	Finished technical school/TAFE	13
	VCE/HSC or Matriculation/Year 12	17
	Some Uni/College of Advanced Education	9
	Tertiary Degree(s)	41
Student	Don't know/can't say/did not reply	1
		11
Social grade	AB	48
	C1	27
	C2	11
	DE	13

Source: SRC 'Internet and Parliamentarians Survey', May 2005.

Note: Percentages are calculated within categories, decimals have been rounded up. Student % is calculated as a proportion of the overall Internet user population.

Q6: Just to clarify your Internet use, do you use the Internet at all these days?

Q6A: How long have you been using the Internet?

Q15: And what is the highest level of education you have completed?

Q15B: Are you studying full-time now?

Q12: Could you tell me please what sort of work the main income earner in your household does?

findings, therefore, it appears that Australians are generally well equipped to take on the challenges of e-democracy.

If we probe these figures a little deeper, however, it becomes apparent that some Australians are better able than others to engage with new ICTs. As the lower part of Table 1 shows, although the gender gap has largely eroded as a determinant of Internet use, age still exerts a strong effect. There is a clear predominance of younger people on-line. Although just less than half of the sample, overall, are aged 45 years or younger, approximately two-thirds of the on-line population belongs to this age bracket. Education remains a relevant predictor of Internet use, with tertiary-educated individuals moderately over-represented among the on-line population.⁵ Occupationally, Internet users are not necessarily drawn from higher-status professions; indeed, there is a slightly higher preponderance of lower-grade white-collar workers (i.e. clerical, sales, service staff) than we find in the sample as a whole. In terms of geographical distribution, although Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales have above-average proportions of their population on-line, Queensland, Western Australia and, particularly, the Northern Territory report lower than average levels of use.

Based on these descriptive statistics, therefore, it would appear that the Australian Internet-using population constitutes a large and relatively diverse group of people, most of whom have a significant amount of experience of the medium. Thus, while certain groups are better placed to take advantage of a new ICT connection to their representatives, in general, we would expect such developments to have a fairly widespread appeal.

Perceptions and Use of e-Representation Tools

In this section, we assess individuals' interest in, and practical engagement with, various forms of government and parliamentary on-line initiatives. We examine the extent to which people had actually visited a range of institutions' and political organisations' web sites and the way in which they use new media to keep in touch with their MPs – or otherwise. Table 2 reports the proportions of respondents (with Internet access) that had visited a range of key political web sites in the year preceding the survey. The findings show that although major news organisations and Australian newspapers top the bill (over one-third of users have visited such a site), national and local government sites are most popular amongst political institutions, with almost half of Internet users claiming to have visited one in the previous 12 months. The numbers visiting parliamentary or individual MPs' web sites are considerably lower, with only around one in ten reporting having viewed them.

⁵Although the numbers of those with Internet access across all categories of education has risen since the Australian Election Study (AES) first collected data on access, the gap between the better- and less well-educated population has remained. For instance, the 1998 AES shows that 57% of those with a postgraduate degree and 52% of those with a bachelor's degree reported access, but only 20% of those with no qualifications did so. By 2004, the proportion of those with no qualifications reporting access had grown to 51%, whereas among those with university experience, it was virtually nil (2%).

Table 2. Political Web Sites Visited in the Past 12 months, 2005

	% of Internet Users (<i>n</i> = 835)
News for current affairs	71
Government/departments	47
Local councils	40
NGO/Political groups	25
Parliament	14
Regional/National assemblies	13
Parties	9
MPs	9
None	17

Source: SRC 'Internet and Parliamentarians Survey' May 2005.

Q: Which, if any, of the following web sites have you visited in the past 12 months?

Despite these low levels of interest, the appeal of using ICTs to contact an MP appears to be quite high. When asked about preferred methods to get in touch with their MP, e-mail attracted over one-third (36%) of respondents, only one just behind personal visits (37%). Letters and phone calls are still the most popular methods, however, with 48% and 72% of respondents, respectively, citing them as ways they would contact their MP. Actual use of e-mail to contact one's MP, however, is much lower. Among the 13% of the sample who reported having contacted their MP in the past three years, only 8% had used e-mail, with most people opting for regular 'snail' mail (37%). Follow-up questions to establish why people were not choosing e-mail to contact their MP indicated that lack of access was a problem (28%), although a similar proportion cited a preference for postal or phone communication (23%) and actual face-to-face contact with their MP (22%).

Having provided some insights into levels of take-up of e-services in Australia, we also sought to understand citizens' attitudes toward a range of more ambitious schemes including: being able to comment on-line on legislation being passed in Parliament; participating in on-line government polls on policy matters; accessing government services on-line; using Internet voting in federal elections; and contributing to on-line government discussion forums. Internet voting attracted the lowest level of support, with only 45% of those polled saying they would like to see it happen. Other initiatives were all supported by a majority of respondents. On-line polls and on-line discussions both held an appeal for 57% of the sample. Most popular, however, were opportunities to comment on legislation via e-mail (74%) and having on-line access to all government services (76%).

To return to our first question, therefore, our survey evidence suggests that Australian political leaders may not be too far out of step with what their electorates demand in terms of on-line communication opportunities. Australians tend to make most use of executive branch web sites and the take-up of channels to interact with representatives is minimal. That said, however, Australians are also interested in opportunities to offer more direct input into the policy process. The survey findings showed a large groundswell of support for new ICTs being used to add citizens' voices to their legislators'

deliberations. Of course, it may be the case that our research has discovered a divide between ‘preferers’ and ‘doers’ when it comes to new ICTs and the representative process. The former constituting a larger group that is more content to simply express interest in the new technology to communicate with their representatives, and the latter being a small core of devotees who are prepared to engage practically with new ICTs for such purposes. This observation leads us into analysis of our second research question, which focuses on the characteristics of those who are positively oriented (behaviourally and attitudinally) toward the use of new ICTs in the representative arena.

Our principal interest here is in establishing how wide is the constituency for on-line representation? Does it really offer a channel for MPs to connect with a wider and more diverse electorate by offering additional digital opportunities? Do such opportunities offer a chance for mobilising new faces in the political arena or do we see the usual suspects (i.e. the more educated, affluent and already engaged)? Perhaps it depends on the extent of activity called for? Do those displaying a positive inclination toward using new ICTs in the representative process, but stopping short of engaging currently in its direct application, constitute a wider and more diverse pool of potential participants compared to the more active early adopters who are already engaging in on-line communication with governing bodies?

Modelling Orientations Toward e-Representation

To examine these questions, we first divided our sample into four sets, according to citizens’ propensity to engage on-line with their representatives, ranging from purely attitudinal to behavioural.

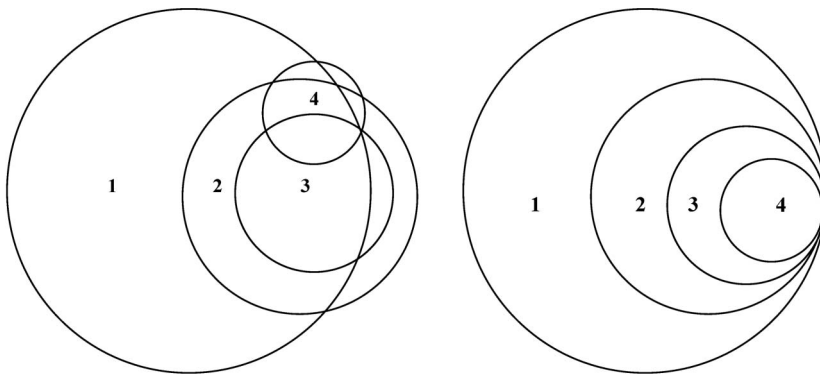
- *Set 1.* Respondents who would like to see all MPs with a web site.
- *Set 2.* Respondents who would consider using e-mail and web site to contact their MP.
- *Set 3.* Respondents whose preferred mode of contact with their MP is through e-mail and the web site.
- *Set 4.* Respondents who actually made contact with their MP through their web site and/or e-mail.

In the first set, respondents have generally positive attitudes towards MPs’ offers of interaction via e-mail and web sites. In the second set, respondents report an overall propensity to use the Internet, among other media, to get in touch with MPs. In the third set, citizens have a definite propensity to use the Internet as a first-resort medium through which to carry out transactions with representatives. Finally, in the fourth set, respondents made contact with their MP using the Internet.

From the figures reported in Table 3 and summarised in Figure 1, it is evident immediately that the four sets include an increasingly narrower range of respondents, who engage in increasingly direct and active forms of on-line representation. On the one hand, the four sets largely overlap, with those people holding positive attitudes also having a positive propensity to use MPs’ e-mails and web sites (79%) and, finally, being engaged in actual on-line contacting

Table 3. Levels of Engagement With e-Representation – Set Overlaps

	Would like to see all MPs with web sites		Prefers using e-mail and web site to contact MP [Total]		Prefers using e-mail and web site to contact MP		Contacted MP on-line, by e-mail or web site	
	N	Row %	N	Row %	N	Row %	N	Row %
Would like to see all MPs with web sites	850							
Prefers using e-mail and web site to contact MP [total]	355	79	450					
Prefers using e-mail and web site to contact MP	107	72	148	100	148			
Contacted MP on-line, by e-mail or web site	68	86	66	84	31	39	79	



- Set 1. Would like to see all MPs with web site, $n = 850$.
 Set 2. Would use email and web site to contact MP, $n = 447$.
 Set 3. E-mail and web site are the single preferred mode of contact, $n = 148$.
 Set 4. Actual contact with MPs through their web site and/or e-mail, $n = 79$.

Figure 1. Set Overlaps: Actual vs Model Layout.

behaviour (86%). Although sets 2 and 3 are nested by design, the second being a subset of the first, the degree of overlap is significant. Overall, this suggests that it is increasingly smaller subsets of respondents that are engaged in the more demanding activities. However, there are also two clear areas of incongruence between attitudes and behaviours, as attitudes and behaviours are not nested concentrically (as the model in Figure 1 would predict). First, neither set 2 nor set 3 are perfectly inside set 1. This means that there are some respondents who do not think that MPs should have a web site but, nonetheless, choose e-mail and web site as the medium of choice (21% and 28% of sets 2 and 3, respectively).

Second, despite the fact that most of the 'doers' of set 4 see e-mail as a tool of first resort to contact their MP (61%), some have a more neutral attitude (14%) and some are even doubtful about its value as a communication tool in this regard (16%). Overall, therefore, there appears to be a high level of reinforcement and complementarity in individuals' levels of engagement with e-representation initiatives. It is not entirely axiomatic that displaying an interest in on-line communication with one's MP goes hand-in-hand with a commitment to behavioural engagement in such activities and vice versa.

To explore this proposition more systematically, we compared the socio-demographic profiles and politically relevant attitudes and behaviours of the individuals at each of the four levels of e-representation propensity identified above. The key question asked was whether these groups are divided essentially by the level of resources they possess, such that those displaying the highest level of commitment to e-representation (i.e. the 'doers') simply have more of a certain type of resources than the rest? Or, is it more that different types of resources are relevant for different groups? Perhaps more traditional resources, such as education and political knowledge, prove more relevant to more direct engagement, whereas Internet familiarity and on-line experience stimulate overall levels of interest and preference.

Findings from the Multivariate Analysis

The results for each of the models are reported in Table 3. In the discussion, we consider the findings for each model individually and then examine them cumulatively. Only variables significant at $p \leq 0.1$ are reported. When a variable is not included (e.g. gender), this means that it is not significant either at zero order or when controlling for other variables.

Model 1: The poor fit of model 1 to the data, together with the lack of any 'stand-out' predictors of positive attitudes, suggest that a diffuse coalition of people are supportive of virtual representation. In general, those who display an engagement in politics (i.e. discuss politics, signed a petition), and who are satisfied with the work of their MP and can correctly name their MP's party are among the most likely to support their representative's on-line engagement. Those who visit political web sites are also more likely to call for MPs to have web sites (an increase of 2% in the probability of support). Somewhat surprisingly, however, individuals' level of Internet use is not significant in predicting an interest in on-line representatives. Young people are also not necessarily more likely to hold supportive attitudes to this aspect of e-democracy, although older citizens (i.e. >65 years) are significantly less inclined to regard MPs having a web site as important. Overall, therefore, the findings suggest that a positive orientation toward on-line MPs is largely a reflection of a positive view and engagement with the representative process as a whole and a general familiarity with the on-line political environment.

Model 2: The findings from our second model, predicting the propensity of citizens to use e-mail and the Web to contact MPs, tell a somewhat more interesting story. First, young people (i.e. 18–34 years olds) are more inclined to use on-line media to actually get in touch with MPs. Indeed, they are, on

average, 13% more likely to consider contacting their MP on-line. Older people, however, are distinctly less sanguine about direct on-line contact, with those aged over 65 being around 10% less likely to want to contact their MP via e-mail or the Web. This finding indicates that the digital divide within on-line politics based around age is certainly alive and kicking, particularly when it comes to the more specific question of using the technology to communicate with political elites. As well as indicating that older citizens may be shut out of these new channels of influence, such findings of course also point to the possibility that the Internet may be able to mobilise new constituencies who were previously less connected to the representative circuit. In addition, although levels of existing political involvement recede in importance, Internet use becomes highly relevant. Although different lengths of use predict different probabilities, overall long-term users are almost twice as likely as non-users to say they would utilise new ICT channels to communicate with their elected representatives. Taken in conjunction with the findings of model 1, such results indicate that although most people would generally think it a good thing for MPs to be on-line, those that would actually seek to exploit the new possibilities for access are younger, technologically literate but not necessarily highly politically active individuals. Some level of political interest is important, however, as having a history of viewing political web sites is strongly linked to one's inclination to utilise on-line representation channels. Having visited a political web site increases an individuals' propensity to contact MPs via e-mail and Web by approximately 6%.

Model 3: The results for the third model very much echo those of model 2. Younger, experienced Internet users with some interest in on-line politics (but not off-line necessarily) are most inclined to see e-mail and Web contact as the preferred way to get in touch with their MPs. Table 4 shows that young adults (aged 25–34 years) are almost twice as likely as other citizens to report a first preference for on-line communications. Length of Internet use assumes an even greater value here than in the previous model, with people who have been on the Internet for more than six years being twice as likely as non-Internet users to choose it as a preferred contact mode, and 1.5 times more likely than those who have been on-line for up to two years.

Model 4: In this model, we examined the traits of those who have actually initiated communication with their representative, either through their web site or by e-mail. What we note immediately from Table 4 is the lack of significance of age and Internet experience variables, which proved very strong predictors of the preference for using these means of contact. Instead, what we find is that those making the move to engage in on-line contact are people who can name their MP, have contacted him/her in the past and are making heavy use of the Internet. Significantly, however, they are not necessarily more politically involved or engaged in wider forms of politics, nor are they better resourced in terms of education. As such, these findings suggest that on-line contacting, when viewed behaviourally, is not attracting a wider range of previously unmobilised citizens, although neither is it necessarily appealing to only the highly active citizen. Those choosing to e-mail their MP appear to be doing so on strategic or opportunistic grounds. Having already contacted their MP in

Table 4. Logistic Regressions Regarding On-Line Representation Attitudes, Propensity and Activities (Four Models)

Variable	Measurement	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
		Exp(B)	Δ%	Exp(B)	Δ%	Exp(B)	Δ%	Exp(B)	Δ%
Age ^a	18–24 years			*	1.73	13	*	1.67	6
	25–34 years			*	1.80	14	**	2.23	10
	35–44 years			†	1.44	8			
	>65 years	**	0.57	-12	*	0.59	-10		
Terminal education age	10–14 years			†	0.384	-22			
	17–18 years			*	0.644	-11			
Correctly names MP	Yes	**	1.453	5	†	1.380	5	*	2.042
Correctly names party	Yes							*	2.103
Contacted MP [off-line]	Yes							†	0.574
Boycott	Yes								
Discuss	Yes	*	1.405	3					
Petition	Yes	*	1.408	1					
Satisfied with MP	Yes	*	1.341	7					
Length of Internet use	Scale 0–7							*	1.366
Length of Internet use	6 months								
	1 year	**	9.575	25				*	20.897
	1–2 years	***	9.999	26				*	16.162
	3–5 years	***	9.383	25				*	36.346
	6–10 years	***	9.238	25				***	54.305
	>10 years	***	14.034	34				***	50.992
Political web sites visited	Scale 0–8 ^b	**	1.107	2	***	1.277	6	***	1.246
Constant			1.013		***	.043		***	0.002
Model fit		850, 71% positive		447, 36.5% positive		148, 13% positive		n = 79, 6.5% positive	
		71% correctly classified		74% correctly classified		88% correctly classified		94% correctly classified	
		Nagelkerke R2 0.07		Nagelkerke R2 0.43		Nagelkerke R2 0.27		Nagelkerke R2 0.42	

^aReference categories are, respectively, 55–64 years old for age; > 19 years for terminal education age; negative responses for dummies; ‘No use’ for Length of Internet use.

^bScale ranges 1–8 in Model 4, predicting actual on-line contact. ***sig. $p < 0.001$; **sig. $p < 0.01$; *sig. $p < 0.05$; †sig. $p < 0.10$.

the past, they are opting for a new, quick and convenient way of continuing the conversation.

Taking the results from our four models together, it is evident that in answer to our original question about who is taking part in e-representative politics, a rather mixed picture emerges. The models consistently challenge the importance of traditional socio-demographic resources in predicting engagement with on-line representatives. In particular, an escalation in the commitment to on-line engagement in the representative process does not appear to rely on any corresponding rise in education or off-line political experience. Essentially, a basic interest in the idea of MPs having a web presence and being reachable via the Internet attracts a fairly wide group of politically engaged individuals (with the notable exception of older citizens). More specific expressions of support for the Internet as a preferred channel of communication, however, tend to be advanced by younger, technologically literate but politically inexperienced citizens. Taking the next step and actually engaging in on-line contact with one's representative, however, does see political experience return to the fore, especially one's knowledge of the system and a past history of contacting.

Extending these findings to the bigger question of whether e-representation can widen the current scope of participation, we are left with a somewhat ambivalent set of conclusions. Overall, the lack of importance of education, class and gender in predicting any of these forms of engagement with e-representation certainly suggests that the pool of potential and actual participants for this mode of engagement is wider than has typically been seen for more active forms of off-line participation. However, the factors that emerge as relevant do not necessarily point toward more democratic outcomes. In particular, models 2 and 3 suggest that a declared preference for on-line contact with an elected representative is driven largely by simply being young and familiar with the technology rather than by any more expressly political motives. Model 4 findings are perhaps even more cautionary in that, although the level of Internet experience is not necessarily decisive, heavy use of the medium, along with knowing one's MP and having a track record for contacting him/her, does significantly raise the likelihood that one takes up the on-line option.

Conclusion

In general, therefore, we can conclude from these data that on-line contacting in Australia is not currently leading to any significant reconnection or even possibly deepening of existing connections citizens have to their representatives and representative institutions. Contacting one's MP on-line is largely a result of having done so already and being a high user of the Internet. Broadening the focus a bit further, however, to those who are attitudinally disposed toward the practice, if not behaviourally engaged, a somewhat more positive story emerges. Here we found mostly younger citizens who are not highly politically mobilised in other respects. Although youth engagement in on-line contacting of an MP may stem more from interest in trying out new types of activities on-line, if such opportunities lead them into a more direct and closer interaction with the political system than they would ordinarily experience, then they may end up helping to widen participation in the democratic process. However, the

numbers for whom this conversion may occur are not known and based on the numbers present in our sample we would not necessarily expect them to be large group.

Returning to our two broad research questions, therefore, it would appear that the any apparent slowdown in the Australian government's approach to e-democracy has not chafed against popular expectations. Although there is support among the public for seeing more of their MPs use the Internet it does not appear to be an area of government in which immediate action is required. Most people are content to use other means than Internet-based communications to correspond with their elected representatives. Should the government decide to embark on any modernising agenda of the e-democratic kind, however, these findings do indicate a number of concerns that might be borne in mind. Based on the profiles we have developed to describe the groups most likely to be involved in the uptake of such initiatives, it is clear that although they provide opportunities to catch the attention of younger, less politically aware citizens, they will, very likely, bypass a significant minority of older citizens entirely. In addition, translating those levels of interest in on-line communication with MPs into more practical engagement may require some kind of educational or interventionist strategies to be developed, given that it is largely those with a track record in contacting their representatives that appear willing and able to do so in the on-line environment.

References

- Åström, J. 2001. 'Digital Democracy: Ideas, Intentions and Initiatives in Swedish Local Governments.' Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, 6–11 April 2001, Grenoble, Sweden.
- Bean, C. 2005. 'Is There a Crisis of Trust in Australia?' In *Australian Social Attitudes: The First Report*, eds S. Wilson, G. Meagher, R. Gibson, D. Denmark and M. Western. Sydney: UNSW Press.
- Bellamy, C. and J. Taylor. 1998. *Governing in the Information Age*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Best, S. J. and B. S. Krueger. 2006. 'Online Interactions and Social Capital: Distinguishing Between New and Existing Ties.' *Social Science Computer Review* 24(4): 395–410.
- Bimber, B. 2003. *Information and American Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bishop, P. 2002. 'e-Democracy: Technological Challenges to Democratic Theory.' *Australasian Parliamentary Review* 17(2): 55–68.
- Bishop, P. and L. Anderson. 2004. 'e-Government to e-Democracy: "High Tech" Solutions to "No Tech" Problems.' Paper presented at the Australian Electronic Governance Conference, Centre for Public Policy, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria, 14–15 April 2004.
- Campbell, A., A. Harrop and B. Thompson. 1999. 'Towards the Virtual Parliament – What Computers Can Do for MPs.' *Parliamentary Affairs* 52(3): 388–403.
- Capling, A. and R. Nossal. 2001. 'Death of Distance or Tyranny of Distance? The Internet, Deterritorialization, and the Anti-globalization Movement in Australia.' *Pacific Review* 14(2): 443–65.
- Chen, P. 2002. *Australian Elected Representatives' Use of New Media Technologies*. Melbourne: Centre for Public Policy, University of Melbourne.
- Clift, S. 2002. 'e-Governance to e-Democracy: Progress in Australia and New Zealand Toward Information-age Democracy.' *Publicus.Net: Public Strategies for the Online World*, March. URL: <www.publicus.net/articles/aunzedem.html>. Consulted 14 January 2007.
- Coleman, S. 2005. *Direct Representation: Towards Conversational Democracy*. London: IPPR.
- Coleman, S. and J. Spiller. 2003. 'Exploring New Media Effects on Representative Democracy.' *Journal of Legislative Studies* 9(3): 1–16.
- Curtice, J. and R. Jowell. 1997. 'Trust in the Political System.' In *British Social Attitudes: The 14th Report. The End of Conservative Values?*, eds R. Jowell, J. Curtice, A. Park, L. Brook, K. Thomson and C. Bryson. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.

- Dalton, R. 2004. *Democratic Challenges Democratic Choices: The Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dalton, R. and M. Wattenberg, eds. 2000. *Parties Without Partisans*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Davis, R. 1999. *The Web of Politics: The Internet's Impact on the American Political System*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dugdale, A., A. Daly, F. Papandrea and M. Maley. 2005. 'Accessing e-Government: Challenges for Citizens and Organizations.' *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 71(1): 109–18.
- Edwards, K., S. Lawrence and M. Print. 2005. *Australia's Democratic Report Card: Young People Assess Democracy in Australia*. Australian Democratic Audit. URL: <http://democratic.audit.anu.edu.au/categories/pub_optfrm.htm>. Consulted 20 January 2007.
- Geiselhart, K. 2004. 'Citizen Engagement: The Next Horizon for Digital Government.' In *The Vocal Citizen: Labour Essays*, eds D. Glover and G. Patmore. Melbourne: Drummond Publishing.
- Gibson, R. K., W. Lusoli and S. J. Ward. 2005. 'Online Participation in the UK: Testing a "contextualised" Model of Internet Effects.' *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 7(4): 56–83.
- Gibson, R. K. and S. J. Ward. 2002. 'Virtual Campaigning: Australian Parties Online.' *Australian Journal of Political Science* 35(1): 99–129.
- Goggin, G., ed. 2005. *Virtual Nation: The Internet and Australia*. Sydney: UNSW Press.
- Goot, M. 2002a. 'Distrustful, Disenchanted and Disengaged?' In *The Prince's New Clothes: Why Do Australians Dislike Their Politicians?*, eds D. Burchell and A. Leigh. Sydney: UNSW Press.
- Goot, M. 2002b. *Distrustful, Disenchanted and Disengaged? Polled Opinion on Politics, Politicians and the Parties: An Historical Perspective*. (Papers on Parliament 38). Canberra: Department of the Senate.
- Gray, M. and M. Caul. 2000. 'Declining Voter Turnout in Advanced Industrial Democracies, 1950 to 1997: The Effects of Declining Group Mobilization.' *Comparative Political Studies* 33: 1091–122.
- Hibbing, J. and E. Theiss-Morse, eds. 2001. *What Is It About Government That Americans Dislike?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hoff, J. 2004. 'The Democratic Potentials of Information Technology: Attitudes of European MPs Towards New Technology.' *Information Polity* 9: 55–66.
- Hogan, M., N. Cook and M. Henderson. 2004. *The Queensland Government's e-Democracy Agenda*. Paper presented at the Australian Electronic Governance Conference, Centre for Public Policy, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria, 14–15 April 2004.
- van den Hoven, J. 2005. 'e-Democracy. e-Contestation and the Monitorial Citizen.' *Ethics and Information Technology* 7: 51–9.
- Kingham, T. 2003. *e-Parliaments: The Use of Information and Communication Technologies to Improve Parliamentary Processes* (Report 37210), Washington, DC: World Bank Institute.
- Klingemann, H.-D. 1999. 'Mapping Political Support in the 1990s: A Global Analysis.' In *Critical Citizens*, ed. P. Norris. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Krueger, B. 2002. 'Assessing the Potential of Internet Political Participation in the United States: A Resource Approach.' *American Politics Research* 30(5): 476–98.
- Lawrence, C. 2003. 'Ideas to Save Our Withering Democracy.' URL: <<http://www.safecom.org.au/lawrence03.htm>>. Consulted 14 January 2007.
- Lewis, C. 2002. 'The Declining Reputation of Politicians: Is It Deserved?' *Australasian Parliamentary Review* 17(2): 131–44.
- Lundy, K. 2002. *Cyberdemocracy and the Future of the Australian Senate* (Papers on Parliament 34, December 1999). Canberra: Department of the Senate.
- Magarey, K. 1999. 'Parliament in the Age of the Internet.' *Parliamentary Affairs* 52(3): 405–28.
- Margolis, M. and D. Resnick. 2000. *Politics As Usual: The Cyberspace Revolution*. London: Sage.
- McAllister, I. 2002. *Civic Education and Political Knowledge in Australia* (Papers on Parliament 38). Canberra: Department of the Senate.
- Mechling, J. 2002. 'Information Age Government: Just the Start of Something Big?' In *Governance.Com*, eds E. Kamarck and J. Nye. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Meikle, G. 2002. *Future Active: Media Activism and the Internet*. Sydney: Pluto Press.
- Norris, P. 2000a. *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Norris, P. 2000b. 'Australian Democracy in Comparative Perspective.' In *The People's Choice: Australian Experiments in Democracy*, ed. M. Sawyer. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Owen, D. 2006. 'The Internet and Youth Civic Engagement in the United States.' In *The Internet and Politics: Citizens, Voters and Activists*, eds S. Oates, D. Owen and R. Gibson. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

- Papadakis, E. 1999. 'Constituents of Confidence and Mistrust in Australian Institutions.' *Australian Journal of Political Science* 34(1): 75–93.
- Passey, A. and M. Lyons. 2005. 'Voluntary Associations and Political Participation.' In *Australian Social Attitudes: The First Report*, eds S. Wilson, G. Meagher, R. Gibson, D. Denmark and M. Western. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.
- Pharr, S. and R. Putnam, eds. 2000. *Disaffected Democracies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Pickerill, J. 2004. 'Rethinking Political Participation: Experiments in Internet Activism in Britain and Australia.' In *Electronic Democracy: Mobilisation, Organisation and Participation Via New ICTs*, eds R. Gibson, A. Rommele and S. Ward. London: Routledge.
- Putnam, R. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon Schuster.
- Rheingold, H. 1993. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.
- Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee. 2005. *Inquiry into Electronic Democracy* (Final report), Melbourne: Parliament of Victoria.
- Sunstein, C. 2001. *Republic.com*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Walsh, K.-A. 1995. 'Politicians: How Low Can They Go?' *Bulletin with Newsweek* 116(September): 14–17.
- Ward, S., R. Gibson and W. Lusoli. 2003. 'Online Participation and Mobilisation in the UK: Hype, Hope and Reality.' *Parliamentary Affairs* 56(4): 652–68.
- Ward, S., R. Gibson and W. Lusoli. 2007. 'Australian MPs and the Internet: Avoiding the Digital Age?' *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 67(2): 210–22.
- Ward, S. and W. Lusoli. 2005. "'From Weird to Wired": MPs, the Internet and Representative Politics in the UK.' *Journal of Legislative Studies* 11(1): 57–81.
- Willis, S. and B. Tranter. 2006. 'Beyond the Digital Divide: Internet Diffusion and Inequality in Australia.' *Journal of Sociology* 42(1): 43–59.