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Direct E-Democracy and Political Party Websites: In the United States and Sweden

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Direct E-Democracy and Political Party Websites:

In the United States and Sweden

by

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Direct E-Democracy and Political Party Websites: In the United States and Sweden

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Abstract

The Internet is seen by some as a means to foster public participation through interactivity and bring forth an e-democracy. Many past studies evaluated the implementation of interactive features on government websites; however, this study focuses on the implementation of such features on political parties' websites, specifically in the United States and Sweden. There has been a rise of a few political parties in Sweden dedicated to the ideal of direct democracy. These so called "net parties" developed around the use of the internet for public deliberation and voting. The websites were evaluated on their implementation of 25 different features with varying levels of interactivity based upon the direction of communication and the level of receiver control. The results show that, while the net parties are small, they tended to implement the most interactive features out of any other group (major and minor parties, United States and Sweden parties). Additionally, Sweden's political parties (not including the net parties) implemented more of the features on average than those of the United States.

Keywords: e-democracy; interactivity; net parties; direct democracy

Introduction

The Internet has become an important medium of communication for all purposes. The rise of social media has generated a way for people to maintain contact with each other, find people they once knew, and meet new people. It also provides a vast array of news and information accessed more quickly than ever. Most of the literature to date concerning the intersection of politics and the Internet has focused on the idea of electronic government (e-government) (see D'Agostino, Schwester, Carrizales, & Melitski, 2011), the term given to governments using Internet communication technologies (ICTs) for interactions with citizens, businesses, employees, and government agencies.

There are two main roles that e-government can fulfill. The first and most commonly fulfilled role is transactional. A government uses e-government as a more efficient way to conduct business with citizens, such as renewing drivers' licenses. Although far less common than the transactional type, ICTs have been used to solicit public support for policies and citizen input into the decision-making process as in the case of the Dutch municipalities that Koekoek et al. (2009) studied. These municipalities implemented ICTs in municipal planning due to frustrations with traditional participation methods which gives rise to the possibility that the ways in which we conduct policymaking, and by extension, the ways in which we exercise democracy may be radically changed through the rise and use of e-government. If ICTs are implemented to fulfill both of these roles, it becomes representative of direct e-democracy. Having citizens come together online to discuss what issues are important and then make the decisions about the issues puts the policy making into the hands of the people, thus obviating the need for politicians.

In this way e-democracy fundamentally changes what policies the government can and

cannot promulgate by including citizens directly in the agenda-setting and decision-making process. Ultimately, there would be (almost) complete transparency and, depending upon the structure, at least a majority of public support. Moreover, e-democracy can increase public acceptance as it is the citizens who raise the issues and debate them instead of politicians.

Some of the literature on e-government has been strikingly optimistic on the prospects of governments moving more and more to the use of ICTs, and that this move could transform the methods of political participation for citizens as described above (Dyson, Gilder, Keyworth, & Toffler, 1994; Grossman, 1995). From campaigns for public office to municipal planning boards, ICTs have been used for the purpose of raising public support and gathering citizen input. However, much of the research has found that e-government has not lived up to the optimistic expectations of theorists in previous literature, such as Ferber et al. (2003, 2005a, 3005b, 2007) and Lilleker and Malagón (2010).

This study explores a different method of achieving the promises of e-democracy: the implementation of ICTs by political parties. While most political scientists as well as the majority of voters believe that political parties are essential for democracy, this is belied by six examples of Pacific democracies that operate without political parties (Veenendaal, 2013). However, Veenendall (2013) admits that

> the idea that parties fulfill a crucial role in representative democracy seems to be at least
> partially confirmed by the present analysis of Palau. [In this case] the absence of parties
> is strongly related to the significance of clan relations and personalistic politics (p. 8)

Additionally, most of the world's democracies function with political parties.

This study focuses on a comparison of the implementations of ICTs of political parties in the United States and Sweden. This comparison has been chosen for two reasons. First, Sweden

has recently seen the rise of a few Internet-based political parties termed "net-parties." These parties are founded upon the ideal of direct democracy. The representatives from these parties are bound to vote according to the online voting which is open to the public. Secondly, Sweden has a multiparty, parliamentary democracy which is structurally more open to the rise of grassroots political parties. The purpose of this study is to provide a descriptive account of the differences that may suggest what conditions could be more favorable for the development of direct e-democracy.

Literature Review

Direct Democracy

The word "democracy" comes from the Greek words of *demos* and *kratos* meaning the rule of the people. One can find this idea in the writings of many political theorists ranging from the times of Classical Athens to now. John Locke (1690) explains that a democratic government derives its power from the consent of the people.

> The majority having, … the whole power of the community naturally in them, may employ all that power in making laws for the community from time to time, and executing those laws by officers of their own appointing; and then the *form* of the government is a perfect *democracy* (Ch. X, sec. 132).

This explains the principle that typically is used to describe a democracy as "one person, one vote." Additionally, the power of lawmaking is in the hands of the people. By "perfect democracy" Locke is explaining the common term of "direct democracy."

While over time the definition of who has the right to vote (or who counts as a person) has changed, the principle remains the same: the people give the power to their government. All examples that we find in modern society of "democracy" are not direct democracies; Locke uses the term *oligarchy*, which he describes as the people putting "the power of making laws into the hands of a few select men" (Locke 1690, ch. X, sec. 132).

The Paris Commune

According to Karl Marx (1891), the 1830 revolution in France transferred state power to the capitalists with the establishment of a Parliamentary Republic. For Marx, parliamentary control is "the direct control of the propertied class" (p. 630). As Marx (1891) notes, "State power assumed more and more the character of the national power of capital over labour" (p.

630). In other words, the power of making laws was put into the hands of a small select group of men. Additionally, this government increasingly became corrupt by transferring increasing power to the executive and away from the National Assembly, their parliament. At this point, even fewer wielded the power of making laws. The Paris Commune of 1871 is one of the few, and most notable, examples of direct democracy in history. Upon coming to power, the people of the commune broke up the old state machinery and put into place a fuller democracy.

Under the government of the Commune the power of making laws was put in the hands of the entire population. The Commune, as in the actual government body, was comprised of a municipal council to which members were elected through universal suffrage, but also could be recalled at any time. Marx (1891) explains that this body was both executive and legislative, charged with carrying out the laws that had been created. This public service was done at workmen's wages thus removing State dignitaries. In doing this, "Public functions ceased to be the private property of the tools of the central government … [and] laid into the hands of the Commune" (p. 632). Additionally, magistrates and judges were elected the same and revocable way.

In The Paris Commune's *Declaration to the French People* (1871), the inherent rights of their commune are outlined:

The vote on communal budgets, receipts and expenses; the fixing and distribution of taxes; the direction of public services; the organisation of its magistracy, internal police and education; the administration of goods belonging to the Commune.

The choice by election or competition of magistrates and communal functionaries of all orders, as well as the permanent right of control and revocation.

The absolute guarantee of individual freedom and freedom of conscience.

> The permanent intervention of citizens in communal affairs by the free manifestation of their ideas, the free defence of their interests, with guarantees given for these manifestations by the Commune, which alone is charged with overseeing and assuring the free and fair exercise of the right to assemble and publish.

> The organisation of urban defense and the National Guard, which elects its chiefs and alone watches over the maintenance of order in the city.
> ("Declaration to the French People", para. 9)

In the Commune, all of the power of making laws was vested in the people, since those designated to make laws were directly recallable whenever the people felt their will was not being carried out. Furthermore, these councillors were those appointed to execute the laws as well and were officers appointed by the people, who had permanent control over the appointees.

In comparison with today's democratic governments, the Paris Commune embodies direct democracy, and is closer to a perfect democracy in Locke's terms. In his discussion of the experience of the Paris Commune, Lenin (1918) argues that the essence of (bourgeois) parliamentarism is "to decide once every few years which member of the ruling class is to repress and oppress the people through parliament" (p. 40). When the power of making laws is put in the hands of a few, they become a ruling class, especially when those who have the power to make laws come from the upper strata of society. In the United States, this has increasingly become the case as the majority of Congress members are millionaires (Choma, 2014); as John

Nichols and Robert W. McChesney (2013) classify it, we have a Dollarocracy, or "a system that is now defined more by one dollar, one vote than by one person, one vote" (p. 6).

Perhaps the "net parties" that are dedicated to the ideal of direct democracy were not specifically modeled after the Paris Commune, but their methods of operation seem quite similar in that the representatives who hold office act more as delegates. This reflects the situation in which those elected are directly accountable to the people who put them there and must follow their wishes at all times.

Theories of Democracy

Robert Dahl (1989) developed a theory of the democratic process in which the democratic process should meet five basic criteria based upon his assumptions that would justify a democratic political order. Dahl begins with basic assumptions that justify the existence of a political order: first, that members must obey the binding decisions made by the government, which is the group of decision makers. Second, that the process of making binding decisions consists of setting the agenda, what will be decided upon, and the decisive stage in which there is adoption or rejection of policy. The assumptions that make a political order democratic concerns the members of the association itself. The binding decisions made must be made by those who are subject to the decisions. Each of these members must be taken into account as to how the policy will affect them and their good is equally considered. However, each member is the best judge of their own interests and these people are termed by Dahl (1989) as citizens, and these citizens make up the *demos*. Therefore, the claims of each citizen are valid as far as how the policies affect them. Finally, the allocation of "scarce and valued things" (p. 108), must be done fairly. Dahl (1989) mentions that this does not necessarily require equality in all things, but in those that do, there must be equal share given to each person, or at least they must have an equal

chance to obtain the resource.

Dahl's (1989) five criteria that must be met are effective participation, voting equality at the decisive stage, enlightened understanding, control of the agenda, and equal opportunity. These are ideal standards as Dahl notes, "if one believes in the assumptions, then one must reasonably affirm the desirability of the criteria" (p. 108). Meeting all five criteria would constitute a "perfect democracy," which would be consistent with Locke's definition. Effective participation is simply the citizens having adequate and equal opportunity in adding to the agenda and endorsing the outcomes they prefer. Secondly, citizens should have equal opportunity to express their choice and have it counted with equal weight in the decisive stage. To determine outcomes, only the choices of citizens should be taken into account. Any system meeting these two criteria would be a narrow democracy.

For a full procedural democracy to exist, it must have an element of enlightened understanding. Dahl (1989) asserts that a *demos* must be somewhat enlightened in order to know what it wants and what is best. This means that each citizen should have adequate and equal opportunity to discover and validate what is in their best interest on a policy matter. This would require that all have equal access to important information relating to the decision to be made. In a system that is fully democratic to its *demos*, the *demos* must have control of what matters are placed on the agenda to be determined by democratic means. The people must be able to make the decisions on the matters that they believe to be important.

It is acceptable for a fully democratic system to delegate decisions in the case that the *demos* is unqualified to make the decision for itself. However, this must be a "revocable grant of authority" in which the *demos* can retrieve the decision to be made by itself (p. 114). The last criterion that Dahl (1989) puts forth to describe a "perfect democracy" is equal opportunity.

Typically, this is interpreted as only legal requirements that ignore the differences between citizens. Dahl offers the example that both a rich and a poor citizen may have legal entitlement to participate in such a democracy, but the rich citizen is likely to have more influence over decisions due to greater access to resources. He explains the idea of equal opportunity:

> When taken in its fullest sense it is extraordinarily demanding -- so demanding, indeed, that the criteria for the democratic process would require a people committed to it to institute measures well beyond those that even the most democratic states have hitherto brought about (p. 115).

What one would expect here is a truly "one person, one vote" democracy in which all votes are counted equally, thus suggesting that the "perfect" democracy would indeed be a direct democracy.

Models of Democracy

Figure 1: Models of E-Democracy

Citizens set the agenda	Partisan Democracy	Direct Democracy
Government (politicians and officers) sets the agenda	Liberal democracy	Deliberative democracy
	Citizens mainly implicitly included in decision making processes	Citizens have an explicitly defined role in decision making processes

Source: Päivärinta and Sæbø (2006)

There is no universal set of models of democracy, as different models are developed based upon different criteria. In an effort to simplify the comparisons, Päivärinta and Sæbø (2006) developed four models of democracy based upon two characteristics that are fundamental to democracy. According to Dahl (1989) they are inclusion in the decision making process and

the power to set the agenda. The four models are Partisan Democracy, Liberal Democracy,

Deliberative Democracy, and Direct Democracy characterized by either the government or the

citizens setting the agenda and citizens having mainly implicit or explicit roles in the decision

making process. Additionally, Päivärinta and Sæbø (2006) map implementations of e-

democracy to these four models.

Partisan e-democracy includes citizens participating in political debates outside of their

representatives and normal channels. The agenda setting is done through visible public opinion

that is not restricted by the government. However, there is no explicit connection to the

decision-making process and coming to a consensus on a topic is very rare. Liberal e-democracy

includes a government-set agenda and citizens having implicit decision-making participation.

This is most descriptive of representative democracy, where citizens delegate their decision-

making and agenda-setting powers to their representatives. However, with liberal e-democracy

implementations, citizens may be asked for suggestions or given the opportunity for

communication with representatives. Päivärinta and Sæbø (2006) point out that the lack of

interactivity on websites produces very little change to politics in terms of election results.

Deliberative democracy gives citizens explicit connections to decision making but not

necessarily control over the agenda. In this model, politicians and citizens come together in

discussion and discourse that leads to a public opinion. It is still a representative form of

democracy that requires cooperation between the politicians and citizens, but by including

citizens' input and participation it gives them explicit power in decision making. The

deliberative e-democracy implementations are designed to increase participation outside of

elections. Päivärinta and Sæbø (2006) suggest that this inclusion may actually increase

participation. Some challenges to this model are that some people are more competent with or

have greater access to IT than others; this is called the "digital divide," and the ones who tend to participate in e-government are mostly involved with traditional politics. Additionally, Päivärinta and Sæbø (2006) note that the enthusiasm of government officials and representatives for e-democracy may dwindle if it starts to change the existing power structure.

Direct democracy is defined in this model as citizens having control over the agenda-setting process and explicit control over the decision-making process. Päivärinta and Sæbø (2006) explain that "network-based groups and individuals take over the role of traditional institutions" (p. 826). In this model, the Internet becomes a precondition for democracy instead of supplementing traditional communication. Päivärinta and Sæbø (2006) find very few implementations of direct e-democracy; the ones that do exist are local parties that emerged due to new movements. The representatives that are elected from the party agree to vote in the legislature according to the results of the online voting.

Party Systems

As Stokes (1999) points out, most political scientists would define a democracy as having more than one party represented in the decision-making body such as the parliament or the legislature, whereas single party systems do not lend themselves to citizen votes effecting any change. Stokes (1999) defines democracy as "political systems in which important governmental posts are decided by fair, competitive elections held on a regular schedule, freedoms of association and speech are protected, and the franchise is extended to nearly all adult citizens" (p. 244). This idea of democracy certainly contrasts with single party states that do not hold fairly contested elections. Within democracies that have more than one party in the decision making body there are dual-party systems and multiparty systems. Dual-party systems have two major parties that are effective, and the term "multiparty system" has come to mean

having three or more. Mukherjee (2011) conducted a study on the impact of party systems on human well-being as measured by infant mortality, child mortality, and life expectancy and concluded that multiparty systems are associated with better welfare because they tend to be more inclusive and competitive systems. This is because they provide representation for multiple interests in society, and the parties must appeal to those interests by performing well in office in order to maintain power.

According to Mukherjee (2011) "multiparty systems are characterized by participation, deliberation, consensus and compromise among groups representing diverse interests" (p. 604) and lead to policies that address the needs of different segments of society. Also, compromise leads to higher levels of social spending since more groups need to be satisfied which may lead to greater well-being. Mukherjee (2011) uses the measure of effective number of parliamentary parties (ENPP) which counts the number of parties that win seats in the parliament and their share of the total seats. Controlling for a number of variables, and measuring the change in ENPP overtime in countries, Mukherjee (2011) found that there is a statistically significant impact of ENPP on human well-being. Between the lowest and the highest ENPP, infant and child mortality were decreased by 11% and 24% respectively, and life expectancy was increased by 0.5%. Mukherjee (2011) found that the more effective parliamentary parties a country had, the better their human well-being was and suggests that that "adopting institutions that promote multiparty systems may be beneficial for citizens" (p. 615). The United States and Sweden had mean scores of 1.94 and 3.63 ENPP respectively.

Interactivity, Interaction, and Participation of State Legislature Websites

In three related studies Ferber, Foltz, and Pugliese (2003, 2005a, 2005b) analyzed the features of state legislature web sites in an effort to identify interactivity and interaction leading

to making e-government more participatory. Ferber et al. (2003) analyzed the state legislature

sites based upon five criteria: content, usability, interaction, transparency, and audience, in an

effort to determine the quality of the websites. The quality index was a sum of all five scores

that were rated on a scale of 1-10. Content and usability ratings relate to the information

provided by the website and how easy it is to access it. Interactivity ratings focused on user-

government communication features. Transparency was rated based upon providing knowledge

to the user regarding who owns the site, which relates to interaction as well as information. The

last criterion was included to determine if the site could be used by citizens and experts. Ferber

et. al. (2003) note that "fostering participation requires sites not to just have good content but

also to provide a variety of means for interactivity" (p. 159).

Ferber et al. (2003) found that the websites had a wide range of quality; New Jersey had

the best site with a quality index of 42.33, and Mississippi had the worst with 12.33. They found

associations between the state's quality index and demographic and political characteristics

suggesting that states with better websites tended to be states with higher levels of political

participation based on the characteristics, thus determining that "demand is driving quality" (p.

161). The association between higher levels of political participation and higher quality state

legislature websites also suggest that the "digital divide" is related to the quality of the websites.

The states that have higher levels of participation also tend to have greater Internet access,

income, and levels of education, which in turn means these states' populations are more inclined

to use the Internet. Ferber et al. (2003) concluded that, as of 2002, the state legislature websites

offered a wealth of information but few new methods of participation. New methods of

communication, such as e-mail to legislators, seem to only replace traditional letters.

Additionally, some legislators are being overwhelmed by e-mail and software such as EchoMail,

can read and auto reply with an email. One new method of participation was free e-subscriptions found on 15 sites, but this is limited to providing information. Ultimately, they found no examples of public forums or chat rooms that fall in line with the promise of e-democracy.

In a subsequent study, Ferber et al. (2005a) further explored the interactivity of the government websites. Noting the limitation to one definition of interactivity, the authors (2005a) performed this study with a features-based evaluation and a survey of the chief technology officers (CTO) of each legislature in 2003. Respondents were asked about the importance of each of the original five criteria, the interactive feature on their sites, and what features they would like to add to promote interactivity. Interactive was rated the second to last important criteria for the CTOs, whereas content was the most important. Very few of the features that the CTOs mentioned that were on their sites represented two-way communication. Ferber et al. (2005a) conclude that the sites are providing unprecedented access to information but still lacking in two-way communication. These sites may not be appropriate venues for forums and discussion because they may violate nonpartisanship standards; however, "standards that limit or foreclose public debate are antithetical to the concept of interactivity" (p. 92). What they may be promoting is civic engagement by providing greater access to information especially through feature such as bill tracking, meetings, and the "find your legislator."

Ferber et al. (2005b) complemented the study of interactivity with a rating of the interactive features. These features were defined as those that "reflected a two way exchange between the user and the site, including the ability of the user to modify the exchange" (p. 406). The distinction was made between interactivity and interaction, since websites can promote interaction with non-interactive features such as fax numbers and phone numbers. The authors (2005b) concluded that the sites were designed they were unlikely to boost civic participation.

The websites are seen as providing e-government more than they are promoting

cyberdemocracy.

Three-way Communication

Figure 2: Six-Part Model of Cyber-Interactivity
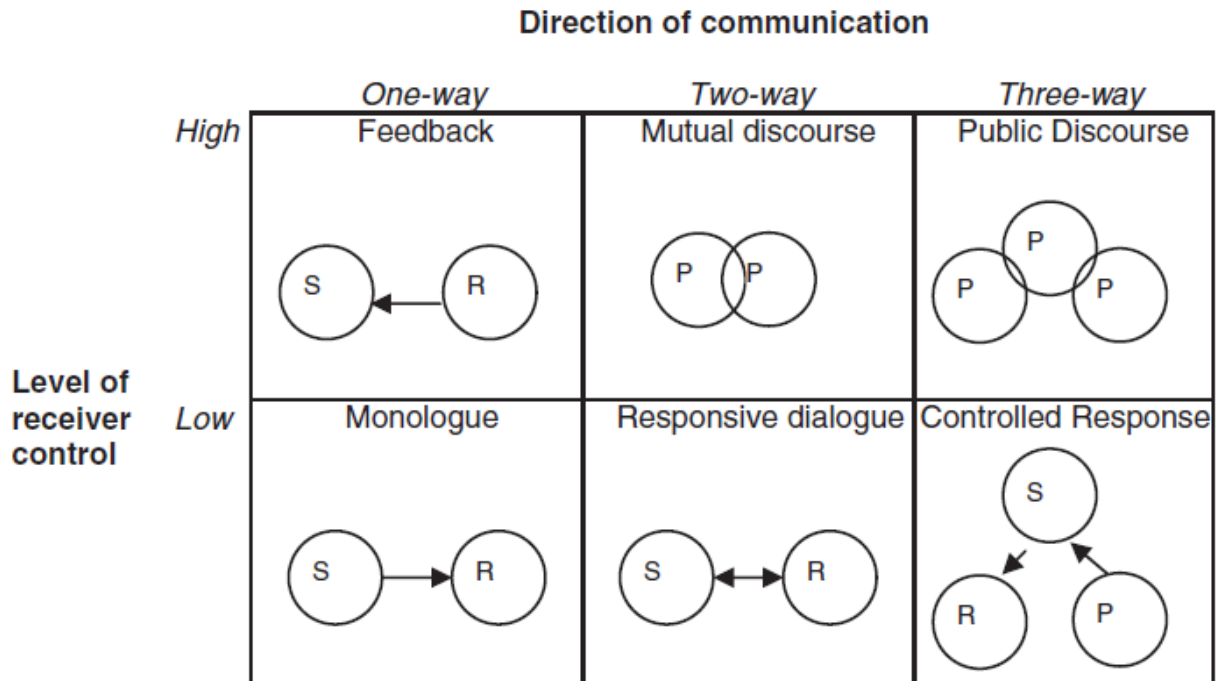
Source: Ferber et al. (2007)

Based upon a previous Four Part Model of Cyber-Interactivity (McMillan, 2002) that

distinguished between one and two-way communication and the level of receiver control over

the communication process, Ferber et al. (2007) produced a more appropriate Six part Model of

Cyber-Interactivity. The four-part model identifies the monologue and feedback as one-way

communication; monologues are communication in which information is disseminated and the

receiver has little control over the process, whereas feedback is communication in which the

receiver has limited participation with no guarantee that there will be a response. Two-way

communication contains interaction. Responsive dialogue is most like e-commerce sites in

which the sender offers to sell something and the receiver decides what they wish to purchase; however, the sender has control over the communication. Mutual discourse is comprised of communication between both parties in which both can send and receive messages as in a chat room. Three-way communication becomes important for providing public deliberation because the communication can influence a third party. Polls, bulletin boards, or moderated forums are examples of controlled response where communication is public but the site remains in control. Public discourse is the venue with unrestricted content where participants have control over the communication, such as in some forums or chat rooms.

Ferber et al. (2007) applied this to government sites (state legislatures), community networks (NJ.com), political sites with the assumption that two and three-way communication features allow for greater interactivity and public deliberation. They found that the state websites do not promote public deliberation due to the absences of three-way communication and that the two-way communication present was more responsive dialogue. The Community Network does provide three-way communication; however, due to the poor quality of the dialogue, it may not promote true public deliberation. The party websites promoted limited three-way communication with semi-controlled response. The discussion on the forums often led one to follow the party line rather than promote public deliberation. They conclude that the public deliberation that was present, in the community networks, was lacking in quality, and it is unclear as to how many citizens and who is actually taking part. The legislative sites facilitate contact and grant greater access to information, but the party websites tended to collect donations and did what the owners wished.

What are Interactivity and Interaction and why are they important?

As Ferber et al. (2005a) explain, there are many definitions of interactivity that originated

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from times both before and after the Internet. The Six-Part Model of Cyber-Interactivity helps

explain the most notable definition used in relation to the Internet as "the ability of users to

modify the exchange" (p. 87) or in terms of the model, the amount of receiver control. Lilleker

and Jackson (2008) explain that "interactivity … suggests not only will a conversation take place

but that all parties that participate can be influenced" (p. 6). Interactivity can be defined as

including both synchronous communication and exchange.

Lilleker and Jackson (2008) state that increased two-way and three-way conversation

(greater interactivity) could cause top-down political communication to be replaced by a non-

hierarchical, horizontal style of communication. In terms of the Six-Part Model, that would be

more characteristic of public discourse. Additionally, they note that research suggests that multi-

directional conversations lead to exchanges that build communities and that, some argue, could

lead to participatory and deliberative democracy.

Interactivity in Campaigns

Lilleker and Malagón (2010) conducted a study of the 2007 French presidential

candidates' use of the Internet for the election. They took a mixed–methods approach by

conducting both content analysis and discourse analysis. The content analysis was conducted

using a modified version of the Six-Part Model of Cyber-Interactivity for user-to-user

interactivity in which receiver control was rated on a scale from 1 to 10 as shown in Figure

3. Additionally, they adapted McMillan's (2002) user-to-document interactivity into a model

with scaled receiver control. For the discourse analysis portion, they looked at "[t]he sum of

voices, genres, styles and discourses found in the text" (p. 32).

Figure 3: Revised User-to-User Interactivity Model

Source: Lilleker and Malagon (2010)

In general, Lilleker and Malagón (2010) found that Sarkozy's website reinforced uniformity and consistency and reflected his conservatism. On the other hand, Royal's website reflected her party's ideals of diversity, collectivism, and participation. Both were found to be instances of a hypermedia campaign as described by Howard (2006), in which the website is integrated into the campaign strategy. Both of these websites were used for the five main functions indicated by Gibson and Ward (2000) as functions of political party websites: information provision, campaigning, resource generation, networking and organizational strengthening, and promoting participation.

Through their analysis, Lilleker and Malagón (2010) found both sites to be identical in terms of the interactive features. However, when analyzing interactivity as a process with the

revised Ferber et al. model and McMillan (2002) user-to-document model, Royal's site was overall more interactive than Sarkozy's two-way site with the debate section being representative of three-way communication with more instances of co-created content. "However, discourse analysis revealed that the discussions were fragmented and disjointed interventions" (p. 37).

In conclusion, Lilleker and Malagón (2010) confirmed that politicians are apprehensive about using more interactive features because of the risk of losing message control. Most of the interactive features represent monologue and packaged content in the user-to-user and user-to-document interactivity models respectively. However, as discovered by the discourse analysis, Royal's site contained a greater multitude of voices and reflected the collectivist outlook. They identify that future research should explore the "visually compelling features [that] affect the level of perceived interactivity" (p. 39) connections to voter turnout and decision-making.

Democracy in Sweden

Ann Michalski (1994) stated that the "guiding principle of Swedish Democracy is *folkstyre* (people's governance)" (p. x). Operating with a tradition of strong local government coming from the Middle Ages, and the principle of decentralization, Swedish government is organized with the idea of "bottom-up" governance (p. xi). The government is organized into three levels in which voters elect representatives to the national, regional, and local levels, these being the parliament, county (*landsting*), and municipality (*kommun*) decision-making bodies. Since the county and municipal governments have a wide range of power, they have more effect on the lives of the citizens and are thus more important. Municipal governments in Sweden can make social, energy, and housing policy, run utilities such as water, electricity, and garbage collection, are responsible for education, public health, local transportation, local planning, and can levy local income taxes. Local governments have general competence in any policy area that

affects the lives of their citizens as long as it does not act in another municipality's area or on a national level. This puts local governments in control of most actions that governments take that affect the daily lives of people.

The counties are responsible for health care, some social policy, regional transportation, regional planning, and regional economic development, for which they also can levy taxes. However, since 1952, power has been shifting from regional to local governments along with consolidating the municipalities. Most of the elected officials at the local level are not full-time politicians while some do represent the national parties, and although there is an increasing amount of professional politicians, many remain civil professionals. The local officials keep in close contact and usually are personally known by their constituents. Although traditionally, the local governments operated on consensus-based decision making, the influence of party affiliated officials has made local governments become more politicized with party rivalry.

Why Sweden?

Sweden is a prime candidate to compare to the United States in terms of political parties facilitating more three-way communication. To begin, there is the presence of the net-parties focused on the concept of direct e-democracy. However, the rest of their democracy functions very differently from democracy in the United States and seems to be closer to the idea of a direct democracy. Underlying this is their principle of *folkstyre* (Michalski 1994, p. x), which brings them closer to the ideal of rule by the people, in their terms "people's governance." Inherent to their democracy is the idea that local government is closer to the people and deserves a large amount of power in which the community, municipality (*kommun*) governs itself. There is little doubt that citizens have a much greater ability to set the agenda and more decision-making power at the local level, compared to a system which gives the national or regional levels

most of the power.

Another major difference between the United States and Sweden is Sweden's multiparty system. Sweden has more ENPP than the United States (Mukherjee, 2011). This lends itself to being closer to direct democracy because more views can be effectively expressed, and parties require deliberation and cross-party support to make decisions. According to Mukherjee (2011) the more ENPP there are, the better the outcomes of the democracy in terms of human well-being. Greater human well-being is certainly in the people's will and their best interest. It is reasonable to conclude that this illustrates that citizens have more power in their democracy.

These aspects of Sweden's democracy and underlying perceptions of what democracy should be, make it seem closer to a direct democracy than the United States. This combined with the presence of the "net-parties" make it a prime candidate to see if that translates to their general political parties encouraging direct e-democracy through more three-way communication.

Political Finance

An important consideration to make when comparing the actions of political parties in different countries is the structure of the political finance system. Finding where funding comes from can offer invaluable insight into the motivations of political actors; political parties are no exception. The differences in political finance systems between the United States and Sweden may be an important factor in the political parties' presence online.

One of the most difficult aspects of comparing the political finance systems between the United States and Sweden, is what Katz and Kolodny (1994) describe as "one of the most notable features of American politics is the degree to which competition is framed in terms of individual candidates rather than partisan affiliations" (p. 23). Although it would seem this has shifted somewhat more towards partisan affiliations in recent years, the structure of the campaign

finance system reflects this individual competition rather than competition between political parties. The most recent piece of legislation dealing with political parties and campaign finance is the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) of 1971 with the amendments in 1974. Katz and Kolodny (1994) argue that this piece of legislation suggests, through multiple provisions, a federal conception of political parties headed by the national committees that reinforces the duopoly of the Democrats and Republicans. Under FECA, major and minor parties receive funding for presidential elections in advance; however, new parties can only receive the funding as a reimbursement if they receive more than 5% of the votes. The minor and new party funding is proportional to the amount of votes they receive. The law defines these classifications in terms of the percent of the popular vote the party received in the last election, major parties having received at least 25% (the Democrats and Republicans), minor parties are those that received between five and 25% percent, and new parties anything less than 5% (Katz & Kolodny, 1994). What makes this difficult as noted before, is that this money is paid to the campaign committees of the candidates, which are required under the law for reporting, and not to their parties.

While FECA placed some limits on campaign spending and required reporting, what is most prevalent in the public's mind when it comes to campaign finance is the Supreme Court decision in the case of *Citizens United v. FEC*. Individual citizens have the right to donate unlimited amounts to political campaigns since it is seen as an exercise of free speech. However, with the Supreme Court's 2010 decision, corporations were granted personhood and were assumed to have all constitutional protections that a person would have (Nichols & McChesney, 2013). This has allowed corporations to make unlimited campaign donations which Nichols and McChesney (2013) estimate at an unprecedented $10 billion in the 2012 election.

Sweden's political finance system has gradually moved away from private donations since the introduction of state subventions to the political parties. Since 1965 the majority of political financing has shifted to almost entirely state, regional, and local subventions to the parties with the system of private donations being completely abandoned (Pierre & Widfeldt, 1994). The first source of state subventions is paid directly to the central offices from the national budget. Part of this subvention is a general subsidy to the political party and the other part is a subsidy for the parliamentary party. Pierre and Widfeldt (1994) explain that these have a "cushion" rule where the changes in the funding amount, which is related to the number of seats the party holds, lags behind the changes in the number of seats. The second source of state subventions is paid to the parliamentary parties by the Riksdag administration, which indirectly comes out of the national budget as well. Although this may seem like an ideal way to limit the issues with a campaign finance system that relies on voluntary contributions, this amounts to what Sorauf (2003) considers a question of motives which amounts to the purchasing of influence. Pierre and Widfeldt (1994) argue that it has led to a different problem, one in which the parties have developed a closer link with the state at the expense of their link to civil society which has likely caused an increased frustration with the established parties.

It is with these different frameworks that we will try to obtain general percentages of where the political funding has come from for the most recent elections in each country. This may be helpful in explaining the variance in the political party websites. The available data will be in different formats for parties in the United States and Sweden and may not be available for all parties. Given this, the data will be used when comparing countries in general rather than between political parties in one country.

Political Party Structure and Ideology

The differences in the structure of political parties between the United States and Sweden present an obstacle when attempting to compare political parties between the two countries. Not only is the former a federal system and the latter a unitary system (although with a heavy emphasis of local government), the organization of their political parties reflects this difference.

Depending upon the way one chooses to define a political party the United States could be said to have two, six, 100, or no political parties. Katz and Kolodny (1994) argue that from a structural perspective the United States has six political parties, the two national presidential wings, and the four organizations in the House and Senate (two for each party in each house). They explain that this is due to the influence of "three fundamental aspects of American politics" those being "the presidential system and the concomitant doctrine of separation of powers, a basic ambivalence about parties, and federalism" (Katz & Kolodny 1994, p. 24). According to Katz and Kolodny (1994), these six parties are loose federations, the national committees being of state parties cooperating to nominate and support presidential candidates and the congressional parties which are comprised of congressmen and senators organizing to allocate committee assignments.

The United States legislature is comprised of the winners of elections in single member districts (although each state has two senators, the seats are up for election at separate times). It is due to this, as Katz and Kolodny (1994) point out, that the main concern of members of Congress is representing the local interests of their constituency which leads them to argue that there is little primacy given to party loyalty (at least at the national level). However, given the existence of the whip position of which each "Congressional party" has one, there is at least a traditional concept of party loyalty. Furthermore, in times of divided government we tend to see

partisan gridlock which not only suggests a level of party loyalty within each Congressional party but also between the Congressional parties and the President. If it is the case that what Katz and Kolodny (1994) claim that while voting "given a choice between representing local interests and remaining loyal to the position of a national party, there is little doubt in the minds of either voters or members of Congress that party should give way," the members of Congress conveniently think the party line is good for their district (p. 26).

Organizationally, these parties are separate and as Katz and Kolodny (1994) phrase it, there are "three parties calling themselves Democratic and three calling themselves Republican" (p. 28). Recalling the claim that we could view the United States having 100 political parties, as the national parties are only associations of state parties, may lead us to say that we must study their activity online as such. However, one thing tying all these parties that call themselves Republican and those that call themselves Democratic together is that they possess, more or less, the same ideological outlook respectively. However, more will follow on this idea later.

In the case of Sweden, the political parties are national in orientation. Of the five traditional parties, two developed within the Riksdag: the Conservatives and Liberals, and three emerged from popular movements: the Centre, Social Democrats, and Communist parties (Pierre & Widfeldt, 1994). Pierre and Widfeldt (1994) argue that the increasing centralization of party organization and policy formulation has been largely due to the introduction of state subventions to the political parties. They describe the parties as stratarchic, meaning that each organizational level has substantial autonomy. While there are local and regional levels of the parties, these levels are focused on membership recruitment and candidate nomination respectively. The leadership and policy-making functions rest with the central level of the party. Given this, it does not make sense to look at the websites of the county level (if they even exist) since it is at

the national level that the policy-making, and thus the ideological perspective of the party influences policy. Thus we arrive at this concept of ideology as the main way we distinguish between parties.

In order to use the term ideology we must have a concrete definition. This can be difficult, as Hamilton (1987) explains that every theorist offers at least one definition. However, Hamilton (1987) sifts through some 85 sources and extracts 27 elements that in some combination make up these definitions. He is careful to exclude elements that are best looked at through empirical research rather than assuming that the element defines the concept of ideology. The definition he arrives at is:

> An ideology is a system of collectively held normative and reputedly factual ideas and beliefs and attitudes advocating a particular pattern of social relationships and arrangements, and/or aimed at justifying a particular pattern of conduct, which its proponents seek to promote, realise, pursue or maintain (Hamilton, 1987, p. 38).

Another way in which we can view ideology, and specifically political ideology, is in terms of the role it plays for adherents. Ball and Dagger (2011) explain that "a political ideology is a more or less systematic set of ideas that performs four functions for those who hold it: the explanatory, the evaluative, the orientative, and the programmatic functions" (p. 1). In doing this, an ideology helps to guide people through political life by helping to explain the events that occur and how they should judge such events. Additionally, ideology helps people to find their identity in political life and what they should try to accomplish.

Armed with Hamilton's (1987) definition and Ball and Dagger's (2011) explanation of what role political ideologies play, we can differentiate between political parties and, in the case of the United States, view many political party organizations that share the same views as one

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political party. In light of this, a political party would seem to be the organization (in this case, at the national level) that has been developed around a specific political ideology.

Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) Strategies in Political Parties

Löfgren and Smith (2003) typify four different strategies of using information and communication technologies (ICTs) used by different political parties in democratic regimes. These are the mass-party strategy, cartel party strategy, consumerist strategy, and grassroots strategy. Depending on the organization, operational norms, and views of the party as far as the democratic linkage embraced and what the role of citizens is, their use of ICTs differ and are used for different roles. Democratic linkage refers to what connects the leaders of the party to the general public.

According to Löfgren and Smith (2003) mass parties focus on representative linkage and developing an adaptive political system and public debates. They use public debates as their means of connecting with the public with a biased bidirectional flow of information. In mass parties, members have exclusive rights to influence policy decisions and voters are seen as potential members. ICT participation is limited to party websites, electronic conferences, and personal contact with politicians and complements traditional political communication.

A cartel party is organized based upon the leadership representing their views and campaigning for votes from the general population. Like the mass party, the cartel party uses representative linkage as a means to develop an adaptive political system. The main form of communication with the public is elite with expert discourse that is unidirectional and top down. There are very few members, most of which are professional party workers; most voters are exclusively seen as potential voters for the candidate. ICT is used for political websites and establishing contacts to aid with campaigning.

Löfgren and Smith (2003) admit that the consumerist party is still in its infancy but is organized around the idea that citizens are the consumers of public goods and that their preferences should determine public policy. As such, it is still a representative form of linkage but focuses on developing individual rights. The communication involved with a consumerist party is bidirectional with political service declarations and voter preferences. There are no members to the party, only temporary supporters, and voters are seen as consumers (of public goods) with predefined preferences. ICTs are implemented to again generate political websites but contain opinion polling to capture public opinion and to solicit campaign contributions.

According to Löfgren and Smith (2003), the grassroots strategy is the most different from the other strategies. A grassroots party is focused on participatory democracy with the intent to develop extra-parliamentary activities and less office seeking. These parties use multidirectional communication through deliberative electronic discussions and consensus. There are no defined members--only loose membership as sympathizers, and all citizens are treated with equal weight in discussions and decision making. The grassroots strategy replaces traditional membership organization with ICTs in the form of membership in virtual organizations, electronic meetings, and electronic voting.

Net Parties

Ovid Boyd (2008) studied four political parties in Sweden that claim to use information and communication technologies for direct citizen participation and potentially are examples of grassroots parties. Boyd uses Löfgren and Smith's (2003) models of political parties to determine whether the parties embrace direct democracy in how they operate. The four "net-parties" that Boyd (2008) interviewed were Knivsta.nu (Knivsta.Now), Aktiv Demokrati, Demoex, and Direktdemokraterna.

Boyd (2008) found that all four of the parties fit into the grassroots party type fully. However, Knivsta.Now included some elements of other party types as well. However, Boyd (2008) mentions that it depends upon the definition of political party that one uses if all four are examples of grassroots political parties; the major distinction is that Direktdemokraterna is not officially registered as a political party. Nonetheless, these parties embrace the democratic values of citizen deliberation and direct decision making. Parties of this type will be the focus of my study.

Research Questions

This study will try to answer the following question:

1. How does the presence of interactive features on major political party websites in the United States compare to that of Swedish political party websites when measured by the facilitation of three-way communication?

2. How does the presence of interactive features compare between major and minor political parties' websites?

3. How do the direct e-democracy, or net-party websites compare to the rest in terms of interactivity?

4. Do the source and level of resources available to a party play a role in determining the quality of the party websites?

Method

Websites to study

Data were collected from the various political parties' national websites investigated.

The parties include the two primary parties in the United States: the Republicans and Democrats.

To compare, I examined the top two parties in the *Riksdag*, Sweden's parliament, the Social

Democratic Party (*Social Demokraterna*), and the New Moderate Party (*Nya Moderaterna*). As

another segment of the study, the websites of minor parties in the United States were examined:

the Constitution Party, Green Party, Libertarian Party (New York State), Pirate Party, and

Socialist Alternative. The New York State Pirate Party website was analyzed because of its

explicit statement of supporting liquid democracy (New York Pirate Party, n.d.). Due to this and

the fact that it is more of a local party, it is most closely related to the Swedish direct democracy

parties (Direct Democrats, Pirate Party, and Knivsta.Now) and hence will be considered as such

for this study.

Although not of the same status, minor parties in Sweden were also investigated. These

were parties with representation in Parliament; they included the Centre Party, Liberal People's

Party (*Folkpartiet Liberalerna*), Christian Democrats (*Kristdemokraterna*), Green Party

(*Miljöpartiet de Gröna*), Sweden Democrats *(Sverigedemokraterna)*, and the Left Party

(*Vänsterpartiet*). Additionally, I will conduct the same analysis on the Pirate Party (*Piratpartiet*)

and the "net-parties" in Sweden that promote direct democracy, including the Direct Democrats

(*Direktdemokraterna*) and Knivsta.Now (*Knivsta.nu*). Unfortunately, there are no known

instances of "net-parties" in the United States; however the closest is the Pirate Party (at least the

New York party).

Feature Analysis

Websites were analyzed based upon a number of different features such as those found by

Ferber et al. (2007) to be common to the DNC.org and RNC.org websites, those ranging from

downloadable document, information, e-mail, signing petitions, polling, and forums. The

specifics of each feature looked at are shown in Table 1. They were analyzed to determine how

much interactivity was promoted based upon the Six-Part Model of Cyber-Interactivity and an

adapted version of Lilleker and Malagón's (2010) scale of receiver control as shown in Table 2.

The scale was adapted as some of the original values' descriptions did not seem to apply very

well (Lilleker and Malagón's scale can be seen in Appendix 1).

Table 1: Features Analyzed

Feature	Direction	Receiver Control	Agenda Setting	Decision Making
Down-loadable documents	1-way	Low		
Privacy statement	1-way	Low		
"Where we stand" information	1-way	Low		
Ownership	1-way	Low		
Statues/Bylaws	1-way	Low		
Press kits	1-way	Low		
Newsroom	1-way	Low		
Educational information	1-way	Low		
Streaming audio/video	1-way	Low		
Links to Social Media	1-way	Low		
Register online to vote	1-way	High		X
Contribute money	1-way	High	X	X
Contacts	1-way*	High		
Press officers (contacts)	1-way*	High		
Active e-mail to Webmaster or other technical staff	1-way*	High		
E-mail to committee	1-way*	High	X	
Subscribe to updates	2-way	Low		
RSS feed	2-way	Low		
"Who's My Legislator" function	2-way	Low	X	
Personal layouts	2-way	High		
Write news editors	3-way	Low	X	
Sign petitions	3-way	Low	X	X
Online polling	3-way	Low	X	X
Public forums	3-way	High	X	X
Host party event	3-way	High	X	X

* If receiver gets a response, then it is 2-way. Without a response it is simply feedback.

Table 2: Scale for measuring level of receiver control

Category	Scale	Definition
Low Receiver Control	1	Feature is present but the receiver has little control; the content is essentially take it or leave it.
	2	Content can be downloaded
	3	User can send information to the site or to others through sharing (usually social network sharing)
High Receiver Control	4	User can send and receive information[a]
	5	User can choose time, type, and amount of information to send or receive, communication is asymmetrical[b]
	6	Sender and receiver have equal levels of control; communication is conversational

a. Contact features received this score when it was handled through a webform

b. Contact features received this score when an email address was provided

The scores for each feature were determined by the level of control that the user was given in interfacing with the content and/or other users and the presence of each feature. Some features were only partially implemented or something similar was found (comments from social media being displayed could be considered a sort of discussion forum), and thus the score for that feature was modified by how complete the implementation was. The level of interactivity the website supports is a product of the receiver control score and the direction of communication that the feature exhibits.

Agenda Setting and Decision Making Features

Most of the features that promoted user-to-user communication (or at least facilitating communication between the user and politicians/party officials) were split into agenda-setting features, or features that provided a potential to help the user set the agenda, and decision-making features, features that provided a potential for the user to participate in decision making. Table 3 shows the potential impact of each of these features on agenda setting and/or decision making. In light of this, party websites were classified as being representative of one of the four models of e-democracy as developed by Päivärinta and Sæbø (2006) depending upon their

implementation of each of the features.

Table 3: Impact of Selected Features on Agenda Setting and Decision Making

Feature	Agenda Setting Impact	Decision Making Impact
Register online to vote		Indirect
Contribute money	Depends on Amount	Depends on Amount
E-mail to committee	Indirect	
"Who's My Legislator" function	Indirect	
Write news editors	Indirect	
Sign petitions	Direct	Indirect
Online polling	Depends on the Party's Use	Depends on the Party's Use
Public forums	Depends on the Party's Use	Depends on the Party's Use
Host party event	Depends on Who the User is	Depends on Who the User is

The features considered to potentially contribute to e-democracy were registering online to vote, contributing money, e-mail to party committee, "Who's My Legislator" function, sign petitions, write new editors, "host a party event" function, on-line polling, and public forums. The last two are the most important depending upon how the party decides to use them. Both could contribute to agenda setting or decision making by either gauging public opinion (or at least the opinion of party members) or using them as a means to determine how party politicians should vote. Signing petitions on-line could be used in much the same way and therefore could contribute to agenda setting or decision making.

Providing a means of contacting the party committee and a person's legislator were considered primarily means of helping the user set the agenda. If enough users were to raise an issue, the party may decide to bring this up at party meetings and/or in the legislature. However, it would be unlikely to have any direct impact on decision making. Additionally, writing the news editors could have a similar impact. Helping users register online to vote provides a possibility of having an impact on decision making; albeit, an indirect one because this explicitly

promotes representative democracy. The remaining two features of facilitating the contribution of money and the ability to host a party event provide a means of affecting both the agenda-setting and decision-making processes. However, this would depend upon how much money was donated for the former and how high profile the user was for the latter.

Website having these features, especially with explicit intent to use them to guide the party's actions, generally meet Dahl's (1989) five criteria of a "perfect democracy." By providing the user with the information necessary to make an informed decision, the ability to effectively participate (such as in forums), control over the agenda, and equality in participation and voting (in the case of online voting), these websites could help to bring these ideas into the rest of the political system.

Other Data Collected

In addition to the analysis of the websites, data were collected on the financing of these parties when available. However, as mentioned before, the style of the data varies between countries as well as what was available. The Swedish parties in the Riksdag developed common forms of accounting and agreed to report their revenue analysis every year, except for the Sweden Democrats (Vansterpartiet, 2014). Given this, the political finance data for Swedish parties is in this format. As for the United States parties, official reporting is required for the three national organization for both the Republicans and the Democrats, as well as candidates running for federal office. Both of these sets of data were collected from fec.gov. The sources of revenue for parties may help to explain differences in the promotion of e-democracy on their websites. It is conceivable that parties that receive a larger percentage of their funds from large donors or small interest groups would be less inclined to promote participation of the masses with their website.

Findings

Overview of the United States' Parties

Only four of the 25 features analyzed were found to be on all of the U.S. websites, those

being "where we stand" information, links to social media, downloadable documents, and some

contact information available. Although, in the case of the Democrats website, documents were

downloadable if the user were to print to PDF as there was no "download" option. Other

features that were mostly found in common between the U.S. websites, with only one or two

websites not having implemented the feature, were streaming audio/video, educational

information (at least about the reasoning behind the party position), a way to make donations to

the party, a newsroom feature, subscribing to updates, and some method of contacting the party

committee and the webmaster/other technical staff.

On the other end of the spectrum two of the features were not found on any of the

websites, and four of the features were only found on one of the websites. Both the features of

press kits and personal layouts were nonexistent on the U.S. websites (aside from the fact that the

Pirate Party website was a Wordpress site, so if the users have accounts they can change the

color scheme of their dashboard and Wordpress tool bar, but this does not change any layout of

the actual site).   Signing petitions and online polling were only implemented on the Republican

website; however, their online polling does not tell you the results of others' responses but

instead gives you a way to make a donation and receive a gift (but one must donate more than

the default amount to receive the gift). Only the Green party website provided a method of

making submissions to the party's national newspaper (the Green Pages). Being able to find

one's legislator (or other politicians affiliated with the party) was only available on the

Libertarian Party website. The site contains a section dedicated to elected officials who are

divided by state and tells the name, the office held, and sometimes a link to their website. The rest of the features analyzed were at least partially implemented by between three and four of the party websites--except for hosting a party event which was only implemented on two of the websites.

Of the United States' websites the Democrats has the most features implemented at 17 (68%) of the features. However, when taking into account the level of receiver control and the direction of communication, the Green Party website scored slightly higher than the Democrats. The website that contained the least amount of the features was the Socialist Alternative website; this was also the site with the lowest score based upon receiver control and direction of communication. This website only implemented 10 out of 25 (40%) features. The average amount of features implemented on the U.S. websites was 14 out of 25 (58%).

The United States' Major Parties

Between the Democratic and Republican party websites the Democrats implemented more features and encouraged a higher level of interactivity than the Republicans. The Democrats implemented all of the features the Republicans did except for signing petitions and online polling. However, the online polling implemented by the Republicans falls short of real three-way communication as mentioned earlier in that it does not provide information on what others' responses were. Additionally, the options are entirely partisan and follow the party line; thus, they were not open to any dissent.

Table 4: U.S. Major Party Implementation of Features

Feature	Direction	Receiver Control	Democrats	Republicans
Down-loadable documents	1-way	Low	X	X
Privacy statement	1-way	Low	X	
"Where we stand" information	1-way	Low	X	X
Ownership	1-way	Low	X	
Statues/Bylaws	1-way	Low	X	X
Press kits	1-way	Low		
Newsroom	1-way	Low	X	X
Educational information	1-way	Low	X	X
Streaming audio/video	1-way	Low	X	X
Links to Social Media	1-way	Low	X	X
Register online to vote	1-way	High	X	X
Contribute money	1-way	High	X	X
Contacts	1-way*	High	X	X
Press officers (contacts)	1-way*	High		
Active e-mail to Webmaster or other technical staff	1-way*	High	X	
E-mail to committee	1-way*	High	X	
Subscribe to updates	2-way	Low	X	
RSS feed	2-way	Low		
"Who's My Legislator" function	2-way	Low		
Personal layouts	2-way	High		
Write news editors	3-way	Low		X
Sign petitions	3-way	Low		
Online polling	3-way	Low		X
Public forums	3-way	High	X	
Host party event	3-way	High	X	

* If receiver gets a response, then it is 2-way. Without a response it is simply feedback.

In addition to the features implemented by the Republicans, the Democrats also provided the user with important information about the website (an explicit statement of ownership and the privacy policy), means of contacting the party and the webmaster, and some important interactive features. After creating an online account one can create an event to host on the website. Most of these are campaigning events such as canvassing and phone banking, but the last option of "Test Event Type" would seem to imply that you can come up with your own

event. While not implemented as a traditional public forum, users can comment on different

pages of the website using Facebook and Twitter. Some of the posts displayed were

controversial, and sometimes it seemed that deliberation was taking place. However, it is highly

unlikely that this online activity has much of a transformational effect on the party line.

The United States' Minor Parties

The four minor parties considered were the Green Party, Libertarian Party, Constitution

Party, and Socialist Alternative. Out of these parties the Green Party had the website with the

most features and encouraged the most interactivity. As mentioned before, the website with the

least features and interactivity was the Socialist Alternative website. While we might expect that

a leftist party would be more interactive as Lilleker and Malagón (2010) found in the case of

Royal's website, the lack of features on the Socialist Alternative may be due to a lack of

resources. In addition to the two features that all of the U.S. websites lacked, the minor party

websites also lacked features to host a party event, sign petitions, and online polling.

Table 5: U.S. Minor Party Implementation of Features

Feature	Direction	Receiver Control	Green	Libertarian	Constitution	Socialist Alternative
Down-loadable documents	1-way	Low	X	X	X	X
Privacy statement	1-way	Low		X	X	
"Where we stand" information	1-way	Low	X	X	X	X
Ownership	1-way	Low		X	X	
Statues/Bylaws	1-way	Low	X	X		
Press kits	1-way	Low				
Newsroom	1-way	Low	X		X	X
Educational information	1-way	Low	X	X	X	X
Streaming audio/video	1-way	Low	X	X	X	X
Links to Social Media	1-way	Low	X	X	X	X
Register online to vote	1-way	High		X		
Contribute money	1-way	High	X	X	X	X
Contacts	1-way*	High	X	X	X	X
Press officers (contacts)	1-way*	High	X	X	X	
Active e-mail to Webmaster or other technical staff	1-way*	High	X	X	X	X
E-mail to committee	1-way*	High	X	X	X	X
Subscribe to updates	2-way	Low	X	X	X	
RSS feed	2-way	Low	X		X	
"Who's My Legislator" function	2-way	Low		X		
Personal layouts	2-way	High				
Write news editors	3-way	Low				
Sign petitions	3-way	Low	X			
Online polling	3-way	Low				
Public forums	3-way	High	X			
Host party event	3-way	High				

* If receiver gets a response, then it is 2-way. Without a response it is simply feedback.

Some features were only found on one of the minor party websites. In addition to being the only U.S. website that contained a way to find politicians affiliated with the party, the Libertarian Party website was the only minor party to implement the feature to register online to vote. This feature showed up on every page, and they provided links to the rock the vote website and eac.gov. The Green Party website was the only minor party to implement public forums. Each of these websites contained the statutes/bylaws while the Constitution Party and Socialist Alternative websites did not. Both the Green Party and the Constitution Party implemented RSS feeds. However, in terms of providing the important information of a privacy statement and

explicitly stating ownership of the website, both the Constitution Party and the Libertarian Party implemented these while the other two did not.

All of the minor party websites contained the features of a newsroom, subscribing to updates, and providing press officer contact information except for one of the parties. The latter two were found to be lacking on the Socialist Alternative website, and the newsroom feature was not present on the Libertarian Party website. The rest of the features analyzed, nine in total, were implemented on all of the minor party websites.

Overview of Sweden's Parties

All of the Swedish political party websites had at least partial implementation of eight features out of 25. These eight features consisted of the four found in common with all of the U.S. websites as well as four of the features that were implemented on most of the U.S. websites including, educational information (at least about the reasoning behind the party position), a newsroom feature, and ways of contacting both the party committee and the webmaster or other technical staff. The features of subscribing to updates, contact info for the press officers, and some form of press kits were found on all of the websites except for one (different parties were lacking one of these three features). Statutes/Bylaws were found on all but two of the websites.

The two features that were not found on any of the Swedish websites were registering online to vote and signing petitions. Additionally, two of the features only found on two of the websites were personal layouts and online polling. The former was only partially implemented on the Liberal Peoples' Party and Knivista.Now websites. The latter was only fully implemented on the Direct Democrats website and had partial implementation on the Centre Party website. Less than half of the Swedish websites contained the following features: write the news editors, host a party event, subscribe to the RSS Feed, ownership information, and public forums.

However, over half of these websites contained at least partial implementation of streaming audio/video, donating to the party, a privacy statement, and a way to find legislators that are from your county and are affiliated with the party. The last feature was only partially implemented as there was usually no search function to find the user's specific county.

The Moderates websites implemented 18 (72%) of the recorded features; this was the largest number of features implemented for the Swedish websites. However, when the level of receiver control and direction of communication was taken into account, the Left's website encouraged the most interactivity. Only 13 of the features were implemented on the Sweden Democrats website (52%); this was the least of any Swedish website although not the worst in terms of encouraging interactivity. The Swedish site that encouraged the least interactivity was the Green Party's website. Sweden's websites averaged 16 (65%) of the features with implementation.

Sweden's Major Parties

The two major parties in Sweden, the Social Democrats and the Moderates, websites were much closer in the amount of features implemented and the level of interactivity encouraged than the U.S. major party websites. However, unlike in the U.S. case, the right wing major party's website had two additional features and encouraged more interactivity. The additional features were one to contribute money to the party and the statutes/bylaws. Also, their implementation of finding members of Parliament affiliated with the party provided some search functionality. However, the Social Democrats' website had a feature of live streaming for their election night party. Although the website was analyzed after the election (and thus not live), the user was able to chat with others watching the live streaming. Given this, it was given a score of six for receiver control since this function may be used during other special events.

Table 6: Sweden Major Party Implementation of Features

Feature	Direction	Receiver Control	Social Democrats	New Moderates
Down-loadable documents	1-way	Low	X	X
Privacy statement	1-way	Low	X	X
"Where we stand" information	1-way	Low	X	X
Ownership	1-way	Low	X	X
Statues/Bylaws	1-way	Low		X
Press kits	1-way	Low	X	X
Newsroom	1-way	Low	X	X
Educational information	1-way	Low	X	X
Streaming audio/video	1-way	Low	X	X
Links to Social Media	1-way	Low	X	X
Register online to vote	1-way	High		
Contribute money	1-way	High		X
Contacts	1-way*	High	X	X
Press officers (contacts)	1-way*	High	X	X
Active e-mail to Webmaster or other technical staff	1-way*	High	X	X
E-mail to committee	1-way*	High	X	X
Subscribe to updates	2-way	Low	X	X
RSS feed	2-way	Low	X	X
"Who's My Legislator" function	2-way	Low	X	X
Personal layouts	2-way	High		
Write news editors	3-way	Low		
Sign petitions	3-way	Low		
Online polling	3-way	Low		
Public forums	3-way	High		
Host party event	3-way	High		

* If receiver gets a response, then it is 2-way. Without a response it is simply feedback.

Aside from the two features that were not implemented by any of the Swedish websites, neither website contained any three-way communication features or the features of writing the news editors, online polling, public forums, or to host a party event. The rest of the features analyzed were implemented similarly between the two sites.

Sweden's Minor Parties

The amount of features implemented for the minor parties was generally the same (aside

from the Sweden Democrats). However, when looking at the fullness of implementation, The

Left's website had more fully implemented features than the others. As mentioned before, it also

encouraged the most interactivity. Aside from the two features not found on any Swedish

website, all other features were implemented by at least one of the minor parties.

Table 7: Sweden Minor Party Implementation of Features

Feature	Direction	Receiver Control	Centre	Liberal Peoples'	Christian Democrats	Green	Sweden Democrats	The Left
Down-loadable documents	1-way	Low	X	X	X	X	X	X
Privacy statement	1-way	Low	X		X	X		
"Where we stand" information	1-way	Low	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ownership	1-way	Low				X		
Statues/Bylaws	1-way	Low	X	X	X	X		X
Press kits	1-way	Low	X	X	X		X	X
Newsroom	1-way	Low	X	X	X	X	X	X
Educational information	1-way	Low	X	X	X	X	X	X
Streaming audio/video	1-way	Low	X			X	X	X
Links to Social Media	1-way	Low	X	X	X	X	X	X
Register online to vote	1-way	High						
Contribute money	1-way	High		X	X	X		X
Contacts	1-way*	High	X	X	X	X	X	X
Press officers (contacts)	1-way*	High	X	X	X	X	X	X
Active e-mail to Webmaster or other technical staff	1-way*	High	X	X	X	X	X	X
E-mail to committee	1-way*	High	X	X	X	X	X	X
Subscribe to updates	2-way	Low	X	X	X	X	X	X
RSS feed	2-way	Low		X	X			
"Who's My Legislator" function	2-way	Low	X	X	X			
Personal layouts	2-way	High		X				
Write news editors	3-way	Low						
Sign petitions	3-way	Low	X				X	X
Online polling	3-way	Low	X					
Public forums	3-way	High						X
Host party event	3-way	High		X				X

* If receiver gets a response, then it is 2-way. Without a response it is simply feedback.

The Green Party's website was the only one to have an explicit statement of ownership,

but it was the only website to not include some sort of press kit. It was one of three to include a

privacy statement, the others being the Centre party and the Christian Democrats. In

comparison, The Left's website was the only minor party site to have public forums. In addition,

it shared the ability to host a party event with only the Liberal Peoples' Party. Three of the

minor party websites implemented the ability to write the news editors including The Left,

Sweden Democrats, and the Centre Party. However, it did not include the ability to find members of parliament affiliated with the party (neither did the Sweden Democrats).

The Sweden Democrats were the only minor party website to lack the party's statutes/bylaws. Additionally, there was no way to contribute money to the party on the website. This feature was not present on the Centre Party's website. However, the Centre Party was the only minor party to implement some type of online polling. This was seen as a partial implementation as it only asked if you agreed with their policy stance on the issue (this was part of the "where we stand" information) and did not show you the results of others' responses.

The Liberal People's Party and the Christian Democrats websites were the only two to implement RSS feed. These two parties also shared in lacking any videos or audio on their websites. The Liberal People's Party was the only minor party to include personal layouts, but this only provided tips on how to customize your browser so that the website displays well. The remaining features analyzed were implemented by all of the minor party websites. Although all parties' websites had some educational information and implemented newsrooms, The Left's implementation of these provided the most receiver control. They provided extensive information on each policy area with links to greater detailed information and links to parliamentary motions as well as some videos. Additionally the Resource Bank had information on how the party does things as well as information on other topics that can be downloaded and commented on. The user was also able to comment on news items, and some comments seemed to contain controversial statements with which the party may disagree, but the comments were visible.

Direct Democracy Parties

The websites considered here are those of the Direct Democrats, the Sweden Pirate Party,

Knivsta.Now, and the New York Pirate Party. These four sites had roughly the same number of features implemented; Knivsta.Now had the most with 17 while the New York Pirate Party had 15. Although when taking into account features that are partially implemented they all had between 13 and 15 fully implemented features. The Direct Democrats website encouraged the most interactivity while the Sweden Pirate Party provided the least.

Table 8: Direct Democracy Party Implementation of Features

Feature	Direction	Receiver Control	NY Pirate	Sweden Pirate	Direct Democrats	Knivsta. Now
Down-loadable documents	1-way	Low	X	X	X	X
Privacy statement	1-way	Low	X	X		
"Where we stand" information	1-way	Low	X	X	X	X
Ownership	1-way	Low	X			
Statues/Bylaws	1-way	Low		X	X	X
Press kits	1-way	Low		X	X	X
Newsroom	1-way	Low	X	X	X	X
Educational information	1-way	Low	X	X	X	X
Streaming audio/video	1-way	Low		X	X	
Links to Social Media	1-way	Low	X	X	X	X
Register online to vote	1-way	High	X			
Contribute money	1-way	High		X	X	X
Contacts	1-way*	High	X	X	X	X
Press officers (contacts)	1-way*	High		X	X	
Active e-mail to Webmaster or other technical staff	1-way*	High	X	X	X	X
E-mail to committee	1-way*	High	X	X	X	X
Subscribe to updates	2-way	Low	X		X	X
RSS feed	2-way	Low	X			X
"Who's My Legislator" function	2-way	Low				X
Personal layouts	2-way	High				X
Write news editors	3-way	Low				
Sign petitions	3-way	Low				
Online polling	3-way	Low			X	
Public forums	3-way	High	X	X	X	X
Host party event	3-way	High	X	X		X

 * If receiver gets a response, then it is 2-way. Without a response it is simply feedback.

None of these websites implemented features to sign petitions (although none of the Swedish sites did either) or write the news editors.   Another feature only applicable to the U.S. websites was registering online to vote, which the New York Pirate Party only partially

implemented by providing the contact number for voter registration in the state and a printable

voter registration form (with the party affiliation of Pirate Party pre-filled). This was also the

only website to explicitly state the ownership of the website. Both Pirate Parties had a privacy

statement. However, the New York Pirate Party website was the only direct democracy party to

not include a way to contribute money (although the Knivsta.Now website only included

instructions on donating by post and not online), the Statutes/Bylaws, or any press kits.

The New York Pirate Party and Knivsta.Now both implemented RSS Feeds while the

other two did not, and the Sweden Pirate Party was the only one to not implement a way of

subscribing to updates. Knivsta.Now was the only site to include a type of personal layout

option; this seemed to be almost like an internal Facebook page. This was also the only site to

include a way of finding one's legislator as the contacts page showed the positions of the

politicians in the party. However, it is not surprising that this was the only one to include this as

the other three did not have any elected officials affiliated with the party.

Both the Sweden Pirate Party and Direct Democrats websites contained the contact

information for the press officers as well as streaming of audio/video. The Direct Democrats'

website allowed users to leave a comment on the videos and also included a short video on how

direct/liquid democracy works. Out of these four sites, the Direct Democrats' website was the

only one lacking the feature to host a party event, although this may be due to the party's focus

on online activity. However, it was the only one to include online polling.

The rest of the features analyzed were included on all of the websites, albeit with varying

levels of receiver control for some of them. As noted above, the Direct Democrats' website

allowed comments on the videos including the video about how direct/liquid democracy works;

therefore, for educational information they received a higher level of receiver control than the

others. The New York Pirate Party received a six for receiver control for their "Where we stand"
information. This was due to them stating "our platform is still a work-in-progress. Please help
us develop it! If you have ideas for how we can empower the people of New York, share them
on our forum or contact us" (¶ 1) and including links to the forums and contact information. For
the newsroom feature, Sweden's Pirate Party had the highest level of receiver control because
the comments seemed to contain controversial debate that the party may outright disagree with.
However, this website's public forum was rated as not fully implemented because the forums
required membership in the party to enter them.

E-Democracy Features

One important aspect of this study was looking more at the features that aid the user in
agenda setting and decision making and the level of receiver control that users were given with
these features. Although registering online to vote could be considered a decision-making
feature (at least indirectly) it has been eliminated from consideration here due to the lack of
registering online to vote on the Swedish websites. The Left's website provided the most
receiver control when it came to agenda-setting features whereas the Socialist Alternative's
website provided the least. As mentioned before, leftist parties would be expected to be more
interactive as in the case of Royal's website in the French 2007 presidential election (Lilleker &
Malagón, 2010); however, The Left is a party represented in the Riksdag and thus is provided
with resources whereas Socialist Alternative is not provided funding. When looking at the
decision-making features, the Direct Democrats provided the most receiver control. On the other
end of the spectrum, the websites of the Social Democrats and the Sweden Democrats both failed
to provide any features related to decision making.

The grouping with the highest average receiver control in both agenda setting and

decision making was the Direct Democracy parties, while the grouping with the least was the Swedish major parties. It would seem that the Direct Democracy parties are more of the grassroots party type by developing venues for deliberative electronic discussions and consensus as Löfgren and Smith (2003) describe. The lack of interactivity on the Swedish major party websites would seem to support Pierre and Widfeldt's (1994) observation that the parties have supplanted their link to civil society with a stronger link to the state. Between the two countries, the Swedish websites provided more receiver control where agenda-setting features were concerned; however, the U.S. websites provided a higher average receiver control for decision making features. Within countries, the U.S. major party average of receiver control exceeded the minor party average of receiver control. In the case of the Swedish websites, this was the opposite.

If we look at the percent of the e-democracy features implemented The Left's website and Knivsta.Now both implemented 63% of the features. Knivsta.Now's implementation of e-democracy features shows that they are following Sweden's guiding principle of *folkstyre* (Michalski, 1994). The lowest percentage of features implemented was 25% which was shared by five of the websites. The direct democracy parties implemented an average of 50% of the e-democracy features while the four major parties averaged 38% and the minor parties averaged 39%. On average, the direct democracy parties tend to follow Boyd's (2008) description of them as being grassroots political parties and could be described as parties that support direct e-democracy (Päivärinta & Sæbø, 2006). When comparing countries, Swedish websites averaged 43% and U.S. parties averaged 38%. U.S. major parties averaged 44% of the e-democracy features while the Swedish major parties only implemented 32% of the same features. However, the Swedish minor parties implemented 42% while U.S. minor parties only implemented 35%.

Overall Quality of Websites

When discussing quality of the websites, we are concerned with the overall total receiver control score for each website and the amount of interactivity encouraged (hence three-way communication features with high receiver control are weighted more heavily). On average the direct democracy parties provided the user with the most receiver control and the highest amount of interactivity. The major and minor parties were close to each other, but the minor parties had slightly higher quality websites than the major parties. The Swedish websites were all around more interactive than the U.S. websites, likely due to the country's tradition of *folkstyre* (Michalski, 1994). However, in the case of the U.S. websites the major parties had higher quality websites than the minor parties. Table 9 shows a summary of the implementation of each feature by party type and country.

Table 9: Feature Implementation Summary

Feature	Direction	Receiver Control	US Major	Sweden Major	US Minor	Sweden Minor	Direct Democracy
Down-loadable documents	1-way	Low	2 / 2	2 / 2	4 / 4	6 / 6	4 / 4
Privacy statement	1-way	Low	1 / 2	2 / 2	2 / 4	3 / 6	2 / 4
"Where we stand" information	1-way	Low	2 / 2	2 / 2	4 / 4	6 / 6	4 / 4
Ownership	1-way	Low	1 / 2	2 / 2	2 / 4	1 / 6	1 / 4
Statues/Bylaws	1-way	Low	2 / 2	1 / 2	2 / 4	5 / 6	3 / 4
Press kits	1-way	Low	0 / 2	2 / 2	0 / 4	5 / 6	3 / 4
Newsroom	1-way	Low	2 / 2	2 / 2	3 / 4	6 / 6	4 / 4
Educational information	1-way	Low	2 / 2	2 / 2	4 / 4	6 / 6	4 / 4
Streaming audio/video	1-way	Low	2 / 2	2 / 2	4 / 4	4 / 6	2 / 4
Links to Social Media	1-way	Low	2 / 2	2 / 2	4 / 4	6 / 6	4 / 4
Register online to vote	1-way	High	2 / 2	0 / 2	1 / 4	0 / 6	1 / 4
Contribute money	1-way	High	2 / 2	1 / 2	4 / 4	4 / 6	3 / 4
Contacts	1-way*	High	2 / 2	2 / 2	4 / 4	6 / 6	4 / 4
Press officers (contacts)	1-way*	High	0 / 2	2 / 2	3 / 4	6 / 6	2 / 4
Active e-mail to Webmaster or other technical staff	1-way*	High	1 / 2	2 / 2	4 / 4	6 / 6	4 / 4
E-mail to committee	1-way*	High	1 / 2	2 / 2	4 / 4	6 / 6	4 / 4
Subscribe to updates	2-way	Low	1 / 2	2 / 2	3 / 4	6 / 6	3 / 4
RSS feed	2-way	Low	0 / 2	2 / 2	2 / 4	2 / 6	2 / 4
"Who's My Legislator" function	2-way	Low	0 / 2	2 / 2	1 / 4	3 / 6	1 / 4
Personal layouts	2-way	High	0 / 2	0 / 2	0 / 4	1 / 6	1 / 4
Write news editors	3-way	Low	1 / 2	0 / 2	0 / 4	0 / 6	0 / 4
Sign petitions	3-way	Low	0 / 2	0 / 2	1 / 4	3 / 6	0 / 4
Online polling	3-way	Low	1 / 2	0 / 2	0 / 4	1 / 6	1 / 4
Public forums	3-way	High	1 / 2	0 / 2	1 / 4	1 / 6	4 / 4
Host party event	3-way	High	1 / 2	0 / 2	0 / 4	2 / 6	3 / 4

* If receiver gets a response, then it is 2-way. Without a response it is simply feedback.

Percentages of Features by Direction of Communication

It seems appropriate here to return to the more objective results of this study. When looking at simply whether a feature was implemented or not and ignoring the level of receiver control, the results reinforce the more subjective findings explained above. Table 10 shows the results of the average percent of the features implemented by their direction of communication and by country and party type (major, minor, or direct). As the figure shows, on average the major U.S. parties and direct democracy parties exhibit the same percentage of three-way communication features. However, the direct democracy parties have a much higher percentage

of two-way communication features implemented.

Table 10: Percent of Features Implemented

Direction of Communication	US			Sweden			Major Parties	Minor Parties	Direct Parties
	Major Parties	Minor Parties	Avg	Major Parties	Minor Parties	Avg			
1-way Communication	83%	71%	74%	83%	72%	75%	83%	72%	73%
2-way Communication*	36%	64%	57%	86%	71%	73%	61%	69%	68%
3-way Communication	40%	10%	23%	0%	23%	24%	20%	18%	40%
All Features	58%	57%	58%	68%	63%	65%	63%	61%	64%

* Features that have the potential to become two-way communication are include here

Types of E-Democracy Evident in the Websites

In comparison to the rest of the website, the "direct democracy" parties all have websites that promote direct e-democracy as defined by Päivärinta and Sæbø (2006). Except for the Swedish Pirate Party, these parties explicitly state their intentions to use the activity online to guide their action in government (at least potentially). However, it would seem that The Left's website also promotes direct e-democracy as it was the highest quality website with the most implementation of three-way communication features. As Lilleker and Malagón (2010) observed in the case of the socialist candidate in the 2007 French presidential elections, left-wing political parties' websites tend to be influenced by their valuing of diversity, collectivism, and participation. Being a political party represented in the Riksdag, and thus receiving state subventions, has provided the party with resources that the "direct democracy" parties do not have. It would seem that having similar sentiments as those parties along with the resources provided, has allowed them to build a higher quality website in terms of interactivity.

Another party website that could be regarded as promoting direct e-democracy, is that of the United States' Green Party. This website was close in quality to The Left's website. This is

interesting as Green Parties are not necessarily as far left as socialist political parties (although they do ally with socialist parties at times); however, in the case of the United States, the Green Party is the most viable party to the left of the Democrats. In comparison to its Swedish counterpart, it built a much higher quality website which could be contributed to the fact that it is likely farther left than its counterpart.

Based upon the quality of the website alone, one could count the Democrats' website as promoting e-democracy (at least since it was a bit better quality than some of the direct democracy parties). However, taking into account Katz and Kolodny's (1994) explanation that the political finance system and congressional organization are set up to reinforce the hegemony of the two major parties, it is likely that the party does not use the action on the website in any meaningful way as e-democracy may threaten the current system that they benefit from, as Päivärinta and Sæbø (2006) suggest. Therefore, this website is an implementation of partisan e-democracy.

Both the Centre and Christian Democrats built relatively high quality websites with some three-way communication and promoted a decent amount of interactivity. Being that these parties are generally conservative parties, their websites are mostly implementations of partisan e-democracy. The rest of the websites seems to be more focused on one-way communication and information provision as well as some communication with the party itself. This general lack of interactivity makes these websites fit within Päivärinta and Sæbø's (2006) definition of liberal e-democracy. It seems strange to label the Socialist Alternative website as being an implementation of liberal e-democracy since I do not doubt that they have similar sentiments to those of The Left in Sweden. However, their website promoted the least interactivity of all the websites studied. It seems these sentiments were not translated to their online presence.

However, this is a very small party with limited resources which is likely the reason for the lack

of interactivity on the website.

Discussion

We have two ways to answer the original questions of this study. We have looked at the overall quality of the websites as well as the quality in terms of the e-democracy features present. Most of the outcomes are similar in that the higher overall quality of the website indicated a higher quality of e-democracy features, but this was not absolute. In answering these questions, we will operate under the assumption that the situation affects the difference in website quality.

Question 1: How does the presence of interactive features on major political party websites in the United States compare to that of Swedish political party websites when measured by the facilitation of three-way communication?

The overall quality of the Swedish major party websites was higher than the U.S. major party sites. While the Democrat website was the highest quality out of the four, the lowest quality website was the Republican website. However, in terms of facilitating e-democracy, the U.S. websites provided more receiver control for agenda-setting and decision-making features. As with overall quality, the Democrat website was the best at this where as the Social Democrats' website did the poorest job at facilitating e-democracy.

This finding seemed somewhat surprising in light of Sweden's guiding principle of *folkstyre* and the tradition of consensus-based decision making (Michalski, 1994). While historic tradition might predict the opposite, Pierre and Widfeldt's (1994) argument of Swedish parties moving away from civil society would suggest similar findings. Also, this may be due to the fact that Sweden has a multiparty system in that left-leaning people can gravitate towards a different party that is represented in Parliament, whereas in the United States the Democrats are one of two successful parties and contain some leftist elements. The large discrepancy between the Democrats and Republicans could be related to Lilleker and Malagón's (2010) findings that the

more left-wing party's website (although the French party was a socialist party) tended to have more interactivity than the conservative party. Also, the features that encouraged three-way communication on the Democrats' website were implemented through social media. Although, we would expect that the Social Democrats would have a more interactive website than the Moderates. This would make sense as the Democrats seem to focus on the youth population (at least more than the Republicans) which makes it more likely that they would incorporate social networking sites into their website. Although, it is unlikely that participation on these websites would have any direct affect in terms of agenda setting or decision making as they are quite large parties. However, this lack of features in the case of the major Swedish parties may be attributed to the issues described by Pierre and Widfeldt (1994) in that the parties have developed closer links with the state due to state subventions and therefore, may have less regard for what the concerns of the general citizenry are.

Another indication that the online activity would not have any direct affect in the United States, and in particular on the high quality website of the Democrats, comes from the sources of money of the parties. According to the data from fec.gov, of the total amount of income the three national Democratic parties received in 2013 and 2014, 81% comes from individual donations and another 9.7% came from other committees which includes Political Action Committees. While the amount from individual sources is not broken down by itemized (over $200) and unitemized (under $200) contributions, the data on financing of individual campaigns is. Out of all the money reported by individual democrats' campaigns in 2014, 81% of their individual contributions were itemized (individual contributions accounted for about 69% of the total funding). Additionally, close to 29% of the funding of individual Democratic campaigns came from non-party committees. While this does not count as funding for the party and hence,

would not be contributed to the party's national website, it does indicate that the successful campaigns were mostly funded by special interest groups and more wealthy donors.

Question 2: How does the presence of interactive features compare between major and minor political parties' websites?

Out of the websites studies, the minor parties tended to build better quality websites and provided more receiver control when it came to agenda-setting features. However, the major parties tended to provide more receiver control when it came to decision-making features. However, it may be more interesting to compare within country to answer this question. In the case of the U.S. websites, the major parties tended to build better websites than the minor parties. Although, this may be attributed to the fact that the Democrat website received higher scores in terms of the three-way communication features, rather than major parties in general. As given by the evidence that the Constitution, Green, and Libertarian parties all had higher scores than the Republicans (at least in terms of overall quality). In the case of the Swedish websites, the minor parties built better quality websites than the major parties. These websites also, provided more receiver control in terms of e-democracy features.

When it comes to the differences between countries in comparing major and minor parties, the disparity of quality in the U.S. websites may be attributed to the disparity in funding for the parties. In terms of national party data, I was not able to find the same information for minor U.S. parties as I was for the Democrats and Republicans. While a national party may exist, none of the minor parties have organizations in the House and the Senate. Any members of Congress who are members of these parties are generally forced to caucus with one of the two major parties in order to be considered for committee assignments as these are allocated by the congressional parties as Katz and Kolodny (1994) point out. These parties may lack the

resources to contest the pricy elections in the United States, as Nichols and McChesney (2013) estimate that $10 billion was spent on the 2012 election, and instead develop a quality website. Something else that may explain this is that the Constitution Party and Socialist Alternative were included in the U.S. minor parties. These websites were generally of low quality, especially the Socialist Alternative website which was barebones on features. However, this may also be related to the general lack of resources that minor parties have.

The disparity between the major and minor parties' websites cannot be explained by an extension of Pierre and Widfeldt's (1994) conclusion. The logical extension of their conclusion would be that parties that receive a greater percentage of their funding from the state would have closer ties to the state than parties that received more funding from other sources. Of the parties that revenue data were available for, the parties that received a higher share of their funding from state subventions tended to have better quality websites, including The Left which received 87% of their revenue from such sources. Although, this could support the argument that the Swedish minor parties are on one hand more dedicated to incorporating the citizens due to their heavy funding by taxation and on the other, tend to embody the principles of "people's governance" more so than their larger counterparts.

Question 3: How do the direct e-democracy, or net-party websites compare to the rest in terms of interactivity?

Given the findings of this study, one can conclude that the parties that embrace direct/liquid democracy had the best quality websites on average both in terms of overall quality as well as the e-democracy features. However, The Left's website did seem to be better than the direct democracy parties in terms of overall quality and receiver control in agenda-setting features. The overall high quality of the direct democracy parties seems to align with Boyd's

(2008) description of the parties. Given that these parties are dedicated to the idea of grassroots/direct/liquid democracy, their websites appropriately reflect this with high levels of interactivity and appropriate implementation of agenda-setting and decision-making features. These websites could also be seen as implementations of the grassroots strategy as outlined by Löfgren and Smith (2003).

For the most part, the literature predicted that political parties tend to use their websites to offer information and facilitate some contact between the party and the public (Ferber, Foltz, & Pugliese, 2003). While Ferber et al. (2005a) suggest that government websites may not be appropriate venues for forums and discussion due to a nonpartisanship standards, one might expect that political party websites would be just the place for that. However, this did not turn out to be the case as Ferber et al.'s (2007) study would predict. Furthermore, if a survey of the webmasters had been done as Ferber et al. (2005a) did of the chief technology officers of each legislature, the responses would most likely have been the same for most of the parties.

Lilleker and Malagón's (2010) findings of Royal's site being more interactive, tend to suggest that left-wing parties would be more interactive. This study found this to be true to some extent in that The Left and United States' Green Party (these being the most left of the main stream parties in their respective countries) were found to be highly interactive as the direct democracy parties were. Lilleker and Jackson (2008) note that multi-directional conversations could lead to exchanges that build communities which could lead to participatory and deliberative democracy. This suggests that the left-wing parties would have more interactive websites to build community. The direct democracy parties built websites that seem to be an electronic model of the Paris Commune in that the activity online would directly influence, if not control completely, the actions of any elected officials. The support shown for the Paris

Commune by Marx (1891) and Lenin (1918) would suggest that far left parties would build websites similar to the direct democracy parties.

The Countries Compared

In comparing the two countries' averages, we can look at them with or without the direct democracy parties. In either case the Swedish websites on average were more interactive in general and provided higher receiver control on agenda-setting features. However, the U.S. websites provided higher receiver control on decision-making features. While still lower than the U.S. average when including direct democracy parties, the average for Swedish websites dropped heavily when removing the direct democracy parties from the average. These findings support Michalski's (1994) description of Swedish politics in that their websites tended to encourage greater participation of the public. Whether the parties use the public interaction on their websites as a director of their action in government or as merely an indication of how the public feels about a particular topic, it does bring the government closer to the people as their democratic tradition encourages. However, these findings conflict with Pierre and Widfeldt's (1994) argument.

Furthermore, the higher levels of interactivity in the case of the Swedish websites could be due to the fact that they have a multiparty system. As Mukherjee (2011) suggests, multiparty party systems tend to be more inclusive and competitive systems in which participation, deliberation, and consensus are necessary for the system to function. This may translate to their websites encouraging more participation and deliberation through interactivity.

Question 4: Do the source and level of resources available to a party play a role in determining the quality of the party websites?

From these results, it would seem that to build a high quality website in terms of

interactivity does not necessarily require tremendous resources. In general, parties that had larger amounts of resources (especially those coming from private donors) had poorer quality websites. This suggests that Sorauf's (2003) concerns over political finance systems that rely on private donations amounts to the purchasing of influence, translates to websites being built that are not concerned with encouraging public participation.   However, this may be a result of a lack of will to dedicate resources towards the party's website. This may be an element at play in the case of the U.S. major party websites; both the Democratic and Republican parties have vast resources but yet the Democrats' website was of much higher quality than the Republicans. In general, it would seem that Pierre and Widfeldt's (1994) conclusion does not translate to the quality of websites universally, especially in the case of The Left having the highest quality website. It would seem that The Left had the resources, albeit the lowest of the six Swedish parties that data were available for, and the will to implement a quality website and still contest elections successfully.

The findings shown in Table 10 support the above discussion as well as reinforce the finding of Ferber et. al. (2003, 2005b, 2007). It would seem that providing information seems to be the general focus of mainstream political parties, rather than providing new means of participation for citizens. However, some of the minor parties (most notably the U.S. Green Party and The Left) and the direct democracy parties seem to be dedicated to new ways to allow citizens to participate in politics by building higher quality websites with more interactivity and explicitly stating that they intend to use the online interaction to guide their actions in politics.

It is not entirely clear if the source and level of resources have a direct effect on the quality of the websites. And in general, I do not think we can clearly see a particular difference between the two countries while looking at all the parties. However, if we look at parties with

similar sentiments about public participation, then we do see a case where parties that have larger

amounts of resources such as The Left, and to some extent the Green Party, built better quality

websites than say Socialist Alternative.

Policy Recommendations

According to the literature, engaging the public more could increase participation and thus improve our democracy. A "perfect democracy" depends upon one's ideas of democracy, but in this case I am referring to Dahl's (1989) definition as well as Locke's (1690). At the heart of this issue is voter participation which may have some relation to the amount of public participation encouraged by the political party websites. According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), Sweden has a voter turnout of 80% as a percentage of the voting age population in their most recent election (International IDEA, 2014a). In comparison the United States had 34% voter turnout in its most recent election. While some may argue that it was this low because it was a non-presidential election, in 2012 the United States had 55% turnout. Additionally, 2014's voter turnout was the lowest percentage since 1946 (International IDEA, 2014b). For anyone concerned with the direction of our democracy (if you can even call 30%-50% of eligible voters voting a democracy), these are scary statistics. Below is a list of policy recommendations that I would suggest be implemented in pursuit of this goal.

Funding Political Parties

This recommendation stems from the fact that the Swedish minor parties tended to have better quality websites than their U.S. counterparts. As Katz and Kolodny (1994) explain that the current provision of funds to political parties under FECA discourages the development of new parties and the success of any party other than the Republicans or Democrats, and hence reinforces their duopoly. Partially related to this would be to institute campaign finance reform, but that is the subject of research beyond the scope of this study. By providing greater amounts of funding to minor parties, it may allow them to compete in elections more successfully and

have the resources to dedicate to building websites that encourage participation.

It would seem that minor parties tend to have websites that have more three-way communication. With a multitude of parties, minor party strategies seem to fall less under Löfgren and Smith's (2003) mass and cartel party models and closer to grassroots parties. This is generally the case in Sweden as the minor party websites encouraged more interactivity than the Social Democrats and Moderates. These two major parties seemed to develop websites that were focused on the provision of information and campaigning for votes. The major parties in the United States are closer to the cartel party model as there are few real members, while the Democrats website does not necessarily show this, both are positioned to support the status quo, as Katz and Kolodny (1994) would suggest. Additionally, in the case of the Democrats' website, pushing the discussion to social media may be the best way to prevent it from happening. Since minor parties tend to be closer to the grassroots party type, they are more likely to build more websites that promote more interactivity which could encourage more public participation. Providing funding to minor parties may prevent a lack of resources from being a barrier to building websites that encourage greater participation.

Although website quality was not primarily based upon access to resources, providing greater resources may allow minor parties to have more visible campaigns. While this would not overcome the structural barriers that exist for third parties in the United States (e.g. first past the post, single member districts), more visible campaigns could have an effect on voting choice. Increasing minor party success could increase competition between political parties. The increased competition could increase voter participation directly and force the two major political parties to compete for votes with other parties.

Incentivize Direct Democracy within Political Parties

A related policy recommendation is to incentivize methods of direct democracy within Political Parties. To some extent this could be used as a reasonable precondition to receiving greater state subventions. By providing incentives to political parties to be responsive to party members, it may encourage greater participation within political parties and thus more citizen input would be used when setting the agenda or making decisions. For direct democracy to be implemented it does not necessarily have to be at the party level; however, political parties are an important part of our democracy. After all, the Swedish Direct Democrats state that they do not have the goal to abolish traditional politics, but only to supplement it with direct democracy (Direct Democrats, n.d.).

Part of this endeavor would be to incentivize the building of a highly interactive website and to institute in the bylaws some official use of the online interaction, as well as interaction with people outside of the Internet. If the people were to know that their input is being utilized by a political party, they may increase their participation in the party, as well as their participation in the rest of politics.

If we could determine a way to open our political system to more political parties as well as encourage those parties to be responsive to the citizens, we may be able to develop a better system of government that values participation. This does not just come from my personal bias against the Republicans and Democrats (as I do not feel either represents my interests), but also has support from previous research. Most notably that of Mukerjee's (2011) study that concluded that the greater the effective number of parliamentary parties was in a country, the better the outcomes of democracy were, at least in terms of human well-being.

Conclusion

The general finding of this study are mixed in terms of encouraging participation. Much of the websites seem to implement mostly top-down political communication and hence, lack the ability to encourage greater participation, much less encourage any fundamental changes to democracy. It would seem that the quality of a party's website is a function of the party's ideology, the will to allocate resources to website development, and the availability of said resources. The results generally support the literature that is skeptical of e-democracy changing politics as we know it. Unless we find a way to have political parties encourage more internal participation, the status quo will continue. The recommendations outlined above are only a small number of possibilities to accomplish this.

The parties that tend to do the best job at building websites with high levels of interactivity are both parties that are based upon the Internet as in the case of the direct democracy parties, as well as parties that tend to have ideologies that value participation and collectivism. The Left and the United States Green Party are the parties that are furthest to the left in their respective countries (in the case of the Green Party it is the furthest left out of the parties that contest the presidential election and have a state party in a majority of the states). It would seem that they have built high quality websites as a means of supplementing their encouragement of participation outside of the Internet. It is these parties that have built websites that provide potential for Dahl's (1989) "perfect democracy." By providing information to the user and three-way communication features that they are dedicated to using, they generally meet Dahl's (1989) five criteria.

As the previous studies have found, most of the political party websites are a venue for pushing the party line and attempting to collect donations. However, these finding also suggest

that mainstream political parties in both countries and the United States in general, have something to learn from the small direct democracy parties. Mainstream political parties could gain by implementing interactive features by gaining more loyal party members and increasing the public's perception of the parties. It would seem that in the case of the United States, our systems of representation and political finance require an overhaul in order to have a possibility of encouraging greater participation. By making participation count with greater power being given to the people, in addition to encouraging more participation, one could expect a more "perfect democracy" to replace an oligarchy. After all, any country that proclaims its support of democracy should do its best to encourage the most participation of the people in that system of government as possible; hence the inclusion of *demos* in the origin of the word.

Limitations of the Study

Although the knowledge gained from this study gives us some valuable insights into what may contribute to political parties implementing ICTs that encourage interactivity and greater public participation, this study is not without its limitations. One of the most notable limitations is that of relying upon Google Translate to be able to code the Swedish websites. This may have led to some missed features that would have counted but the names did not translate perfectly. Another limitation (that affects almost all studies, except for the most highly funded of them) is one of limited resources. The major area in which this study could have improved with greater resources would be to incorporate more coders and implement inter-coder reliability.

While the results are interesting and do bring to light something about political parties' presence online, this study may have analyzed too few websites which is also related to limited resources. A larger number of websites would provide more data and the results would be more applicable. In addition to this, another limitation is that the United States has primarily a two-

party system. As mentioned before, what we considered "minor" parties for this study are not of

the same status in the United States as they are in Sweden. Also, while the results may provide

important information regarding the websites of political parties in the United States and

Sweden, comparing only two countries may limit external validity.

Another factor that contributes to the limitations is that the selection of features may not

have been the best set of features to look at. These were mostly adapted from the list of features

that Ferber et. al. (2007) found in common with the websites of the Democrats and Republicans.

Their study was done over seven years ago, in which time new features may have arisen that

were missed. Also, just because the features may have been appropriate for U.S. political party

websites, does not mean they are the best for comparing between countries. Most notable is the

lack of registering online to vote and signing petitions in the case of the Swedish websites.

Registering online to vote could either not be legal in Sweden, or not necessary for political

parties to encourage registering to vote since they have a much higher percent of voter turnout.

Also, their political system may not have an official recognition of petitions. Relating to the

features, another limitation that arises is that the websites were analyzed based upon the presence

of features rather than looking at the quality of implementation of the features.

Future Work

One of the most interesting findings of this study is that it would seem that a political

party having a highly interactive website that includes three-way communication features is

mostly dependent upon the ideology and the motivation to build an interactive website. The

reasons why some political parties build better websites than others requires further

investigation. A future study, possibly involving interviews with key individuals in website

development, to uncover the intent to use the online interaction as well as incorporating the

usage data for the website might reveal more about this subject. Additionally, this study should

include a deeper analysis of what combination of political ideologies would lead a political party

to build a highly interactive website. Another idea for future work that arises from the

limitations would be to study the quality of implementation of the three-way communication

features.

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Appendix 1: Scale for Measuring Level of Receiver Control

Category	Scale	Definition
Low receiver control	1	One-way hyperlink with unclear destination
	2	One-way hyperlink with defined destination
	3	Hyperlinks created with user input, language is dynamic using second person
	4	User has control over read and link options, video play is optional, content can be downloaded
	5	Users have control over interfacing with content (above) and can send information
High receiver control	6	Users can send and receive information, i.e. debate forums
	7	Users have multiple options to send and receive information, their input has transformational power – can be seen, i.e. text-only chat
	8	Users can upload content, and can receive feedback
	9	User can choose time, type and amount of information sent and received, the information sent is transformed by the receiver and the transformation is transparent; communication is asymmetrical
	10	Sender and receiver have equal levels of control; communication is conversational

Source: Lilleker and Malagón (2010)