Chapter 9

Civic Society

The networking potential of the Internet and its ability to link transnational advocacy networks, grassroots political organizations, and the independent media around the world has aroused hopes that civic society can be nurtured and mobilized through digital technologies. ‘Civic society’ is understood to refer to the multiple organizations buffering between citizens and the state, including parties already discussed in the previous chapter, as well as the news media, traditional interest groups such as trade unions and professional associations, in addition to alternative social movements like environmentalist organizations, the women’s movement, human rights groups and peace activists. The news industry were among the first organizations venturing online, while transnational advocacy networks have been some of the most active organizations taking advantage of the Web for mobilizing, publicity and interaction. Stealth protest coalitions have formed like virtual guerilla armies around issues like world trade, fuel taxes and genetically modified food, then subsequently dissipated, only to reappear in different guise at a later date. But what have been the political consequences of these developments? After reviewing debates in the literature theorizing about these issues, we examine evidence comparing civic society worldwide by focusing upon three questions:

?? Which news media, interest groups and new social movements are online throughout the world?
?? What is the potential impact of online civic society on political participation, community building, and democracy?
?? What explains this distribution, in particular how far does democratization or technological diffusion foster the spread of civic societies on the Internet?

Theories about the Democratic Impact on Civic Society

As always, there are alternative interpretations about whether the virtual glass is half-empty or half-full, depending upon the normative foundations of democratic theory underlying any evaluations. On the one hand, cyberoptimists hope that the Internet will prove the great equalizer. Digital technologies may serve to strengthen the institutions of civic society, widening the opportunities for information, communication, and participation in the electronic public sphere, allowing well-organized and nimble David’s to run circles
around lumbering corporations and international bodies\(^2\). The characteristics of the Internet to shrink costs, maximize speed, broaden reach and eradicate distance provides transnational advocacy networks with an effective tool for mobilization, organization and expression that can potentially maximize their leverage in the global arena\(^3\). If what matters are openness in the marketplace of ideas and ways to link with like-minded advocates, then the Web delivers an equal opportunity soapbox. Protest movements have traditionally relied upon activities like street theatre, public demonstrations and direct action to challenge authorities\(^4\). The Internet has altered this dynamic by electronically promoting the diffusion of protest ideas and tactics efficiently and quickly across national borders\(^5\). The mobilization of transnational advocacy networks has caught policymakers off guard. The World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle in late November 1999 exemplified this process, bringing together an alliance between labor and environmental activists – the Turtle Teamster partnership – along with a network of consumer advocates, anti-capitalists, and grassroots movements that attracted a firestorm of media attention. Web sites, like that maintained by the International Civil Society (ICS), provided hourly updates about the major demonstrations in Seattle to a network of almost 700 NGOs in some 80 countries including environmentalists, students, religious groups, human rights organizations, trade unions and related movements\(^6\). The Seattle meeting was a particularly dramatic demonstration of the potential of this medium but it is far from alone; other well-known examples include the anti-land-mine campaign in the mid to late-1990s, the anti-globalization protests against the World Bank and IMF in Prague in December 1999, and the widespread anti-fuel tax protests that disrupted European politics and unsettled governments in October 2000\(^7\). In Chicago in 1968, protestors chanted 'The whole world is watching' as TV broadcast pictures of police beating demonstrators outside the Democratic Convention. But such publicity depends upon journalistic gatekeepers, and today campaigners can do it directly for themselves, bypassing the traditional news media by organizing a few cheap web cams broadcasting live pictures, lending local activities a worldwide platform. To learn about Burma, for example, you can listen to the speeches of human rights activist, Aung San Suu Kyi, or read reports by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International or Free Burma Coalition, an activist network, although you can also learn about the news from the government's perspective on their web site\(^8\). Many environmentalists have incorporated the multimedia capabilities of the Internet into their direct action strategies. Global Forest Watch, for example, is a transnational network of scientists and local groups regularly monitoring, recording and reporting the erosion of forests, using digital maps and web cams to publicize abuses by the timber industry and agribusiness, providing a flexible kind of regulatory process working outside of formal
government structures. The Internet also facilitates a host of independent newspapers, magazines and radio stations, at minimal cost compared with the investment required for a traditional printing plant and distribution networks, or broadcasting transmission channels. Digital outlets can be particularly important under authoritarian regimes, where protest activities and the independent news media are severely constrained or silenced, although cases like the Falun Gong in China and anti-state dissidents in Cuba illustrate that the authorities can move effectively to block and suppress Internet use by insurgent forces.

Many communitarian theorists adhering to the values of direct or ‘strong’ democracy have also expressed hopes that at the most diffuse level the Internet can strengthen virtual grassroots groups, moving from traditional ‘communities of place’ based on physical location and ascribed identities towards ‘communities of choice’ based on collaborating together on common interests. Howard Rheingold has presented one of the strongest arguments that electronic bulletin boards, discussion groups, and listservs can be used to exchange ideas, debate issues and mobilize opinion, building lasting relationships and social bonds. The sociologist Amatai Etzioni also believes that the Internet can foster virtual communities, as well as complementing, strengthening and sustaining existing social ties in the non-virtual world. In similar vein, Tsagarousianou hopes that new information technologies can revitalize civic networks in urban neighborhoods.

Yet more pessimistic prognostications can also be heard. Ayres warns that cyberspace diffusion among NGOs has a cautionary side: while significantly enhancing the potential for disparate individuals and groups to collectively pool resources and strategy, the Internet also holds the power to turn unreliable and unverifiable information into global anarchy. Bimber argues that the process may produce accelerated or hyperpluralism, in which the Internet reinforces the fragmentation of the American political system moving from interest-based group politics towards a more fluid, issue-based group politics with less institutional coherence. In contrast, others fear that instead of empowering new actors, digital technologies may instead function to reinforce the power of established interests and organizations. Taylor Boas warns that authoritarian regimes like Cuba restrict the Internet for dissident forces, while allowing pro-state groups full access, as well as using the medium to boost inward investment, marketing of its products, tourism, and traditional areas of development like education and health. The Cuban government’s official web site serves to present an official face to the world. McChesney fears that the commercialization of the Internet as a tool of mass entertainment, funded by advertising, will entrench the power of mega media conglomerates in the global marketplace, allowing international corporations like Disney, Time Warner and Bertelsmann to ‘don a new set of clothing.’ The commercial
side of the Web threatens to overwhelm the public sector as the number of dot.coms has been expanding far faster than the governmental and non-profit organizations. The Internet Software Consortium estimate that in January 2000 out of 72 million domain hosts worldwide there were about 25 million dot.coms, compared with 0.9 million dot.orgs and 0.7 million dot.gos. Non-retail corporate web pages are often designed as another form of public relations wallpaper, promoting glossy images and favorable puff but providing minimal two-way interaction, even by email. Moreover, as with parties, it is not clear whether there is a ‘balanced’ or equal representation in civic society: Hill and Hughes examined a random sample of American interest groups on the web and found that conservative web sites were on average larger, glitzier and more visible than their liberal counterparts, although the latter were better networked in terms of links. There is also widespread concern that although the new political resources on the web are potentially open to all with Internet access, in practice these will serve to reinforce the voices of those who are already most active and engaged, as well as those who are already among the most well-informed from traditional news outlets, rather than reaching the inactive in society. To explore the evidence underpinning these views, we first need to establish how the news media and transnational advocacy networks have exploited the potential of this new medium, then go on to assess the possible consequences of this development.

Which News Media are Online?

The news industry has been some of the most active players in the online world. Journalists were among the first to jump on the Internet bandwagon although conflicted between fears of being left behind, like the quill pen and illustrated parchment in the age of the Gutenberg press, and fears about the economic consequences of ‘giving away the store’. In the 1970s ‘online’ meant costly investments using special Viewtron and videotex news accessed over phone lines. In the early 1980s, electronic versions of eleven US newspapers like the L.A. Times and Washington Post were accessible, expensively and slowly, via proprietary services like CompuServe, Prodigy and America Online. In the early 1990s newspapers like the San Jose Mercury News and Albuquerque Tribune experimented with online textual retrieval of newspaper stories. By 1993, 20 daily newspapers had ventured online and by 1996 there were about 1000. Today AJR Newslink estimate that worldwide there are probably over 5,400 online newspaper sites, broadly defined to include major metros, non-dailies, the business press, the alternative press like the Village Voice, specialty newspapers like D.C.’s Roll Call or Seattle’s Gay News, as well as promotional or limited content web sites. Yahoo lists even more news sites, although again not all providing daily updates, including 6600 newspapers, 2500 magazines, 8500 radio stations, and 538 television stations,
not counting the 14,000 general sites devoted to television. Surf the Internet café over breakfast and you can browse Le Monde, the Jerusalem Post, the Washington Post, or (my morning reading) the London Times. At first some newspapers provided only a shop-window announcing their existence, but the content rapidly expanded until many provide all the daily news printed in the paper version and more, such as special archives, audio interviews, photomontages, rolling banner news headlines, readers polls, and links to related sites.

Radio and television ventured online shortly after the press. Twiddle the Internet dial and you can listen 24/7 to live streaming audio of samba from Rio, or perhaps, given your particular tastes, blues from Chicago, Celtic gigs from Connemara, swing big bands from New York, or the BBC World Service in Arabic, Spanish, Russian, Chinese and Welsh. Technologies morph into each other, with the web becoming available through television sets, just as broadband TV can be watched online via common software like RealPlayer and Windows Media Player. The most extensive online news and current affairs services have been provided by public broadcasters, such as the British BBC, Canadian CBC, Australian ABC, the American PBS, as well as by some of the American commercial networks like ABC and CNN. Figure 9.1 shows the typical formats commonly offered by these web sites, including regularly updated headline news, sections for weather, sport, and kids, as well as search indexes, archives with in-depth programs, tickertape stock reports, and special features. Live coverage of parliament is also available. Nevertheless in many countries so far online television companies have often provided little streaming audiovisual contents. Many TV sites currently remain strictly promotional containing little more than corporate advertising, providing daily TV schedules and information, as well as company reports about the organization, but minimal updated news contents or programming.

As discussed fully in subsequent chapters, this context is rapidly altering the typical profile of the news audience. Pew surveys in spring 2000 indicate that one-in-three Americans go online for news at least once a week, compared to 20% in 1998. And 15% say they receive daily news from the Internet, up from 6% two years ago. At the same time, regular viewing of network news has fallen from 38% to 30% over this period, while local news viewing has declined from 64% to 56%. Internet users are also slightly less likely than non-users to watch morning shows like Today and Good Morning America and evening news magazines like 60 Minutes, 20/20, or Dateline. Regular use of Internet news is even higher among the younger generation, and there has also been a more moderate decline in newspaper and magazine readership. Online news has probably penetrated less widely in countries with lower patterns of Internet access, nevertheless there are many indicators of its
potential market, for example streaming financial news headlines are widely accessed via i-
mobile phones in Japan, and the BBC is among the top-10 most popular sites in the UK. When asked about a range of activities available via the Internet, many Europeans expressed interest in reading news and magazines online, especially in Scandinavian countries where Internet use is among the highest in the world.

**Which newspapers are online?**

Given what we know about the global inequalities in Internet access, how far are similar geographic patterns also evident in the spread of the online news media? The distribution of newspapers and television stations across different countries is more difficult to establish than the classification of parliamentary, party or government web sites, in part because a simple keyword or indexed search using common engines reveals the multiplicity of organizations supplying digital ‘news’ in one form or another, ranging from full text versions of national and regional daily papers down to local newspapers, electronic magazines and periodicals, as well as radio stations, TV sites, and news organizations. Portal sites such as Yahoo! and Lycos are content aggregators providing access to Associated Press, Reuters and Bloomberg wire service news, and they ran classified ads too. Microsoft owns the Microsoft Network, Sidewalk city guides and Slate, the high-profile webzine. Many journalists also run their own personal web sites, including phenomena like the Drudge Report. Like ants in the kitchen, ‘news’, broadly defined, pops up all over the web.

The best way to document the scope and reach of this phenomenon worldwide is to draw on established databases that regularly monitor online news media. The AJRNewslink, run by Newslink Associates and the American Journalism Review, provides probably the most comprehensive list that is currently available. The one major limitation with relying upon a single source such as the AJRNewslink is that this list is maintained by an organization based in the United States, which may provide bias the results towards more comprehensive coverage of American newspapers and TV stations than those elsewhere, for example in Africa or the Middle East. The information provided by this database was therefore crosschecked and verified against three other similar sites: one run by Editor & Publisher, which also provided details about the geographic spread of news outlets; the World News Index which indexes all daily news sources on the Internet, and Yahoo’s more eclectic list of news media in each country. Even with multiple sources, another important limitation of this exercise is that each web site is counted equally: whether a glitzy, continually updated, content-rich, all bells-and-whistles 24/7 news audio-video broadband TV station or a weekly online magazine or quarterly periodical containing the contents page and details about how to subscribe. Moreover the boundaries of ‘news’, always permeable, have become even
fuzzier. If defining what counts as a ‘party’ creates headaches, then demarcating ‘the news media’ generates an instant migraine. The process of calculating the number of online media outlets is not dissimilar to counting tadpoles wriggling in a jam-jar. For all these reasons, the data should be regarded as broadly indicative, a rough and ready tally, rather than in any sense a definitive global census. For comparison with the traditional news media, these estimates can be compared with the number of daily newspapers published in each country, as monitored worldwide by UNESCO.

Table 9.1 and Figure 9.2 about here]

The global distribution of online newspapers is displayed in Table 9.1 and mapped in Figure 9.2. The most important comparison for this study is less the number of online newspapers in each region – which often closely reflects the degree or concentration or dispersion in the newspaper market – than the proportion of newspapers currently available online within each region or country. The latter – representing the density of online newspapers - provides the best gauge of the penetration of the Internet society per se. The results of the comparison suggest that about 2500 or four-out-of-ten daily newspapers are now online worldwide. This is a more conservative estimate than some others because this figure excludes non-dailies and promotional newspapers and magazines sites. Newspapers in Western Europe have the highest online newspaper density, with almost two thirds of all papers have a digital version on the web. North America, South America and Scandinavia come next, all with about half their papers online.

North America leads the world in terms of the sheer number of online daily newspapers, in part because of the penetration of Internet access in these countries as well as the fragmentation of traditional news outlets in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The physical size of the continent coupled with historically poor national distribution systems, along with the dispersal of power in the federal system of government, means that the U.S. and Canadian press largely serves local and regional communities, despite a few notable exceptions with a coast-to-coast readership like USA Today, the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times and, north of the border, the Toronto Globe and Mail. With over one thousand online papers, the United States is a striking outlier across the world, and only the vast and diverse population of India has nearly as many newspaper outlets.

In contrast Scandinavia has fewer printed or digital newspapers, but a far higher per capita newspaper readership. Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia Pacific, and Central and Eastern Europe all lag behind with a lower online newspaper density than average. There are 67 daily newspapers online in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa, compared with twice as many in the UK alone, and 1247 in the United States. The situation in the post-Communist societies is
somewhat surprising given the distribution of Internet access observed in earlier chapters and relatively high levels of literacy and education in the population, suggesting that potentially the news media in these countries could catch up fast within the next few years. Inequalities in the distribution of online newspapers are also evident by levels of socioeconomic and democratic development: about half of all newspapers are online in the richest nations compared with just over one quarter of all newspapers in the poorest. Yet it should be stressed that the contrasts by levels of development are evident in both new and old media, with sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East lagging behind in the total number of daily newspapers printed in these regions, as well as in per capita readership. The Internet is therefore largely reinforcing and exacerbating long-established global disparities in access to the press, although the technology is not necessarily causing the differences among rich and poor societies, which antecedes the birth of the World Wide Web.

[Table 9.2 about here]

The worldwide distribution of all different types of media outlets - including almost twelve thousand web sites for newspapers, magazines, radio stations, TV sites and news service organizations - is shown in Table 9.2. This data is drawn from an alternative source, the Editor and Publisher database. The regional classification of countries is slightly different (Mexico and Central America is categorized with South America, and Central, Eastern and Western Europe are counted together) but the overall pattern largely confirms the geographic map already drawn from information in the AJRNewslink database. In terms of the number of web sites, the United States dominates with almost eight thousand online media across all categories, representing two-thirds of all newspapers, magazines and radio stations, and three quarters of all TV sites and news services. As noted earlier, this predominance could be attributed to the use of databases compiled and monitored by an organization based in the United States, although roughly similar regional patterns are confirmed by analysis of other available media databases. This pattern probably reflects America's international dominance of the television production process and ownership of entertainment conglomerates like Time-Warner and Disney Corp - it is no coincidence that Silicon Valley is next door to Hollywood - along with the widespread penetration of the Internet access in American society. Europe ranks in second place across all categories, with almost two thousand online news media sites, and at the bottom of the chart the fewest online media are located in Africa and the Middle East.
Explaining the Distribution of Online Newspapers

What explains this global distribution? Figure 9.3 examines the simple correlations between the number of online newspapers and the number of printed newspapers in a country. The results show a strong correlation although a closer examination of the scatterplot of this relationship in Figure 9.3 reveals some important outliers to this pattern. Many of the Anglo-American English-speaking nations have more online newspapers than would be expected by the distribution of the printed press, including the UK, Canada, Australia and Ireland, perhaps reflecting and also contributing towards the predominance of the English language on the Internet. In contrast some societies with minimal Internet access among the public, such as Pakistan, Russia and Greece, have many more printed papers than digital versions.

To test these relationships further regression analysis was used, entering the usual indicators of socioeconomic, technological and political development in the first model, for comparison with previous chapters, then adding the number of newspapers in the second, with the number of online papers per country as the dependent variable. The results of the first model in Table 9.3 show that the proportion of the population that is online is a strong and significant predictor of online newspapers. This remains significant in the second model, although the number of printed newspapers is also important. Most strikingly this provides further independent corroboration that, just like the distribution of party and government web sites, technological diffusion is a more important driver than the process of democratization per se. Digital newspapers are most widely available in those societies at the forefront of the Information Society where much of the population has moved online, whether established democracies, transitional and consolidating states, or authoritarian regimes. Democratization is not the driving force behind the move of the news media into the digital world, but in the longer-term it might well be the consequence, if independent journalists and a plurality of smaller news outlets flourish on the web.

Virtual Civic Society

The news media represents one part of civic society. The distinctions between traditional interest groups, alternative social movements and transnational advocacy networks are fluid and imprecise, so that all these forms of association in civic society are compared in this chapter34. The term ‘interest group’ conventionally refers to more formal organizations that are either focused on particular social groups and economic sectors, such as trade unions, business and professional associations, like the NAACP or the American Medical Association, or on more specific issues such as abortion, gun control, or the
environment. Often traditional interest groups have well-established organizational structures, formal membership rules, and their primary orientation is towards influencing government and the policy process and providing direct services for members, like trade union negotiations over pay levels in industry or the provision of informational networks for professional associations. Some develop an extensive mass membership base while others are essentially lobbying organizations focusing on insider strategies, with little need for maintaining a larger constituency. New social movements, exemplified by the civil rights and anti-nuclear movements in the 1950s, and the counter-culture environmental and women’s movement of the 1970s, tend to have more fluid and decentralized organizational structures, more open membership criteria, and to focus on influencing lifestyles and achieving social change through direct action and community-building as much as formal decision-making processes. Lastly transnational advocacy networks bring together loose coalitions of these organizations under a common umbrella organization that crosses national borders.

The Internet may serve multiple functions for all these organizations, similar to the utility of this medium for political parties, including lobbying elected representatives, public officials, and policy elites; networking with related associations and organizations; mobilizing organizers, activists and members using action alerts, newsletters and emails; raising funds and recruiting supporters; and communicating their message to the public via the traditional news media. The global reach and real-time speed of the Internet make it particularly useful for transnational advocacy networks, exemplified by diverse campaigns such as the movement against the production and sale of land mines, demonstrators critical of the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle, environmentalists opposing genetically modified foods, and anti-sweatshop campaigners opposed to the manufacturing conditions of Nike shoes. Go online and you can find thousands of networks devoted to bringing together like-minded souls ranging from Anarchists, Hippies and Vegetarians to Skinheads, Survivalists, and Aryans, and a cornucopia of activist groups from the issues of Abortion and Afrocentrism to Welfare Reform and Xenotransplantation. You can monitor human rights with Amnesty International, the environment with Greenpeace, or the state of democracy with the National Democracy Institute. Or, should you be so inclined, you can find out how to make a homemade nitroglycerin bomb or join the Gay Nazis. And you can visit hundreds of policy think tanks in D.C. ranging from the Heritage Foundation and the Cato Institute to the Brookings Institution and the Twentieth Century Fund.

The potential activities for organization and mobilization involve far more than the passive reading of informational Web pages. Transnational advocacy networks represent
‘umbrella’ web sites aiming to amplify the impact of multiple smaller like-minded NGOs. As exemplified by the Institute for Global Communications progressive network (Figure 9.4), through the Internet you can subscribe to advocacy and lobbying groups, affiliate your organization, receive emailed policy newsletters and action alerts, send faxes or emails to decision-makers, circulate electronic petitions, learn about forthcoming street demonstrations, protest events, job vacancies and voluntary activities, as well as share effective strategies for activism, contribute short news items to the site, and participate in online discussions. The IGC site, established in 1990, currently contains about 350,000 links contained in over 8000 pages. A similar networking function is fulfilled by OneWorld.net, founded in 1995, a website containing 15,000 pages with almost 100,000 links to progressive organizations promoting human rights and sustainable development. The website available in four languages allows you to learn news and press releases about trouble spots around the globe, to read in-depth policy reports, to listen to selected radio or watch TV reports, to locate volunteer jobs, to become active in a range of campaigns, to shop online, and future developments for the site include a learning channel promoting education.

As illustrated by the Greenpeace site, social movements have taken advantage of many innovative features of the Internet; this website features breaking news, streaming audio and video clips, information resources, ways to join the organization, participate in a chat room and subscribe to 20-30 cyberactivism list-servs on topics such as bio-diversity or nuclear power, and national and local branch addresses. Daily counts show that www.Greenpeace.org receives about 58,000 visitors in a typical week in mid-2000, up four-fold from four years earlier, with about half a million visitors in total since the launch of the current site in late 1997. Domain analysis indicates that users of the website come from all over the world including Europe (15%), North America (10%), Australia (4%), South America (3%) and Asia (2%). If party and government web sites are heavily ‘top down’, as traditional hierarchical institutions, the alternative philosophy of new social movements and NGOs may well provide a more congenial environment fostering ‘bottom up’ interactions in civic society. Nor is this a minor part of the virtual world. As we saw earlier (Table 5.2), a quick and simple search for the term ‘interest group’ using Yahoo, Alta Vista and InfoSeek produced almost 5 million hits across all engines, more than the combined total for ‘political parties’, ‘elections’ and ‘parliaments’. In short, digital technologies facilitate the network of networks, which should be an environment where civic society and the public sphere flourish like summer gardens.
Establishing which groups and organizations have moved online, however, is not straightforward. Other studies have used search engines like InfoSeek and Yahoo! to provide a sampling frame, analyzing a random selection of American groups listed in these indexes, like the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Association of Women, and the National Audubon Society\textsuperscript{39}. This approach provides a representative selection of groups on the Internet, but unfortunately this process can tell us nothing about the broader universe of interest groups and social movements. For this we can turn to the Union of International Organizations (UIA) based in Brussels, which has published the Yearbook of International Organizations since 1908-9\textsuperscript{40}. This source provides the most comprehensive list available of multifarious types of organizations worldwide, including non-profit associations, societies, federations, institutes, bureaus and associations, as well as scientific and academic research centers, trade unions, business groups, and non-profit foundations. The Yearbook is probably stronger on traditional interest associations with a formal organizational structure rather than more disparate alternative social movements, especially groups and coalitions that only exist online, but nevertheless its geographic scope and subject coverage is wide-ranging. The online UIA database lists details about 55,465 international governmental organizations (IGOs) and national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) worldwide in November 1999, including their location, type, and whether they have established a web site. A representative sample of 468 organizations was selected from this source by a process of random selection (picking the first organization on each page of the database listed alphabetically), and the web sites were examined for those organizations that were found to be online.

The diverse and eclectic organizations under comparison ranged from the African Democratic League, the Anti-Slavery International, and the Association for Lesbian, Gay and Bi-Sexual Psychologies to the Woodworking Association of North America, the World Copyright Organization and the Zoo Conservation Outreach Group. Overall from the random sample of 468 organizations the analysis suggests that about one quarter (109) had a web site identified by the UIA. This may seem like a relatively low proportion, but even if this is a conservative estimate (underestimating the recent proliferation of web sites by new social movements), if we extrapolate more generally from this sample the results suggest that about 12,400 interest groups are online worldwide. A systematic analysis of these groups by type, organizational structure and sector, as well as the contents of these web sites, would require a much larger sample to prove reliable, but nevertheless a glance through the list of websites quickly confirmed the multiplicity and variety of the groups found online: the Christian Jugglers Association and the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation mixed company in
cyberspace alongside the European Metalworkers' Federation, the International Potato
Center, the European Board of Urology, the International Naturist Federation, the Mammal
Society, the Nordic Youth Committee and the International Chamber of Shipping. Beyond
geography, there was no discernable pattern to the groups found online: the sacred and the
profane coexisted together, as did business associations and trade unions, and the Christian
right and the progressive liberals. The geographic spread confirmed the pattern already
widely observed in previous chapters, including the predominance of sites for organizations
headquartered in North America, Western Europe, Scandinavia and Australia, even if their
mission was broader, for example Australian associations promoting international human
rights and conflict resolution, Nordic academicians studying Middle Eastern cultures, or
Virginian evangelists concerned to spread the word in Africa. The initial impression of
interest groups and transnational advocacy networks on the web based on this comparison is
one of tremendous diversity, a virtual Hyde Park Corner where a plurality of multiple actors
can and do find opportunities to network, organize and express their viewpoints.

Conclusions: The Rise of the Virtual Civic Society

This examination of the presence of civic society on the Internet cannot answer
deeper questions about the long-term consequences of digital technologies for deepening
and broadening democracy. The process of technological diffusion remains in transition and,
just like parties and governments, organizations are still learning how to use the potential of
the web to do more than act as a static form of electronic pamphlet or poster. Yet the
existence of ‘flash’ movements triggered by particular issues or events, like anti-globalization
protests in the streets of Seattle, Washington DC and Prague, and the anti-fuel tax coalition
shutting down motorways from London to Oslo, suggests that this digital information
environment has the capacity to alter the structure of opportunities for communication and
information in civic society, providing a culture that is particularly conducive for
alternative social movements, fringe parties from the libertarians to the Greens, and
transnational advocacy networks seeking to organize and mobilize dispersed groups for
collective action. Compared with the traditional channels of television and print journalism,
the many-to-many and one-to-many characteristics of the Internet multiply manifold the
access points for publicity and information in the political system. The global dimension of
the Web facilitates transnational movements transcending the boundaries of the nation state.
The linkage capacity strengthens alliances and coalitions. Moreover, as discussed in the next
chapter, the values that pervade many transnational advocacy networks – such as those
seeking to promote such issues as women's rights, the environment and conflict resolution –
seem highly conducive to the irreverent, egalitarian and libertarian character of the cyberculture. The transition to the Internet seems to be altering and transposing certain common ways of doing things - like lobbying, communication and organizing - thereby subtly tipping the balance of power and resources among intermediary political actors, like the shift from network TV news to their wired cousins, or from traditional international organizations like the WTO and IMF towards transnational networks. Traditional communication media do not disappear, but a new repertoire of communication and information strategies appear, which are used by the most flexible and adaptable organizations. The traditional resources of organizational structures, mass members and money become less significant than know-how and technical skills that smaller and more flexible insurgents can use to organize, mobilize and express themselves to challenge established authorities. Companies like Amazon.com appear on the commercial scene to rival traditional bricks-and-mortar booksellers like Barnes and Noble; services like Napster threaten the core profits and way of doing business of music companies like Sony; and electronic magazines like Wired and Slate compete for readers with long-established outlets like the New York Times and Washington Post. Traditional institutions may have the capacity, far-sightedness, flexibility and resources to reinvent themselves in virtual form, like the venerable BBC winning multiple awards and critical kudos for its online news service, although others lose their strategic predominance, such as when Encarta challenged the Encyclopedia Britannica. The radical shake-up provided by the Internet revolution opens a window of opportunities for insurgents like Yahoo! and Napster. To assess the full consequences of this process we need to examine how the public has responded to the virtual political system and, in particular, whether opportunities for political communication and information on the Internet are used mainly by those who are already the most active, or whether they have the capacity to reach out to more marginal sectors of society - like the younger generation - who are otherwise disengaged from public life. Governments and civic society are providing a cornucopia of information on the World Wide Web - but who is paying attention? It is the public's use of digital technologies to which we now turn.
Table 9.1: The World of Online Newspapers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total Number of Online Newspapers (2000)</th>
<th>Total Number of Daily Newspapers (1966)</th>
<th>Proportion of All Daily Newspapers Online</th>
<th>Total Number of Nations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>2494</td>
<td>8145</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Europe</td>
<td>388</td>
<td>1134</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>1355</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>981</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scandinavia</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>2712</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and Eastern Europe</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>711</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High human development</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>3752</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium human development</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>4171</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Human development</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established democracies</td>
<td>2111</td>
<td>3937</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidating democracies</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>1739</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Democracies</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>469</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The table summarizes the distribution of online newspapers in 179 nations as at June 2000 according to AJR newslink. [http://Ajr.newslink.org](http://Ajr.newslink.org). This data was crosschecked and verified against the lists of newspapers (media links) maintained by Editor & Publisher, [www.mediainfo.com](http://www.mediainfo.com), the World News Index [http://wni.Harold.nu](http://wni.Harold.nu), and the list provided by Yahoo! [http://Dir.yahoo.com/News_and_Media/Newspapers/By_region/Countries](http://Dir.yahoo.com/News_and_Media/Newspapers/By_region/Countries).


Type of Democracy: The level of democracy for each country was classified according to Freedom House 7-point scale of political rights and civil liberties. Countries were then classified as established democracies (1.0 to 2.5), consolidating democracies (3.0 to 4.5) and non-democracies (5.0 to 7.0). Freedom House Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties 1999-2000. [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org).
Table 9.2: The world of online news media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Newspapers</th>
<th>Magazines</th>
<th>Radio Stations</th>
<th>TV Sites</th>
<th>News Services</th>
<th>All %</th>
<th>All N.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>64.2</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>7880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>1813</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TOTAL          | 100.0       | 100.0     | 100.0          | 100.0    | 100.0         | 100.0 | 11872  |

Source: Editor & Publisher June 2000 [www.medainfo.com](http://www.medainfo.com)
### Table 9.3: Explaining the Distribution of Online Newspapers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human development</td>
<td>-0.053</td>
<td>0.585</td>
<td>-0.031</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technological development</td>
<td><strong>0.422</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.000</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.294</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.000</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political development</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
<td>0.816</td>
<td>-0.057</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of newspapers per nation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>0.583</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.000</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.133</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.456</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The beta coefficients represent the results of stepwise OLS regression models predicting the number of online newspapers in 169 nations in June 2000.

**Daily Newspapers:** The number of daily newspapers per nation in 1996. UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 2000. Paris: UNESCO.


% Online from [www.nua.ie](http://www.nua.ie) (see Table 2.2 for details)

Figure 9.1: Examples of online TV News: Britain (BBC), Australia (ABC), the United States (ABC) and Canada (CBC), midday headlines 19 July 2000.
Figure 9.2: The world of online newspapers
Figure 9.3: The printed press and digital newspapers

Note: For ease of visual interpretation the United States and India are excluded as outliers, each with over 1000 printed newspapers, and the comparison of 174 nations also automatically excludes all countries with fewer than 2 online newspapers.
Figure 9.4: Examples of transnational advocacy networks online


For example see www.dassk.com for streaming audio of speeches by Aung San Suu Kyi as well as details about her life and the latest news bulletins. For the Human Rights Watch report see http://www.hrw.org/worldreport99/asia/burma.html. The Free Burma Coalition can be found at: http://www.hrw.org/worldreport99/asia/burma.html. For the alternative official government web site, including streaming media and a chat room, see www.myanamar.com.


19 Internet Software Consortium. www.isc.org


25 http://ajr.newslink.org/news.html

26 For a comparison see www.Broadcast.com


30 The AJR Newslink database is updated by regular comparison with dozens of others, such as the databases compiled by state and national press association and news media "jump station" sites. Updates from readers are also solicited via an online submission form. Newslink Associated then manually visit each site suggested or found elsewhere and attempt to categorize it, verify its legitimacy, and locate the best URL for it. Beyond continuous amendments, each section in the database is thoroughly overhauled and checked once or twice a year.


32 The simple correlation between the number of daily newspapers and the number of online newspapers in 174 countries proved strong and significant (R=.639 Sig. .001).


37 The Institute for Global Communications can be found at www.igc.org. One World net can be located at www.OneWorld.org. For the range of volunteer activities and activist organizations available online see also http://www.serviceleader.org/vv/forvols.html.

38 http://www.greenpeace.org
