Why Mobilize Support Online? The Paradox of Party Behavior Online

by

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Internet offers opportunities for political mobilization that parties are underexploiting. If we believe that parties have as their main goal maximizing support the question that follows is, why are parties not using the Internet to further this goal? I propose a model that brings light into this paradox and accounts for observed differences in party behavior online. I argue that if parties are not using the new media to mobilize support is because the benefits of using it are not clear and there are costs -- communicational and organizational -- involved in this decision. Parties that are large and in the opposition, that are either low or highly cohesive ideologically, and that have small extra-parliamentary organizations will have the greatest incentives to use the Internet for political mobilization and will be in the best position to pay the costs involved in this decision. The paper uses evidence from parties in Spain and Catalonia to illustrate the argument.

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The Internet is increasingly being perceived by parties and candidates as an effective tool for political mobilization. The 2000 elections in the US have been depicted as the elections signaling the beginning of a new era in political campaigning marked by the use of the Internet as an effective tool for mobilization (Bimber, 2003; Kamarck, 2002). Scholars and experts have gone so far as to attribute Obama's victory in the 2008 election to his use of the Internet. While this is questionable, it is undeniably true that through the use of the new media Obama was able to mobilize an unprecedented amount of resources that helped him in his campaign to win the presidency. In the 2004 Spanish elections, parties used for the first time the Internet in their campaigns in a serious way. The video of Mariano Rajoy, the leader of the Spanish Popular Party, asking citizens to give their opinions on many salient issues of the campaign marked an important breakthrough in the use by the Spanish parties of the Internet for political campaigning.

Internet audience is also growing in advanced democracies. In the US, the percentage of Internet users reaches 77% of the population, while in Spain it has grown to be 62% of the population. Moreover, Internet is rivaling other media as the main source of getting news. In December 2008, Pew reported that for the first time American people were searching more news in the Internet than in the newspapers. In Catalonia, one out five people report getting news from the Internet.

Yet, with all these promising facts, political parties are under-exploiting the opportunities that the Internet offers for political mobilization. This fact is quite startling if we believe that parties will do anything in their hands to achieve what is assumed to be their main goal: maximizing support. In fact, this is not only a startling fact but is can even be framed as a paradox, for if parties really have as their main goal maximizing political support, why are they not using the Internet to further this goal?

This, of course, is only apparently a paradox. If parties are not fully exploiting the Internet to mobilize political support is probably because it is not clear what they gain from it. In fact, one of the main arguments of this paper is that if parties are not exploiting the new technology to its fullest for mobilizing support is because the

benefits of using the internet for political mobilization are still uncertain while there are very certain costs – communicational and organizational – involved in the decision.

Departing from the assumption that parties have the goal of maximizing support, this paper proposes a model of party behavior online that brings light into the "Internet paradox" and accounts for observed differences in party strategies online. Departing from this model, the paper argues that certain characteristics of parties -- related to their size, ideology and organization -- affect the *incentives* as well as the *costs* of using the net for political mobilization. In particular, the paper argues that parties that are large, non-ideological and have small extra parliamentary organizations not only will have greater incentives to use the internet for political mobilization but also will be in an advantage over other parties to move and compete for votes in the online environment.

The argument is illustrated with evidence from parties and party activists in Spain and Catalonia. To illustrate the argument I use both aggregate and individual data. At the aggregate level, I analyze party websites to assess website efficiency in terms of the potential for mobilizing support. At the individual level, I use data on party activists to assess whether parties make a difference in explaining levels of cyber-activism and what kind of parties are more successful at mobilizing their followers online. The results of the analysis in general go in the direction expected by the theory: I find that large, non-ideological and non-bureaucratic parties both have the most efficient websites and are the most successful at mobilizing their followers online.

This paper has the following structure. In the next section I review the literature on party behavior online and present my perspective to analyze party behavior online. In the third section, I review the literature on mobilization and explain how Internet is supposed to affect political mobilization. In the fourth section, I present the model. In the fifth section, I explain the data, measures and methods used in the analysis. In the last two sections I present the results of the analysis and discuss them. Finally, I conclude with some comments.

The Approach to Party Behaviour Online

The question of how parties are using the internet – with what intensity and for what purposes -- has attracted much attention from scholars in the last decade. In fact, there

are countless studies that analyze party website in order to make inferences about party behavior online. Most of these studies focus in one-single country and are very descriptive. They engage in party website analysis without stating hypothesis about parties' most likely uses of the Internet and parties' most likely behavior online. At most these studies test the hypothesis of normalization or equalization (Newell, 2001; March, 2004; Vaccari, 2007; Lusoli et. al., 2008; Small, 2008; Strandberg, 2008).

Of all the studies analyzing party websites, a few studies have been comparative and have systematically attempted to relate observed differences in party behavior online to explanatory variables (Norris, 2003; Gibson and Römmele, 2003; Padro-Solanet and Cardenal, 2008; Sudulich, 2009; Bastien, 2009; Foot et al. 2009; Chadwick and Anstead, 2009). Some of these studies have highlighted the role of institutions, such as the electoral system and the state's territorial structure (Chadwick and Anstead, 2009), the structure of competition (Gibson and Römmele, 2003), and party characteristics such as size, ideology and organization (Sudulich, 2007; Sudulich 2009, Padro-Solanet and Cardenal, 2008). However, even those that have attempted to provide explanations have not explained why such factors related to party characteristics as size, ideology, and organization should affect party strategies online.

While we owe these studies much of our cumulated knowledge on the subject, this literature has suffered from one general problem: it has not been informed by any theory of parties in order to derive hypothesis about party behavior online. With a few exceptions, which have used some contributions to the theory of party behavior (Römmele, 2003; Gibson and Ward, 2000), this literature has approached the study of party behavior online in a theoretical void. Mostly and generally, this has been the case because this literature has been driven by normative expectations about the transformative power of the Internet and not by positive propositions concerning what drives party behavior.

In this paper, I use the rational choice approach to party behavior to model party behavior online. I depart from a very simple assumption from which I then derive hypothesis about party behavior online. I assume that parties have one main goal: to maximize electoral support. I admit that parties may have other goals, such as office and policy, but I argue that maximizing support is their one overriding goal.[1] This allows me to have expectations concerning the main uses that parties will make of the Internet.

Since I depart from the assumption that parties want to maximize their electoral support I will expect parties to use the Internet for political mobilization. Hence, departing from this simple assumption, I ask what parties are doing online to maximize this goal.

But using the rational choice approach to party behavior not only allows to have expectations about party uses of the Internet, it also allows to expect parties to behave in a certain way -- that is, as rational beings that calculate the benefits and costs of any decision, including the one to use the Internet as a political mobilization tool. Since it is likely that the costs and benefits of using the Internet for political mobilization will vary across parties according to different factors this approach will also allow me to derive hypothesis concerning the conditions under which parties will more likely use the Internet for political mobilization. In other words, this approach not only allows me to pose the question: What are parties doing online to mobilize support? But also to answer the following one: What accounts for the differences in party strategies online?

In a following section I sketch out my model of party behavior online and state the hypotheses that will further be tested. But before I discuss how political organizations such as parties have traditionally proceed to mobilize support and how Internet is expected to change the traditional ways in which parties and political organizations have mobilized support.

Conventional versus Online Mobilization

Political mobilization is "the process by which citizens are stimulated to participate in the political process by taking actions such as voting or contacting public officials" (Bimber, 1998: 391). Participation is the task of citizens, while mobilization is the task of political organizations (Krueger, 2006). Political organizations induce people to participate in the political process by decreasing the costs of participation. In particular, organizations decrease the costs of participating for individuals by saving them costs of information and by convincing them – by means of expensive communication campaigns – that their participation matters. By saving costs of information and communication to citizens, however, political organizations incur in considerable costs. Moreover, the costs of mobilizing people in the traditional ways are high (Krueger, 2006, quoting Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993). Some of the traditional activities that political organizations have used to mobilize citizens include mail-posting, telephone-calls, face-to-face encounters, nock at the door strategies, and meetings and rallies.

Since these activities are costly, political organizations have mostly targeted the people who have been most likely to respond (Verba et al, 2002; Krueger, 2006). In order words, because mobilization is a costly activity, political organizations have been careful to target the individuals who were most likely to participate; hence, reinforcing existing inequalities in patterns of participation across the population (Krueger, 2006).

The appearance of the mass media and particularly of the TV contributed somehow to change things by allowing political organizations to reach a much wider public. But while the mass media helped to expand the pool of the potentially targetable, it did not help much to reduce the costs of modern campaigns for parties. Carrying out a campaign through the TV and the mass media continues to cost enormous resources to political parties. Think only of the amount of money that parties and candidates pour into modern campaigns. Moreover, the dominance of the mass media in modern campaigns has not completely wiped out the use of other traditional activities such as post-mailing and party meetings (Bimber, 2003; Kamarck, 2002). All in all, then, mobilizing support is a costly activity in which political parties must incur if they want to achieve their primary goal of winning elections by getting people out to vote them.

Since the Internet reduces so dramatically the costs of information provision and communication, it has been argued that it might also help to reduce the costs of political mobilization (Bimber, 1998; 2003; Ward et al., 2003; Krueger, 2006). The Internet has an advantage over the traditional media: While it potentially may help to reach a wide audience, it allows doing so at a minimum price. Think of the email. As Krueger (2006) argues it costs the same to send a message to one than to send it to a thousand people. Hence, the email might be used a very powerful tool to try to reach a wide audience at a minimum cost. Unfortunately, there are several barriers to using the email to indiscriminately target a wide audience. One of the most important barriers has to do with the reaction of people to unsolicited email (Krueger, 2006). While people accept quite well interferences in their private life when political contacting is done face-to-face, this does not seem to be the case when political invitations come in the form of unsolicited email. Krueger (2006) has some interesting figures that reveal how negatively people respond to receiving political information in the form of unsolicited email. This clearly limits the potential of using the email for delivering political information to a wide audience and casts doubts over the efficiency of the Internet as a tool for political mobilization. While over the paper the email is an extremely cheap

way to deliver political information to an extremely large pool of people, in practice it turns out that there are powerful barriers to using it for purposes of political mobilization.

But email is just one specific tool that parties and political organizations could use for political mobilization. There are other online tools that political organizations may use to mobilize support. Take for example Web 2.0 technologies, such as social networks or weblogs. A priori, these are specially well-suited tools for political mobilization precisely because, in contrast to the dominant top-down style of delivering information, they have an interactive and decentralized nature[2]. There are some isolated studies examining how the use of social networks and weblogs affect the vote share of parties (Williams and Gulati, 2007; Albrecht et al., 2007). However, this is an area that is yet to be explored. There is a lot of knowledge to be gained about how these tools might help parties and candidates win votes.

Finally, parties and candidates can use websites as political mobilization tools. Websites can be effective mobilization tools for the following reasons. First, they are the main platforms and presentation cards projecting parties in the online environment. Second, they can be used as platforms hosting a multiplicity of different interactive tools such as social networks, weblogs etc… Empirical studies show that so far websites have been used primarily as tools of information provision and very rarely as interactive tools. Yet, as Internet audience increases and Web 2.0 technologies expand, this role could be changing. In the US, where Internet audience is large and where winning an additional vote can make an important difference, candidates are more and more using their websites for political mobilization (Bimber, 2003; Kamarck, 2002; Klotz, 2005). Yet there are still important barriers to using the websites for political mobilization, in particular when the goal is wining additional votes. One of the characteristics that distinguish the Internet from other traditional media is that its use is driven by purpose, by choice. The role that "choice" plays in the new media reflects in that people decide whether to use or not the Internet for information consumption but also in the infinite alternatives from which they can choose. This high choice environment characteristic of the Internet in turn leads to narrowcasting or audience fragmentation. This poses a challenge to those parties and candidates that want to use their websites as tools for mobilizing support; namely, how to attract peoples' attention to their sites (Kamarck, 2002; Bimber 2003). In fact, the few studies that have

empirically examined who are the visitors of party and candidate websites find that the most likely visitors to party and candidate websites are already supporters of those parties and candidates (Norris, 2003; Bimber, 2003; Vissers, 2009). This seems to be such an uncontested fact that it even shapes the perceptions of US campaign managers concerning the audiences they expect to target with sites. In his study of online mobilization in the 2000 US elections, Bimber (2003) finds that very rarely campaign managers say that sites are addressed to target "undecided" voters. As a campaign staffer notes "The Web site is good at mobilizing people, but not at bringing people in. There has to be active interest for people to go to the site, and most of these people are people who have already decided" (Bimber, p. 187). According to another campaign staffer, the purpose of sites is "to mobilize the people that are supportive of us and to get them excited about the campaign and to give them a sense of momentum and activity within the campaign" (p.54).

This discussion points to the limitations of websites to directly attract the attention of the undecided voters and win new votes, but it still leaves websites with some potential to increase the amount of participation and collaborative work among party supporters and activists. In turn, increasing participation and collaborative work among party supporters may have a boomerang effect increasing the likelihood that new people will join in. In other words, websites may not be efficient at winning new votes for parties, but they might still have an indirect effect on the electoral fortunes of parties by increasing the overall amount of participation and collaborative work among party supporters and activists.

These limitations affecting different online tools for winning new votes might explain why parties still perceive the benefits of using the Internet for political mobilization as being unclear. However, as we just discussed, the Internet may still have a marginal effect on the electoral fortunes of parties and, depending on certain characteristics of parties, they will have more or less incentives to play the odds with the new media.

Benefits and Costs of Online Mobilization

The purpose in this section is to start specifying the conditions under which parties will be willing to exploit the Internet for political mobilization. To begin specifying these

conditions it is useful to think of parties as rational agents that assess the benefits and costs of any decision before making it. One way to start specifying these conditions then is by asking what are the expected benefits and costs involved in the decision to use the Internet as a mobilization tool for parties.

We can think of the potential benefits of using the Internet for political mobilization as being a function of the utility for parties of winning an additional vote multiplied by the probability that campaigning on the Internet will provide that additional vote. There are multiple barriers limiting the impact of the Internet for winning new votes[3]. However, the Internet may still marginally affect the electoral fortunes of parties by increasing the participation and collaborative work of party supporters (Bimber, 2002; see also Cardenal, forthcoming). Other things being equal, the probability that campaigning online will have an impact on winning votes for parties will depend on how extended the Internet is among the population and on how many and how often people use the Internet for political activities. Obviously, the larger the Internet audience and the larger the population using the Internet for political activities is, the greater the chances that campaigning online will have an effect – even if marginal -- on the electoral fortunes of parties.

On the other hand, the utility for a party of winning an additional vote will depend on the political institutions and on the characteristics of the party (Chadwick and Anstead, 2009). For example, if in a political regime power is highly concentrated and the rules of election are majoritarian the stakes of losing or winning an election rise and the expected utility of winning an additional vote tends to increase. This explains why e-campaigning developed earlier in the Anglo-Saxon countries, where majoritarian systems prevail, than in the European countries, where proportional systems prevail.

But the expected benefits of an additional vote not only depend on the character of political institutions or on the characteristics of countries. The utility of an additional vote, once we hold constant political institutions, can also be affected by the characteristics of parties and by their position in the electoral market. For example, large parties that can realistically expect to win elections and occupy the government may have an extra incentive to campaign on the Internet to win additional votes than small parties. Also, being in the opposition, especially if the race is close and electoral

pressure is high (Römmele and Gibson, 2003), can be an incentive to campaigning on the Internet.

From the benefit-side of the equation, and holding constant political institutions, thus, we would expect large parties and parties in the opposition to have greater incentives to use the Internet to mobilize political support.

Yet, if parties only expected to reap benefits from using the Internet to mobilize support we would observe a much more intensive use of it. But we don't. And the reason why in general, and specifically in the context of the European countries, we do not observe a more intensive use of the Internet for political mobilization is because not only the marginal benefits of using it vary for parties depending on the institutional setting and their characteristics, but also because there are costs associated with exploiting the qualities of the Internet for political mobilization.

The first potential cost of exploiting the interactive qualities of the Internet may affect parties' ability to communicate effectively and coherently their message (Stromer-Galley, 2000; Klotz, 2005; Vaccari, 2007). Precisely because the interactive qualities of internet allow for decentralization in communication, and because Internet is expected to be most effective when this decentralized potential is realized, one unintended effect of using the Internet for mobilizing support can be to lose control of the message. This risk has been acknowledged by campaign managers of parties (Vaccari, 2009), and it can be reduced by restricting the interactive potential of the Internet (Stromer-Galley, 2000) or by controlling the diffusion of the party message from above through "plagiarized participation" (Klotz, 2005).

While this is a real risk for all parties, some parties will have less to loose from allowing different voices to participate in the diffusion of the message. For example, parties with either very low or very high ideological cohesion will risk less from engaging in decentralized modes of communication: Parties with very low ideological cohesion because they already are made up of a plurality of voices, and parties with very high ideological cohesion because they will expect the participants' voices to be aligned with the party's message. In contrast, parties with intermediate levels internal cohesion will have more to lose by engaging in decentralized modes of communication. These parties will reasonably fear internal discrepancy to come to surface if they allow different voices to participate in the diffusion of the message. Hence, these parties will try to

minimize the negative consequences of engaging in decentralized modes of communication and will be the less expected to use Internet for political mobilization.[4]

A second potential cost of using the Internet for political mobilization is the human and monetary resources that it requires. Opening bidirectional channels of communication and inducing citizens to take action through the net requires immense resources to assist website visitors with questions and the use of online tools (Vaccari, 2007). Moreover, once a party has opened channels of communication it is expected to respond to citizens' demands, and not doing so may backfire (Stromer-Galley, 2000). Since attending questions and demands from citizens can be really burdensome, parties need to decide whether they are willing to pour the necessary resources to attend these demands. Second, they have to decide whether they are willing to take away resources from traditional activities to put them to work in the online environment (Vaccari, 2007). There is an opportunity cost in using the net as a mobilizing tool, and parties have to decide whether they are willing to pay this cost. It is expected that these costs will be lower for large parties for they count with many more resources than small parties.

Finally, another potential of using the Internet for political mobilization is organizational since online mobilization strategies may interfere with party strategies of member recruitment and consolidation. We know that parties develop different strategies for recruiting and maintaining members and that these strategies respond to how important they perceive "members" to be for attaining their goals (Scarrow, 1994; 1996). These strategies almost always include exchanging some amount of "private goods" -- such as rights to decide on internal party affairs and career opportunities -- for members' voluntary work. The more important members are for a party organization the greater the amount of private goods the party will be willing to give in exchange for their work, and the higher the barriers of entrance to the party will be. This may interfere with strategies of mobilization online for if parties want to induce participation from website visitors and citizens they will have to lower the barriers of entry to the party and this may conflict with the benefits of the traditional members. The larger the extra parliamentary organization of a party, the more likely that party strategies to mobilize support online will conflict with existing strategies of member recruitment and maintenance.

From the discussion above, we can derive the following propositions and testable hypothesis:

H1. large parties will have more incentives than small parties to use the internet to mobilize support not only because the potential benefits of mobilizing additional support will be greater due to their reasonable expectations to win office but also because they will have more resources to pour both in online and traditional activities of mobilization.

H2. Large parties that are in the opposition and compete in a close race will have even more incentives to pour resources into the net to mobilize additional support

H3. Non ideological parties and highly cohesive ideological parties will have an advantage over ideological but not very cohesive parties to use the net to mobilize additional votes and support.

H4. Parties with a large extra-parliamentary organization will be in a disadvantage over parties with small bureaucracies to compete for votes and additional support using the net.

Data, Measures and Methods

To test these hypotheses, this paper uses both aggregate and individual data. At the aggregate level, I engage in party website analysis. Although websites are not the only tool parties have to mobilize support online, it is an important one. Websites are the most salient platform that parties have to project their image online. Parties use their websites to project themselves the way they want in the online environment. Also, websites can be used as platforms hosting a bunch of other multimedia and interactive tools such as videos, blogs, emails, social networks. Since websites are the most recognizable tool of party images in the net and since they can be used to host a variety of other multimedia and interactive tools, they are a good place to look at to identify party strategies online.

In total, 12 party websites are analyzed including the websites of four Spanish parties (PSOE, PP, IU, and UPyD) and eight Catalan parties (PSE, CDC, UDC, CIU, ERC, IC-V, Cs, PPC). Data was gathered during the first two weeks of February 2010; that is, two years before the next Spanish election and approximately eight months before the

next Catalan election. In spite of the different proximity to elections, I did not find differences between websites cutting across levels of government. In fact, the websites of both the Spanish and Catalan parties had improved much from the last time I analyzed them (see Padro-Solanet and Cardenal, 2007) and they all seemed to be quite active despite their different proximity to elections. Sudulich (2009) might be right when she states that more and more campaigns are being waged permanently.

At the individual level, I use a survey to party activists of four Catalan parties: the survey was delivered and answered between March and June of 2009. In total 1357 party members answered the questionnaire. The four Catalan parties for which individual data is available are: PSC, CDC, ERC, IC-V. All of them are included in the analysis at the aggregate level. Hence, for four parties in our sample we have data at both the aggregate and the individual level. These four parties together represent more than 80 per cent of the vote in Catalonia both in national and regional elections. Hence, by having data on party members from these four parties, we have a fairly good representation of party activism in Catalonia.

It is important to keep in mind that I am not making causal statements about the effect of websites on party supporters. My causal statement is about an unobservable: party decisions to use the Internet for political mobilization, of which both websites and party members' behaviour are indicators. If despite collecting the data at different moments results converge this would be further evidence that there are systematic factors affecting party decisions to use the Internet for political mobilization. Also, if the evidence at the individual level is found to be in line with the results at the aggregate level, this would really work to strengthen the argument.

The dependent variable in this paper varies with the level of analysis. At the aggregate level, the dependent variable is the effectiveness of party websites as mobilization tools. At the individual level, the dependent variable is cyber activism. Cyber-activism is understood here as the amount of activity that a party member does online to help his party achieve its goals. In the survey we asked party members from a list of online activities what activities they had done to help their parties. These activities included using the agenda online, downloading material for campaigns, writing in blogs and forums, sending a party postcard to a friend, and others. The survey asked about a total of 19 online activities. Cyber-activism is measured as an additive index of these online

activities. In the survey, we also asked questions about offline activities. These activities included assisting to local meetings, assisting to sectorial meetings, assisting to party rallies and demonstrations, talking party politics with friends, and others. With this information I create an additive index of activism that in the analysis is used as a basis of comparison with cyber-activism.

To measure the effectiveness of websites as mobilization tools I depart from a well-established methodology of party websites analysis (Gibson and Ward, 2000). I assume that a website is more effective as a mobilization tool the more opportunities it creates for political action (Schneider and Foot, 2002) and the more interactive it is (Stromer-Galley, 2000). In other words, I assume that two dimensions are involved in the effectiveness of websites as mobilization tools: a participatory and a communication dimension. I then use the classical literature on participation and the literature on party website analysis to construct two ordered indexes, one of participation and one of communication. From the cross tabulation of these two ordered indexes I derive five categories that I use in the analysis. These categories are: information, contacting, discussion, vertical mobilization and horizontal mobilization. Using factor analysis two dimensions are identified as underlying these categories: one that is less participatory and dominated by a top-down communication style where the categories of information and contacting load the most and one that is more participatory and dominated by an interactive mode of communication where the categories of discussion and horizontal mobilization load the most.[5]

As a measure of the effectiveness of websites, I also use two total indexes of mobilization. The first one is simply an additive index of all the items included in the analysis. The second one assigns different weights to the items depending on their location in the ordered index of participation and in the ordered index of communication. In this weighted index of mobilization, higher forms of participation in which the prevailing mode of communication is interactive, such as discussion and horizontal mobilization, have the greatest weight.

As for the independent variables, I use the following measures. To measure party size I use a standard measure in this literature that relates size to party's seat share in parliament.[6] Parties are classified as "major" when they have more than 20 percent of

the seats in the parliament; as “minor”, when they have between 3 and 20 percent of the representation and as “fringe” when they have less than 3 percent of the representation.

As indicators of ideological cohesion I use two measures: the distance in the mean positions in the left-right scales of different opinion groups within the party and the distance in the positions in the left-right scale of party members.[7] Using this information, parties are classified in three categories: low, intermediate and high.

As indicators of the size and importance of the extra parliamentary organization, I use a combination of measures. As a measure of the size of the extra parliamentary organization I use the ratio members/voters. As a measure of the importance of the extra parliamentary organization I use party members’ rights.[8] When the values in either one of these categories or both are high I classify parties as having large extra-parliamentary organizations. In all the other cases, parties are classified as having small extra parliamentary organizations.

Finally, I use different methods to test the hypotheses. At the aggregate level, I use ANOVA to test whether the differences in means across groups of parties classified by size, ideological cohesion and organization, are statistically significant. At the individual level, I want to test whether parties matter to explain different levels of cyber activism. Since I only have individual data for four parties I use these parties as “substitutes” of their characteristics. In other words, I test for party characteristics indirectly through the nominal parties. I use ordinal logistic regression because the dependent variable has limited values. To run an ordinal logistic regression I have transformed the dependent variable into three categories: low, intermediate and high participation. To make this transformation I have used a combination of both the standard deviation of the distributions and the quartiles. In the regression, I control for a host of other factors that might also influence levels of cyber activism and activism (socio-demographics, selective incentives, the benefits of policies, the frequency of use of the Internet, having a party or a public office or not, and others).

Analysis and Results

Party Website Analysis

One way of testing the influence of size, ideology and organization on party performance in the net is by comparing means and using ANOVA to test for the

statistical significance of the differences. Table 1 shows the mean performance by size, cohesiveness and organization in the five categories of the dependent variable and in the two indexes of mobilization. The table provides strong confirmation for hypothesis 2 and 4 for, as we can see, the mean performance of large parties in the opposition and of parties with small extra-parliamentary in key participatory categories such as discussion and horizontal mobilization and in the two indexes of mobilization is higher than that of other parties, and these differences are statistically significant. The table also provides some confirmation for hypothesis 1. Large parties perform better than small and fringe parties in the category of discussion and in the two indexes of mobilization, and these differences (Major>Small and Major>Fringe) are statistically significant. Finally, the table provides only weak and partial confirmation for hypothesis 3. Highly cohesive parties do not perform better as an average than intermediately cohesive parties, and while low cohesive parties perform better as an average than high and intermediately cohesive parties they do so only in one category: horizontal mobilization and not in the overall indexes of mobilization.

Table 1: Mean performance in the variables measuring website effectiveness by size, cohesiveness and organization

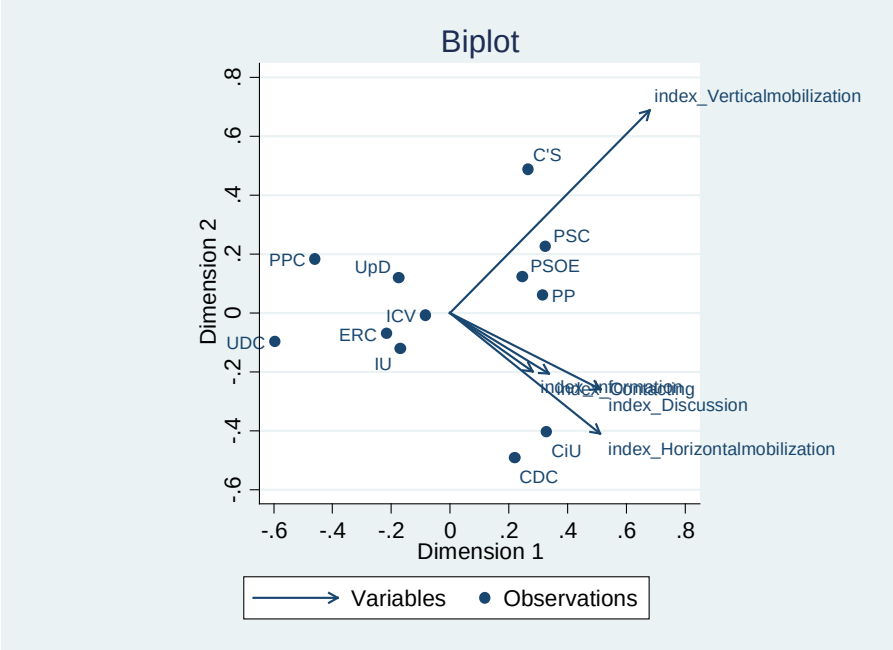
		Information	Contacting	Discussion	Vertical mobilization	Horizontal mobilization	Total index of mobilization	Total weighted index of mobilization
		Index 0-1	Index 0-1	Index 0-1	Index 0-1	Index 0-1	Index 0-1	Index 0-1
Size	Major	0,8040**	0,7380	0,5960**	0,5940	0,6840	0,7080**	0,6400**
	Minor	0,7450	0,5700	0,2500	0,3500	0,4950	0,5300	0,4100
	Fringe	0,6233	0,5667	0,3300	0,5667	0,4800	0,5333	0,4633
Size*gov/opp	Major and in opposition	0,7900	0,7567*	0,6633***	0,4700	0,7800**	0,7200**	0,6833***
	Other	0,7157	0,6086	0,3543	0,5657	0,5014	0,5771	0,4800
Cohesiveness	High	0,6050	0,4950	0,5600	0,4950	0,6300	0,5750	0,5600
	Intermediate	0,7850	0,6400	0,3725	0,5650	0,5175	0,6100	0,4925
	Low	0,8550**	0,8500*	0,6200	0,3500	0,8550***	0,7500	0,7150
Organization	Large	0,7380	0,5960	0,3720	0,5080	0,5400	0,5860	0,4940
	Small	0,7900	0,7567	0,6633**	0,4700	0,7800***	0,7200**	0,6833***

$^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$

Another way to test the influence of size, ideology and organization on party performance in the net is by visualizing how individual parties perform in the five categories of the dependent variable and in the two indexes of mobilization. To visualize how parties perform in the five categories of the dependent variable I use a

biplot. The scores of all parties in the two indexes of mobilization are given in table 2, where information concerning their values in the independent variables is also available.

Figure 1. Party location and performance in the five categories of website effectiveness



The first thing to say about the graph is that parties that are located in the left side of the figure score low in all five categories of the dependent variable. This can be confirmed by looking at Table 2. Of these parties, however, two really score much lower than the rest, PPC and UDC. The reason why these parties underperform in all five categories of the dependent variable is that they have no incentives to use the web for political mobilization. The PPC's poor website simply reflects the fact that this is not genuinely an autonomous party but the regional branch of a highly centralized state-wide party, the PP. In contrast, the UDC's case is a good example of "the small fish eats the big". Since UDC is the small partner in an electoral coalition, it has incentives to free ride on the effort of the big partner to mobilize support. Both UDC and PPC can be considered "outliers" and for this reason they have been excluded from the means and ANOVA analysis.

Table 2: Truth table

Partit	Size	Opposition	cohesiveness	imp organization	Total index mobilization	Total weighted index mobilization
PSOE	Major	No	Intermediate	High	0,66	0,58
PP	**Major**	**Yes**	**High**	**Low**	**0,66**	**0,62**
IU	Fringe	Yes	High	High	0,49	0,5
PSC	Major	No	Intermediate	High	0,72	0,57
CiU	**Major**	**Yes**	**Low**	**Low**	**0,76**	**0,75**
CDC	**Major**	**Yes**	**Low**	**Low**	**0,74**	**0,68**
UDC	Small	Yes	-	-	0,39	0,22
ERC	Small	No	Intermediate	High	0,5	0,37
ICV	Small	No	Intermediate	High	0,56	0,45
PPC	Small	Yes	High	Low	0,31	0,26
C'S	Fringe	Yes	-	-	0,62	0,55
UpD	Fringe	Yes	-	-	0,49	0,34

The second thing to note about the biplot is that the parties that are located in the upper right of the graph closer to the vector of the variable “vertical mobilization” are either parties with large extra parliamentary organizations, such as PSC and PSOE, or fringe parties that are new, such as C’S. This is reasonable for we would expect parties that have a history of prioritizing the resources of the organization to continue prioritizing these resources and new fringe parties to be the most interested in organization building.

Finally, the biplot shows that the parties located in the lower right of the space close to the vectors of the variables of horizontal mobilization and discussion -- the two categories loading the heavier in the participatory dimension – are the Catalan Nationalist Party (CDC), the electoral coalition of this party with UDC (CiU) and the Spanish Conservative Party (PP). In particular, CiU and CDC are located the closest to the vector of horizontal mobilization, while the PP is located the closest to the vector of discussion. As Table 2 shows, these parties take positive values in all the key independent variables (they are large, in the opposition, they have low and high levels of cohesion and they have small extra-parliamentary organizations) and consistently with the fact that they score high in the key participatory categories, they also score the highest in the two indexes of mobilization, and especially in weighted one. In other words, as these results show, the Catalan Nationalist Party (CDC), its electoral coalition (CiU), and the Spanish Popular Party (PP) seem to be the parties having the greatest incentives to use the Internet for political mobilization and willing to take more risks to mobilize supporters online by exploiting the interactive qualities of the new media.

In the following section, we further test these results by analyzing whether these are the parties that are most successful at mobilizing their followers online. Unfortunately, we

only can test these results partially since we have data for a small subsample of the parties included in the aggregate analysis.

The Analysis of Cyber-activism

Let us start the analysis of cyber-activism by looking at the distributions of activism and cyber activism by party. The first thing that stands out is that, setting aside the case of IC-V, there are apparently no differences in the distribution of activism across parties while there seem to be important differences in the distribution of cyber-activism across parties. This impression is confirmed when we use other representations of the distribution of activism and cyber-activism by party. From the graphs it is also clear that one party (IC-V) seems to outperform all the others in levels of both activism and cyber-activism. In other words, IC-V seems to show the highest levels of mobilization of its followers and this happens equally across different types of activism. This could partly be explained because IC-V is the smallest party in the sample and we know that group size, here party size, matters for participation (Olson, 1971; Tan, 1998; Weldon, 2006ll, Tan).

Figure 2. Distribution of activism by party

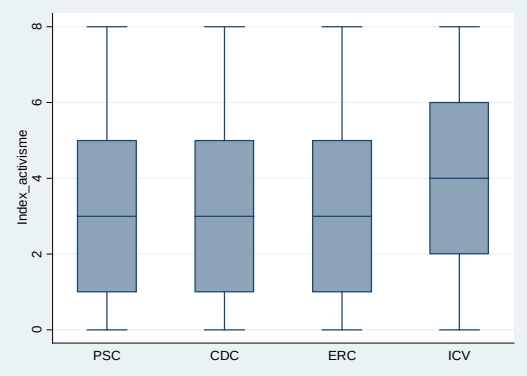
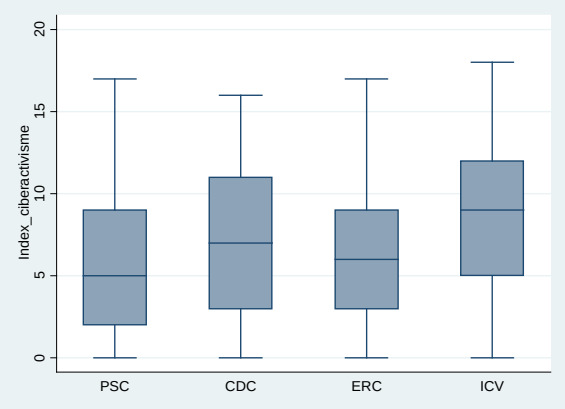


Figure 3. Distribution of cyber-activism by party



The second thing that stands out is that among the parties that seem to be mobilizing more followers online together with IC-V stands CDC, and to a lesser extent ERC. Further analysis shows that while the distribution of activism and cyber-activism within IC-V is very similar, it varies a lot within CDC and ERC. In general, these parties, but especially CDC, tend to be more effective at mobilizing followers online than offline. In contrast, the traditional left-wing parties, PSC and IC-V, but especially PSC, continue to be more effective at mobilizing their followers' offline.[9]

To test further whether parties matter to explain levels of cyber-activism I ran two logistic regressions, one for cyber-activism and another for activism. The results of the regressions confirm what we have only visually begun to grasp: that parties matter to explain different levels of cyber-activism while they do not matter to explain levels of activism. The table tells us that being a member of either IC-V, ERC or CDC increases the probability of doing a higher number of activities online with respect to being a follower of the Catalan Socialist Party (the reference category).

Table 3: Results of an ordinal logistic regression for cyber-activism and activism

	Cyber-activism	Activism
Age	-0.0192***	-0.00726
	(0.00548)	(0.00515)
Ideology	0.0567	0.0845*
	(0.0468)	(0.0448)
Catalan Nationalism	0.0282	0.0488
	(0.0448)	(0.0414)
Ideological Distance	0.0412	0.0785**
	(0.0399)	(0.0370)
Identity Distance	-0.0124	0.0281

	(0.0343)	(0.0322)
Office v. no office	1.162***	0.737***
	(0.130)	(0.121)
Years of membership	0.0269***	0.0135**
	(0.00698)	(0.00646)
IC-V	**1.030***	**0.254**
	(0.215)	**(0.198)**
CDC	**0.930***	**-0.0767**
	(0.269)	**(0.251)**
ERC	**0.494****	**-0.272**
	(0.244)	(0.229)
Internet frequency of use	0.361***	0.0811
	(0.0675)	(0.0584)
Proximity to party	0.250	0.928***
	(0.223)	(0.209)
Size of municipality	0.0852**	0.0316
	(0.0392)	(0.0370)
Adhesion through the Net	1.475***	0.132
	(0.133)	(0.117)
Activism Index	0.259***	
	(0.0276)	
cut1		
_cons	3.762***	2.741***
	(0.744)	(0.694)
cut2		
_cons	6.269***	4.394***
	(0.760)	(0.702)
Number of obs	1176	1176
LR chi2	437.05	95.76
Prob > chi2	0.0000	0.0000
Pseudo R2	0.1727	0.0373

Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

But the question is, do these parties matter equally for cyber-activism or some matter more than others? Even if we do not know by how much, from the table it is clear that being a member of IC-V increases the probability of doing a higher number of activities online with respect to being a member of PSC more than being a member of CDC, and being a member of CDC increases the probability of doing a higher number of activities online with respect to being a member of PSC more than being a member of ERC. In fact, the influence of being a member of ERC for explaining levels of cyber-activism disappears with other model specifications. In particular this happens when we run a linear regression. When running a linear regression the positive influence of being a member of IC-V and CDC for explaining levels of cyber-activism still holds, while the influence of being a member of ERC wipes out.

Table 4 shows the predicted probabilities of participating at different levels (low, intermediate and high) by party. The first column gives these probabilities for members with no office and the second column for activists with an office. The reason for calculating the predicted probabilities separately for members with no office and members with office is twofold. We know that "having an office" is one of the most powerful factors affecting both offline and online levels participation. This is reasonable if we think that for party members holding an office the stakes of winning and loosing elections are higher than for party members not holding offices; this in turn explains that they will have greater incentives to contribute more to their parties. We also know that almost half of the activists in the sample have an office (a party office, a public office or both). Hence, not separating by "holding" or "not holding" an office would overestimate the probabilities of participating at high levels for a grass root party activist.

The second reason for separating the predicted probabilities of online participation according to "holding" and "not holding" an office is to isolate the importance of this factor for the different parties. Holding an office seems to increase the probability of participating at high levels for all parties. However, as table 4 shows (second column third row) holding an office predicts different probabilities of participating at high levels for the different parties and it also contributes differently to move from low to high participation for each party (see column 2 and row 4). If we find that most of the predicted probability of moving from low to high levels of participation is explained by having an office it would signal that a party is not being very successful mobilizing rank-and-file followers online. Conversely, if we find that a good size of the predicted probability of moving from low to high levels of participation is not explained by having an office it would be further evidence that a party is being successful in mobilizing rank-and-file supporters online.

Table 4: Predicted probabilities of online participation at low, intermediate and high levels for activists with office and no office by party

	No office	office
Low		

CDC	0,1007	0,3390
PSC	0,2211	0,0816
IC-V	0,0920	0,0308
ERC	0,1476	0,0514
Intermediate		
CDC	0,4778	0,2667
PSC	0,5557	0,4397
IC-V	0,4621	0,2493
ERC	0,5321	0,3477
High		
CDC	0,4215	0,6995
PSC	0,2233	0,4787
IC-V	0,4459	0,7200
ERC	0,3203	0,6009
Diff High-low		
CDC	0,3208	0,3605
PSC	0,0022	0,3971
IC-V	0,3539	0,6892
ERC	0,1727	0,5495

As we can see in table 4 (comparing column 1 and column 2 of row 3), it is much more likely to participate at high levels when a party activist holds an office than when he does not, and this happens for all parties. In fact, these predicted probabilities almost double with respect to not holding an office. While this is true for all parties, there are some differences across parties. In particular, the differences in the predicted probabilities of being a high participant for party members holding and not holding an office are greater for PSC and ERC, the parties that also show the lower predicted probabilities of being in this group. It seems then that those parties for which the predicted probabilities of having members in the group of the most active are lower (PSC and ERC) are also those for which "having an office" makes the greater contribution to being in the group.

Row 4 shows the contribution of each party to moving from low to high levels of online participation separated by holding and not holding office. To get an idea of how much a party contributes to moving from low to high levels of online activism we need to look at both its contribution when members hold office and when they do not. Adding the two differences can give us an estimate of each party's contribution to moving from low to high levels of online activism. But what is more important is to look at the difference of the differences -- that is, to calculate the difference between the two columns. These differences tell us how much "holding an office" contributes to moving from low to

high levels of participation for each party. The greater this difference the more having an office contributes to moving from low to high levels of participation for each party. The two parties for which holding an office contributes more to moving from low to high levels of activism are again PSC and ERC. And the party for which holding an office contributes less to moving from low to high levels of online activism is CDC. Again, what this tells us is that while PSC and ERC are the least successful parties at mobilizing their rank and file online, CDC is the most successful one at mobilizing its rank-and-file online.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has offered a model of party behaviour online. Departing from this model this paper not only has argued that certain characteristics of parties "matter" for explaining decisions to use the Internet for political mobilization, but also has explained why they matter. Certain characteristics of parties -- related to their size, ideological cohesion and organization -- matter because they affect both the incentives and costs for parties of using the Internet for political mobilization. Parties that are large have greater incentives than small parties to use the Internet for political mobilization because they have reasonable expectations to win the government and they will tend to value more winning an additional vote. If additionally they are in the opposition and run in a close race the benefit of winning an additional vote will increase and the incentives to use the Internet for political mobilization will be greater. Large parties will also be expected to use the Internet for political mobilization more than small parties because they will be able to afford pouring the necessary resources into the new media at very little cost for other more traditional activities of political mobilization. Also, parties that have either low or high levels of ideological cohesion and parties with small extra-parliamentary are in an advantage over parties with intermediate levels of ideological cohesion and large extra parliamentary organizations to compete for votes online because they can afford to engage in decentralized modes of communication and to lower the barriers of entrance to the party at no cost for their members.

In spite of the evidence that this and other papers provide in support of the argument that large parties are more efficient than small ones in the use of the Internet, this finding continues to be somehow a counter-intuitive one. It is still true that Internet lowers the barriers of entrance for new parties into the political arena and that it levels

up the playing field of political competition for small and fringe ones. If there are good reasons to believe that small parties should take more advantage of the Internet, why do empirical studies consistently find that large parties are more efficient in their use of Internet? There might be two reasons for this. The first reason could be theoretical. It might well be, as it has been argued in this paper, that the benefits of using the Internet for political mobilization by means of any online tool are still unclear due to the fragmentation of the Internet audience and to the difficulty of attracting attention to the sites. This uncertainty concerning the benefits of online mobilization would affect both large and small parties but, due to the scarcer resources of small parties, the cost of opportunity of investing in online mobilization would still be higher for small parties. The second reason could be empirical. It is possible that empirical studies have found that large parties use more efficiently the Internet because so far they have focussed in the analysis of websites. As I have argued here websites is only one possible tool for political mobilization and it is not precisely the cheapest one. We have yet to know how parties and political organizations, especially small ones, are using and taking advantage of web 2.0 technologies. These technologies, among which we find social networks and politicians' blogs, not only are cheaper than having sophisticated websites but also are much more promising as tools for political mobilization.

To conclude, much more research is needed concerning how political organizations, and particularly parties, are using the Internet for political mobilization. Studies focussing on political party uses of the social networks are much needed not only to help increase our knowledge concerning the dynamics of online mobilization but also to falsify existing knowledge concerning the behaviour of parties online.

APPENDIX A. PARTIES INCLUDED IN THE ANALYSIS

At the aggregate level:

1. Spanish Socialist Party, Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE)
2. Spanish Popular Party, Partido Popular (PP)
3. Spanish Ex-Communist Party, Izquierda Unida (IU)
4. Spanish Union, Progress and Democracy, Union, Progreso y Democracia, (UpD)
5. Catalan Socialist Party, Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (PSC)
6. Catalan Nationalist Coalition, Convergencia i Unió (CIU)
7. Catalan Nationalist Party, Convèrgencia Democràtica de Catalunya (CDC)
8. Catalan Christian Democratic Party, Unió Democràtica de Catalunya (UDC)
9. Catalan Left-Wing Republican Party, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC)
10. Catalan Left-Green Coalition, Iniciativa per Catalunya (IC-V)
11. Catalan Popular Party, Partido Popular de Catalunya (PPC)
12. Citizen's Party, Partit dels Ciutadans de Catalunya (CS)

At the individual level:

1. Catalan Socialist Party, Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (PSC)
2. Catalan Nationalist Party, Convèrgencia Democràtica de Catalunya (CDC)
3. Catalan Left-Wing Republican Party, Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC)
4. Catalan Left-Green Coalition, Iniciativa per Catalunya (IC-V)

APPENDIX B. ITEMS IN THE FIVE CATEGORIES OF THE MOBILIZATION INDEX

Information provision (0-18)
org. history
party structure
values/ideology
policies
manifesto
media releases
speeches
people/who's who
executive
leader focus
candidate profiles
Agenda
Campaign diary or blog (no feedback)
voting information
frequently asked questions
Registering Bulletin Board
RSS, OTHER FEEDS..
Creating Blogs

Contacting (0-7)
central party headquarters adress and telephone
party email
party leaders with email (%)

public officials with email (%)
party leaders with blog
public officials with blog
Discussion forums with leaders and party officials

Discussion (0-8)
Forms asking for proposals: general
Forms asking for proposals: policy - specific
Commenting news
Online polls
Blogs with feedback
Discussion board
Chat rooms
Wiki

Vertical mobilization (0-7)

Instructions related to how to behave as cyber activist
Donate
Join
Buy
Become a volunteer online (cyber-activist)
Become a volunteer offline (become a friend)
Material available for download

Horizontal mobilization (0-11)
Distributing campaign materials
Sharing information through social networks
Ask a friend to get involved
Forward site material
Write to the media
Links to social networks (facebook, MySpace, Twitter...)
Facebook activity
Facebook supporters
Blog aggregators
Own social network
Creating groups

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[1] In this sense, this study departs from others (Römmele , 2003; Gibson and Römmele , 2003; Sudulich, 2007) that attempt to explain party behavior online according to different party goals. To the traditional three party goals -- office, policy and votes -- this literature adds a forth one: participation. While policy and office may well be competing goals, they are subject to the electoral imperative; that is, they can only be realized by winning elections. As for participation more than a party goal it is here conceived as a compensation mechanism, that is, as a private good that parties accept to give supporters in exchange for their work and support. See Strom, 1990; Padro-Solanet, 2009.

[2] For a discussion of how interactivity and decentralization in communication stimulate participation, see Cardenal, forthcoming. I use this assumption to assess the efficiency of websites as mobilization tools

[3] For a discussion of some of the barriers affecting the use of different online tools , such as email or websites, for political mobilization, see Krueger, 2006; Bimber, 2003, and Kamarck, 2002.

[4] This argument has been nicely elaborated by Padro-Solanet (2009).

[5] Cardenal (forthcoming) offers a more detailed account of the methodology used to analyze websites.

[6] This measure was first proposed and used by Norris (2003) and it has been subsequently used in other studies such as Sudulich's (2009).

[7] Data to calculate these distances draws on direct and indirect sources. To calculate the distances in the left-right dimension between party members we have used an online survey to party activists of the Catalan parties. The distances in the same scale between opinion groups for the Spanish parties and the two major Catalan parties has been drawn from Padro-Solanet (2009). When information for both measures is available I use them both; when information is only available for one of these measures I use this one piece of information. For some parties no information is available and thus they will be left out of the analysis.

[8]Data on the number of party members has been drawn from both newspapers and academic articles studying monographically some of these parties. Data on members' rights has been drawn from parties' statutes.

[9] These results cannot be seen comparing the distribution of activism and cyber-activism across parties but only comparing these distributions within parties. Also, using the mean instead of the median is important to note these differences.