Y490 Politics of the Internet

October 8, 2009
AOL as a Negative Example of Online Democracy

- Limits on sending email to lists (justified as part of anti-spam efforts)
- Monitoring and censorship of material posted to the site
- No town hall or town meeting forum for members
Key Questions (Chadwick, ch. 5)

- What are the philosophical origins of e-democracy?
- Is geographical community and face-to-face interaction essential for democracy?
- Do virtual communities help or hinder democracy?
- Why is it so difficult to be an active citizen? Will the Internet help?
- Do corporate sector discussion forums provide deliberative public spheres?
- How useful are the concepts of social capital and public sphere for interpreting the Internet’s impact on democratic politics?
E-Mobilization

- Uses of the Internet by interest groups and social movements for political recruitment, organization, and campaigning.

- Three main themes:
  - Traditional interest groups (restructuring)
  - New forms of mobilization
  - Pure Internet-based direct action
Interest groups

- Interest groups are part of civil society and try to influence public policy.
- They achieve influence primarily through the collection and transmission of strategic information to the three branches of government (sometimes called lobbying).
- They may directly provide campaign funds to presidents and legislators who want to get elected to re-elected.
- They may decide to take disputes over executive decision or legislation to the judiciary.
A social movement is a large group of people focused on carrying out, resisting, or undoing large-scale social changes.

Examples:
- Civil rights
- Anti-war
- Environmental
- Pro-Life

Social movements may include coalitions of organized interests and interest groups.
Types of Interest Groups

- Radical vs. Status Quo
- Single-issue vs. Multiple-issue
- Categories:
  - Producer associations
  - Consumer groups
  - Environmental groups
  - Civil liberties and human rights groups
- Peak associations: e.g. U.S. Chamber of Commerce, AFL-CIO
Examples of Large Interest Groups

- National Rifle Association (NRA)
- American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)
- American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO)
- National Association of Manufacturers (NAM)
- U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- American Medical Association (AMA)
- American Bar Association (ABA)
- Sierra Club
Interest group tactics

- Nearly all groups testify at hearings, lobby government officials, make informal contacts with legislators, present research or technical information, send letters to members to inform them about their activities, enter into coalitions with other groups.

- Some interest groups publicize candidate-voting records, conduct direct mail fundraising efforts, buy issue advocacy advertisements in the print or electronic media, contribute time and staff to election campaigns, endorse candidates, and participate in protests and demonstrations.
Interest group success

- How do we measure interest group success?
  - Passed legislation
  - Campaign contributions
  - Public opinion
  - Media visibility
- Are there specific types of interest groups that are more successful than others?
- What are the factors that make them successful?
Traditional Campaign Methods

- Letter writing
- Phone canvassing
- Direct mail
- Newsletters
- Petitions
- Targeting of media outlets
On-Line Campaign Methods

- Extensive use of multi-media and interactivity to engage potential supporters
- Fund-raising via email and web sites
- On-line solicitation of support for petitions and email campaigns
- Setting meetings and rallies on-line as a supplement to the use of telephone networks

Example: MoveOn.org
Examples of On-Line Campaigns

- **Lotus MarketPlace**
  - Software developed around 1990 by Lotus Corporation for mining data about market behavior of households
  - Program cancelled after pressure from EFF and other groups with privacy concerns

- **Clipper Chip**
  - Proposed by the Clinton Administration, a chip that would permit the National Security Agency to decode encrypted data (on the theory that nobody else could)
  - Killed after strong opposition from EFF, CPSR and ACM
Electronic Frontier Foundation

- Founded in 1990 by Mitch Kapor of Lotus
- John Perry Barlow was co-founder, still on the board
- Mission: to defend free speech, privacy, innovation and consumer rights on the Internet
Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility (CPSR)

- Founded in 1981 by engineers (mostly) at Xerox PARC and Stanford in response to Reagan administration nuclear strategies.
- It is a “public-interest alliance of people concerned about the impact of information and communications technology on society.”
- Members in 30 countries
- Main concerns: freedom, privacy, Internet governance
Association for Computing Machinery (ACM)

- Professional association of computer scientists
- Organized into special interest groups
- Has a separate office for public policy
- Concerns:
  - Advancing computing as a discipline
  - Balancing intellectual property and innovation
  - Protecting privacy
  - Assuring the security and reliability of systems
More Examples of Online Organizing

- Environmental Defense Fund
- PETA
- Zapatistas
- Smart Mobs
  - Flash Mob in Grand Central Station
  - Food Court Musical
  - Redheads Protest Wendy’s