Digital Politics Divide:
The Digital Divide in Building Political e-Practices

Andrea Calderaro

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Abstract

The study explores the relation between Internet and politics from a cross-national perspective of analysis. In the domain of the political sciences, the Internet has been welcomed for its potential to facilitate political practice. However, it is also commonly noted that the Internet is not equally distributed and not everybody can equally make the most of its potential. This is why the Digital Divide is perceived as the obstacle which limits the potential of the Internet to influence politics.

Today, we are entering the third decade after the advent of the WWW, and the Internet is used far more broadly worldwide. We also have much more empirical evidence about Internet use. However, most research until now has concentrated on Western countries which have similar political systems, and therefore neglects a larger comparative perspective.

This study empirically resizes the relation of causality between the Digital Divide and the influence of the Internet on politics. I explore how other contextual factors are determinant in this regard. In order to test this empirically, I set up a dataset tracking internet use, internet infrastructure, internet politics, blogging practices and social, economic and democratic factors of over 190 countries. Through cross-national analysis, first, I size the current status of the Digital Divide across countries. Second, I explore whether and how this scenario affects the inequalities in using the Internet for practicing politics. By following a constructivist approach, I explore not only how *political parties* are unequally present online across countries to perform conventional forms of politics, but also how *citizens* and *social movements* use the Internet to practice civic engagement. I pay particular attention to how people use social network organization tools to empower their own information narratives.

My empirical findings confirm that the Digital Divide plays a limited role in explaining the relation between the Internet and politics. Rather, the use of the Internet to practice politics is mainly determined by the political context in which political actors operate. In this framework, the Digital Divide is only one of the several factors characterizing the national context.

Jury: Prof. Jan A.G.M. van Dijk (University of Twente), Prof. R. Michael Alvarez (California Institute of Technology), Prof. Alexander Trechsel (EUI, Supervisor), Andrea Calderaro.

Bio

Andrea Calderaro is currently a lecturer in New Technology and International Relations at the University "La Sapienza" of Rome. He holds his PhD from the department of Social and Political Sciences of the European University Institute (EUI), where he also holds his MA of Research. He took his MS in Sociology at the University "La Sapienza" of Rome, Italy. In addition to the EUI, he was educated at the California Institute of Technology (CalTech, USA – visiting researcher), Oxford Internet Institute (University of Oxford, UK - SDP) and at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Science Sociales (EHESS, France).

His field of research explores the Digital Divide and the link between its dimension and the various categories of political practice, themes around which his publications focus on. His publications include the co-editing of the inaugural issue of the International Journal of E-Politics - IJEP ("E-Politics in a Global Context", 2010).

He is associate editor of the IJEP, and member of several programme committees, including the steering committee on "Internet Politics" within the framework of the European Consortium in Political Research (ECPR), for which he is chairing the section on "Internet and Politics" at the ECPR General Conference (Reykjavik, 2011).

He has been speaker and panel chair at the International Communication Association (ICA), International Studies Association (ISA), American Political Science Association (APSA), European Consortium of Political Research (ECPR) and the Association of Internet Researches (AoIR).