

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-80067-9 - Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power

Bruce Bimber

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Information and American Democracy

Technology in the Evolution of Political Power

This book assesses the consequences of new information technologies for American democracy in a way that is theoretical and also historically grounded. The author argues that new technologies have produced the fourth in a series of “information revolutions” in the United States, stretching back to the founding. Each of these, he argues, led to important structural changes in politics. After reinterpreting historical American political development from the perspective of evolving characteristics of information and political communication, the author evaluates effects of the Internet and related new media. The analysis shows that the use of new technologies is contributing to “postbureaucratic” political organization and fundamental changes in the structure of political interests. The author’s conclusions tie together scholarship on parties, interest groups, bureaucracy, collective action, and political behavior with new theory and evidence about politics in the information age.

Bruce Bimber is Associate Professor of Political Science and Director of the Center for Information Technology and Society at the University of California in Santa Barbara. He formerly held positions at RAND and Hewlett-Packard. He is author of *The Politics of Expertise in Congress* and numerous articles dealing with technology and politics. He holds a Ph.D. in political science from MIT and a B.S. in electrical engineering from Stanford.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-80067-9 - Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution
of Political Power

Bruce Bimber

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-80067-9 - Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power

Bruce Bimber

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

COMMUNICATION, SOCIETY AND POLITICS

Editors

W. Lance Bennett, *University of Washington*

Robert M. Entman, *North Carolina State University*

Editorial Advisory Board

Larry M. Bartels, *Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University*

Jay G. Blumer, Emeritus, *University of Leeds and University of Maryland*

Daniel Dayan, *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, and Department of Media & Communications, University of Oslo*

Doris A. Graber, *Department of Political Science, University of Illinois at Chicago*

Paolo Mancini, *Istituto di Studi Sociali, Facoltà di Scienze Politiche, Università di Perugia and Scuola di Giornalismo Radiotelevisiv, Perugia*

Pippa Norris, *Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University*

Barbara Pfetsch, *Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung*

Philip Schlesinger, *Film and Media Studies, University of Stirling*

David L. Swanson, *Department of Speech Communication, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*

Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Department of Political Science and Department of Communication and Journalism, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem*

John Zaller, *University of California, Los Angeles*

Politics and relations among individuals in societies across the world are being transformed by new technologies for targeting individuals and sophisticated methods for shaping personalized messages. The new technologies challenge boundaries of many kinds – between news, information, entertainment, and advertising; between media, with the arrival of the World Wide Web; and even between nations. *Communication, Society and Politics* probes the political and social impacts of these new communication systems in national, comparative, and global perspective.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-80067-9 - Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution
of Political Power

Bruce Bimber

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-80067-9 - Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution
of Political Power

Bruce Bimber

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Information and American Democracy

TECHNOLOGY IN THE EVOLUTION OF
POLITICAL POWER

Bruce Bimber

University of California, Santa Barbara



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-80067-9 - Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power

Bruce Bimber

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10013-2473, USA

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521800679

© Bruce Bimber 2003

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2003

Reprinted 2008, 2011

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Bimber, Bruce A. (Bruce Allen), 1961–

Information and American democracy : technology in the evolution of political power / Bruce Bimber.

p. cm. – (Communication, society, and politics)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-80067-6 (hb.) – ISBN 0-521-80492-2 (pb.)

1. Information society – Political aspects – United States. 2. Information technology –

Political aspects – United States. 3. Internet – Political aspects – United States.

4. Political participation – United States – Computer network resources.

5. Democracy – United States. 6. Communication – Political aspects – United States.

I. Title. II. Series.

JK468.A8 B56 2002

320.973–dc21 2002067675

ISBN 978-0-521-80067-9 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-80492-9 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-80067-9 - Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution
of Political Power
Bruce Bimber
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

For Laura

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-80067-9 - Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution
of Political Power

Bruce Bimber

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>List of Figures and Tables</i>	<i>page xi</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xiii</i>
1. Information and Political Change	1
<i>Overview of the Theory</i>	12
<i>The Empirical Picture</i>	25
<i>Plan of the Book</i>	27
2. Information Revolutions in American Political Development	34
<i>The Information Theory of The Federalist</i>	34
<i>The First Information Revolution and the Rise of Majoritarianism</i>	47
<i>The Second Information Revolution and the Roots of Pluralism</i>	62
<i>The Third Information Revolution and the Mass Audience</i>	75
3. The Fourth Information Revolution and Postbureaucratic Pluralism	89
<i>The Question of Information Abundance</i>	89
<i>The Bureaucratic Conception of Pluralism</i>	92
<i>Postbureaucratic Political Organization</i>	99
4. Political Organizations in the Fourth Information Revolution	110
<i>Introduction</i>	110
<i>Consumer Protection and Privacy</i>	125
<i>Environmental Advocacy</i>	133
<i>Education Policy</i>	150
<i>Gun Control</i>	161
<i>Campaigns for Office in 2000</i>	173
<i>Summary of the Cases</i>	188

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-80067-9 - Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution
of Political Power
Bruce Bimber
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CONTENTS

5. Political Individuals in the Fourth Information Revolution	197
<i>The Informed Citizen?</i>	197
<i>Theoretical Considerations</i>	200
<i>Diffusion of Information Technology among Individuals</i>	210
<i>Information Technology and Political Engagement</i>	217
6. Information, Equality, and Integration in the Public Sphere	229
<i>Drawing Conclusions: A Revolution in the Middle</i>	229
<i>A Brief Comparison with Other Nations</i>	231
<i>Dahl's Equality Proposition</i>	239
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	251
<i>Index</i>	263

Figures and Tables

FIGURES

1.1 Summary of the Four Political Information Revolutions in the United States	<i>page 23</i>
3.1 Hypothetical Effects of Contemporary Information Technology on the Capacity to Organize Collective Action	100
5.1 Diffusion of the Internet in the United States	211
5.2 Diffusion of Historical Communication Technologies in the United States	212

TABLES

3.1 Organizational Types in Politics	105
3.2 Constraints on Postbureaucratic Political Organization	109
5.1 Changing Demographics of Internet Users	213
5.2 Analyzing the Digital Divide: Access and Daily Use, 2001	215
5.3 Extent of Political Use of the Internet, as a Fraction of Those with Access	216
5.4 Attention to Campaigns across Media, 2000	218
5.5 The Internet and Political Engagement, 1998	220
5.6 The Internet and Political Engagement, 2000	222

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-80067-9 - Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution
of Political Power

Bruce Bimber

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-80067-9 - Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power

Bruce Bimber

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

The origins of this volume lie in the interplay between research and teaching that constitutes the central theory of the modern university. Several years ago, a student in my course on technology and politics prepared an exceptionally good term paper about a new subject, the Internet and political equality. When I had designed the course earlier that year, 1995, the Internet had struck me as no more than one of several potentially important sociotechnical phenomena relevant to politics and social issues, along with genetic engineering, industrial competitiveness, and defense conversion following the end of the Cold War. Although the student's paper did not venture far from material that I had covered in the course, it prompted me to think further about the subject and eventually to launch my own inquiry into theoretical aspects of technology and information in American democracy. This book is one result. I have since lost track of the student who wrote that paper, but I acknowledge here her contribution to the direction of my research.

Students of business history will recall that 1995 was the year when Netscape Communications Corporation announced it would become a publicly held firm. That stock offering remains perhaps the most powerful symbol of the evolution of the Internet from a limited, government-sponsored, academically oriented enterprise into an economic and social phenomenon of vast scale. I managed to turn a tiny investment into a somewhat larger one on the first day of the Netscape public offering, but I do not write as a technology booster. My orientation toward technology as a force for social and political change, as well as for the production of wealth, rests on only a skeptical optimism. I grew up in what came during my youth to be called "Silicon Valley" and I picked up the local trade by earning a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering after high school. Having learned to design semiconductor circuits in the early 1980s is

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-80067-9 - Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power

Bruce Bimber

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

something akin to knowing Latin. It is hardly irrelevant to contemporary discourse and language but is far from sufficient for getting by on the street. I bring from that experience an abiding interest in technology as a motor for social and political change of all kinds. My study of information technology in recent years has been motivated in large part by an interest in the linkages between technological development and political change.

In academic volumes such as this one, recognition of assistance from others typically follows a particular order, beginning with professional colleagues, then moving on to students and assistants, and then finally family. I depart from that tradition. My greatest debt in the preparation of this work, as in all my undertakings, is to my partner and wife, Laura Mancuso. Her support was not simply in the manner of wifely forbearance during my hours at the computer. It combined professional wisdom and intellectual advice, as well as being a true life partner – that *and* putting up with my writing and the trying procedures of academia, such as pursuing tenure. My gratitude to her is deepest and comes first.

I am also indebted to my parents for launching me originally on my career as an engineer and then showing unconditional support when I became a social scientist in graduate school. Many friends provided support and encouragement as I wrote and researched, especially Arnold Schildhaus and Judith Mustard and the entire Broyles-González family: Yolanda, Esmeralda, Francisco the elder, and Francisco the younger.

Within the profession, my two greatest intellectual debts are to W. Russell Neuman, of the University of Michigan, and Jessica Korn, now of the Gallup Organization. Russ encouraged me in 1999 to get on with things and begin the book that had been gestating and that others had warned me against rushing. He then provided invaluable advice and encouragement at many points along the way. Jessica collaborated with me on a related writing project and helped me work through many of the ideas that form Chapter 2, especially the material on Federalist theory.

Several people worked with me as research assistants on projects connected with this book, some of whom have since moved on and are now researchers, teachers, or other professionals. Former UC Santa Barbara students involved in the project early on whom I thank are: Robin Datta, Kaushik Ghosh, Margrethe Kamp, Kendra Pappas, Robin Volpe, and Gary Wang. Current graduate students also assisted ably at various points, including Robert Hinckley and Lia Roberts, who did expert jobs at helping to prepare some of the quantitative analyses. Most especially, I thank three first-rate doctoral students who conducted the bulk of the case study interviews reported in Chapter 4: Joe Gardner, Diane Johnson,

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-80067-9 - Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power

Bruce Bimber

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

and Eric Patterson. They formed a great team and made development of the case studies enjoyable.

The cases are based on approximately eight dozen interviews with lobbyists, campaign staff, activists and political entrepreneurs, public officials, interest group staff and executives, and other political professionals. Most of these informants agreed to be interviewed on the record, and they are cited in the narrative. Those who were uncomfortable with attribution are not identified but were nonetheless helpful with background material. I am grateful to all who gave their time during busy professional schedules to talk with me or the members of my research team, either in person or by telephone.

In a class all her own is another professional research assistant, Florence Sanchez, of the Department of Political Science at UC Santa Barbara. She read and copyedited the entire volume – *closely*. The quality and professionalism of her work is beyond all expectations. She improved every page.

I have benefited immensely from conversations with others, many of whom are likely not aware that their comments at various meetings and workshops or in the hallways were influencing the direction of my research and writing. Among these are Scott Althaus, W. Lance Bennett, Ann Crigler, Richard Davis, Michael X. Delli Carpini, Andrew Flanagin, Doris Graber, Chuck House, M. Kent Jennings, Deborah Johnson, Alan Liu, Helen Nissenbaum, Pippa Norris, Tom Schrock, Rebecca Fairley Raney, David Swanson, Michael Walzer, John Woolley, and the late Steve Chaffee.

Financial support for the research in this book was provided by two grants from the National Science Foundation and also grants from the Carnegie Corporation and the Pew Charitable Trusts. Intramural funding came from the Regents of the University of California. I am most grateful to all of these financial supporters.

Bruce Bimber
Santa Barbara, California
May 2002

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-80067-9 - Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution
of Political Power

Bruce Bimber

Frontmatter

[More information](#)
