NOTE TO USERS

This reproduction is the best copy available.

UMI®

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

E-mocracy: Information Technology & State Legislatures

by

Antoinette J. Pole

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York, 2005.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

UMI Number: 3169964

Copyright 2005 by
Pole, Antoinette J.

All rights reserved.

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI®

UMI Microform 3169964
Copyright 2005 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.
All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Copyright

2005

Antoinette J. Pole

All Rights Reserved

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Approval Page

This manuscript has been read and accepted by the
Graduate Faculty in Political Science in satisfaction of the
dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

4/12/05
Date

Marilyn Gittell, Chair of Examining Committee

April 12, 2005
Date

Ruth O'Brien, Executive Officer

Charles Tien

Andrew J. Polsky

Frederick S. Lane

Lorraine C. Minnite

Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Abstract

E-mocracy: Information Technology
&
State Legislatures

by

Antoinette J. Pole

Adviser: Marilyn Gittell

While rapid advances in information technology have occurred in the private sector, government and nonprofit organizations have been much slower to embrace e-mail and the Internet. Proponents of government use of information technology assert that e-mail and the Internet will lead to increased political participation and better representation. Critics in contrast contend that information technology will not necessarily lead to increased participation and that those who already wield power will continue to monopolize power. My dissertation investigates how and to what degree state legislators and interest groups, and to a lesser degree constituents, use e-mail and the Internet in legislative politics. Specifically I examine how these new technologies impact representation, political participation and democratization.

To examine the impact of information technology on state legislators and interest groups mail-in surveys were sent to 390 state legislators and 400 interest groups in Vermont and New York. I also conducted in-depth interviews with a total of 31 state legislators and 24 executive directors and presidents of interest groups. Findings from my research indicate that there is increased use of e-mail

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and the Internet by legislators, and that information technology improves representation. In addition, the data show that legislators and interest groups perceive there to be increased political participation by constituents and interest groups as a result of information technology, lending support to scholars who are optimistic about the benefits of information technology. Despite this perception of increased political participation, interest groups that represent under and unrepresented populations have not benefited from information technology as much as some scholars have hoped. Even with the advent of e-mail and the Internet inequalities in power among interest groups have not diminished, strengthening the claims made by the critics.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Acknowledgements

This was an awesome undertaking and I have many people to thank. First, I want to thank the members of my dissertation committee. I owe them a tremendous amount of gratitude. Without the guidance and sage wisdom of my adviser and reader, in particular, this project would not have come to fruition. A special thanks to *mgittell@aol.com* for believing in me and pushing me to "just get it done." My love of statistics and methods was cultivated by *ctien@hunter.cuny.edu* for which I am enormously grateful. *Ctien@hunter.cuny.edu's* patience and flexibility throughout this process deserves thanks.

Good friends and colleagues also played vital roles in helping me with this dissertation. I want to extend thanks to my friends who reviewed the survey and interview instruments, compiled the sample, stuffed envelopes, drove with me to Montpelier and most importantly provided extensive editorial support. These friends include: *mporcius@aol.com, maggiegray@hotmail.com, dwillard@whitecase.com, marcia_vilas@yahoo.com, lauram1111@aol.com, tsteffy@gc.cuny.edu, emaclachlan@gc.cuny.edu, ddelbene@prfi.org, hlavatovicc@liebermanresearch.com, agoldberg@gc.cuny.edu, sudolf@no.email.com, phishingpole@gmail.com, mlevitt@earthlink.net, pinto_r@mindspring.com, rnerio@gc.cuny.edu.*

Unending thanks also to my wider circle of generous friends, too numerous to mention, who provided me with emotional support throughout various stages of the process.

Location played a fundamental role in my ability to complete this project. I am especially thankful to *mgittell@aol.com* for providing me with space at The Howard Samuels State Management and Policy Center to execute my dissertation. I am also grateful to the entire staff at the Samuels Center who were so supportive. Thank you to *emartle@afinancial.com* and *lvastine@createam.fr* for creating writing havens for me in Chicago and Paris. *Paulcatena@yahoo.com* and *smingler@senate.state.ny.us* opened doors during the interviewing process in Albany.

Finally I am especially indebted to my father, brothers and grandmother. Their constant love, encouragement and humor helped to motivate me and ultimately finish.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

This dissertation is dedicated in
loving memory of my mother Victoria Pole.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1
Hypotheses 3
Significance 7
Literature Review 10
Democratic Theory 10
Information Technology and Government 11
Political Participation 13
Representation 14
Leadership 16
Organizational Theory 17
Interest Groups 19
Methodology 20
Research Design 20
Operationalization 21
Case Selection 25
Data Collection 26
Key Findings 31
Organization of Chapters 33

CHAPTER TWO: LEGISLATING IN THE AGE OF TECHNOLOGY 35
History of Information Technology: Two State Legislatures 39
Representation: For Better or Worse? 44
E-mail 45
Internet 55
Political Participation: Constituents 65
E-mail 66
Internet 75
Institutional Behavior 78
E-mail 78
Internet 81
Democracy: More of the Same Ol'? 84
E-mail 86
Internet 89
Conclusions 92

CHAPTER THREE: INTEREST GROUPS & STATE LEGISLATIVE POLITICS 96
Descriptive Analysis of Interest Groups In Vermont & New York 100
Descriptive Overview of Interest Groups 100
Technological Capacity of Interest Groups 102
E-mail 106
Listservs 113
Internet & Websites 115
Political Participation: Interest Groups 123
E-mail 125

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Internet..... 135
Lobbying With Technology..... 140
E-mail..... 142
Internet..... 146
Democracy: More Access for the Underrepresented?.....153
E-mail..... 153
Internet..... 157
Conclusions..... 161

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION..... 166
Representation..... 167
Institutional Behavior..... 172
Political Participation.....177
Constituent Participation via Information Technology as Reported by Legislators..... 177
Interest Group Perception of Participation via Information Technology..... 180
Democratization.....186
Are State Legislatures More Democratic With Information Technology? 187
Do Interest Groups Have More Access With Information Technology?.....191
Directions for Future Research..... 194

Appendices.....196
Appendix A Survey of E-mail & Internet by State Legislators & Staff 196
Appendix B State Legislative Interview Instrument 208
Appendix C Survey of E-mail & Internet Use Among Interest Groups..... 211
Appendix D Interest Group Interview Instrument..... 224

Bibliography..... 215

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

List of Tables

Table 1-1 Independent & Dependent Variables 7

Table 1-2 Party Ratio by State Legislature & Survey Data 28

Table 2-1 Rate of Responding to US Post & E-mail in Number of Days 53

Table 2-2 Frequency of Updating Individual Websites 62

Table 2-3 Individual Websites That Record Number of Visits or Hits 62

Table 2-4 Information That Can Be Found on Individual Websites 63

Table 2-5 Per Capita US Post & E-mail Received by Legislative House 67

Table 2-6 Legislators' Perceptions of Constituent Access Via the Internet ... 90

Table 3-1 Number of Issues by Interest Group 101

Table 3-2 Type of Internet Connection by Interest Group 104

Table 3-3 High-Tech & Low-Tech Users by Interest Group 105

Table 3-4 High-Tech & Low-Tech Users in States Who E-mail Interest Group Members About Pending Legislation & Committee Hearings 108

Table 3-5 Interest Groups Who E-mail Their Members About Pending Legislation & Committee Hearings 108

Table 3-6 E-mail Contact With Legislators by Interest Group 112

Table 3-7 High-Tech & Low-Tech Users Who Analyze Website Activity 119

Table 3-8 Provision of Government Information on Websites by Interest Groups 121

Table 3-9 Average Number of E-mail & Pieces of US Post Legislators Receive Weekly From Interest Groups by State 134

Table 3-10 Amount of Contact Via the Internet by High-Tech & Low-Tech Users in Vermont & New York 139

Table 3-11 Ease of Lobbying Through Information Technology by Interest Groups 151

Table 3-12 Improved Lobbying Through Information Technology by Interest Groups 152

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Table 3-13 **E-mail Access to Legislative Leaders & Committee Chairs by Interest Groups** 156

Table 3-14 **Access to Legislative Leaders & Committee Chairs by High-Tech & Low-Tech Users in Vermont & New York**..... 156

Table 3-15 **Comparison of Pre-Technology to Post-Technology Access to Legislative Leaders and Committee Chairs by Interest Group**..... 160

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

List of Figures

Figure 2-1 How Legislators Use E-mail 50

Figure 2-2 Gauging the Policy Preferences of Constituents Via E-mail 51

Figure 2-3 How Legislators Use the Internet 57

Figure 2-4 Gauging Policy Preferences of Constituents Via the Internet 59

Figure 2-5 Contact Between Legislators & Constituents Via the Internet 77

Figure 3-1 Contact Between Legislators & Interest Groups Via the Internet .. 140

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 20 years advances in information technology have occurred rapidly in the United States, especially in the private sector. Implementation and utilization of information technology in the public sector, however, have proceeded gradually and with a certain amount of trepidation. Nevertheless, the proliferation of personal computers coupled with the advent of e-mail and the Internet has forced all levels of government to accept the changing landscape of communication and information distribution and reception. While computers have been in existence for over 35 years, it is only in the last three to five years that computer use has become widespread among American households and government. In December 1998, for example, personal computers were found in 41 percent of households, with 26 percent of households reported having Internet access. By August 2000, the numbers were 51 percent and 42 percent, respectively (http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/digitaldivide/Execsumfttn 00.htm). Similarly most state governments obtained Internet access and e-mail during the mid to late 1990s. The New York state legislature, for example, acquired Internet access in 1997, though an internal e-mail system was available a few years earlier (Pole 2000).

Optimistic about the impact of information technology on government, authors including Dahl (1989), Grossman (1995), Rosenthal (1998), Barber (1984) and Etizioni (1993) contend that information technology will dramatically

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

affect democracy and government leading to increased participation and better representation. According to Dahl,

> Telecommunications technology will exert a powerful influence for change on the democratic process. It will allow people to place questions on the public agenda and to participate in discussions with experts, policymakers and fellow citizens. It will take a conscious and deliberate effort, however, to make new technology work for democracy rather than against it (Dahl 1989).

Similarly Grossman states that "interactive information technology has the potential to become the twenty-first century's electronic version of the Acropolis, where Athenian citizens assembled to govern themselves" (Grossman 1995). Grossman contends that we are entering into the "electronic republic" or the "third transformation." The third transformation allows the electorate to have more control in government where citizens become directly involved in decision-making, unlike the second transformation which is based on the notion of representative democracy where citizens are indirectly involved in decision-making. Although themes of participation, representation and democracy are examined in these accounts, empirical evidence of their effect is weak.

In contrast Davis (1999), Barber (1998), Abramson, Arterton, and Orren (1988) and Bimber (2003) are less optimistic about the effect of information technology on government. Davis's 1999 empirical study finds that "information technology may diminish social capital and dilute gains in participation" (Bimber 2003). Most noteworthy, Barber, initially a strong advocate of information technology, later revises his position in his 1998 analysis to suggest that information technology may actually "undermine deliberative democracy and the nature of social interaction" (Barber 1998). Similarly, Abramson, Arterton, and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Orren (1988) maintain that the speed of politics may undermine deliberation and that we may move toward "government by public opinion poll." Not entirely pessimistic, Bimber (2003) finds that while information technology does not lead to increased political participation, it results in some interesting instances of collective action. Though these analyses offer empirical evidence none examine how information technology impacts state legislatures and state legislative politics.

Focusing on representation, political participation and democratization, my dissertation is an empirical study that examines the effect of information technology on state legislatures. Specifically, I study the effect of information technology on state legislators, constituents and interest groups. The following questions frame my research:

1. What effect do e-mail and the Internet have on constituents and interest groups?
2. What impact do e-mail and the Internet have on state legislatures? Are state legislatures more democratic because of information technology?
3. How do e-mail and the Internet affect state legislators? Are state legislators better representatives as a result of e-mail and the Internet?

Hypotheses

From the previously outlined questions, two major and several minor hypotheses are generated. **Major Hypothesis 1:** *Information technology leads to increased political participation among constituents and previously excluded or marginalized groups—those who have been traditionally under or unrepresented.* More individuals have access to e-mail and the Internet through which they can

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

communicate and obtain information from their state legislators. With the advent of e-mail and the Internet, coupled with the decline in cost associated with obtaining a personal computer and access to the Internet, I expect that marginal groups—which often have had fewer resources—will have more access to legislators. Prior to e-mail and the Internet, access to legislators often required large sums of money to hire a professional lobbyist. Organizing grassroots efforts was more difficult because it required vast amounts of manpower and resources no longer necessary with e-mail and the Internet. I contend that information technology strengthens participatory democracy.

This dissertation also seeks to examine how information technology impacts institutional and individual behavior in state legislatures. **Major Hypothesis 2:** *Information technology alters organizational and individual behavior in state legislatures.* The use of information technology challenges such concepts as "span of control, centralization of authority, formalization of rules and procedures" (Woodward 1958). With information technology legislators will have increased access to leaders, resulting in decentralized or weaker leadership. State legislators will use e-mail and the Internet to interact with each other and to accomplish tasks related to casework and legislation. Political scientists have thus far ignored the link between information technology and change in political institutions. In a case study I wrote in 1999 on the New York state legislature, I found that there is a greater degree of efficiency and increased collaboration in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

policy formulation because of the Internet and the Legislative Retrieval System[1] (Pole 2000). My dissertation expands on this work, explicating the more specific influences that result from expanded use of information technology with greater emphasis on its impact on representation, political participation and democratization.

Specifically I study how information technology use—the independent variable— defined as e-mail, the Internet, listservs, networks and personal computers, impacts several dependent variables. (See Table 1-1 for an illustration of the independent and dependent variables.) My dissertation examines how information technology affects the interactions between state legislators and other players, including constituents, leaders in state legislatures, and interest groups. I expect that information technology leads to better representation[2], increased political participation and increased democratization, ceteris paribus. Beneath are minor hypotheses, which are discussed and tested in Chapters Two and Three.

1. **Representation Hypothesis**. Information technology facilitates communication among legislators, and between legislators and constituents regardless of place and as a result state legislators will report that they are "better representatives."
2. **Political Participation by Constituents Hypothesis**. Contrary to studies that suggest that political participation has declined, state legislators

---

[1] The Legislative Retrieval System (LRS) is a web-based software application that tracks legislation.
[2] See Chapter Two for a definition of "better representation."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

perceive there to be increased contact and interactions between state legislators and constituents as a result of information technology.

3. **Institutional Behavior Hypotheses**.
   A) **Intra-Institutional Behavior Hypothesis**. Information technology alters interactions between individual members, party leaders and committee chairs.
   B) **Leadership Hypothesis**. Information technology leads to decreased power among legislative leaders regardless of the level of professionalization in state legislatures.
   C) **Inter-Institutional Behavior Hypothesis.** Interest groups will report that they exert more influence over rank-and-file members, party leaders and committee chairs because of e-mail and the Internet.
4. **Democratization Hypothesis**. Contrary to analyses that suggest that there has been a decline in democracy, state legislators perceive there to be more democratization in their state as a result of information technology.
5. **Interest Group Hypotheses**.
   A) Marginal and non-marginal groups will report there to be increased political participation as a result of information technology.
   B) Information technology will mute differences between non-marginal and marginal groups.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

C) With advances in information technology impacting non-marginal groups, marginal groups and state legislatures, interest groups will report that there is increased access to state legislators.

Table 1-1
Independent & Dependent Variables

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables
Information Technology	change in political participation among constituents
• e-mail use	change in representation
• listserv use	change in intra-institutional behavior
• Internet use	change in access to legislative leadership
• personal computers	change in the levels of democratization
• networks	change in political participation among non-marginal groups
	change in political participation among marginal groups

Significance

Prior to 2000 the literature on information technology and government offered theoretical explanations regarding the prospects for representation, political participation and democratization (Grossman 1995; Dahl 1989; Rosenthal 1998; Barber 1998), but they were empirically unsubstantiated. Existing empirical studies during this period focused on voting, campaigns, advocacy issues, individual participation and public organization (Morris 2000; Browning 1996; Bennett and Fielding 1999; Hill and Hughes 1998; Ting and Grant 2000). Recently, however, Bimber (2003), Wilhelm (2000), and Davis, Elin and Reeher (2002) attempt to bridge the gap in the literature on information technology and government offering theoretical analyses that are supported by empirical evidence. These authors primarily focus on how information technology

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

is changing political participation and democracy. To date it appears that there are few if any studies that examine the impact of information technology on state politics in general and state legislatures and legislators in particular. My research addresses this gap in the literature, investigating the nexus between information technology and government. If states are "laboratories of democracy," then the issues addressed in this dissertation might extend to all levels of government within the US. Further these issues might arise in other representative and federal systems.

In addition to exploring whether and how legislators are using technology in state legislatures I also focus on how information technology affects representation, political participation and democratization in state legislative politics. Recent accounts suggest that voting has been on the decline (Putnam 1995), though there is evidence of increased political participation through advocacy and activist groups (Berry 1997). Moreover e-mail and the Internet are dramatically shaping how individuals participate in interest groups and how they communicate with elected representatives. Innovations that have altered interest group participation include the use of listservs to notify interest group members of important issues and pending legislation; targeted e-mails to representatives through special software programs; and web-sites that inform visitors of pending legislation and important issues (Hrebenar and Thomas 1993). Since the means of participation and communication are being transformed, there are consequences for democracy and representation. One consequence is a political system with increased access for individuals and groups. Groups that were

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

previously marginalized or underrepresented, for example, have an opportunity to articulate their concerns via e-mail or the Internet. As noted earlier access and communication took place via lobbyists or advertising campaigns that required large sums of money. Other consequences might be "better representation," which might include quicker responses to constituent concerns; development of legislation or attention to concerns that were previously unarticulated; or having more contact with a greater variety of constituents.

Also of import is how information technology impacts institutions and institutional behavior. Rosenthal (1998) contends that state legislatures are more open and democratic than previously thought, while Pitkin (1967) suggests that representation includes many groups and people taking into account the overall structure and functioning of a system. My dissertation studies these largely unexamined claims in the context of e-mail and the Internet. Rosenthal only offers cursory remarks about the impact of information technology on the openness of state legislatures since this is not the main point of his research. I assess whether or not state legislatures are more open in terms of interactions between rank-and-file members, party leaders and committee chairs.[3] My research also evaluates whether or not power among legislative leaders decreases with the advent of e-mail and the Internet, which results in increased access to information. Traditionally in the New York state legislative process, three individuals, the Governor, the Senate Majority Leader and the Speaker of

---

[3] Rosenthal's analysis is a response to critics who argue that since the 1960s (following the Vietnam War and Watergate in particular) state legislators are unresponsive and state legislatures are undemocratic.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the Assembly, have dominated major decisions. If due to e-mail and the Internet decisions are no longer being dominated by these three individuals and other members have more input then this provides evidence for Rothenthal's theory that state legislatures are more open and democratic as a result of information technology. Whether or not e-mail and the Internet alter endogenous or exogenous institutional interactions merits investigation.

Literature Review

I seek to engage several distinct bodies of literature that cover a range of important political activities from citizen participation to representation. The literature lends support to the aforementioned hypotheses. I include relevant literature from organizational theory and technology because existing literature in the field of political science does not examine information technology with the same depth or range that these fields have.

Democratic Theory. While most accounts of democratic theory emphasize electoral politics, Lenski (1966) and Bollen (1980) focus on political liberties and access to government by non-elites, respectively. Since access to government by citizens and groups is examined in my dissertation, Lenski's and Bollen's work are especially useful. Lenski discusses the importance of the electoral process, however, he also emphasizes the role of political liberties. Political liberties, according to the author, allow people to organize and rise in opposition. Bollen defines political democracy as "the extent to which the political power of the elite is maximized and that of the nonelite is maximized" (Bollen 1980, p. 372) He

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

asserts that the right to protest or support government policies or decisions is essential to preserving the political liberties of all individuals. These political liberties ensure that individuals and interest groups can compete with the existing elites. These analyses are of import since information technologies can be used as conduits to organize in support and opposition of government policies and decisions.

Information Technology and Government. Prior research on information technology and government can be divided into two camps, the optimists and the pessimists. Authors in the former camp, Barber (1984), Grossman (1995), Browning (1996), and Bennett and Fielding (1999), assert that information technology is beneficial, discussing how information technology has improved democracy in the US. In a largely theoretical analysis Grossman addresses the probable impact of technology on participatory democracy. Grossman states that we are entering into the "electronic republic" or the "third transformation," where citizens will become directly involved in decision-making, thereby having more control in government. Grossman only provides evidence from television regarding how information technology is transforming government (Grossman 1995). Whether or not Grossman's concept of the "electronic republic" is applicable remains to be seen. Browning (1996), and Bennett and Fielding (1999) offer empirical accounts that examine the impact of information technology on voting and advocacy issues. These accounts offer empirical evidence that the Internet is an important democratizing mechanism that can lead to increased participation by individuals and groups that were previously

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

prevented from participating (Browning 1996; Bennett and Fielding 1999). Although Browning, and Bennett and Fielding focus on voting, campaigns and advocacy issues, their work is nevertheless important because it establishes the importance and potency of the Internet in politics from an empirical perspective.

In contrast the pessimists, Abramson, Arterton, and Orren (1988), Barber (1998), Davis (1999), Wilhelm (2000) and Bimber (2003), argue that technology will not necessarily improve the prospects for political participation and democratization. Davis (1999) and others assert that technology will not improve democracy because the individuals who currently dominate the media will also dominate the Internet's presentation of news and information. He shows how the Internet has been taken over by players who already run or own other forms of mass media. Existing players have learned not only how to use the Internet to maintain power, "but to prevent the very diffusion of power to other players the Internet is supposed to encourage" (Davis 1999, p.7). Finally Davis finds that information via the Internet does not necessarily make individuals any more well-informed or politically engaged. Barber states that technology has become potentially undemocratic. While democracy depends on deliberation, prudence, slow-footed interaction, and time-consuming forms of multilateral conversation and social interactions that are often time-consuming, demanding and sometimes interminable, information technology is the antithesis of this. According to Barber, "If democracy is to benefit from technology then we must start not with technology but with politics. The new technology is only an instrument of communication. It can not determine what we will say to whom we will say it"

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

(Barber 1998). Finally Bimber (2003) contends that the Internet will not necessarily improve democracy, worsen democracy or make a difference in many instances. The Internet only changes how democracy is practiced. The author maintains that the Internet will not induce disengaged individuals, instead it facilitates communication and organization among those that are already interested and engaged in politics (Bimber 2003). Perhaps as Bimber argues information technology is just another mode of communication.

Political Participation. Analyses of political participation are typically narrow in scope, focusing on voting, and they do not pay attention to other modes of participation including but not limited to contacting an elected official, writing letters, signing petitions and protesting. Several authors (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Putnam 2000; and Ridlen Ray 1999) examine political participation in the United States and they develop expansive explanations of political participation not limited to voting. Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995), for example, identify a number of activities they consider to be political participation, including voting, undertaking campaign work, making campaign contributions, contacting government officials and protesting. Contact with an elected official ranked third in terms of political activity, after voting and being affiliated with a political organization (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995). According to the authors,

> Meaningful democratic participation requires that the voices of citizens in politics be clear, loud and equal: clear so that public officials know what citizens want and need, loud so that officials have an incentive to pay attention to what they hear and equal so that the democratic ideal of equal responsiveness to the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> preferences and interests of all is not violated (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, p. 509).

An explanatory model of political participation is offered with emphasis on the role of institutions. My dissertation explores how constituents and interest groups participate in state legislative politics, focusing on how constituents and interest groups contact state legislators. Both Ridlen Ray and Putnam discuss the Internet's potential to influence political participation. Ridlen Ray posits that the Internet leads to increased social connectedness that it improves interactions and participation in associational life (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999). The author further states that "information sharing and interest in affiliation prompts involvement in politics and augments the political skill of the individual." Ridlen Ray recognizes that the ties between individuals and technologies vary from weak to strong and associational life has changed with the advent of new technologies. Since Americans value both individualism and social connectedness, the author asserts that they will continue to balance these values as they apply technology to their individual and associational lives (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999). Less optimistic Putnam asserts that almost every form of community involvement has declined. For example writing to a congressional member or senator experienced a 23 percent decline over the last 20 years (Putnam 2000). Putnam admits that it is too early to assess the impact of the Internet, however, he admits that the Internet may be key to improving civic engagement and social connectedness. My dissertation evaluates whether or not political participation increases or decreases with the advent of new technologies.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Representation. Authors including Rosenthal (1998), Jewell (1982) and Pitkin (1967) study legislative behavior, assessing the openness of state legislatures and the principle tasks legislators perform. Rosenthal contends that state legislatures are more democratic than previously thought due to a number of factors including reapportionment, a trend toward single-member districts, more descriptive representation, increasingly competitive electoral races that coincide with a decline in "safe seats" and increased constituent participation. The author's discussion of increased constituent participation notes the use of e-mail, but Rosenthal does not elaborate on how legislators use e-mail nor does he provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate the impact of information technology on state politics apart from offering cursory remarks regarding the importance of technology in his conclusion (Rosenthal 1998). While Rosenthal assesses the extent to which state legislatures are democratic, Jewell (1982) focuses on how representation occurs in state legislatures. Jewell suggests that there are four components of representation: communication, policy responsiveness, constituent services and the allocation of resources. His analysis is important because he examines state level variations, including the strength of political parties, level of professionalization, level of resources, etc., which might affect representation. In addition to being one of the first comparative studies of state legislative politics that departs from the legalistic and constitutional traditions, this work is significant because it provides a first hand account of how legislators represent their constituents (Jewell 1982). Discussion of e-mail and the Internet is absent because this analysis predates much of information technology.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Nevertheless Jewell's analysis is relevant because the idea of how constituents are represented, delineated in the four components of representation, is central to my dissertation. Pitkin (1967) examines representation from a theoretical perspective and she maintains that representation is typically discussed in terms of what representation is rather than what representation means. In defining what representation is, Pitkin asserts that the mandate-independence controversy polarizes a representative's role. Most relevant to my dissertation is the author's definition,

> Political representation is primarily a public, institutionalized arrangement involving many people and groups, and operating in the complex ways of large-scale social arrangements. What makes it representation is not any single action by any one participant, but the overall structure and functioning of the system, the patterns emerging from the multiple activities of the patterns emerging from the multiple activities of many people. It is representation if the people (or a constituency) are present in governmental action, even though they do not literally act for themselves (Pitkin 1967, pp. 221-222).

The importance of the overall structure is accentuated in Pitkin's analysis. This is defined as intra-institutional behavior in my dissertation discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

Leadership. Rosenthal (1998), and Jewell and Whicker (1994) study leadership in state legislatures assessing how power is structured and dispersed. The authors maintain that how professionalized a state legislature is helps to determine whether or not leadership is centralized or decentralized. Elements that determine levels of professionalization in state legislatures include pay, length of session, resources and professional staff. The authors assert that professional legislatures tend to have dispersed power while the opposite is true

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of non-professional legislatures. In professional legislatures for example resources are broadly distributed with the introduction of computers and professional staff thereby reducing information gaps and the time involved in making decisions (Rosenthal 1998). Both studies note the importance of resources in professional and nonprofessional legislatures, yet the impact of information technology is only mentioned in passing—failing to offer substantive empirical evidence to back the claims made by the aforementioned authors.

Organizational Theory. Since my dissertation also broadly investigates how the state legislature uses information technology, studies by organizational theorists including Woodward (1958), Lawrence and Lorsch (1967), Perrow (1967, 1970), Thompson (1967) and Galbraith (1977) are important because they examine the relationship between information technology and organizational structure, in addition to focusing on how information technology impacts individuals within organizations. Since the mid 1960s organizational theorists like Lawrence and Lorsch have asserted that contingency theory, which emphasizes the interdependence of organizations and their environs, best explains the relationship between information technology and organizational structure (Lawrence and Lorsch 1967). Under contingency theory, how technology shapes organizational structure is given significant attention. Woodward (1958), for example, argues that technology directly determines differences in organizational attributes such as span of control, centralization of authority, formalization of rules and procedures. Several authors, including Woodward (1967), Perrow (1967, 1970) and Thompson (1967), emphasize the importance of three

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

variables: complexity or diversity, uncertainty or unpredictability, and interdependence. Galbraith (1977) maintains that these variables affect how information is processed because organizations exist to process information. Many empirical studies have been conducted, which lend support to my hypothesis that information technology is impacting state legislatures. Scott, however, maintains that the data are not strong. Contrary to Gerwin's 1981 study, which found more support at the individual level rather than the organizational level, Fry reviewed 48 empirical studies of technology and structure conducted between 1965-1980. His meta-analysis concludes that the organizational level—not the individual level—reveals a relatively consistent pattern of results that support contingency theory's predictions (Goodman, Sproull and Associates 1990).

Criticism of contingency theory abounds, with many scholars suggesting that contingency theory be modified because it is too rigid (Goodman, Sproull and Associates 1990). Unlike organizational theorists, Barley (1990) asserts that the literature on technology can better explain how technology impacts organizational structure. Accordingly studies from this perspective examine information technology and organizational structure from macro and microsocial perspectives. The former posits that macrosocial forces influence organizational structure, individual action and technical design. This perspective incorporates Marxist theories of deskilling and institutional theories. Institutional theorists, for example, contend that rules, regulations and wider belief systems constrain organizations. In addition technology is only influential under certain

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

circumstances and it does not influence all organizations. The latter perspective posits that microsocial processes "are triggered by new technologies and traces of structural change occurs upward from below." Under the microsocial view, new technology alters tasks and skills and this creates possibilities for change in the organizational structure (Barley 1990). Barley proposes merging macrosocial and microsocial theories together, though he notes that this is methodologically problematic because empirically there is insufficient means for tracing chains of influence in either direction. This analysis is particularly useful because both the macro and microsocial views recognize how technology can alter organizational structures.

Interest Groups. Authors including Berry (1997), Ziegler and Baer (1969), Rosenthal (1993) and Hrebenar and Thomas (1993) assess interest group power, interest group interactions and lobbying strategies, though none aside from Hrebenar and Thomas discuss whether or not information technology affects power and interactions. Ziegler and Baer (1969) and Hrebenar and Thomas (1993) assert that interest group power depends on a number of variables, including the strength of the interest group, the issue, and the strength of political parties. In contrast Rosenthal provides a descriptive account of interest group behavior similar to Hrebenar and Thomas (1993), though Rosenthal focuses on state level interaction and Hrebenar and Thomas on national level interaction. The latter work is particularly useful because the authors discuss how information technology impacts interest groups and their ability to lobby whereas Rosenthal ignores the role of information technology.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Hrebenar's and Scott distinguish between traditional lobbying and indirect lobbying through the media. According to Hrebenar and Thomas ,

> Technological innovations have revolutionized lobbying strategies and tactics in recent years. The use of computers, data processing, direct mail solicitation, and the increased use of media have given interest groups the tools to increase their impact on the policymaking process. A distinction between traditional and electronic lobbying styles is made (Hrebenar and Thomas 1993).

I expect that my findings at the state level will be similar to Hrebenar and Thomas 's. Also noteworthy is Berry's exploration of whether the sheer number of interest groups and their collective power undermines American democracy (Berry 1997). The author contends that the explosion of interest group activity has resulted in inequities in the political process—especially for under or unrepresented groups. Berry's work is important since it addresses the role of marginalized groups as well as assessing the prospects of political participation for interest groups. Based on findings from Browning (1996) and Bennett and Fielding (1999), information technology acts as a democratizing force in politics. Evidence from my dissertation that under and unrepresented groups have gained access through information technology would refute Berry's claim that political participation is uneven and lend support to claims that political participation will be altered as a result of information technology.

Methodology

Research Design. In order to test the major and minor hypotheses outlined in my dissertation I generated two surveys (sent to state legislators and interest groups) and conducted in-depth interviews (with state legislators and executive

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

directors and presidents of interest groups) that measure the attitudes and opinions of state legislators and the heads of interest groups toward information technology on a range of topics. I designed the survey and interview questions to assess how and to what degree state legislators and interest groups use technology.[4] The survey questions focused on various aspects of representation, political participation and democratization as related to constituents, state legislators and interest groups. A specific discussion of the questions that are used to test the hypotheses appears in Chapters Two and Three. The survey and interview instruments appear in Appendices A through D.

Operationalization. **Information technology** facilitates communication. In particular it aids in the exchange and dissemination of information. For the purposes of this research, information technology primarily refers to e-mail and the Internet. Information technology also includes personal computers, networks and listservs. When referring to e-mail, respondents were told to think of e-mail as distinct activity separate from other activities related to the Internet.

Rosenthal suggests that **representation** is typically defined as "the congruence between constituent views and legislative action." For the purposes of my dissertation representation is conceptualized in terms of internal and external interactions. Internal interactions refer to the institutional aspects of representation, which is called **intra-institutional behavior**. Measurement of

---

[4] A preliminary set of survey and interview questions ask legislators and interest groups whether or not they use e-mail and the Internet. A small percentage of legislators and interest groups do not employ these technologies however my dissertation focuses on those individuals who use technology and the degree to which they use it. Some references are made to the non-users however extensive analysis of non-users is beyond the scope of this study.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

internal interactions examines how legislators communicate with each other and leadership (and how frequently); how they develop policy and perform research (and how long it takes); their perceptions of how information technology has changed their jobs, etc. External interactions refer to the interactions between state legislators and constituents, interest groups and marginal groups with a focus on "participatory representation." Measurement of external interactions compares e-mail and US Post across a number of dimensions including quality and length of the communication and types of issues raised.

In addition to having an institutional context, representation is also defined as how a member *ought* to represent his constituents (Rosenthal 1998). Three components of representation (Jewell 1982)—communicating with constituents, responding to policy, and providing and responding to the needs of individuals and groups—provide a framework for how members ought to represent their constituents. To assess these components I examine how e-mail and the Internet aid state legislators in their provision of constituent services and policy formulation. Communication with constituents via information technology, quicker responses to constituent concerns, development of legislation or attention to concerns that were previously unarticulated, more contact with a greater variety of constituents and better assistance in providing constituent services are defined as **"better representation."** Better representation is measured by counting the number of e-mails versus US Post; comparing the response rate to e-mail to US Post; asking legislative staff whether they perceive there to be a difference in the type of concerns articulated or provided via e-mail versus US Post; inquiring

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

whether legislators think they are better representatives as a result of information technology; and questioning whether legislators were able to better gauge the policy preferences of constituents via e-mail and the Internet.

Leadership in state legislatures includes principal officers, like the Majority and Minority Leaders, and committee chairs. The Council of State Governments' guide to legislative leadership, committees and staff was used to identify leaders in the New York and Vermont state legislatures. In discussing leadership the term **power** must also be defined. Power in state legislatures is measured in terms of access to leaders (is there more access or is it easier to meet or communicate as a result of e-mail); who determines what is on the agenda; and who makes decisions (do e-mail or the Internet affect how committee decisions are made or whether or not bills are reported out of committee or whether or not information is widely dispersed).

Unlike studies that measure and define participation in terms of voting this dissertation defines **political participation** as the amount of contact or interactions between state legislators, and constituents and interest groups. Reliably measuring whether or not interactions increase, decrease or stay the same is exceedingly difficult. Hence to measure political participation I rely upon the opinions and perceptions of state legislators, state legislative staff and executive directors and presidents who headed interest groups. For example I ask the aforementioned individuals whether or not more constituents and interest groups participate because of e-mail and the Internet. In addition to perceptions of political participation I also measure political participation in terms of the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

number of e-mails legislators receive; the number and variety of listserv messages legislators receive and send; and the number of "hits" on interest group websites (if available).

Democratization is the process through which more individuals engage in politics through political participation. Increased participation through information technology leads to more voices and more access. While many measures of democratization are based on voting or political stability, Bollen (1980) suggests that these indicators are not always valid. For the purposes of my dissertation democratization is defined as access, inclusiveness and diversity. Questions regarding whether or not the legislative process is more inclusive or open; whether or not more groups are participating in the political process; whether or not efforts to lobby or communicate have increased through the use of information technology; and whether or not there is greater diversity of constituent contact, measure respondents' perceptions of democratization.

Interest groups are individuals or organizations who come together, formally or informally, to influence public policy (Hrebenar and Thomas 1993). My dissertation looks at registered interest groups that seek to influence public policy at the state level. Interest groups that lobby on behalf of the traditionally under or unrepresented with little access to state legislators are termed **marginal groups**. Marginal groups represent populations that are unable to mobilize on their own because they are poor, physically or mentally disabled, or without the capacity to represent themselves, such as children (Walker 1991). In my dissertation I employ Walker's definition of marginal groups focusing on social service

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

organizations, which are fundamental in securing further assistance for these groups. Excluded from my definition of marginal groups are the elderly because they have successfully mobilized their efforts unlike other under and unrepresented groups. Nonprofit organizations that represent marginalized populations typically do not devote a large portion of their financial resources toward lobbying activities, though there are some organizations that do devote substantial resources so that they might influence public policy. **Non-marginal groups** are defined as organizations that represent populations or issues that have not been under or unrepresented. The environment, tourism, business and agriculture are some of the areas that are deemed non-marginal. Traditionally individuals who belong to and/or are represented by these interest groups have had access to state legislators whereas individuals who belong to non-marginal interest groups have been under or unrepresented.

Case Selection. Two cases are selected, the Vermont and New York legislatures. According to Yin (1989) case studies are preferable when asking how and why questions. Central to this research is describing how legislators and interest groups use e-mail and the Internet as it relates to representation, political participation and democratization. Nicholson-Crotty and Meier (2002) argue that important theoretical propositions have grown out of smaller studies pointing to exploratory and subsequently seminal works by Dahl and Hunter.

To determine which legislatures to study the selection of the two cases was made based on Kurtz's (1992) categorization of legislatures into three distinct groupings: non-professional, semi-professional and professional

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

legislatures. In this initial exploratory study I chose to study legislators from a non-professional and a professional legislature. According to Kurtz non-professional legislatures meet less frequently and have smaller staffs and low salaries, and members often work part-time outside the legislature. In contrast professional legislatures are in session full-time, have larger staffs, and receive generous salaries, and members consider their position full-time employment. State legislators from Vermont were selected because the Vermont legislature is a non-professional legislature while legislators from New York were chosen because the New York legislature is a highly professional legislature. These cases also provide an interesting framework for comparison since legislative politics in Vermont tend to be more participatory in nature while major legislative decisions in New York tend to be dominated by three individuals (the Governor, the Senate Majority Leader and the Speaker of the Assembly). Finally this study also controls for the technological capabilities of the two legislatures. In both states legislators have access to personal computers at their respective state houses, a state-issued e-mail account and Internet access. In addition, each state legislature has a website to disseminate information. Differences in technological capacities include the installation of WiFi in the Vermont statehouse, audio and video capabilities in the New York Senate and Assembly and publicly financed websites for each member of the New York legislature.

Data Collection. To measure the affect of information technology on the individual behavior of state legislators and constituents I generated a survey (Appendix A: Survey of E-mail & Internet Use by State Legislators & Staff) and I

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

conducted in-depth open-ended interviews (Appendix B: State Legislative In-Depth Interviews) with state legislators and state legislative staff. Surveys were designed to assess how legislators use information technology and how it impacts representation, political participation and democratization. A 12 page, 48-item questionnaire was generated in October 2002 and sent to all 391 state legislators in New York and Vermont.[5] A total of 88 state legislators responded to the survey yielding a 23 percent response rate.[6] The 38 responses from Vermont and 50 responses from New York appear to be a fairly representative sample. Legislators reported that they were elected to office between 1982 to 2001 in Vermont and 1972 to 2002 in New York, which is nearly identical to the legislatures as a whole. On average, legislators in Vermont were elected to office in 1996, and 1991 in New York.[7] The distribution of the cases in the two chambers is skewed toward the House and Assembly with three-quarters of the responses (31 cases in Vermont and 35 cases in New York). Of the remaining 22 cases, responses from Senators in New York comprise three times as many

---

[5] The survey instrument and in-depth interviews informed respondents that questions pertaining to the Internet did not include e-mail since e-mail was deemed a discrete activity.

[6] To increase the response rate a self-addressed stamped envelope was enclosed and a complementary copy of my findings would be made available to all respondents. Approximately three weeks after the initial survey was sent, a reminder was sent to all state legislators via e-mail, which contained the questionnaire as an attachment. Over the last three decades response rates for telephone and mail-in surveys of state legislators tend to range from 25 percent to 80 percent, while the average response rates for six or seven page surveys averages about 36 percent (Maestas, Neeley and Richardson, Jr. 2003).

[7] Legislators in Vermont obtained Internet access in the statehouse in 1998 and over half of the respondents in the sample were elected to office prior to 1998. Access to the Internet for New York state legislators differed across the two chambers, with the Senate obtaining access in 1995 and the Assembly in 1997. Over 65 percent of the respondents in the sample were elected to office prior to 1995.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

legislatures. In this initial exploratory study I chose to study legislators from a non-professional and a professional legislature. According to Kurtz non-professional legislatures meet less frequently and have smaller staffs and low salaries, and members often work part-time outside the legislature. In contrast professional legislatures are in session full-time, have larger staffs, and receive generous salaries, and members consider their position full-time employment. State legislators from Vermont were selected because the Vermont legislature is a non-professional legislature while legislators from New York were chosen because the New York legislature is a highly professional legislature. These cases also provide an interesting framework for comparison since legislative politics in Vermont tend to be more participatory in nature while major legislative decisions in New York tend to be dominated by three individuals (the Governor, the Senate Majority Leader and the Speaker of the Assembly). Finally this study also controls for the technological capabilities of the two legislatures. In both states legislators have access to personal computers at their respective state houses, a state-issued e-mail account and Internet access. In addition, each state legislature has a website to disseminate information. Differences in technological capacities include the installation of WiFi in the Vermont statehouse, audio and video capabilities in the New York Senate and Assembly and publicly financed websites for each member of the New York legislature.

Data Collection. To measure the affect of information technology on the individual behavior of state legislators and constituents I generated a survey (Appendix A: Survey of E-mail & Internet Use by State Legislators & Staff) and I

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

survey. I interviewed state legislators who held leadership positions and state legislators who headed the Finance and Ways and Means Committees. I interviewed members in leadership positions because leaders would be best poised to comment on whether or not decision-making had changed or whether or not it essentially remained the same.

A second survey instrument was generated and sent to interest groups in February 2002. The selection of Interest groups is based on a methodology developed in Walker's (1991) analysis of interest groups at the national level. Groups chosen for this study include state level interest groups that recruit members. Excluded from this study are universities and city governments where membership is not voluntary (Walker 1991). A cross-section of interest groups were chosen to represent the diverse interests in each state and the various levels of resources and access that each group has at its disposal. A total of 400 interest groups were surveyed; 200 in Vermont and 200 in New York. To compile a list of interest groups in Vermont I used GuideStar.org, a national database that lists nonprofit organizations by state and topical area; online newspapers including *The Rutland Herald*, The Barre Montpelier Herald and The *Times Argus*; and the Internal Revenue Service's list of nonprofit organizations. Interest groups in New York were selected using the New York State Directory 2000-2001. While the non-marginal groups were randomly selected, the marginal groups were selected based on whether or not the organization served under or unrepresented populations. Some examples of organizations that were selected

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

include those that serve the following populations homeless, children, mental or physically disabled, domestic abuse, drug abuse and HIV/AIDS.

A reminder was sent two-weeks after the initial survey was mailed, urging respondents to complete and return the questionnaire. The survey (Appendix C: Survey of E-mail & Internet Use Among Interest Groups) was designed to gauge how marginal and non-marginal interest groups in Vermont and New York use information technology. The survey asked organizations how they and their members (if applicable) use e-mail, the Internet, listservs and special software. In addition groups were asked about their perceptions of political participation via information technology and their perceptions of lobbying via information technology. Groups were asked to self-identify whether or not they serve a marginal population such as the poor, physically or mentally disabled, or children. Responses to the mail-in survey totaled 115 with a 28 percent response rate. Four cases were dropped from the analysis because membership in these organizations was not voluntary. The responses were evenly divided between the two states with 56 responses from Vermont and 55 responses from New York.[10]

In-depth open-ended interviews (Appendix D: Interest Group Interviews) were conducted with executive directors and presidents of organizations via telephone.[11] I selected organizations based on their annual lobbying expenditures choosing the top 10 and bottom 10 organizations among marginal

---

[10] Nine organizations did not indicate whether they served marginal populations. Using question 6 from The Survey of E-mail & Internet Use Among Interest Groups (Appendix C), groups that indicating that they served the physically/mentally handicapped, children or social services were coded as "marginal," otherwise they were coded as non-marginal.

[11] The survey instrument was amended slightly, adding three additional questions after the first two interviews were conducted.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and non-marginal groups in each state.[12] I conducted six interviews with non-marginal groups in each state for a total of 12 interviews. I also conducted the same number of interviews with marginal groups, six in each state. Interviewing organizations with large budgets and those that spent little on lobbying would illustrate whether or not those with copious resources have more influence using e-mail and the Internet.

Key Findings

Four key findings emerge with regard to the impact of information technology as it relates to representation, political participation and democratization. First, I found that representation is better or improved. Within the state legislatures there is a growing tendency to use e-mail and the Internet, though New York state legislators have been much slower to embrace these technologies than their Vermont counterparts.

Second, there is a perception of significantly and slightly increased political participation among constituents and interest groups. A majority of state legislators in Vermont reported there to be a significant increase in political participation via e-mail, while about a third of state legislators in New York reported there to be a significant increase in political participation. Despite the lower percentage of New York state legislators indicating there is a significant increase in political participation, a majority of New York state legislators reported

---

[12] While it was possible to determine which firms have the highest lobbying expenditures in New York, data on the lowest level of lobbying expenditures was not available. I randomly selected organizations that had low levels of expenditures.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

that there is a slight increase in political participation via e-mail among constituents. Both marginal and non-marginal groups viewed information technology as leading to increased political participation and as does the data from the state legislators, though interest groups illustrate more confidence in the impact of new technologies than do state legislators.

Third, while interest groups stress the importance of using e-mail and the Internet especially in their grassroots efforts, this is not a be-all end-all. Instead the data show that new technologies are only another weapon in their arsenal. The importance of maintaining and facilitating face-to-face contact for the purposes of lobbying remains paramount, not to be replaced by information technologies. In addition while I expected that information technologies would even the playing field for marginal groups, they are still at a disadvantage when compared to non-marginal groups. Though many marginal groups obtained e-mail and the Internet, they lack the technological sophistication and savvy of non-marginal groups. So rather than leveling the playing, non-marginal groups still have disproportionate access to and influence over state legislators with information technology.

And fourth, in terms of democratization, legislators in Vermont asserted in interviews that the state legislature was open prior to the advent of e-mail and the Internet. Unlike citizens in New York, citizens in Vermont have always been able to sit in on committee meetings, party caucuses and floor debate. It does not appear that the legislature is more open with the advent of new technology. However, these technologies do provide another tool for communication and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

information dissemination. There has not been a marked change in the amount of access to state legislators in Vermont since citizens contacted their state legislators at home prior to the advent of e-mail and the Internet. The existing political culture and structures provided ample access to state legislators in Vermont. Access has been enhanced, with additional tools such as e-mail and the Internet arguably improving access for those users who have access to them. In contrast with a political culture that is less open, the New York state legislature initially appears to be slightly more democratic with the advent of e-mail and the Internet. Constituents can e-mail their state legislators or they can access their state legislator's website. In addition constituents also can watch televised sessions online. Ultimately, however, decisions are still made by the same three individuals. While the state legislature appears to be more open and it appears that constituents and interest groups have greater access, I argue that this evidence must be looked at critically in light of the fact that decision-making essentially remains the same.

Organization of Chapters

Chapter Two begins with an overview of the historical evolution of information technology in each state legislature, providing context for the analysis and subsequent discussion. Using survey data and in-depth interviews a descriptive analysis details how state legislators, constituents and state legislatures use e-mail and the Internet to conduct state legislative business.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Data analysis explores the impact of information technology on representation, political participation, intra-institutional behavior and democratization.

Chapter Three depicts how and the degree to which marginal and non-marginal interest groups use e-mail and the Internet to organize their members, to disseminate information to their members and state legislators, and to lobby state legislators. Central to this chapter is my hypothesis that information technology evens the playing field for those organizations with fewer resources. This chapter investigates whether or not there is increased political participation and democratization for interest groups as a result of e-mail and the Internet.

Finally Chapter Four presents conclusions from Chapters Two and Three. In addition to summarizing the findings I discuss the implications of these new technologies in the context of state legislative politics. Recommendations regarding the future use of information technology in state politics are presented.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER TWO

LEGISLATING IN THE AGE OF TECHNOLOGY

E-governance[13], the conjoin between government and online technologies, is widespread in the US—more than 68 million Americans have visited government agency websites to contact public officials, file taxes, and apply for public benefits since January 2002 (Larsen and Raine 2002). Not only do citizens use information technology to access government but elected and appointed officials and their staff rely upon information technology to gather and disseminate information and to communicate with constituents and individuals from the public and private sectors. Research indicates that congressional members feel overwhelmed by the volume of e-mail they receive while local government officials, namely mayors and city council members, enjoy the advantages that e-mail offers. E-mail helps officials at the local level to complete their official duties and to communicate with greater ease (Larsen and Raine 2002).

The extent to which state legislatures employ information technology is largely unknown. In the most technologically advanced state legislatures members have laptops to read constituent e-mail and to review amendments and bills (Perlman 2001). In contrast less advanced legislatures do not provide representatives with individual computers or individual websites. Variation is

---

[13] "E-governance or electronic governance may be defined as the delivery of government services and information to the public using electronic means. Such means of delivering information is often referred to as information technology or "IT" in short form. Use of IT in government facilitates an efficient, speedy and transparent process for disseminating information to the public and other agencies, and for performing government administration activities." (http://www.bangaloreit.com/html/egovern/egovern.htm)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

apparent in how information technology is employed across the 50 state legislatures and also in how individual legislators use it. Some writers argue that state legislators may be more responsive to e-mail than their national level counterparts since state legislators are usually younger than congressional members and possibly more technologically inclined. Electronic activity may be a more effective tool for communication at the state level since state legislators receive less e-mail from constituents (Wallace 2001).

This chapter examines how state legislators and their constituents use e-mail and the Internet and the degree to which they use these technologies. A brief overview of the historical evolution of information technology including the hardware, software and operating systems that emerged in state legislatures provides context. Following this I assess how information technology influences representation, political participation, institutional behavior and democratization—the central foci of this chapter. I test four hypotheses:

Representation Hypothesis. Information technology facilitates communication among legislators, and between legislators and constituents regardless of place, and as a result state legislators will report that they are "better representatives."

I expect that state legislators and their staff will perceive information technology as resulting in better or more efficient representation. Advances in technology enable state legislators to respond to constituents with greater ease and rapidity. State legislators can quickly access or send e-mail, in addition to accessing websites, which provide a plethora of information instantaneously. E-mail and the Internet enable state legislators to gauge policy preferences of their

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

constituents more quickly. I expect that Internet access affords state legislators and their staff not only an additional research tool to obtain a wider array of information but also an important resource that aids in providing constituent services[14] and formulating legislation. This significantly enhances state legislators' ability to represent constituents and to formulate policy.

Political Participation by Constituents Hypothesis. Contrary to studies that suggest that political participation has declined, state legislators perceive there to be increased contact and interactions between state legislators and constituents as a result of information technology.

While Putnam (2000) and others maintain that civic participation is on the decline, I contend that e-mail and the Internet lead to increased civic engagement. Rather than measuring political participation solely in terms of voting like Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995), I posit that interactions between state legislators and constituents via e-mail and the Internet are important components of political participation. I expect that even though Vermont is rural and New York is largely urban and suburban, the perception of political participation on the part of state legislators will be similar. The ability to send e-mail to state legislators accompanied by expanded access to the Internet and state legislative websites results in increased civic engagement on the part of constituents.

Institutional Behavior Hypotheses. A) Intra-Institutional Behavior. Information technology alters interactions between individual members, party

[14] The terms constituent services and casework are used interchangeably. Constituent services and casework are services or assistance that legislators provide to their constituents usually

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

leaders and committee chairs. **B) Leadership**. Information technology leads to decreased power of legislative leaders regardless of the level of professionalization in state legislatures.

I posit that e-mail and the Internet facilitate internal communication within state legislatures lending support to Rosenthal's (1998) conclusion—not explored in his analysis of state legislatures—that information technology will result in more democratic and participatory state legislatures. E-mail enables state legislators to contact each other and to strategize politically when other means of contact are not possible or convenient. Committee business and communication among party leaders may be facilitated by e-mail and in some instances by the Internet.

Important decisions in New York state politics have historically been dominated by three individuals—the Governor, the Senate Majority Leader and the Speaker of the Assembly. With the advent of information technology I expect that the decision making process will be more inclusive, affording rank-and-file members increased input on legislation and greater access to party leaders and committee chairs. While leaders may possess enormous resources (additional staff, lulus[15], more computers, etc.) accrued largely through their positions, the gap in information between leaders and non-leaders is narrowing as a result of widespread access to information via e-mail and the Internet.

Perceptions of Democratization. Contrary to analyses that suggest that there has been a decline in democracy, state legislators perceive there to be increased

---

unrelated to formulating legislation.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

democratization in their state legislatures and for constituents in these states as a result of information technology.

With e-mail and the Internet I expect that constituents will have more access to state legislators and to information related to state legislative politics. Access to the Internet through individual member sites as well as the state legislature's website enables constituents to obtain information about their state legislator, to track bills, or to watch sessions online. Additional information can be obtained from other websites also used by constituents. Moreover information technology is not unidirectional since state legislators and their staffs communicate and disseminate information through e-mail and the Internet. I contend that state legislative politics is more open and inclusive as a result of information technology. Hence there is a perception of increased democratization.

History of Information Technology: Two State Legislatures

Introduced in the late 1950s, the first computers relied on "punched cards" to store information. The creation of transistors and circuits in the 1960s led shortly thereafter to the widespread proliferation of computers. Transistors and circuits increased the speed and storage capacity of computers. The introduction of chip technologies and the subsequent integration of circuit technology in the 1970s dramatically improved the capacity and capability of computers (Danziger et. al. 1982). It was during this period that personal computers first appeared in

---

[15] A lulu is additional compensation paid to state legislators who hold committee or leadership positions.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the work place. Discussing the historical evolution of information technology might seem unnecessary since computers have been in most work places for almost 25 years. However while this is true for the private sector and universities, the public sector—government and nonprofit agencies—has been much slower to embrace advances in information technology, often because it was cost-prohibitive. By the early 1980s the New York State Assembly and Senate acquired personal computers for state legislative offices in the capitol and the district through a contract with IBM. Meanwhile Vermont state legislators who lacked legislative offices, let alone a budget for staff or computers, were left to their own devices.

Prior to the 1980s few state legislatures had personal computers. In New York, however, some state legislators had personal computers, but the hardware and software were neither standardized nor networked. The use of personal computers in state legislative politics was fragmented and disparate. To remedy these problems two separately networked Disk Operating Systems (DOS) were established in each chamber of the New York State legislature circa 1983. Accompanying these networked systems was the standardization of hardware and software within each house. The number of personal computers allocated to each state legislator remained disparate however. These disparities can be attributed to the differences between the two chambers and the parties in power. For example members of the majority party received more computers than the minority party, though individuals who held leadership positions were allocated more computers than non-leaders regardless of party affiliation. Personal

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

computers notably aided correspondence and, mail merges in particular, making correspondence easier while computers also facilitated drafting bills, developing memoranda in support and opposition to legislation and preparing press releases. General clerical duties were more efficiently undertaken with the advent of the personal computer, though many individuals in the state legislature resisted advances in technology.

A clunky, albeit usable, e-mail program was in place with the advent of the networked system. Users accessed e-mail by logging onto a mainframe computer wherein software produced by IBM called OfficeVision provided users with e-mail, an electronic calendar, phone directories and other tools. Sending e-mail internally was simple, however, sending messages externally was exceedingly difficult because users needed to include a "gateway number" in addition to an e-mail address to communicate with other users. The gateway number permitted the mainframe to locate and to speak to other systems. Oddly few systems required gateway numbers as most systems were sophisticated enough to locate an e-mail address without it (Pole 2000). While e-mail was in place few individuals e-mailed with any regularity due to the complexities associated with using it. Hence it was not used widely for communication or information dissemination.

Advances in the early 1990s helped make the existing cumbersome system more user-friendly. In the Assembly a graphics-based system operating system called Windows 3.0[16] replaced DOS in 1991, eliminating the need for the

[16] Windows 1.0 and 2.0 preceded Windows 3.0 in the fall 1985 and 1987 respectively, yet neither was widely received by the public, unlike their successor, Windows 3.0.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

command-line interface. Users could simply click on an icon using a mouse to access programs rather than keystrokes. Following the installation of Windows 3.0 all computers in the Assembly were upgraded to Windows 3.1. In contrast, the Senate did not alter its operating environment instead relying upon the OS/2 system, a command-based interface system. Despite the antiquated operating system, the New York Senate was connected to the Internet in 1995. The Assembly lagged behind the upper house, not obtaining Internet access until June 1997 when it installed Windows 95. The Internet, accompanied by upgraded, user-friend e-mail programs, significantly enhanced the prospects for communication and information dissemination. Prior to obtaining Internet access technology only moderately improved administrative conditions for state legislators and staff. Though all state legislative offices in Albany were connected to the Internet by 1997, many district offices were not connected to the Internet until after 2000.

Because state legislators in Vermont lack individual offices with computers in Montpelier (nor do they have offices in their districts), it is exceedingly difficult to pinpoint when state legislators in Vermont first had access to e-mail or when they were first connected to the Internet. Personal computers purchased for home use by state legislators lacked standardized equipment or software. In the capitol there were limited computer services and access. Until 1994 the legislature had a WANG VS 85 minicomputer used largely by the technology staff in the state legislature. During this period only four state legislators accessed the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

system and only one state legislator used the system with any regularity, primarily for tasks related to word processing.

In 1994 Novell Netware, a personal computer-based network, was installed in the Vermont statehouse. Software provided on the network included WordPerfect Office, consisting of WordPerfect, Lotus 1, 2, 3, and GroupWise. Four shared personal computers were set up in the member's lounge enabling state legislators to access e-mail and word processing programs for the first time. In Montpelier few members relied upon e-mail or the Internet because the statehouse was not equipped with sufficient terminals to adequately meet the demands of state legislators. However in 1998 each of the 27 committees in the House and Senate was allocated a personal computer for a total of 31 computers in the Vermont state legislature. This was seen as a dramatic improvement though members still had limited access to e-mail and the Internet when in Montpelier. In addition to expanding the number of terminals in the legislature in 1998, Microsoft Office replaced WordPerfect. With the expansion of additional computer terminals coinciding with a decline in prices for home personal computers, members could begin to take advantage of e-mail and the Internet for communication and information dissemination.

Three years later the system was again enhanced, migrating to a Windows operating network and adding another eight personal computers to the member's lounge. In response to the lack of access to modern technology, the Vermont statehouse was wired for remote access called Wi-Fi in 2001. This remote access allows users with laptops to work anywhere in the statehouse

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

providing they have the required hardware. To date laptops have not been used. Some members fear that laptops will create unnecessary noise in an already noisy chamber but one member said that he would be happy to see laptops on all desks.

By the mid to late 1990s both state legislatures had access to e-mail and the Internet and each legislature established a website. A plethora of information can be found on the respective state legislative websites ranging from individual member biographies to the text of bills. In addition to the state legislative sites (with separate sites for each chamber in New York) individual member sites have been developed in New York. The majority party in the Assembly limits the amount and type of information that appears on minority members' websites while giving members of the majority party almost unlimited access to post to their sites. Finally while anyone can walk into the statehouse in Vermont and listen to committee proceedings or sessions, New Yorkers can only begin to approach this level of openness with the advent of SenNet TV and audio and video in the Assembly in 2002, which enables viewers to watch session via the Internet.

Representation: For Better or Worse?

Jewell's (1982) seminal work on representation investigates four aspects of representation in state legislatures. These four components of representation include communicating with constituents, which includes being accessible to constituents and learning about constituent needs, while simultaneously informing constituents of legislative activities; responding to policy, which

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

includes examining the various types of constituent demands; providing services and responding to the needs of individuals and groups; and allocating resources to the district (Jewell 1982). This research relies on the first three components of Jewell's analysis to illustrate how information technology affects communication with constituents, policy responsiveness and service provision. To assess these components I examine how e-mail and the Internet aid state legislators in their provision of constituent services and policy formulation.

Since my research looks at the interplay between information technology and representation, I also aim to measure whether or not representation is better, worse, the same or just different. Better representation is measured in terms of whether or not e-mail and the Internet facilitate quicker response rates and whether or not a different set of constituents contact state legislators than before e-mail and the Internet were available. Quick response rates are important when there are time-sensitive issues such as an impending committee or floor vote or locating a missing benefits check on behalf of a constituent. My research also takes into account whether or not new or additional information can be provided to constituents through information technology and whether or not representatives perceive these technologies as enabling them to provide more efficient or effective service to constituents.

E-mail. One might think that e-mail use in state government, state legislatures in particular, is a given. While many state legislators have had e-mail for about 10 to 15 years, it has not been employed with any regularity until the last five years. Survey data show that 23 percent of Vermont and New York state legislators (20

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

out of 88) still do not use e-mail. More encouraging 38 state legislators in Vermont (100 percent) and 27 state legislators in New York (55 percent) indicated that they use e-mail for legislative business and casework. The data show that the 20 state legislators (41 percent) who do not use e-mail are from New York.[17] There are certainly members from Vermont who refuse to use e-mail though they are not represented in this dataset. Of the nonusers in the New York state legislature, 17 have staff (85 percent) that use e-mail for legislative business and casework, creating an environment where more than 95 percent of state legislative offices (85 out of 88) access e-mail.

State legislatures use private and state-issued e-mail accounts to conduct state legislative business in both states. Twenty-eight state legislators in Vermont (100 percent) have private e-mail accounts that they use to conduct state legislative business while 37 state legislators (100 percent) reported using their state-issued account. In New York 68 percent of state legislators (13 out of 19) have private e-mail accounts that legislators use for state legislative business. A majority of New York state legislators rely on state-issued accounts as do their staff. A larger number of staff than state legislators, 27 out of 50 staff (54 percent), indicated that they use private accounts.[18] State legislators in New York who indicated that they do not use e-mail have a dedicated staff person who manages their state-issued account.

---

[17] Legislators who do not use e-mail were elected to office between 1972 and 1999. Thirteen of the 20 non-users (65 percent) are members of the Assembly and the remaining non-users are Senators (35 percent). In the Assembly 33 percent of the non-users (4 out of 12) are from upstate New York and the remaining 66 percent of non-users (8 out of 12) hail from New York City and the metropolitan area. In the Senate 28 percent of the non-users (2 out of 5) are from upstate New York and 71 percent of non-users are from New York City and the metropolitan area.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Those state legislators and staff who use private e-mail accounts to conduct state legislative business do so out of both convenience and necessity. Working out of their homes, businesses or places of employment, Vermont state legislators often access their state-issued accounts remotely. [19] For home use private e-mail accounts are established once a contract is signed with an Internet Service Provider (ISP). Legislators in Vermont often rely more heavily on private accounts than state-issued accounts out of convenience. Direct e-mail access through an ISP is often more convenient than logging on remotely to the website that houses the state-issued e-mail accounts. Not only are state-issued addresses published on the Vermont state legislature's website but private e-mail addresses are published as well. In New York private accounts are often used out of necessity. In the Assembly staff members do not have state-issued e-mail accounts because the existing e-mail system is limited in its capacity, currently handling only accounts allocated for the 150 state legislators. In rare instances Assembly staff who work for a party leader have obtained state-issued accounts. As a result many staff have acquired private accounts, which they use from time to time to conduct legislative business. Smaller in size, the Senate does not face these same limitations and all staff are issued e-mail accounts. Unfortunately, the software the Senate uses to e-mail makes receiving and sending attachments exceedingly difficult. Because of this Senate offices rely upon private e-mail accounts wherein attachments can easily be sent and received.

---

[18] This figure is somewhat unreliable however, because there were 23 missing responses out of a total n = 50.

[19] Most Vermont legislators hold full-time or part-time jobs and fulfill their state legislative duties on a part-time basis.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

On average state legislators check e-mail more than *several times weekly*. The modal values show that most legislators check e-mail *daily* and that staff check e-mail *several times daily*. To gain a clearer picture of whether or not state legislators checked e-mail frequently or infrequently I created a dichotomous variable. When I asked state legislators how frequently they check e-mail, respondents who indicated checking e-mail *several times daily, daily* or *several times weekly* were coded as *frequently* equal to one and respondents that checked e-mail *weekly, several times monthly, monthly* or *never* were coded as *infrequently* equal to zero.[20] More than 65 percent of state legislators (58 out of 88) in both states check e-mail frequently compared to 17 percent of legislators (15 out of 88) who check e-mail infrequently, providing further evidence that suggests that this medium is commonly employed to undertake state legislative business.

To assess how state legislators use e-mail, survey recipients were asked to indicate for what purposes or how they use e-mail (Figure 2-1). State legislators in the two states use e-mail for a variety of reasons: to send/receive attachments, to request information or documents, to contact constituents, to schedule meetings and to contact other state legislators. While there is significant variation in terms of how legislators use e-mail across the last two categories, nearly 80 percent of legislators in Vermont and New York use e-mail to contact constituents. State legislators in both states also behave similarly in their use of e-mail to send/receive attachments and to request information or documents. In contrast a greater percentage of legislators in Vermont use e-mail

[20] See Appendix A question 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

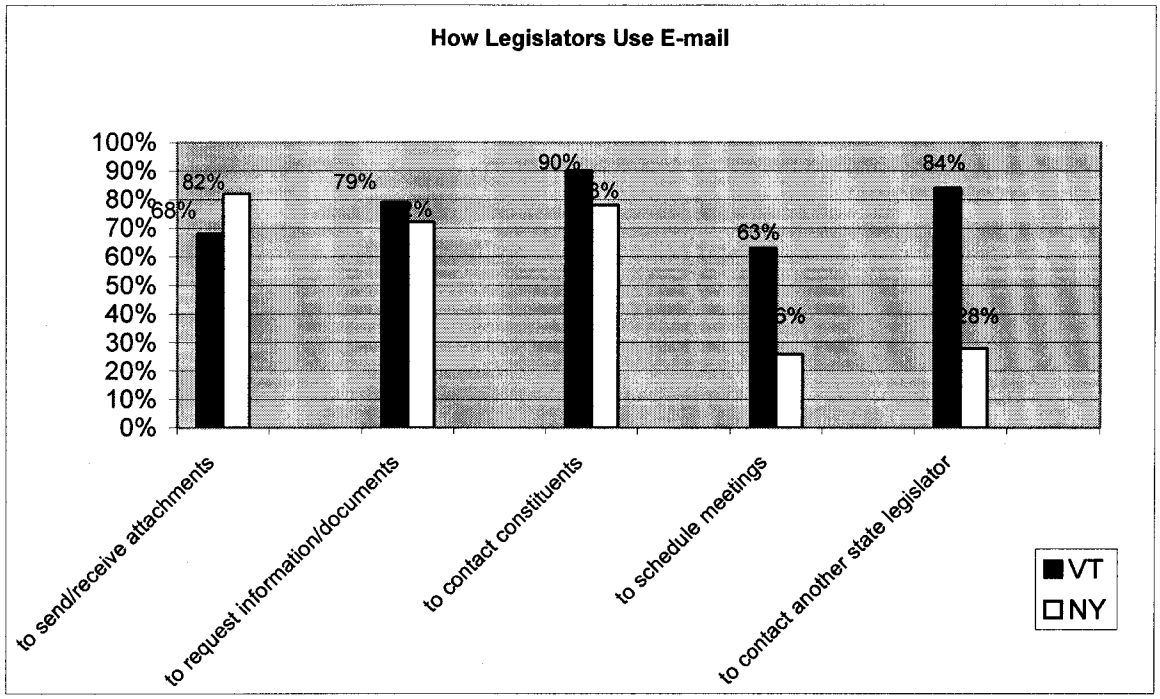
to contact other state legislators and to schedule meetings compared to a much smaller percentage of legislators in New York. Legislators in Vermont said in interviews that they use e-mail to set up meetings with other state legislators because it was easier than trying to track someone down by phone. Committee chairs echoed these sentiments, stating that it is infinitely easier to schedule committee meetings through e-mail and a minority of respondents admitted that they use e-mail to strategize politically. Respondents in New York, however, said that they only forward information via e-mail. When frequent and infrequent e-mail checkers are cross tabulated with this variable a higher percentage of legislators who use e-mail to send/receive attachments, to request information or documents, to contact constituents, to schedule meetings and to contact other state legislators are frequent checkers.

What explains why fewer state legislators in New York e-mailed their colleagues? Culturally, e-mail has not taken hold among state legislators in New York, perhaps because legislators have staff to read and to respond to e-mail. Without staff, legislators in Vermont are left to address e-mail on their own. In a majority of legislative offices in New York staff are responsible for reading and drafting replies to e-mail, which are subsequently reviewed by the legislator. Following the legislator's approval staff members send out replies. While members in Vermont struggle to contact one another because they are in Montpelier infrequently and they are without offices, legislators in New York can more easily locate their fellow legislators with the help of staff and legislative offices that act as a home base. With staff to help and the likelihood of locating a

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

member in their office, these factors potentially reduce the need of New York state legislators to communicate with each other through e-mail.

Figure 2-1



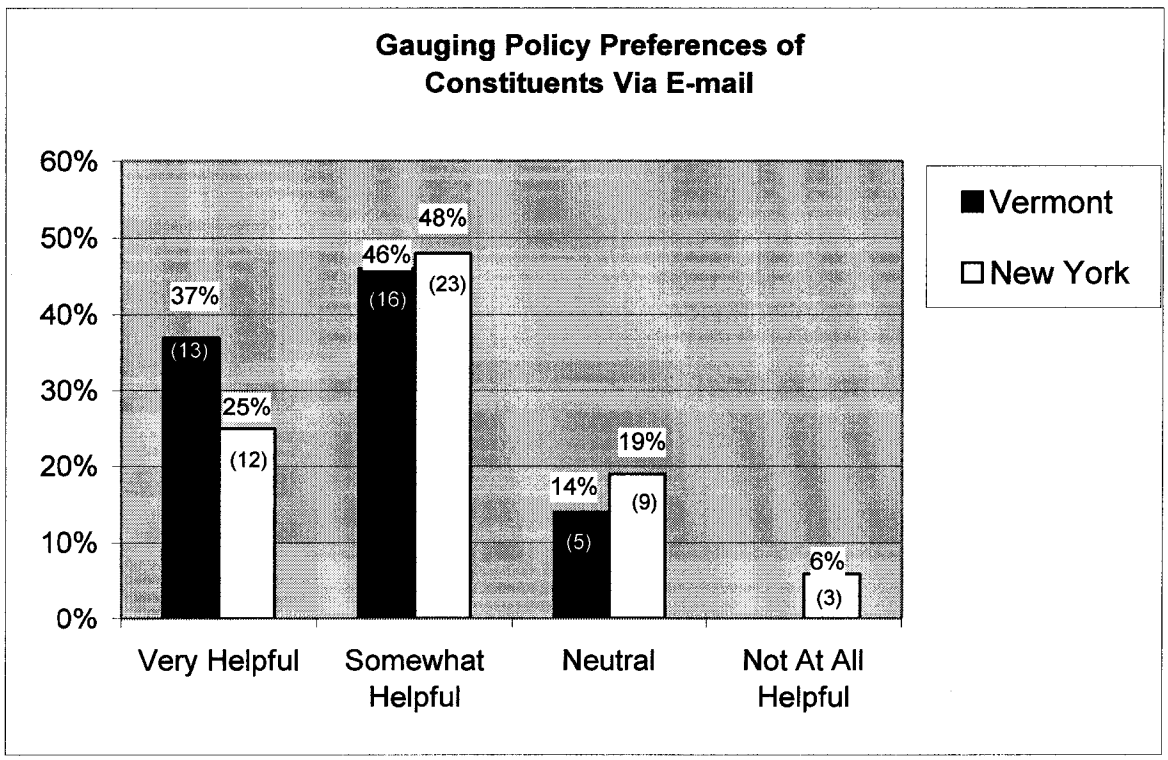
Source: State Legislative Data 2002.

Creating policies that will benefit one's constituents is an important component of representation. Jewell (1982) distinguishes between major economic or social issues that are important to the general public and the narrow parochial interests of specialized groups. The survey asked state legislators to indicate whether or not e-mail and the Internet helps them to gauge what issues are important to constituents (See Figure 2-2). A greater percentage of legislators in Vermont indicated that e-mail helps them to gauge the policy preferences of constituents than in New York. Few legislators in Vermont, 25 percent (9 out of 37), however, tally e-mail. Though New York legislators are

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

somewhat less enthusiastic about e-mail's utility in gauging the policy preferences of constituents 64 percent of legislators (32 out of 50) indicated that they tally e-mail from constituents. In interviews many New York state legislators indicated that they track constituents' policy preferences that they receive via e-mail by converting e-mails to a hard copies and filing the printed e-mails accordingly. Staff in New York also said that they show the state legislator how many e-mails he receives on a given issue, further evidence that policy preferences are expressed through e-mail. Despite the fact that a smaller percentage of legislators in New York reported that e-mail is very significant this finding is arguably noteworthy especially if it aids in policy formulation.

Figure 2-2



Source: State Legislative Data 2002.

Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In order to gauge whether or not representation was better I asked state legislators whether or not they are more efficient as a result of e-mail.[21] A majority of state legislators in Vermont said that they are *somewhat more* efficient because of e-mail. An additional 26 percent of legislators (9 out of 35) reported that they are *much more efficient*. When this variable is cross tabulated with frequent and infrequent e-mail checkers, the frequent e-mail checkers are much more convinced that e-mail leads their office to be much more efficient. Eighty percent of the frequent e-mail checkers reported that e-mail enables them to be somewhat or much more efficient because of e-mail. In contrast only 47 percent of the infrequent e-mail checkers indicated e-mail enables them to be somewhat or much more efficient because of e-mail. The survey also asked state legislators how quickly they respond to letters sent by US Post compared to how quickly they respond to e-mail. This variable was recoded into an ordinal level variable with four discrete categories to produce meaningful categories. Approximately 60 percent of state legislators in Vermont indicated that they respond to letters sent by US post in less than four days while 95 percent of respondents indicated responding to e-mail in less than four days. State legislators from New York reported increased efficiency, similar to their counterparts in Vermont. The data show that 41 percent of state legislators in New York (20 out of 49) feel they are somewhat more efficient and 20 percent of legislators (10 out of 49) reported feeling much more efficient because of e-mail. Of the 20 legislators who do not use e-mail 13 legislators (65 percent) reported

[21] See Appendix A question 38a.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

that their efficiency level *remains the same* with e-mail while only six legislators (30 percent) asserted that there are somewhat more efficient because of e-mail.

Despite having similar opinions as to their levels of efficiency the average response time to letters sent by US Post is slower than e-mail (See Table 2-1). On average legislators compose responses to e-mails two days earlier than US Post in Vermont and a day and a half earlier in New York. Both e-mail and US Post are significant at the .05 level exceeding a critical value of about 2.00. Comparatively, state legislators in Vermont respond to US Post and e-mail more quickly than legislators in New York. Since politics is very intimate and personal in Vermont, state legislators might feel compelled to respond to constituent concerns more quickly than their counterparts in New York. The slower turn-around time in New York might be attributed to the fact that legislators spend more time engaged in casework, which is more time consuming than addressing other constituent concerns.

Table 2-1
Rate of Responding to US Post & E-mail in Number of Days

	US Post	E-mail
Vermont	3.5*	1.5 *
New York	7.2*	5.7*

*Significant at the .05 level.
Source: State Legislative Data 2002.

During interviews I asked state legislators to identify any challenges e-mail presented. Respondents in both states noted that the sheer volume of e-mail that they receive often prevents or makes it difficult for them to respond to all e-mail. Another drawback associated with the volume of e-mail is the difficulty legislators

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

have locating a particular e-mail message, which requires them to sift through large quantities of e-mail. Some also noted that without any type of filtering software the volume of non-constituent e-mail, spam and viruses presents problems.

Not only were state legislators asked whether or not they are more efficient but they were also asked whether e-mail improves their ability to represent constituents.[22] The perception among state legislators is that e-mail improves their ability to represent constituents. Half of all Vermont state legislators (19 out of 36) reported that e-mail *significantly improves* their ability to represent constituents while 31 percent (11 out of 36) indicated that e-mail *slightly improves* their ability to represent constituents. Somewhat less enthusiastic are New York state legislators. The data show that 29 percent of state legislators (14 out of 49) in New York said e-mail significantly improves their ability to represent constituents and 43 percent of New York state legislators said that e-mail slightly improves their ability to represent constituents. Even a majority of the non-users indicated that e-mail improves their ability to represent constituents. When asked in interviews whether or not e-mail helps them to do a better job, the responses from legislators mirrored the survey results.[23] State legislators in both states noted that their response times are quicker when employing e-mail. Sending e-mail also enables legislators to have a record of their communication. Phone conversations and letters sent by US Post in contrast could not be as easily tracked. One respondent in New York remarked

[22] See Appendix A question 45.
[23] See Appendix B question 16.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

that, "Any time there is more communication between an elected official and their constituents, [it] is always beneficial. As long as the legislator and staff are on top of it." Others noted that e-mail facilitates both internal and external communication within the state legislator's office and with constituents, respectively. Surprisingly some state legislators said that e-mail does not help them to do a better job. Most of these respondents were unable to explain why. One state legislator in New York who was able to explain said,

> Not yet! I think we under utilize e-mail as a tool of communication here. Our system is inefficient and ineffective. Our system is older so we don't rely on it. We have Outlook, but we are not networked internally [within the office]. We would have to pay for it so we aren't networked at all. [This means that] we have to make other choices about communication.

E-mail is certainly viewed as an asset by the majority of state legislators in both states enabling them to communicate and to respond to constituent needs both quickly and effectively.

Internet. While e-mail has been around for nearly 15 years access to the Internet, albeit limited, has only been available since 1995 in both legislatures. The survey asked state legislators whether or not they use the Internet and if they use the Internet for casework or legislative business.[24] Eighty-three percent of state legislators in Vermont (28 out of 34) indicated that they use the Internet for casework or legislative business. Dramatically fewer state legislators in New York reported using the Internet. I suspect this is because New York is a professional legislature in which state legislators rely heavily upon their staff to perform tasks related to constituent services and policy formulation. Only 48 percent of New

[24] See Appendix A question 21a-c.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

York state legislators (23 out of 48) use the Internet though 98 percent of staff (48 out of 49) indicated that they use the Internet for casework and legislation.

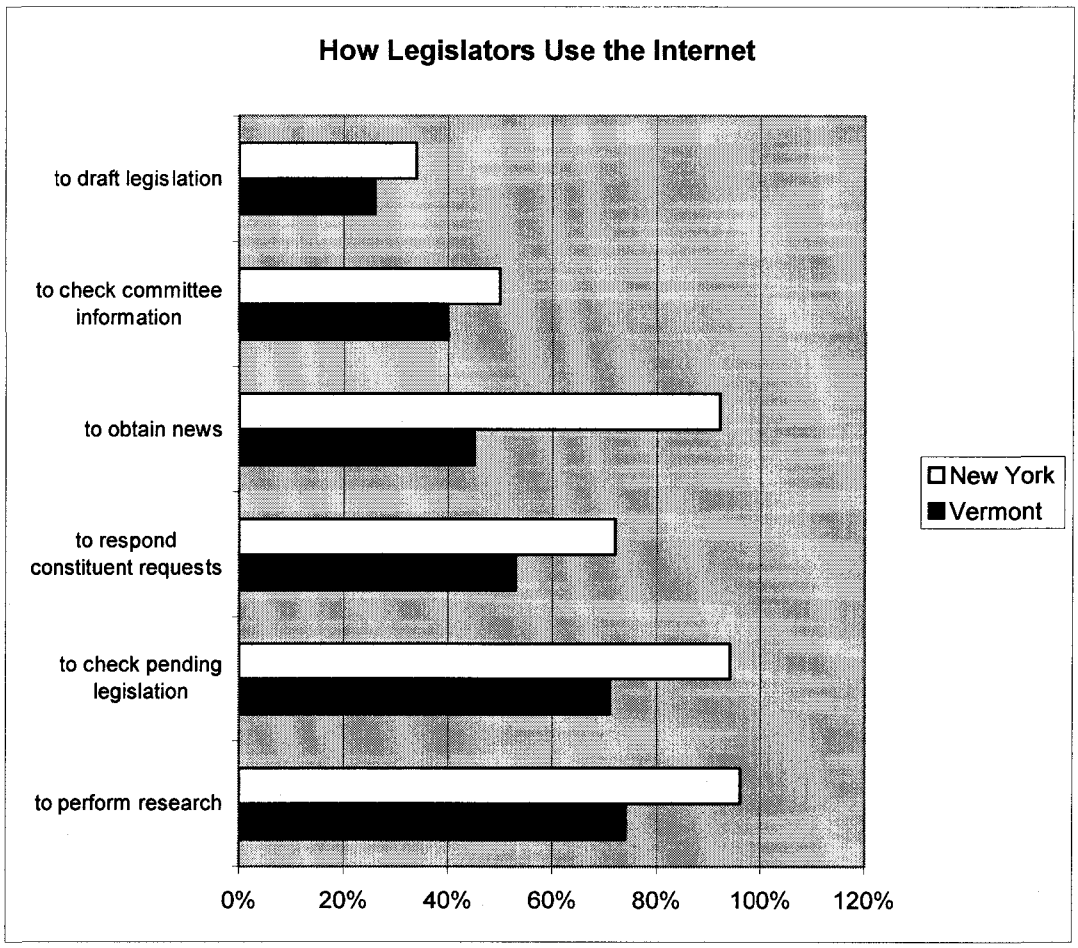
The Internet and state legislative websites also aid in service provision and responding to individual and group needs. State legislators and staff use the Internet to complete a variety of tasks related to casework and policy formulation (See Figure 2-3). Legislators use the Internet to perform research, to check on pending legislation, to respond to constituent requests or concerns and to obtain news. Across the two states legislators behave similarly with regard to performing research and checking on pending legislation. However almost twice as many state legislators and staff in New York use the Internet to obtain news and to respond to constituent requests or concerns than state legislators in Vermont. Otherwise there were few differences in how legislators use the Internet in the two states.

Rather than asking state legislators and staff how frequently they use the Internet the survey asked respondents to rate on a scale from zero to five –zero indicating never used and five indicating very frequently used—how frequently they use specific websites on the Internet to complete tasks related to casework and legislation.[25] In both states legislators and staff reported using their *state legislature's* and *state agency websites* for casework and legislation. On average state legislators rated state legislative websites a 3.4 and 3.6 for casework and legislation, respectively. State agency websites in both states have a mean score of 4.4 for casework and 3.2 for legislation. Compared to other sites—including

[25] See Appendix A question 25.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Figure 2-3



Source: State Legislative Data 2002.

federal government sites, nonprofit sites, state governor's site and news sites—the state legislature and state agency websites yield the highest mean and modal values in both Vermont and New York. The modal values for both casework and legislation are five, indicating that state legislators and staff use their state legislature's and state agency websites sites very frequently. Legislators use *news sites* and the *web-based Legislative Retrieval System* very frequently to formulate legislation, though state legislators and staff in New York use the latter site more frequently than Vermont state legislators. Other sites are rarely used.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

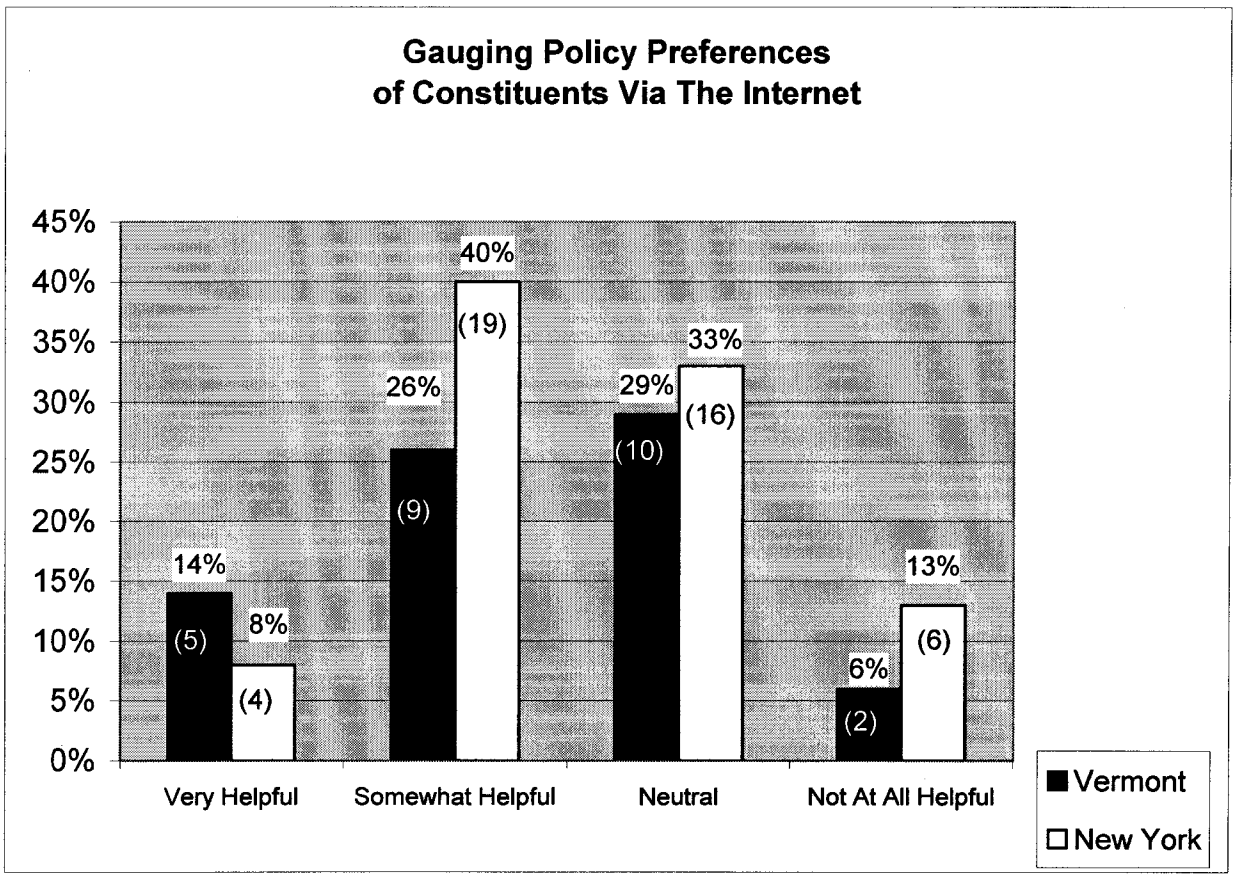
Jewell notes the importance of meeting constituent needs and responding to policy wishes. The Internet has been used to varying degrees to respond to constituent needs as well as for crafting public policy (See Figure 2-4).[26] According to the data a plurality of state legislators in Vermont indicated that the Internet has a *neutral* effect in terms of helping them to gauge the policy preferences of constituents. Somewhat more enthusiastic, 40 percent of New York state legislators (19 out of 48) indicated that the Internet is *somewhat* helpful in terms of helping them to gauge the policy preferences of constituents. While New York state legislators viewed the Internet as having a more favorable impact on their ability to respond to the policy preferences of constituents than did Vermonters, it should be noted that a sizable percentage of state legislators in Vermont, 20 percent (7 out of 35), indicated that the question was *not applicable* perhaps accounting for the difference between the two states.

Individual websites are invaluable tools for state legislators allowing them to disseminate information to constituents, which is an important component of representation according to Jewell. Uploading information to individual member websites enables state legislators to provide constituents with biographical and contact information, news about the district and pending legislation. Only two out of 36 state legislators (6 percent) in Vermont indicated that they have an individual website compared to 80 percent (39 out of 49) of state legislators in New York. Since the Vermont state legislature is nonprofessional, money is not allocated for the construction of individual websites, which most likely contributes

[26] See Appendix A question 40.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Figure 2-4



Source: State Legislative Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

to the paucity of individual websites. Though the survey results show only two members having websites, it is likely that more than two state legislators have websites since qualitative research shows that three members in Vermont have websites. According to the qualitative data most state legislators in New York asserted that their newsletters and press releases are the most valuable information provided on the site. Some admitted that they are negligent and fail to update their sites in a timely fashion while others noted that additional information ought to be posted. During interviews I asked state legislators how

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

important they felt their individual website was.[27] New York state legislators from the majority party in both houses noted the variety and abundance of information that is typically posted to their individual sites. Responses to this question however produced markedly partisan differences. According to one minority member,

> [The website is] not really important because we don't have control over it. We make sure that the bio and other limited information is correct but because the Assembly Majority has control over it [the website], we can't really communicate or disseminate information. We do not use the website as a mode of communication. If we had control over it, I imagine that we would use it more. We might be willing to use it more if we could post stuff to it.

Other members of the minority party echoed similar sentiments. Unlike their Republican counterparts, Democrats in the Senate do not have individual websites that are publicly financed. Even more unexpectedly the New York Senate's homepage does not have links to individual state senators' websites nor do individual sites frequently have links to the New York state Senate's homepage. In the Assembly all members have individual sites financed by the state. The Democrats severely restrict the content and amount of material posted to the individual websites of minority members. Individual members in Vermont and minority members in the New York Senate are left to incur the costs associated with developing and maintaining websites. Though the costs can be relatively inexpensive, these state legislators are potentially at a disadvantage.

A dearth of sophisticated website development quickly emerges when selecting for state legislators with individual websites. For example, few state legislators targeted specific groups or individuals when designing their websites.

---

[27] See Appendix B question 24.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Of the state legislators who reported having a website only 15 percent (6 out of 41) said that they designed their website to target constituents and one office reported targeting Hispanics.[28] As illustrated in Table 2-2, among those legislators who have websites, few legislators update their sites with any regularity. State legislators were asked whether or not their individual websites record the number of visits or hits as well as whether or not their office analyzes websites activity (Table 2-3).[29] A plurality of respondents do not know whether or not their site records the number of hits to the site. Still fewer state legislators with individual sites, 17 percent, reported *analyzing website activity*. More respondents, 65 percent (27 out of 41), indicated that they do not analyze website activity. Evidently analyzing and frequently updating sites are not priorities for most state legislators. It seems that for most state legislators having some information posted to websites is sufficient. One state legislator whose site tracks the number of hits said the site receives between 900 and 1000 visits on a monthly basis. It would behoove legislators to analyze and update their sites in a more timely fashion in light of the volume of traffic generated by individual sites.

The content on state legislators' sites is somewhat homogeneous. In the Assembly this due to the fact that the majority party controls or limits what can appear on sites. Table 2-4 illustrates information that is found on individual websites.[30] A large percentage of respondents reported that information about *bills* and *pending legislation* appears on their site. In addition to the information listed in the table individual websites also inform visitors about a legislator's

[28] See Appendix A question 28.
[29] See Appendix A questions 31 and 32.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

activities through press releases, newsletters, and bills a member is currently sponsoring and co-sponsoring.

Table 2-2
Frequency of Updating Individual Websites

Frequency of Updating Websites	Percentage
Update Website Weekly	27 (11/41)
Update Website Monthly	20 (8/41)
Don't Know How Often Website Updated	20 (8/41)

Source: State Legislative Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

Table 2-3
Individual Websites That Record Number of Visits or Hits

Records The Number of Visits or Hits?	Percentage
Yes	30 (12/41)
No	30 (12/41)
Don't Know	40 (17/41)

Source: State Legislative Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

In addition to individual sites each state legislature has a website. State sites provide a plethora of information from contact information for state legislators to information on bills. Other information that appears on state legislative sites includes biographical information, the journal, committee information, press releases, links to other parts of state government and frequently asked questions. I asked state legislators what impact they feel their

[30] See Appendix A question 33.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Table 2-4
Information That Can Be Found on Individual Websites

Type of Information	Percentage
Information on bills/pending legislation	78 (32/41)
Speeches	12 (5/41)
Committee information	63 (26/41)
Candidate information	66 (27/41)
Information on signed bills	51 (21/41)

Source: State Legislative Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

state legislature's website has on state politics. In both states legislators indicated that their state legislative site is an excellent way to disseminate information. Legislators asserted that not only does their state legislature's site serve constituents and various organizations but it also allows them to obtain information on bills. For example, a state legislator in Vermont said that using the site allows him to obtain information on bills without having to carry around a hard copy of bills. He said that this was particularly helpful when examining the budget. Another Vermont state legislator remarked that the state legislative website makes the Vermont state legislature more transparent. Information posted to the state legislature's site can be accessed in a more expedient manner than if it were necessary to obtain a hard copy. The website essentially facilitates access to state legislative information. In both New York and Vermont state legislators also stated that they feel more constituents contact them because of the state legislature's site. An overwhelming majority of respondents

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in New York reported that the state legislative website definitely contributes to increased contact and improved access to information. One staff member in New York further explained that,

> If you want access to government, there's no excuse now. You can go right to the Internet. You can watch it happen on tv. A lot of the e-mail that we get, you can see that people have visited the Assembly website because they are very specific about a bill. Prior to the development of the state legislature's website, only staff knew about bill numbers. This has enabled these people to have information so that they can better communicate their concerns to us.

Clearly state legislative websites play an important role in terms of expanding access and contact while providing a host of information. This in turn improves state legislators' ability to represent their constituents and to formulate and pass laws.

This research also measures representation in terms of efficiency. State legislators were asked whether or not they are more efficient as a result of the Internet.[31] A majority of state legislators in Vermont reported that they are *somewhat more* efficient as a result of the Internet. During interviews almost all state legislators in Vermont acknowledged relying upon the state legislature's website especially for tasks related to legislation.[32] "I can easily access Vermont laws; when attempting to remedy problems I can look up the law. It's easier to provide government services as a result of the Internet," recounted one state legislator. Universally, the Internet rarely helps Vermont state legislators with tasks related to constituent services, except for one member who noted that the Internet helps him to communicate with younger and more affluent constituents.

---

[31] See Appendix A questions 38b and 38c.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

New York state legislators are more convinced that the Internet helps them to be more efficient. Forty-two percent (17 out of 41) of the respondents in New York said they are much more efficient and 39 percent (16 out of 41) reported that they are somewhat more efficient. The data also show that 75 percent of legislators (15 out of 20) who do not use the Internet reported that the Internet allows their office to be somewhat or much more efficient. Though these legislators do not use the Internet, nearly 80 percent of staff (19 out of 24) who work for these legislators do. Respondents suggested that the Internet provides abundant and instantaneous information whenever one chooses to access the information. The Internet produces more background information and facilitates research, which resulted in fewer phone calls and faxes in addition to providing some information that would have been almost impossible to obtain without the Internet. Repeatedly respondents echoed sentiments like this one when asked whether or not the Internet helps state legislators to do a better job, "Definitely...it took forever to get Internet access. Within the past five years, we now all have Internet access. The legislature has finally embraced modern technology. It's made my job a heck of a lot easier. It's definitely made my job easier."

Political Participation: Constituents

In examining political participation in the United States, Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) identify a number of activities they consider to be forms of political participation including voting, undertaking campaign work, making campaign contributions, contacting a government official, protesting, informal

---

[32] See Appendix B question 25.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

community activity, attending a local board meeting, holding board membership, being affiliated with a political organization and attending a meeting of a political organization. The authors assessed the frequency of various modes of political participation and contact with an elected official ranked third, after voting and being affiliated with a political organization (Verba et. al. 1995). Rosenthal also broadly defines political participation. He contends that public opinion polls, e-mail,1-800 numbers, call-in radio and television are modes of political participation that lead to increased contact with representatives (Rosenthal 1998). Under examination in this dissertation are *perceptions of political participation*. This is measured in terms of the amount of contact or interactions constituents have with state legislators from the vantage point of state legislators. This research assesses whether or not e-mail and the Internet leads to increased political participation.

E-mail. According to the survey data Vermont House members receive an average of 728 e-mails and 572 pieces of US Post on a yearly basis. [33] In the Vermont Senate legislators receive 6,136 e-mails and on average 1,820 pieces of US Post on a yearly basis. New York state Assembly members receive on average 1,196 e-mails from constituents and 1,404 pieces of US Post on a yearly basis. In the New York state Senate members receive on average 2,600 e-mails and 4,732 pieces of US Post on average on a yearly basis. As illustrated in Table 2-5 Vermont state legislators receive significantly higher rates of e-mail than their New York counterparts. Legislators in Vermont receive 20 to 38 times as many e-mails per capita as New York state legislators. E-mail is statistically significant in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

both state legislatures at the .05 level exceeding a critical value of about 2.00. In contrast, the difference in per capita US Post is somewhat smaller with legislators in Vermont receiving between six and 13 times as many letters per capita as New York state legislators. US Post is statistically significant in the Vermont House and New York Assembly at the .05 level exceeding a critical value of about 2.00. This illustrates that not only do constituents in Vermont contact their representatives more frequently but that they use e-mail more than US Post. I suspect that legislators in Vermont receive more correspondence because of the highly participatory nature of Vermont state politics and the willingness of legislators to use e-mail.

Table 2-5
Per Capita[a] US Post & E-mail Received by Legislative House

	US Post	E-mail
Vermont House	.140*	.179*
Vermont Senate	.089	.302*
New York Assembly	.011*	.009*
New York Senate	.015	.008*

*Significant at the .05 level.
Source: State Legislative Data 2002.
Note: Vermont House districts have 4,059 people, while Vermont Senate districts have 20,294 people. The population of a New York Assembly district is 126,510 people and a New York Senate district has 306,072 people.
[a] It is possible that individuals who e-mail or send US Post to legislators send more than one piece of e-mail or US post, skewing the per capita figures.

I also asked state legislators to indicate what percentage of constituent e-mail addresses casework versus legislation.[34] The modal values show that responses are divided evenly between casework and legislation. Constituents e-mail state legislators on issues ranging from less serious concerns like a pothole

[33] See Appendix A question 7a.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

or broken street light to more serious matters such as proposed budget cuts for particular state programs. One interviewee said,

> At times it feels like you are running triage in an emergency room. I'm checking e-mail several times a day. Of course, the biggest load of e-mail is received in the morning. So, we want to prioritize. For example, this lady who e-mails us about her house going into foreclosure and is about to be put out on the street, we're going to give her a call and try to get to the bottom of that first, rather than responding to the e-mail that extends an invitation to a Little League reception. We prioritize.

Like other modes of communication e-mail provides constituents with a means of expressing their opinions as well as providing a way to ask for assistance relating to casework or legislation.

Respondents were asked to rank the means by which constituents most commonly contacted them.[35] Constituents in Vermont contacted state legislators by phone or e-mail most frequently. Fifty-three percent of respondents in Vermont (18 out of 34) ranked phone first while 44 percent of state legislators (15 out of 34) ranked e-mail first. During interviews half of the Vermont state legislators said that they attach more importance to a phone call while the other half indicated that they afford e-mail the same level of importance as any other means of communication. Similarly when respondents were asked to compare whether or not constituents use e-mail *more frequently, the same* or *less frequently* than phone, US Post, fax, office visit or courier service, the data show that state legislators in Vermont categorically reported that constituents e-mail more frequently than any of the other modes of communication.[36] In contrast

---

[34] See Appendix A question 8a.
[35] See Appendix A question 11a.
[36] See Appendix A question 17.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

state legislators in New York did not rank e-mail as one of the top two ways constituents contact their office. Instead 47 percent of state legislators (21 out of 45) ranked e-mail third despite the volume of constituent e-mail and the frequency with which legislators check e-mail in New York. The data for the legislators who do not use e-mail largely mirror the above findings. Qualitative research shows that while most state legislators in New York attach the same level of importance to e-mail as compared to other modes of communication, a phone call or an office visit could not be ignored or put off. Survey data further illustrate that in New York legislators use e-mail less frequently than phone or the US Post but more frequently than fax, office visits or courier service. A majority of state legislators however in both states keenly noted that any type of constituent communication is important. One member said,

> Yes, I give e-mail the same level of importance as other modes of communication. There are some people that are e-mail junkies. Their message however, is just as important as someone who drops something off personally or who sends something via US Post.

E-mail offers another mode of communication and state legislators view it as another avenue through which constituent views can be expressed. Problematic, however, is the fact that not all members afford e-mail the same amount of importance as other modes of communication. Some members admitted in interviews that e-mail is not given the same level of importance as a phone call or office visit though these were the minority of respondents. In an apologetic manner a state legislator in New York told me that while he tries to get to e-mail sometimes as many five days would pass without checking his account. This is

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

largely because of how much time it takes to filter e-mail; meaning deleting non-constituent e-mail and advertisements and scanning messages for viruses. Constituents who reside in districts where members do not afford e-mail the same level of importance as other modes of communication are at a disadvantage if they prefer e-mail to other modes of communication. Moreover constituents are usually unaware of how much importance their state legislator ascribes to e-mail.

The data show that state legislators and staff check e-mail accounts but replies to inquiries are not necessarily sent via e-mail nor are all requests answered or even logged. Surprisingly less than half of all respondents in Vermont said that they log or track e-mail. Only 24 percent of state legislators in Vermont (9 out of 37) track e-mail. Without staff or offices Vermont members struggle to reply to constituent e-mail and US Post. In New York 64 percent of state legislators (32 out of 50) track e-mail, which is consistent with their practice of logging constituent mail that arrives via US Post. These small differences across the two states might be attributed to the level of professionalization; Vermont state legislators have limited time and resources so they are not as easily able to log or track constituent correspondence. Despite the fact that legislators do not track e-mail with any regularity, more than 90 percent of all constituent e-mails (83 out of 88) receive some sort of reply.[37] Despite the fact that 20 legislators in New York do not use e-mail 19 out of 20 legislators said they respond to constituent e-mail. While more than 90 percent of constituent e-mail receives a reply this statistic requires further clarification. More than half of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

all state legislators (49 out of 88) respond to all constituent e-mails regardless of whether or not the e-mail contains a complete mailing address or if the sender is from the member's district. Thirty-nine state legislators (44 percent) do not reply to all e-mail and they employ some type of criteria to determine which e-mail they will reply to. For example some state legislators only respond to constituents who reside in their district while others only respond to e-mails that include a full mailing address. When possible the protocol for responding to e-mail usually mirror the procedures and criteria established for responding to US Post.

Methods of responding to e-mail vary. Some state legislators respond to e-mail via e-mail, others respond to e-mail through written correspondence or a telephone call and others do not check or respond to any e-mail, though this is extremely rare. These variations are interesting because they are an indicator of a state legislator's management style—if they have staff—and the member's view toward information technology. Thirty-seven state legislators in Vermont (100 percent) reported that they respond to e-mail through e-mail and 10 state legislators (100 percent) indicated using US Post to respond to e-mail inquiries. In an interview one member said, "I rarely respond to inquiries sent via US Post because I don't have time to sit down and type out a reply but I almost always respond to e-mail." One interviewee presented a contrasting and uncommon view maintaining that e-mail is much more problematic than US Post because he could read the letters sent via US Post and handwrite responses while sitting in committee meetings or [while he was on] the floor and his secretary would later type up his replies. Due to a limited number of computers in the statehouse

---

[37] See Appendix A question 5a.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

finding a computer to write a reply is problematic. Replying to constituent e-mails with a phone call is fairly common in Vermont, where it is not unusual for state legislators to receive phone calls in their homes from constituents. The data show that 21 state legislators in Vermont (100 percent) use the phone to respond to e-mail. In New York fewer state legislators, 37 (100 percent), respond to e-mail via e-mail. Responding to e-mail via e-mail may seem routine and ordinary in most industries yet many state legislators resist responding to e-mail this way. In New York, for example, many staff told me that there is a perception that a reply sent by e-mail is "less official" than a reply sent via US Post, which appears on letterhead and contains the state legislator's signature. As evidenced through the qualitative data in many instances it is easier to call a constituent rather than replying via e-mail. Often more information is needed or the question or concern is too complex to articulate in an e-mail. Many state legislators and staff said that when they do respond to e-mail via e-mail it is in instances when the reply requires a simple answer, when the reply contains a link to a website, or when the state legislator or staff are unable to respond to the constituent during normal business hours.

Clearly constituents use e-mail to contact state legislators and an overwhelming majority of legislators respond to these requests, concerns and comments from their constituents. It appears that this new medium has made inroads that might potentially lead to increased political participation. When state legislators were asked whether or not e-mail results in *significantly increased, slightly increased, stayed the same, slightly decreased* or *significantly decreased*

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

contact and interactions between their office and constituents, 52 percent of state legislators in Vermont (19 out of 37) reported a significant increase and 38 percent of legislators (14 out of 37) indicated a slight increase in contact and interactions between state legislators and constituents as a result of e-mail. [38] New York state legislators were not as convinced as their colleagues in Vermont that e-mail yields a significant increase in contact and interactions. Only 28 percent of state legislators in New York (14 out of 50) reported a significant increase in contact and interactions compared to 52 percent legislators (26 out of 50) who indicated there is a slight increase in contact and interactions between state legislators and constituents as a result of e-mail. I cross tabulated this variable with frequent and infrequent e-mail checkers and nearly 80 percent of respondents in both groups reported an increase in contact and interactions because of the Internet.

State legislators were asked whether or not communication with constituents changed because of e-mail.[39] Legislators were asked to rate how communication changed on a scale from zero to 10, zero indicating *much less communication* and 10 indicating *much more communication*. The variable was recoded into a dichotomous variable. Ratings from zero to six were recoded to zero and labeled *static and/or less communication* and ratings from seven to 10 were recoded to one and labeled *more communication*. Nearly three-quarters of Vermont state legislators reported that e-mail communication with constituents results in more communication. A much smaller percentage of legislators in New

[38] See Appendix A question 14a.
[39] See Appendix A question 43.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

York, 53 percent, said that e-mail results in more communication. E-mail's perceived impact on communication between constituents and legislators in New York is weak despite the fact that legislators receive a sizable amount of e-mail and the frequency with which they check e-mail.

In interviews with state legislators I asked whether or not the level or amount of political participation changed because of e-mail or whether the mode had simply changed. Legislators in Vermont further confirmed the survey findings, suggesting that political participation had indeed increased as a result of e-mail. Many state legislators also reported that the mode of communication had changed because of e-mail. The qualitative results in New York reflect slight differences between the two chambers. In the Senate most respondents were not sure whether or not e-mail definitely leads to increased political participation, though all respondents said that e-mail creates another dimension for communication. One respondent said,

> Maybe we are seeing some people [participate] that we wouldn't have, who are now e-mailing. So we are seeing a bit more political participation and we have [definitely] seen a shift in the mode.

Another individual in the Senate remarked that he thought that it is difficult to measure the level of political participation. It might appear as though political participation is staying the same when in fact in it has increased. Previously individuals had to call or write their state legislators to obtain information but with the Internet constituents can bypass their legislators and obtain information directly from the Internet thereby giving the appearance that political participation had stayed the same. As a result it might appear that political participation via e-

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

mail remained constant or even decreased because many individuals no longer needed to contact a state legislator and instead they could go directly to a website to access information. In the Assembly respondents agreed that the mode of communication has definitely changed and that a slight increase in political participation accompanied this changed. Assembly members and staff said, "There are more individuals who are e-mailing you that you wouldn't have heard from. Each year we receive a few more e-mails from individuals we might not have heard from. So the level and the mode have changed."

The Internet. Specific data on constituent access to the Internet is somewhat limited, though data that is more general shows that computer ownership and Internet access have grown significantly in the US since 1984. According to Current Population Reports, "In August 2001 60.2 million households, or 56.5 percent, had one or more computers and 53.9 million households or 50.5 percent of households had at least one individual who used the Internet at home" (US Census Bureau February 2002). Of the total population in Vermont—590,000 people—between 57.3 and 63.3 percent of individuals have access to the Internet. Of the total population in New York—17,510,000 people— between 51.6 and 54.3 percent of individuals are Internet users. Since January 2002 approximately 68 million Americans have accessed government websites. Seventy-six percent of Americans have accessed state government websites compared to 80 percent who have visited federal sites and 41 percent who have visited local sites. Whether government websites focus too much on providing services and not enough on facilitating civic involvement has been raised by

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

academics, activists and some elected officials—though 42 million users have used websites to research public policy issues and 23 million Americans have accessed the Internet to send public officials comments about policy choices (Larsen and Rainie 2002). More specifically this raises the question of whether or not political participation in state politics among constituents increases as a result of the Internet and state legislative websites.

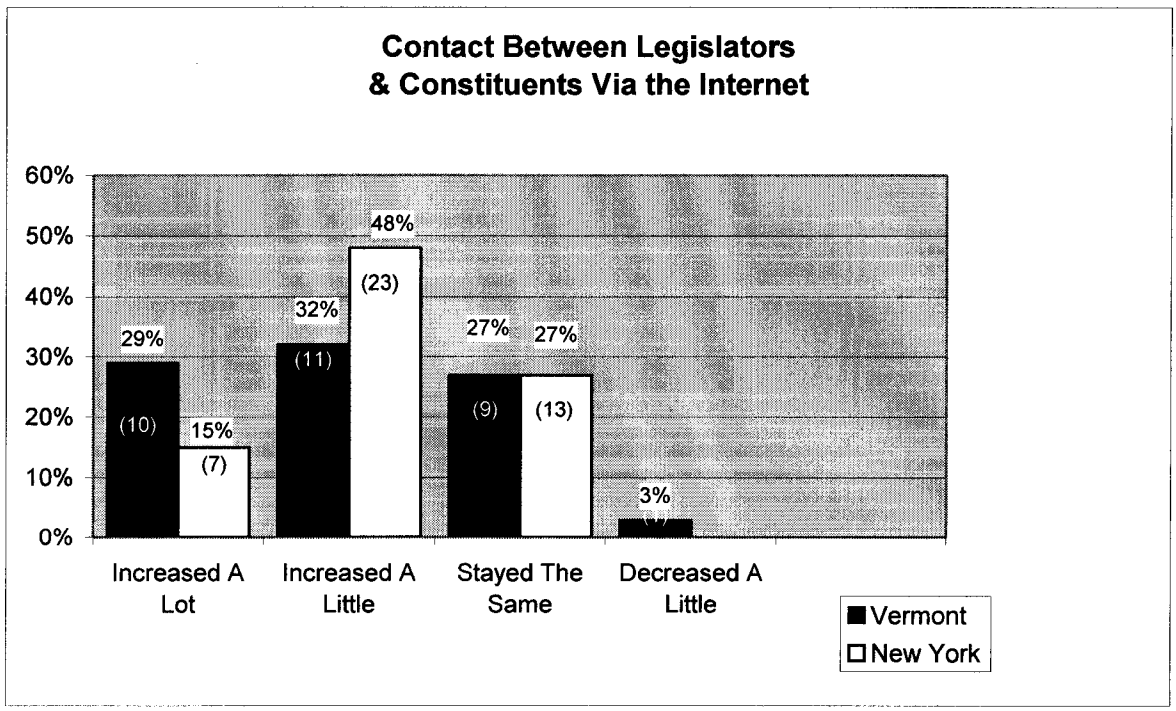
The survey asked state legislators to gauge whether or not they felt contact and interactions between constituents and themselves *increased a lot, increased a little, stayed the same, decreased a little* or *decreased a lot* as a result of the Internet.[40] As indicated in Figure 2-5 a plurality of legislators reported that contact and interactions increased a little because of the Internet. The qualitative data further confirm the survey results suggesting that there is increased political participation as a result of the Internet. In Vermont a majority of legislators said in interviews that political participation increased because of the Internet. One individual said it was because individuals have greater access as a result of the Internet. "Constituents can access the House journal and calendar which are posted on the site. Individuals can obtain information at a faster rate and there is greater participation from the public." Similarly another member noted that not only does the Internet affect political participation but because individuals could contact him from home it enabled some constituents to contact him when they might not have had the courage to pick up the phone. In New York almost half of all legislators reported that political participation

[40] See Appendix A question 23c.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

increased a little. Findings from the qualitative data in New York mirror the findings from the quantitative data. Among those who said that participation is increasing as a result of the Internet many noted that more people contact them because of the "zip code finder" feature on the state legislature's website. This feature enables individuals to locate their legislator. In other instances individuals obtained their state legislator's phone number from the member's website and called about an issue or a bill. "They call us even if it isn't our bill. We are getting a lot of hits as a result of the New York State website." The Internet and state legislative websites undoubtedly impact political participation allowing constituents to easily communicate with state legislators and to access information on state legislative websites that was not previously available.

Figure 2-5



Source: State Legislative Data 2002.

Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Institutional Behavior

Predating new institutionalists, who maintain that rules and procedures shape legislative behavior, Hanna Pitkin (1967) asserts that the internal interactions of representation be studied not from an individual-representation angle, but from an institutional perspective. "Political representation is primarily a public, institutionalized arrangement involving many people and groups operating in complex ways in a large-scale social movement. Representation is not one single action but the overall structure and function of the system" (Pitkin 1967). In general my dissertation examines institutional behavior, asking whether or not e-mail and the Internet affects how state legislatures operate. More specifically institutional behavior measures internal interactions between and among state legislators committee chairs and party leaders. I expect to find increased communication among legislators and increased access to leaders via information technology.

E-mail. Contact between rank-and-file members, party leaders and committee chairs traditionally takes place via phone or in-person. I asked whether or not the aforementioned individuals have taken advantage of advances in information technology since e-mail and the Internet. For example I ask state legislators whether or not they use e-mail to communicate with each other, party leaders and committee chairs.[41] A plurality of state legislators in Vermont, 39 percent (14 out of 36), indicated that e-mail does *not change* interactions between state legislators, party leaders and committee chairs. Thirty-six percent of members (13 out of 36) said that interactions between state legislators, party leaders and

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

committee chairs *increases slightly*. The data show that 22 percent of state legislators in Vermont (8 out of 36) reported that interactions between state legislators and party leaders *increased significantly*. If the increased categories are collapsed, the data suggests that the majority of state legislators view e-mail as contributing to increased interactions between state legislators and leadership. In terms of interactions between state legislators and other rank-and-file members a plurality of state legislators in Vermont, 44 percent (15 out 34), reported that interactions increased slightly while another 24 percent (8 out 34) said interactions increased significantly.[42] Only a third of the members in Vermont said that e-mail does not change the level of interactions. A majority of legislators obviously see e-mail as a tool that facilitates interactions among members but they are less convinced that it facilitates interactions between party leaders and committee chairs. Qualitative data shows that just under half of those interviewed reported that they use e-mail to contact committee chairs while fewer said that they e-mail party leaders. One member enthusiastically told me,

> I use e-mail for internal business. I use it to contact the Speaker as well as committee chairs. I use e-mail on substantive issues and to strategize politically. E-mail is quick and easy. It's often difficult to contact individuals by other means—tracking them down is challenging.

While not all state legislators have embraced e-mail to this degree most admitted that e-mail is especially helpful in terms of contacting other members. Without offices in the statehouse, Vermont state legislators can be difficult to locate. In addition most members noted that e-mail is particularly useful for scheduling

---

[41] See Appendix A question 35a.
[42] See Appendix A question 36a.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

meetings and sending attachments. One party leader said that she frequently e-mails the party caucus on a wide range of issues. While members may not be actively contacting leadership through this medium, it is important to note that party leaders in Vermont use e-mail.

A majority of New York state legislators reported that interactions between party leaders and committee chairs do not change as a result of e-mail. Only 31 percent of state legislators in New York (15 out of 48) reported that e-mail results in slightly increased interactions between state legislators, party leaders and committee chairs while a meager four percent of legislators (2 out of 48) said that e-mail significantly increases interactions. Of the New York legislators who do not use e-mail 60 percent of respondents (12 out of 20) indicated that contact and interactions between legislators and party leaders remains the same because of e-mail. Interestingly their views do not differ dramatically from legislators who use e-mail. Repeatedly, qualitative results show that state legislators infrequently use e-mail to contact other state legislators. In instances when party leaders and committee chairs sent e-mail, the e-mail typically notified recipients about meetings, invites and committee agendas. Party leaders in New York rely upon the Democratic and Republican listservs to inform legislators about information related to party politics. A wide variety of information from the press releases to information packets is sent both electronically and in hard copy. For example signing on as a sponsor or a co-sponsor to a bill occurs through e-mail in New York, yet the legislature continues to generate enormous amounts of paper communication. Interviewees in New York expressed wariness about electronic

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

communications, contributing to their reluctance to employ e-mail. One senator said,

> ....knowing that everything you put on the computer becomes public knowledge very rarely would I use e-mail as a political tool discuss political issues with party leaders. The time it takes to just call a party leader to discuss an issue is shorter than [the time it takes to e-mail]. But on occasion I have used e-mail to receive information.

While state legislators typically do not e-mail each other, a sizable number of staff said that they use e-mail to conduct state legislative business, especially with other offices and within their own offices. Staff members however were quick to note that they rarely e-mail other state legislators, instead opting to call another staff member via phone. The exception to this is when someone sends a follow-up e-mail often containing an attachment with information that had been discussed previously.

Internet. The impact of the Internet on interactions between state legislators, party leaders and committee chairs seems less easy to define. In fact it is difficult to imagine a way in which the Internet could facilitate interactions between and among state legislators. Almost 50 percent of state legislators in Vermont (17 out of 35) indicated that the Internet does *not change* interactions between state legislators, party leaders and committee chairs.[43] Collapsing the categories *slightly increases* and *significantly increases* 32 percent of state legislators (11 out of 35) said that the Internet increases interactions between state legislators, party leaders and committee chairs. A plurality of Vermont state legislators said that interactions between state legislators who do not hold a leadership position

[43] See Appendix A question 35b.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

does *not change*. Twenty-seven percent of state legislators in Vermont (9 out of 34) reported a *slight increase* and nine percent of legislators (3 out of 34) noted a *significant increase* in interactions via the Internet among rank-and-file members.[44] The data analysis yields similar results in New York. According to the data 60 percent of New York state legislators (28 out of 48) reported that the Internet does not change the level of interaction between state legislators, party leaders and committee chairs. However, when collapsing the categories significantly and slightly increased, 30 percent of legislators (14 out of 48) asserted that the Internet leads to increased interactions between state legislators, party leaders and committee chairs. With a majority of New York state legislators and a plurality of Vermont state legislators reporting that the Internet does not lead to increased interactions via the Internet, the impact of the Internet on interactions among legislators is limited.

In addition to assessing interactions between members, institutional behavior also examines decision-making.[45] I asked state legislators whether or not e-mail and the Internet impacts on how decisions in the state legislature are made and whether these technologies impact who makes decisions.[46] In Vermont a majority of state legislators do not view e-mail and the Internet as having an impact on how decisions are made. Some state legislators in interviews however remarked that technology probably changes how decisions are made. For example several state legislators noted that when the legislature debated the Civil Unions Act in 2000 they were inundated with e-mail. A majority

[44] See Appendix A question 36b.
[45] Because of space limitations questions of this nature do not appear on the survey.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of state legislators in New York indicated that e-mail and the Internet do not impact how decisions are made. However a sizable number of respondents suggested that there is an external impact and still others asserted that the legislative process is more informed. Less than half of the respondents said that e-mail and the Internet impact how decisions are made. Those who reported an impact contend that there is an external influence. Respondents were confident that constituent concerns expressed through e-mail and the Internet do indeed influence final decisions. A staff assuredly said, "Yes e-mail influences final decisions since they are issues of concern. We bring these e-mails to the attention of the Assemblywoman. Depending on the issue we sort it accordingly." Along with a more informed process a few individuals mentioned that e-mail and the Internet make communications within the state legislature easier. Yet in terms of decision-making a majority of state legislators and staff in both states still do not recognize e-mail or the Internet as having an impact on how decisions are made. Similarly state legislators in both states overwhelmingly said that the same people are making decisions. For example one respondent said,

> I think this is a great way for constituents to have access to you and for you to access to them. You can get a feeling for how they would vote. But so much of what occurs is decided beforehand. So I think it doesn't make much of a difference. It's got potential.

In New York where major decisions are made by three individuals, one staff member reported that while the same three individuals are making the important decisions, the information that is funneled to them prior to meeting has changed. "They enter these negotiations with not only more detailed information, but with a

---

[46] See Appendix B question 27 and 28.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

greater variety of input." The same people continue to make decisions in both states though the amount of information they have when making these decisions has changed considerably.

Finally to gain an overall view of the impact of e-mail and the Internet, the survey asked state legislators whether or not e-mail and/or the Internet change the way state legislators conduct legislative business.[47] The results yielded significant differences across the two states. Seventy percent of state legislators in Vermont (25 out 36) asserted that e-mail and the Internet change the way state legislators conducted state legislative business. In striking contrast 45 percent of New York state legislators (22 out of 48) indicated that e-mail and the Internet change business while 48 percent of legislators (23 out of 48) indicated that they do not change the way state legislators conduct business.

Democracy: More of the Same Ol'?

Democratization is often measured in terms of voting or political stability. Bollen (1980) however suggests that these indicators are not always valid. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady assert that participation requires that the voices of citizens in politics be clear, loud and equal. The media and citizens have criticized state legislators claiming that public officials are unresponsive and that state legislatures are undemocratic. Rosenthal (1998) finds this to be untrue. In his analysis of state legislatures he contends that state legislatures are not undemocratic. In fact they are much more democratic than what has been popularly believed. Furthermore the author suggests that computers have led to

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

increased professionalization and simultaneously to more democratic and participatory state legislatures. Rosenthal asserts that when almost all state legislators have access to computers, resources are more evenly dispersed (Rosenthal 1998).

My dissertation measures democratization in terms of access, inclusiveness and openness from the perspective of state legislators. I expect that legislators will report that e-mail and the Internet lead to greater access for constituents. Prior to e-mail and the Internet, constituents faxed, telephoned, visited or sent letters via US Post to state legislators. E-mail and the Internet create an additional avenue for political participation, one leading to extended democratization. The expression of new concerns that were not previously articulated—another measure of democratization—suggests both improved access and inclusiveness. Perhaps different ideas are being expressed through new technologies that were unexpressed under traditional modes of communication. I also suspect that e-mail and the Internet lead to a more inclusive political process in which constituents who previously did not contact state legislators have the ability to do so through e-mail or the Internet.

Another indicator of increased democratization is the degree of openness and inclusiveness in the state legislature. To measure the level of democratization within state legislatures, I examine state legislators' perceptions of their state legislature as well as state legislators' ability to have input on specific policy areas. A more democratic process would be one in which decision-making includes input from rank-and-file members. In addition state

---

[47] See Appendix A question 37.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

legislators might view their legislature as being more open with the advent of e-mail and the Internet.

E-mail. In order to evaluate access I asked state legislators to assess whether or not they felt constituents have more or less access to them or the legislative process since the introduction of the e-mail.[48] A majority of state legislators in Vermont said that constituents have *much more* access to them and the legislative process with e-mail. Another 32 percent of legislators (11 out of 34) reported that constituents have *somewhat more* access. In interviews I asked legislators whether or not constituents have greater access to them because of e-mail. [49] Confirming the survey data, Vermont state legislators overwhelming said that e-mail leads to greater access. In contrast to Vermonters, only 25 percent of New York state legislators (12 out of 49) indicated that e-mail allows constituents much more access to them and the political system. While New York state legislators were less convinced than Vermont state legislators that e-mail has a strong impact on access to them or the legislative process, almost 50 percent of legislators (24 out of 49) indicated that e-mail leads to somewhat more access for constituents. Interestingly, among the state legislators in New York who do not use e-mail, 45 percent of legislators (9 out of 20) said constituents have somewhat more access to their office because of e-mail and 15 percent of legislators (3 out of 20) reported that constituents have *much more* access to their office because of e-mail. I cross tabulated this variable with frequent and infrequent checkers. A 30 percentage-point difference emerges between the

[48] See Appendix A question 47a.
[49] See Appendix B question 18.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

frequent e-mail checkers and the infrequent e-mail checkers with 87 percent of frequent e-mail checkers asserting that e-mail leads to more access for constituents. In interviews members of the New York state Assembly argued that constituents always have been able to access them. Staff in the New York Senate in contrast reported that indeed there is greater access as a result of e-mail. Some staff members speculated that there are constituents who would not call or stop by the office but who might e-mail. For these people e-mail indeed leads to greater access.

In addition to increased access a more democratic political system should also be more open. According to the survey data 40 percent of Vermont state legislators (14 out of 35) reported that e-mail fosters a *much more* open political process for constituents.[50] Another 46 percent of legislators (16 out of 35) indicated that e-mail leads to a *somewhat more* open political process for constituents. Though state legislators were not asked whether or not e-mail results in a more open political system, most legislators commented repeatedly in interviews that the Vermont state legislature is very open. I observed this when I conducted interviews. Anyone is invited to sit-in on committee meetings and party caucuses. In contrast party caucuses are not open to the public in New York. The data however show similar results in both states. Thirty-one percent of respondents in New York (15 out of 48) indicated that the political process is much more open for constituents due to e-mail while 50 percent of state legislators (24 out of 48) reported that the political process is somewhat more open. Among state legislators in New York who do not use the Internet, 20

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

percent (4 out of 20) asserted that the political process is much more open because of the Internet and 45 percent of legislators (9 out of 20) reported that the political process is somewhat more open because of the Internet. Vermont state legislators feel more strongly about e-mail's effect in opening up the political system. Almost 80 percent of state legislators (69 out of 88) in both states clearly see e-mail as enhancing the openness of the political process in these states.

In addition to assessing whether or not the system is more open for constituents I also asked state legislators whether or not they thought their state legislature is more open because of e-mail.[51] In addition to creating a more open political process for constituents, a majority of state legislators in both states indicated that e-mail affects the openness of state legislatures. In Vermont 46 percent of state legislators (16 out of 35) said their state legislature is *somewhat more* open and 26 percent (9 out of 35) indicated their legislature is *much more* open as a result of e-mail. State legislators in Vermont consistently said that the political process is very open in Vermont so the results are not surprising. Scholars who study the New York state legislature assert that the political process in New York is one where decisions are made by the top three leaders—the Governor, Senate Majority Leader and the Speaker of the Assembly (Schneier 2001). While 44 percent of New York state legislators (21 out of 48) indicated that their state legislature is somewhat more open 18 percent (9 out of 48) claim that e-mail fosters a much more open political process in the state

---

[50] See Appendix A question 41a.
[51] See Appendix A question 41d.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

legislature. Exogenously e-mail appears to impact state legislative politics and endogenously it appears that legislatures are more open.

Internet. The Internet promises to make politics more open and inclusive, especially as more people gain access to it. While the US Census and Pew Internet Project report that Internet access among the general population has increased, my dissertation measures whether or not there is a perception that constituents have increased access to state legislators. State legislators were asked whether or not constituents have more access to them and the legislative process as a result of the Internet and individual legislator's websites (Table 2-6).[52] In Vermont a plurality of state legislators asserted access to them and the legislative process remains *the same* as a result of the Internet. Interestingly almost 50 percent of New York state legislators (24 out of 49) view the Internet as leading to *somewhat more* access to state legislators and the legislative process. Constituents in Vermont enjoyed tremendous access to state legislators even before the advent of the Internet. It seems that this new technology has had little impact on access in Vermont. Constituents in New York however do not enjoy the same access. The fact that nearly 50 percent of state legislators reported that constituents have more access is noteworthy. Data analysis suggests that individual websites do enhance access for constituents in New York.[53] (Most state legislators in Vermont do not have individual websites so this question was not applicable.) According to the data 29 percent of state legislators in New York (14 out of 48) reported that constituents have somewhat more

[52] See Appendix A question 47b.
[53] See Appendix A question 34a.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

access to the state legislature due to individual websites and 27 percent (13 out of 48) said that there is much more access. Clearly individual sites facilitate and improve access for constituents.

In addition to evaluating access state legislators were asked if the Internet fosters a more open political process for constituents and the state legislature.[54] A plurality of state legislators in Vermont responded that the Internet fosters a *somewhat more* open political process for constituents. Another 27 percent of legislators (9 out of 34) indicated that the political process is *much more* open for constituents and the same

Table 2-6
Legislators' Perceptions of Constituent Access Via the Internet

Amount of Access to the Internet	Vermont	New York
Much More	21% (7/34)	22% (24/49)
Somewhat More	27% (9/34)	50% (24/49)
The Same	35% (12/34)	22% (24/49)

Source: State Legislative Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

percentage indicated that the system remains *the same* for constituents as a result of the Internet. More state legislators in New York indicated that the Internet leads to a more open political system for constituents. For example the data show that 44 percent of respondents (21 out of 48) said the political system is somewhat more open and 35 percent of legislators (17 out of 48) reported that it is much more open for constituents. Prior to the Internet obtaining information

[54] See Appendix A questions 42a,d.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

from the state legislature was very difficult. Individuals placed a phone call to public information but there was no guarantee of obtaining the desired information. State legislators were also asked whether or not the Internet leads to a more open political process within their state legislature. Collapsing the values *somewhat more* and *much more* it appears that 56 percent of legislators in Vermont (19 out of 34) claimed that their state legislature is more open due to the Internet. During interviews many state legislators said that the Vermont state legislature was already very open without the Internet. A majority of those state legislators who I interviewed in Vermont however conceded that the Internet leads to a more open state legislature. One Vermont Senator said,

> The ability to obtain information has improved [as a result of the Internet] so in that sense it [the Internet] has expanded access and participation. So if someone calls me up I can tell him or her where to go or say here let's work through it. They would have probably still participated [without the Internet] but their ability or level of participation I think is a little improved so in that sense I think it's probably also access. The process becomes more transparent if they know where to get a journal or the calendar. And, describing it to them it's not complete Greek, if they have a computer that they can pull up this information.

While state legislators in Vermont felt that the Internet moderately improves the openness of the political process, 58 percent of New York state legislators (28 out of 48) said the political process is somewhat more open and 17 percent of legislators (8 out of 48) claim the political process is much more open because of the Internet for a combined total of 75 percent. The qualitative results in New York show that an overwhelming majority of those who were interviewed said that the New York state legislature is much more open and inclusive because of the Internet. "People can now look up information that they previously had to

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

come into our office to obtain," said one interviewee. Most legislators noted that individuals can watch session online however one respondent keenly observed,

> They [state legislators] would like to say that the legislature is more open. They [the state legislature] now broadcast session online and you can go to the home page and if you have the software you can watch the proceedings; this is their way of saying it's more open. But for people who don't have computers that have a fast connection or the software to watch session it's not open to everyone. However, the Senate is more open than it used to be and it's definitely more accessible.

The Internet does not have as much of an impact on the Vermont legislature compared to the New York legislature. The Vermont legislature has always been perceived as being a relatively open state legislature even before the advent of the Internet. In New York there is a perception of increased openness with the advent of the Internet.

Conclusions

The data support my hypothesis that representation is better because of e-mail and the Internet. Legislators in both states reported that they respond to e-mail more quickly than US Post and e-mail helped state legislators to gauge the policy preferences of constituents. Almost all state legislators indicated that they respond to e-mail that they receive from constituents, illustrating that e-mail is an important tool that facilitates communication between constituents and legislators. The data also show that state legislators in both states are more efficient and they perceive themselves to be better representatives because of e-mail. State legislators were not convinced that they are better representatives because of the Internet. Nevertheless almost 40 percent of respondents in each

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

state reported that the Internet helps them to gauge the policy preferences of constituents. Few Vermont state legislators have individual websites but members from the majority party in New York resoundingly noted the importance of their individual sites, which provide a plethora of information related to state politics and their district. With less control over their individual sites, minority members downplayed the importance of their individual sites. The data show that regardless of party, state legislators in Vermont and New York said that their state legislatures' website plays a crucial role in disseminating information to constituents and various organizations. Finally the Internet improves efficiency in both states with New York state legislators relying more heavily upon the Internet to perform tasks related to casework and legislation. This might be attributed to the fact that their work is driven by casework whereas this is not the case in Vermont.

According to the data there is a perception of increased political participation among constituents, which supports the *Political Participation by Constituents* hypothesis. State legislators in Vermont receive more e-mail per capita than New York state legislators and almost all constituent e-mail received a reply. Replies to e-mail, however, might be sent by a method other than e-mail. Moreover when asked directly whether e-mail leads to increased political participation, more than half of all Vermont state legislators indicated that political participation has significantly increased. New York state legislators were less enthusiastic with only 28 percent of legislators indicating a significant increase and 52 percent of legislators reporting a slight increase in political participation.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Respondents in both states were more convinced that the Internet leads to increased political participation. For example state legislative websites were important vehicles for disseminating information that led to increased political participation. Individuals could more easily access their state legislator since the state legislature's website lists phone numbers and e-mail addresses. Information on the status of bills and committee decisions can be easily accessed via the state legislature's website. The ability to obtain information is an important component of political participation.

Within state legislatures there is a growing tendency to use e-mail and the Internet but New York has been much slower to embrace these technologies than Vermont. Despite the fact that Vermont state legislators use e-mail to correspond with one another, the data do not support the *Intra-Institutional Behavior* and *Leadership* hypotheses. State legislators in both states reported that interactions between rank-and-file members and leaders does not change as a result of e-mail. Similarly interactions have not been transformed as a result of the Internet. Neither e-mail nor the Internet have any impact on how decisions were made. While new information may be available through these mediums a majority of members did not believe new or additional information or the new technologies impacted their decisions. Notably, a few respondents acknowledged that these new technologies did result in new or additional information, which did in fact influence their decisions.

Finally the data also support the *Perceptions of Democratization* hypothesis. According to state legislators in Vermont their state legislature was

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

very open prior to the advent of e-mail and the Internet. Nevertheless these technologies provide another tool for communication and information dissemination. E-mail fosters a more open political system for constituents in both states. Approximately 50 percent of state legislators in Vermont and New York reported that their state legislature is more open because of e-mail. While it does not appear that state legislatures are much more democratic, even a slight increase in openness is arguably an important increase. Data regarding the impact of the Internet on democratization illustrates that that there is increased access and openness. A majority of state legislators in both states indicated that the Internet leads to a more open political process for constituents. In addition more than 50 percent of legislators in both Vermont and New York reported that their state legislature is more open because of the Internet. With a political culture that is less open, the New York state legislature appears to be slightly more democratic with the advent of e-mail and the Internet. These technologies provide another means through which to access state legislators and information pertaining to state legislative politics. The Internet enables visitors to the New York state site to watch televised sessions online, further enhancing access. In the end access and openness have improved in both state legislatures with the advent of e-mail and the Internet albeit slightly in Vermont.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER THREE

INTEREST GROUPS & STATE LEGISLATIVE POLITICS

Advocacy organizations and interest groups have used e-mail and the Internet to mobilize and lobby congressional members since the mid-1990s. An emerging "e-citizenry" began percolating in the late 1990s and at the national level a variety of organizations from *Meetup.com* to *MoveOn.org* have engaged in online mobilization efforts with varying degrees of success. While unsuccessful in its attempt to stop the Clinton impeachment, MoveOn.org recently mobilized 2.4 million members to sign petitions, organize street demonstrations and donate money for political advertisements through the Internet (Janofsky and Lee 2003). Data from the Pew Internet & American Life Project show that approximately 90 million Americans have used the Internet to contact or obtain information from a group. More specifically 50 percent of Internet users indicated contacting a trade association or a professional group and 22 percent reported contacting a political group (Fox and Rainie 2001). Clearly there is strong evidence of online advocacy, however, the degree to which online efforts affect political participation and democratization is unknown.

Whether and to what extent interest groups use e-mail and the Internet as conduits for political participation in legislative politics at the state level remains largely unexamined. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, "while e-mail and the Internet have become staples of national advocacy organizations, the Internet is increasingly being used to promote or oppose state and local issues" (Wallace 2001). According to some nonprofit observers online activism may be more

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

effective at the state level than at the national level since state legislators receive fewer pieces of e-mail from constituents (Wallace 2001).

In this chapter I examine how and the degree to which non-marginal and marginal groups[55] in Vermont and New York use information technology to communicate with legislators, mobilize their members and lobby.[56] I expect interest groups to report increased political participation[57] and democratization[58] because of e-mail and the Internet. The data largely confirm these hypotheses supporting arguments made by the optimists (Grossman 1995; Browning 1996; Bennett and Fielding 1999; Barber 1984) who assert that information technology will lead to increased political participation and democratization. In contrast, the data do not support the hypotheses that information technology creates a level-playing field for marginal groups and that all interest groups will have more influence over legislators because of e-mail and the Internet. These findings are especially important in light of arguments made by the pessimists (Davis 1999; Barber 1998; Abramson, Arterton, and Orren 1988; Wilhelm 2000; Bimber 2003)

---

[55] As noted in Chapter One non-marginal groups represent populations or issues that have traditionally enjoyed lots of access to legislators. The environment, tourism, business and agriculture are some of the areas that are deemed non-marginal. Interest groups that lobby on behalf of the traditionally under and unrepresented and have little access to state legislators are termed marginal groups. Marginal groups represent populations that are unable to mobilize on their own because they are poor, physically or mentally handicapped, or without the capacity to represent themselves such as children (Walker 1991). I employ Walker's definition of marginal groups focusing on social service organizations, which are fundamental in securing further assistance for these groups. Excluded from the definition of marginal groups are the elderly because they are able to successfully mobilize their efforts unlike other under and unrepresented groups.

[56] Again the focus of this chapter is not on the organizations that do not use technology but rather those organizations that do use technology and the degree to which they use it.

[57] As noted in Chapter One political participation is defined as the amount of contact and interactions between legislators, and constituents and interest groups.

[58] As noted in Chapter One democratization is defined as access, inclusiveness and diversity.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

who contend that groups that already wield media power will continue to monopolize power.

Following a brief discussion of the hypotheses tested in this chapter descriptive analysis describes the technical capacity of organizations[59] and how organizations use e-mail, listservs, the Internet and organizational websites to mobilize, communicate and disseminate information. This discussion provides context for the subsequent sections of this chapter. The balance of the chapter examines how interest groups use e-mail and the Internet as related to political participation, lobbying and democratization as well as testing several hypotheses. I test the following hypotheses:

Institutional Behavior Hypothesis. C) Inter-Institutional Behavior. Interest groups will report that they exert more influence over party leaders, committee chairs and rank-and-file members because of e-mail and the Internet.

The scope of interactions among party leaders and committee chairs will be extended with new technologies. Party leaders and committee chairs will not rely as heavily upon information from staff or lobbyists. Instead they will communicate directly with members of interest groups and they will receive a greater variety of information that can potentially impact their decisions and interactions with other legislators. Similarly, the vast quantity of information that is available as a result of information technology may impact how party caucuses and committee meetings are conducted since rank-and-file members will attend meetings with access to wider array of information. Finally the speed at which

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

information is sent and received potentially affects interactions such that leaders and committee chairs may be compelled to react more quickly to information.

Interest Group Hypotheses

A) Marginal and non-marginal groups will report there to be increased political participation as a result of information technology.

Compared to non-marginal groups, I expect that marginal groups will exhibit similar levels of political participation. With new technology marginal groups and their members can easily interface with legislators. In instances where distance or resources prevented individuals from visiting or contacting state legislators new technologies potentially reduce costs and problems associated with distance.

B) Information technology will mute differences between non-marginal and marginal groups.

New technologies will enable marginal groups to lobby and mobilize as well as non-marginal groups. Marginal groups no longer need to have copious resources to mobilize or to capture the attention of state legislators. I expect that interest groups will use e-mail and the Internet with the same frequency and in a similar manner regardless of state or organizational differences such as the size of the organization and their budgets. I also expect that lobbyists from non-marginal and marginal groups will use new technologies to communicate and disseminate information to state legislators.

---

[59] The terms *organization(s)* and *interest group(s)* are used interchangeably through this dissertation.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

C) With advances in information technology impacting non-marginal groups, marginal groups and state legislatures, interest groups will report that there is increased access to state legislators.

Since almost all non-marginal and marginal groups have e-mail and Internet access, I expect that levels of access to state legislators will be comparable. I expect that it is easier for individuals who belong to interest groups to contact party leaders and committee chairs directly via e-mail. There are potentially fewer barriers to accessing legislators especially ones who hold leadership positions via e-mail since an individual does not have to go through a secretary or staff, though it is possible that secretaries and staff are screening, reading and responding to e-mail on behalf of the legislator.

Descriptive Analysis: Information Technology & Interest Groups

Descriptive Overview of Interest Groups. Organizations that responded to the survey were established between 1794 and 2001 and all of the interest groups indicated that participation in their organization is voluntary.[60] Among interest groups in Vermont 67 percent of non-marginal groups (14 out of 21) reported that members of their organization pay a fee while nearly 60 percent of marginal groups in Vermont (17 out of 29) said that their members do not pay a fee.[61] In New York 90 percent of non-marginal groups (17 out of 19) pay a fee and 71 percent of marginal groups (20 out of 28) pay a fee. A majority of the fees paid by

[60] Four organizations were excluded because membership was not voluntary.
[61] See Appendix C question 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

members in these organizations are mandatory. The data suggest that there is not a significant difference between non-marginal and marginal groups, though a greater percentage of non-marginal groups than marginal groups in New York reported that their members pay a fee.

Groups that responded to the survey cover a wide range of areas including but not limited to agriculture, business, education, the environment, economic development, healthcare, the elderly, physically/mentally disabled, children, the homeless and social services. I assess how many issues an organization is typically concerned with and classify interest groups as single-issue or multi-issue in orientation.[62] Few non-marginal groups reported that they cover more than one issue (Table 3-1). In contrast over 70 percent of marginal groups in both states are concerned with more than one issue. Because many of the marginal groups provide social services, I expected these organizations would cover more than one issue area. In fact, the data confirm this; a majority of the marginal groups are multi-issue in orientation.

Table 3-1
Number of Issues by Interest Group

	Single Issue	Multiple Issues
VT Non-Marginal Groups	52% (11/21)	48% (10/21)
VT Marginal Groups	30% (10/33)	70% (23/33)
NY Non-Marginal Groups	48% (10/21)	53% (11/21)
NY Marginal Groups	29% (10/34)	71% (24/34)

Source: Interest Group Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The size of organizations (and their respective memberships) and the number of individuals employed by the organization vary considerably. Respondents were asked how many members belong to their organization and how many individuals were employed by their organization.[63] More than half of the organizations surveyed (56 out 111) reported having memberships of more than 100 persons.[64] Qualitative data in both states show that more than half of the interest groups have a member base. Interviewees self-defined membership. Marginal groups tend to define their membership in terms of individuals, clients or broader populations while non-marginal groups define their membership not only in terms of individuals but also in terms of customers, households, organizations and cities. Virtually all of the non-marginal organizations indicated that they have a member base. On average organizations employ 39 individuals. A majority of organizations, however, employ fewer than 25 people. More specifically 60 percent of respondents (65 out of 11) reported that their organization employs 10 or fewer employees and 18 percent of respondents (20 out of 111) said their organization employs between 11 and 25 employees.

Technological Capacity of Interest Groups. The technical capacities of interest groups merits discussion and provides context for the remainder of this chapter. When asked how many employees in their organization have regular access to computers, on average, 89 percent of respondents indicated that their employees

---

[62] See Appendix C question 7.
[63] See Appendix C questions 8 and 9.
[64] A large number of respondents, 33, did not respond to this question perhaps because their organization does not have an existing member base.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

have regular access to computers.[65] In addition to assessing access to computers I also asked how many employees have access to the Internet and when they first had access to e-mail and the Internet. Eighty percent of non-marginal groups in both states reported that *all* of their employees have Internet access.[66] In contrast more than half of the respondents from marginal groups in Vermont (16 out of 31) indicated that *all* of their employees have Internet access and an additional 45 percent of marginal group respondents in Vermont (14 out of 31) said that *some* of their employees have access to the Internet. Eight percent of non-marginal and marginal groups in New York said all of their employees have access to the Internet. In Vermont respondents said they obtained e-mail access between 1993 and 2002 and Internet access between 1994 and 2002.[67] In New York respondents reported that they obtained e-mail access between 1990 and 2000 and the Internet between 1990 and 2000. Marginal groups in Vermont and New York said that they obtained e-mail access in 1993 and 1990 respectively, two years earlier than their non-marginal counterparts.

Connecting to the Internet through an Internet Service Provider (ISP) occurs through a modem, Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN), Digital Subscriber Line (DSL), cable modem or T-1 (or greater).[68] These devices differ from each other in terms of the rate at which information is sent and received. A modem has the least capacity and a T-1 (or greater) has the greatest capacity.

---

[65] See Appendix C question 10.
[66] See Appendix C question 11.
[67] See Appendix C question 14.
[68] See Appendix C question 12.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Table 3-2 illustrates how organizations in Vermont and New York connect to their ISP. While non-marginal groups in Vermont are dispersed evenly between modem and DSL a majority of the marginal groups reported using a modem to connect to their ISP. Non-marginal groups in New York are

Table 3-2
Type of Internet Connection by Interest Group

	Modem	ISDN	DSL	Cable Modem	T-1
VT Non-Marginal Groups	37% (7/19)	5% (1/19)	26% (5/19)	11% (2/19)	5% (1/19)
VT Marginal Groups	65% (22/34)	3% (1/34)	3% (1/34)	9% (3/34)	9% (3/34))
NY Non-Marginal Groups	32% (6/19)	------ ------	37% (7/19)	11% (2/19)	16% (3/19)
NY Marginal Groups	25% (8/32)	6% (2/32)	31% (10/32)	6% (2/32)	28% (9/32)

Source: Interest Group Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

divided between modem and DSL with a higher percentage of respondents indicating that they connect to the Internet through DSL. Interestingly only a small percentage of non-marginal groups connect to the Internet through a T-1. Marginal groups compare favorably to non-marginal groups, however a greater percentage of non-marginal groups in New York connect to their ISP through a T-1. I suspect that this might not be an entirely representative sample because more marginal groups than non-marginal groups connect to their ISP through a T-1 or greater. One would expect a greater number of non-marginal groups to connect to their ISP through a faster connection. Alternatively a greater percentage of marginal groups might have upgraded their ISP connection to T-1 sooner than their non-marginal counterparts.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The method of connecting to the Internet was recoded into a dichotomous variable.[69] Modem users were recoded to 0 and labeled *low-tech users* and ISDN, DSL, cable modem and T-1 (or greater) users were recoded to 1 and labeled *high-tech users*. As illustrated in Table 3-3 there is more than a 30 percentage-point difference between high-tech users in Vermont and New York. Differences between non-marginal and marginal groups are more pronounced in Vermont. More than 70 percent of marginal group respondents in Vermont (20 out of 28) reported that they connect to the Internet through a modem. Lower technical capacities potentially impact how marginal groups in Vermont use the Internet (discussed in greater detail later in this chapter).

Table 3-3
High-Tech & Low-Tech Users by Interest Group

	High-Tech Users	Low-Tech Users
VT Interest Groups	37% (17/46)	61% (28/46)
NY Interest Groups	71% (35/49)	29% (14/49)

Source: Interest Group Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

I also asked respondents whether or not their organization is networked.[70] Evidence of Internet access and a networked organization illustrates technical capacity and a level of technical sophistication not present in organizations that are not networked. A networked system allows users to share files and documents. Networked systems might facilitate internal communication resulting in enhanced communication between and among employees. More than 70 percent of non-marginal groups in Vermont (13 out of 18) are networked

[69] See Appendix C question 12.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

compared to 39 percent of marginal groups in Vermont (13 out of 33). In New York 81 percent of non-marginal groups (13 out of 16) and 88 percent of marginal groups (30 out of 34) are networked. The data clearly suggest that the technical capacities of marginal groups in Vermont are inferior to the other interest groups that I surveyed. Marginal groups in Vermont may be at a distinct disadvantage when communicating with legislators, mobilizing their members and lobbying legislators.

E-mail. During interviews I asked interest groups to rank the various modes of communication that their organization uses to contact state legislators.[71] Executive directors and presidents of interest groups repeatedly ranked in-person contact as the first and most important mode of communication followed by a phone call. A majority of respondents ranked e-mail third. One executive director commented that, "E-mail is good for immediate follow-up which can be comprehensive." Still another individual noted that, "Snail mail [US Post] would have been ranked ahead of e-mail a few years ago but that isn't the case now."

How interest groups use e-mail to communicate, mobilize and lobby state legislators merits further discussion. According to the data approximately 65 percent of interest group respondents in both states said they use e-mail to inform their members about pending legislation or committee hearings.[72] In selecting for high-tech and low-tech users, 60 percent of respondents in each category reported that they use e-mail to inform members of their organization

---

[70] See Appendix C question 13.
[71] See Appendix D question 8.
[72] See Appendix C question 27.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

about pending legislation and committee hearings.[73] This suggests that technological capacities do not necessarily influence an interest groups' decision to e-mail their members about pending legislation or committee hearings. Significant differences emerge, however, when selecting for the high-tech and low-tech users in each state and when differentiating between non-marginal and marginal groups. More than a 25 percent-point difference appears between high-tech and low-tech users in each state as illustrated in Table 3-4. Marginal groups e-mail their members about pending legislation and committee hearings less frequently than their non-marginal counterparts (Table 3-5). While there is more than a 20 percentage-point difference between non-marginal and marginal groups, a 15 percentage-point difference exists between the marginal groups. The reason for the significant disparity between the marginal groups might be attributed to the fact that more than half of the marginal groups in Vermont use a modem to connect to their ISP. Without a "fast connection" e-mailing members might be more tedious, though one could argue that e-mailing is a low-tech activity. Alternatively e-mailing might not be deemed as effective in Vermont or the marginal organizations may lack the resources to compile and execute e-mail notices to their members. I suspect that non-marginal groups have larger budgets and a tendency to contract out for lobbying services. Because of these factors the non-marginal groups do not have to rely as heavily on their member base.

---

[73] Unless specified *high-tech users* and *low-tech users* refers to interest groups in both states. In other words high-tech users can be comprised of organizations from both Vermont and New

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Table 3-4
High-Tech & Low-Tech Users in States Who E-mail Interest Group Members About Pending Legislation & Committee Hearings

	Yes	No
VT High-Tech Users	73% (8/11)	27% (3/11)
VT Low-Tech Users	44% (7/16)	56% (9/16)
NY High Tech Users	59% (16/27)	41% (11/27)
NY Low-Tech Users	13% (7/8)	88% (1/8)

Source: Interest Group Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

Table 3-5
Interest Groups Who E-mail Their Members About Pending Legislation & Committee Hearings

	Yes	No
VT Non-Marginal Groups	86% (12/14)	14% (2/14)
VT Marginal Groups	43% (6/13)	54% (7/13)
NY Non-Marginal Groups	86% (9/11)	18% (2/11)
NY Marginal Groups	58% (17/29)	42% (12/29)

Source: Interest Group Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

Through qualitative research I asked executive directors and presidents of interest groups how important e-mail is compared to other modes of communication.[74] While a majority of non-marginal groups in Vermont reported that e-mail is less important, a plurality of marginal groups in Vermont indicated that it is more important than other modes of communication. Among the marginal groups many noted in interviews that e-mail is important because it enables them to communicate quickly. A Government Affairs Director that I

York. The same applies to low-tech users.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

interviewed said, "E-mail is invaluable because it allows our members to respond to alerts in a timely fashion and it facilitates grassroots work." In contrast non-marginal groups asserted that the personal relationships forged with legislators are most important. E-mail is viewed as being easy to use, however, it is somewhat more removed from the process. Interviewees also said that e-mail is supplemental; it is not a primary communication tool.

To further assess how interest groups use e-mail I asked interest groups how frequently they send messages to their members that pertain to state politics.[75] In Vermont 41 percent of interest group respondents (15 out of 37) reported that they e-mail their members information about state politics on a weekly basis. Half of the non-marginal in Vermont indicated e-mailing their members on a weekly basis compared to two-fifths of marginal group respondents. In New York 36 percent of interest group respondents (12 out of 33) said that they e-mail their members about state politics. The gap between marginal and non-marginal groups in New York is greater than in Vermont, with a 20 percentage-point difference between groups. Only 20 percent of non-marginal groups in New York send messages to their members on a weekly basis. Again I suspect that non-marginal groups have larger budgets and a tendency to contract out for lobbying services. Because of these factors they do not have to rely as heavily on their member base so a weekly update is unnecessary.

---

[74] See Appendix D question 7.
[75] See Appendix C question 29.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

I also asked interest groups whether or not they encourage members of their organization to contact their state legislators through e-mail.[76] While the data show that a majority of interest groups in Vermont encourage their members to contact state legislators through e-mail, responses in New York were divided evenly, half indicating that they *encourage members to e-mail state legislators* and half stating that they *do not encourage their members to e-mail state legislators*. There are considerable differences between high-tech and low-tech users on this variable. Nearly 70 percent of high-tech users (25 out of 37) encourage members of their organization to e-mail legislators compared to 44 percent of low-tech users (15 out of 34). In distinguishing between high-tech and low-tech users in the two states, the data show that a slightly greater percentage of high-tech users encourage members of their organization to e-mail legislators than do low-tech users in Vermont. The disparity between high-tech and low-tech users in New York is more pronounced with a 40 percentage-point difference. Nearly two-thirds of high-tech users in New York encourage members of their organization to e-mail state legislators. These findings strongly suggest that differences in technological capacities influence whether or not organizations encourage their members to e-mail legislators. Non-marginal and marginal groups in Vermont and non-marginal groups in New York behaved similarly with more than 55 percent of respondents in these three categories indicating that they encourage members of their organization to e-mail state legislators. In contrast less than half of the marginal groups in New York (11 out of 24) reported that they encourage their members to e-mail New York state legislators. Marginal

[76] See Appendix C question 31a.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

groups in New York might not encourage their members to e-mail because they believe an office visit or a letter sent by US Post is more effective than an e-mail.

I also inquired whether or not the organization uses e-mail to communicate with state legislators.[77] This is especially important because many organizations do not have member bases. An organization's staff also has direct contact with legislators through e-mail. While a majority of interest group respondents in Vermont (31 out of 53) indicated that their organization uses e-mail to communicate with state legislators, a minority of interest group respondents in New York (18 out of 46) reported using e-mail. Table 3-6 illustrates the differences between the two states differentiating between non-marginal and marginal groups. In selecting for high-tech and low-tech users, there is a 20 percentage-point difference between high-tech and low-tech users, with nearly 60 percent of high-tech users reporting that their organization e-mails legislators. These differences are also evident when selecting for high-tech and low-tech users in the two states. Hence the data suggest that again technical capacities influence an organization's decision to e-mail legislators. These findings are interesting because ISPs are fewer in number and the type of Internet connection is often limited in Vermont.[78] Even if e-mail is considered a low-tech activity, one might expect to see slightly higher e-mail use in New York since organizations that have a greater variety of ISPs to choose from and in instances where the connection speed is greater (via DSL or cable modem). Another explanation for the differences between the two states might be

[77] See Appendix C question 32.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Table 3-6
E-mail Contact with Legislators by Interest Groups

	Yes	No
VT Non-Marginal Groups	62% (13/21)	38% (8/21)
VT Marginal Groups	56% (18/32)	44% (14/32)
NY Non-Marginal Groups	44% (8/18)	56% (10/18)
NY Marginal Groups	36% (10/28)	64% (18/28)

Source: Interest Group Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

attributed to the fact that legislators in Vermont are more willing to communicate with interest groups through e-mail than legislators in New York. Interest groups in New York rely upon more traditional means of communicating because fewer legislators use e-mail. Findings from the data in New York are surprising because one would expect to see higher levels of e-mail use in a professional legislature with strong interest groups. During interviews executive directors and presidents of interest groups in both states reported that face-to-face meetings are still the primary way they communicate with state legislators. Despite this a greater percentage of high-tech users in New York e-mail legislators than do low-tech users. In New York interviewees said that they use e-mail as a follow-up to in-person conversations with legislators.

Finally while a large number of interest groups use e-mail to provide state legislators with information, organizations also e-mail legislators to persuade legislators to vote a certain way in committee meetings or on the floor, to discuss the details of a bill, or to schedule a meeting.[79] A majority of organizations in

[78] A wide range of ISPs is not available in Vermont and not all service providers offer DSL or cable modem.
[79] See Appendix C question 33.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Vermont and New York e-mail state legislators *every few months* with no difference between marginal and non-marginal groups.[80] In addition to assessing the frequency of e-mailing state legislators I also asked interest groups how many issues their organization e-mails state legislators about during an average month. A majority of interest groups in both states responded that they e-mail state legislators on between one to four issues monthly. Marginal groups in New York vary slightly. Compared to marginal and non-marginal groups in Vermont and non-marginal groups in New York 38 percent of marginal groups in New York (3 out of 8) reported that they address between one to four issues and the same percentage said they address between five to seven issues on a monthly basis via e-mail to state legislators. The slight variation might be attributed to the fact that marginal groups often address many issues. Marginal groups in New York might have larger budgets and bigger staffs.

Listservs. The data show that between 20 and 35 percent of interest groups in both states have listservs, though a greater percentage of executive directors and presidents indicated in interviews that their organizations have listservs. A few individuals admitted in interviews that while they do not have a formal listserv they compile e-mail lists, which serve the same purpose. Individuals who subscribe to the listservs vary from employees and board members to organizational members. One respondent, a very sophisticated listserv user, told me that he uses listservs for different groups that are interested in different issue areas.

---

[80] See Appendix C question 34.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

When asked whether or not they use listservs to inform members of their organization about pending legislation and committee hearings 20 percent of interest groups in Vermont (10 out of 49) and 31 percent of interest groups in New York (14 out of 45) reported using listservs to inform their members about pending legislation and committee hearings.[81] A plurality of interest groups in Vermont (15 out of 37) and New York (12 out of 33) said that they send messages to their members through their listserv on a *weekly basis.* [82] When I cross tabulated this variable with high-tech and low-tech users 30 percent of high-tech users (12 out 40) and 17 percent of low-tech users (6 out of 36) employ listservs to inform their members about pending legislation and committee hearings. In Vermont high-tech and low-tech users behaved similarly however a greater percentage of high-tech users than low-tech users employ listservs to notify members of their organization about pending legislation and committee hearings.

According to one respondent the benefits of using a listserv are that "listservs facilitate communication among shared interests and it preserves and records transactions and documents unlike a standard e-mail list." It is surprising that more interest groups do not use listservs because of the inherent benefits. If used in a sophisticated manner as illustrated above listservs can help to organize members and employees by issue area. This might be especially beneficial for large organizations or organizations with large memberships. Finally listservs are especially advantageous for organizations that address multiple issues.

---

[81] See Appendix C question 28.
[82] See Appendix C question 30.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Internet & Websites. Many organizations took advantage of the Internet early on with a majority of organizations procuring Internet access in 1996. Interest groups use the Internet for a variety of tasks related to state legislative politics including conducting research, checking on pending legislation, obtaining news, visiting state legislative websites, determining a state legislator's position on an issue and informing their members.[83] In Vermont a majority of interest group respondents use the Internet to conduct research, to check on pending legislation and to visit state legislative websites. Differing slightly a majority of interest groups in New York use the Internet to conduct research, to obtain news and to inform their members. During interviews I asked executive directors and presidents how their organization uses the Internet for purposes related to state politics.[84] The responses largely support the quantitative data. Some respondents also mentioned that they use the Internet to search other organization's websites, to research policy items, to issue a call to action, to publish memos on issues and to access information about public hearings.

When asked whether or not they use the Vermont and New York state legislatures' websites, an overwhelming majority of interviewees in both states reported that they do indeed visit their state legislature's websites. In Vermont interviewees said that they use their state legislature's website to access information on committee agendas and meetings, bills, the calendar, schedules, proceedings, e-mail addresses and the journal. One individual remarked that the legislative tracking system is a tremendous asset because it allows him to search

[83] See Appendix C question 25.
[84] See Appendix D question 24.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

by keyword or [bill] number; another said that accessing the schedules for committee meetings is crucial since committee meetings are typically shut down by this point of the year [late January]. In New York executive directors and presidents of interest groups reported using their state legislature's website to contact members, to obtain press releases, to watch sessions online, to view the calendar, to access legislators' vote on bills, and to download information on bills, memoranda and committees. One respondent in New York said that she uses the New York legislature's website to know who to approach on a particular issue and to examine existing law in order to better understand the implications and importance as it relates to proposed bills. As noted in Chapter Two state legislative websites are heavily trafficked. State legislators and their staff, citizens and interest groups all rely upon these sites to varying degrees. The availability of a wide range of information through state legislative websites improves the transparency of state legislatures and aids in expanding access to state legislatures for those who have Internet access.

Interest groups rely not only on the Internet to gather information but to provide information as well. Organizational websites provide visitors with information on the organization and often information about federal, state and local government. Pending legislation, voting records, candidate information, press releases and contact information for government officials are often found on organizational websites. More specifically websites supply visitors with immediate information on a range of issues, which can potentially lead to increased political participation. According to the survey data 64 percent of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

interest groups in Vermont (35 out of 55) said that their organization has a website and 96 percent of interest groups in New York (53 out of 55) have websites. [85] All of the individuals I interviewed said their organization has a website.[86] The number of organizations in Vermont that have websites is much lower than the number of organizations in New York that have websites. Differentiating between marginal and non-marginal groups, the data show that 86 percent of non-marginal groups (19 out of 22) in Vermont have websites while just under half of all marginal groups in Vermont (16 out of 33) have websites. Thus marginal groups in Vermont do not appear to be as technologically sophisticated or advanced in their use of the Internet. Arguably developing a website is costly, however, designing and registering even a rudimentary website can be accomplished with very little money. When selecting for high-tech and low-tech users more than 90 percent of high-tech users (29 out of 41) and more than 70 percent of low-tech users (47 out of 52) indicated that their organization has a website. Also noteworthy the data show that more than 90 percent of high-tech and low-tech users in New York reported their organization has a website. Despite the considerable difference between high-tech and low-tech users, almost three-quarters of the low-tech users have a website suggesting that technological capacity does not necessarily impact website development and maintenance.

I also assessed how organizations use their sites. For example interest group respondents were asked how frequently they update the material on their

[85] See Appendix C question 18.
[86] See Appendix D question 21.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

websites and whether or not they analyze traffic to their organization's website. When selecting for high-tech and low-tech users 53 percent of high-tech users (24 out of 45) update their websites on a *weekly basis* compared to 30 percent of low-tech users (8 out of 27).[87] Clearly the frequency with which sites are updated might be influenced by technological capacity. This is somewhat obvious because the rate at which information is sent or received facilitates or hinders one's ability to upload or alter website content. Among marginal and non-marginal groups over half of all non-marginal groups in both states and marginal groups in New York update their websites on a weekly basis. In contrast a plurality of marginal groups in Vermont update their websites on a *monthly basis*. In addition marginal groups in Vermont do not record the number of visits or hits that their website receives unlike the other interest groups.[88] Analyzing website activity might be an indicator of how technologically sophisticated and savvy an organization is in their advocacy and lobbying efforts. Organizations that analyze what users view on their website might be better equipped to mobilize and organize individuals for purposes related to state legislative politics. Although a majority of interest groups in both states indicated that they do not regularly analyze website activity, the data show significant differences between marginal and non-marginal groups.[89] More than half of all non-marginal groups in Vermont and New York regularly analyze website activity. In contrast fewer than 40 percent of marginal organizations in both states analyze website activity. The fact that few marginal groups analyze website activity is not surprising since these

[87] See Appendix C question 19.
[88] See Appendix C question 20.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

organizations typically have fewer employees and smaller budgets. Among high-tech and low-tech users more than half of the high-tech users (24 out of 45) analyze website activity compared to only a quarter of the low-tech users (7 out of 27). As noted in Table 3-7 when selecting for state and the type of user low-tech users in Vermont stand out because few of the low-tech users in Vermont analyze website activity.

Table 3-7
High-Tech & Low-Tech Users Who Analyze Website Activity

	Yes	No
VT High-Tech Users	62% (8/13)	39% (5/13)
VT Low-Tech Users	14% (2/14)	86% (12/14)
NY High Tech Users	53% (17/32)	47% (15/32)
NY Low-Tech Users	39% (5/13)	62% (8/13)

Source: Interest Group Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

The survey also asked interest group respondents whether or not their organization's website has political material and content.[90] The survey did not define political material and content allowing survey respondents to self-define these terms. In Vermont 34 percent of interest group respondents (12 out of 35) said that political material or content appears on their websites. Data from the interviews support the survey data with almost half of all non-marginal groups indicating that they provide information on their website about state government. Similarly fewer executive directors and presidents of marginal groups reported that their organization provides information about state government on their

[89] See Appendix C question 21.
[90] See Appendix C question 22.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

website.[91] In contrast half of the interest group respondents in New York (25 out of 50) indicated that their website contains political material or content. It is worth noting that a greater percentage of marginal groups than non-marginal groups in New York reported that political material or content appears on their websites. Among high-tech and low-tech users two-thirds of high-tech users and one-third of low-tech users reported that their organization's website contains political material and content. Again technological capacities might play a role in an organization's decision to post political material and content.

Despite the fact that few organizational websites include political material or content, a substantial number of organizational websites provide information about federal, state and local government (Table 3-8).[92] As illustrated in Table 3-8 a greater percentage of interest groups post information about state government. It is not entirely clear why interest groups in New York provide more information about the various levels of government in general and state government in particular than their counterparts in Vermont. In general a greater percentage of the high-tech users provide government information on their websites. In terms of how much of an organization's website is devoted to state politics more than half of all interest group respondents estimated that between zero and five percent of their organization's website is devoted to state politics with a modal value of five percent. While organizations provide information about state politics and government this information comprises a small percentage of their entire website. Further analysis of marginal and non-marginal groups

[91] See Appendix D question 22.
[92] See Appendix C question 23.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

reveals that marginal groups in Vermont are somewhat less likely to provide information about state politics than non-marginal groups whereas there is no difference between groups in New York. In Vermont for example 54 percent of marginal groups include information about state politics on their websites compared to 71 percent of non-marginal groups. The provision of government information on organizational websites in the form of web links can lead to increased political participation and increased access to legislators.

Table 3-8
Provision of Government Information on Websites by Interest Groups

	Federal	State	Local
VT Interest Groups	35% (11/31)	55% (17/31)	17% (5/29)
NY Interest Groups	55% (26/47)	63% (31/49)	43% (20/47)

Source: Interest Group Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

For respondents who indicated that their organization's website includes information about state politics, the survey asked respondents to estimate how much of their organization's website is devoted to issues that pertain solely to state politics. Respondents were also asked what type of information about state politics their website provides.[93] Approximately 23 percent of interest group websites address state politics with a modal value of five percent. In both states a large number of interest groups indicated that their site provides *information about bills or pending legislation.* Additionally groups in both states checked the response *other.* Respondents had an opportunity to explain what other type of information their website provides. Other information that appears on websites

[93] See Appendix C questions 24 and 25.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

includes links to state and federal sites, grant proposals, budget information and contact information for state officials. In New York many respondents additionally noted that their website provides information about bills that have been signed into law. During interviews I asked executive directors and presidents of interest groups what type of information about state politics their website provides.[94] Interviewees indicated that their websites include information about bills, memoranda in support or opposition of legislation, legislative hearings, the state budget, links to other departments in the state, videos of legislative hearings, reports, news stories, and invitations to send form letters via US Post, e-mail or fax. The type of information that respondents provide on their websites does not differ across the two states.

Finally when asked whether or not their website has links to their state legislature or other state government websites more than 75 percent of interest group respondents in Vermont (16 out of 21) said they have links to their state legislature or other state government sites. [95] In contrast half of the interest group respondents in New York (16 out of 32) reported that their organization's website provides links to their state legislature or other state government sites. When selecting for high-tech and low-tech users more than half of all high-tech and low-tech users have links to their state legislature or other state government websites. Differences between marginal and non-marginal groups in New York show that a majority of marginal groups report that their organization's website does not provide links to the state legislature or other state government sites. In

[94] See Appendix D question 22.
[95] See Appendix C question 26.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

New York the substantially lower percentage of organizations that provide links to their state legislature or other sites might suggest that organizations do not find state government or state government sites to be particularly useful. Historically, the New York state legislature has not been perceived as being particularly open or inclusive perhaps explaining why so few organizations provide links to the state legislature's website.

Political Participation: Interest Groups

Scholars who examine the impact of information technology and government are divided as to whether or not the Internet will have a favorable impact on political participation. None, however, examine the impact of information technology on state level interest groups. In this section I use survey and interview data from interest groups and legislators to test the hypothesis that non-marginal and marginal groups perceive there to be increased political participation as a result of information technology. Following a brief explanation of the dependent and independent variables, this section examines how e-mail and the Internet affect political participation.

The dependent variable *political participation* measures perceived contact and interactions between interest groups and state legislators via information technology from the perspective of interest groups and state legislators. Some of the questions that measure political participation from the perspective of interest groups are as follows: In your opinion do e-mail, the Internet and listservs lead to more contact?; Do you think e-mail gives your organization an advantage in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

terms of your organization's ability to participate in state legislative politics?; If your organization uses information technology do you feel that it provides your organization an advantage in terms of contacting or lobbying state legislators?; What drawbacks does e-mail provide in terms of your ability to participate in state legislative politics?; Does e-mail give non-marginal and marginal groups an advantage in terms of their ability to participate in state legislative politics?; And does the Internet lead to increased contact and interactions between your organization and state legislators?; [96] Questions that measure interest group participation from the vantage point of legislators are as follows: Does e-mail from the following interest groups increase, decrease or stay the same compared to other modes of communication?; Does e-mail result in increased or decreased interactions between your office and interest groups?; And does e-mail result in increased or decreased interactions between your office and interest groups?[97]

The independent variables measure the level of e-mail and Internet use, types of Internet connections and whether or not organizations are networked. Some of the questions that measure e-mail and Internet use include whether or not an organization e-mails state legislators; whether or not an organization encourages their members to e-mail legislators; how frequently an organization e-mails state legislators; whether or not an organization uses the Internet to contact legislators; how much e-mail and US Post do you receive from interest groups on a weekly basis?[98] Other independent variables measure the technological capacities of interest groups. Questions that assess the

---

[96] See Appendix C questions 37 and 55; and Appendix D questions 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19.
[97] See Appendix A questions 14b, 15a-k and 23d

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

technological capacities of organizations include the following: What type of Internet connection does your organization have?; Is your organization networked?; and What year did your organization obtain e-mail and the Internet?[99]

E-mail. To assess political participation, measured in terms of contact and interactions, I asked a set of preliminary questions related to contact and lobbying. All of the executive directors and presidents of interest groups that I interviewed indicated that they had contact with a state legislator during the last 12 months.[100] Some of the reasons for contacting a state legislator included lobbying, educating, scheduling meetings, fundraising, writing memos, assisting constituents, testifying, doing advocacy work, proposing initiatives and providing data.[101] Qualitative research shows that a majority of respondents in both states said contact usually occurs through face-to-face meetings.[102] In an unusual response one executive director from a marginal group in New York asserted that there is no "typical way" of contacting state legislators. Instead her organization employs different strategies for contacting state legislators depending upon the issue the organization is addressing.

To measure contact and interactions the survey asked interest group respondents whether or not they use e-mail to contact state legislators. As noted previously (see Table 3-6) 59 percent of interest groups use e-mail to contact state legislators in Vermont and 38 percent of interest groups in New York use e-

---

[98] See Appendix A question 7b and 7c; and Appendix C questions 17, 31a, 31b, 32 and 34.
[99] See Appendix C questions 12, 13 and 14.
[100] See Appendix D question 1.
[101] See Appendix D question 2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

mail to contact state legislators. In both states a slightly larger percentage of non-marginal groups e-mail legislators than do marginal groups. Qualitative research in Vermont reveals that nearly all interviewees said that their organization uses e-mail to contact state legislators.[103] While survey data in New York show that fewer than 40 percent of interest group respondents use e-mail to contact state legislators, the qualitative data suggest that half of the interviewees e-mail state legislators. Of the interviewees who said they do not e-mail legislators, one individual noted that his organization encourages members to initiate contact via e-mail. Another respondent said, "We know that legislators don't read their e-mail. I think there is a lot of contact between organizations and state legislators, however, e-mail is mostly used between our organization and legislative staff." The disparity between the survey and interview data might be attributed to the fact that during interviews respondents often qualified their responses saying that they primarily e-mail with staff. Had the survey choice included "state legislators and/or staff" a greater number of respondents in New York might have indicated that their organization contacts state legislators using e-mail. If political participation is measured in terms of contact and interactions, the data strongly support the idea that interest groups in Vermont use e-mail to contact legislators. In contrast, the qualitative data indicate that at best half of the interviewees in New York use e-mail to contact legislators.

---

[102] See Appendix D question 3.
[103] See Appendix D question 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

I also asked executive directors and presidents of interest groups how frequently they e-mail legislators both during session and off-session.[104] The data show that almost all non-marginal groups in Vermont e-mail on a weekly basis whereas the frequency with which marginal groups e-mail varies. A plurality of marginal groups reported that they e-mail a few times a month. In Vermont most interviewees said that they rarely e-mail legislators when the legislature is not in session. A plurality of non-marginal groups in New York claim that they contact state legislators on a daily basis whereas a plurality of marginal groups in New York said they contact legislators on a weekly basis during session. Like interest groups in Vermont interest groups in New York also reported that they e-mail legislators less frequently when the legislature is not in session. Non-marginal groups in both states use e-mail more frequently than their marginal group counterparts. This might be attributed to larger staff, bigger budgets, or a belief that e-mail is particularly efficacious.

I also asked executive directors and presidents why they use e-mail and to give an example of a time when they used e-mail to contact a state legislator.[105] The reasons for using e-mail varied. About half of the executive directors and presidents in Vermont said they use e-mail to persuade a legislator to vote a particular way while others said that they never use e-mail to persuade legislators. Many of the individuals I interviewed reported that they use e-mail to disseminate and share information, to furnish legislators with specific language for bills, to send invites and to educate. Responses from non-marginal groups

[104] See Appendix D question 10.
[105] See Appendix D questions 5 and 6.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and marginal groups differ slightly. Fewer non-marginal group interviewees in Vermont mentioned using e-mail to persuade state legislators. Interviewees asserted that personal contact is crucial. For e-mail to be effective interviewees said it depends on who is sending the e-mail and for what reasons. Personal contact however remains more important than e-mail. Executive directors and presidents reported using e-mail to contact state legislators as opposed to another form of communication when action needs to be taken on an issue within a prescribed period of time. In New York several interviewees from non-marginal groups said that they use e-mail to follow-up on conversations or to express an opinion regarding the state budget. Several marginal groups in New York expressed that they use e-mail sparingly and like their non-marginal counterparts they use e-mail to submit language for bills, to send memos in support of or opposition to bills, or to follow-up on conversations. Differences in how interest groups in the two states use e-mail may explain why organizational use of e-mail is much lower in New York than in Vermont. Rarely do interest groups in New York use e-mail to persuade legislators. Instead e-mail is ancillary and used as follow-up to conversations. This difference might be attributed to the fact that more legislators in Vermont use e-mail than in New York. Interest groups in New York probably do not use e-mail because fewer than 60 percent of legislators in New York use e-mail even though staff read and respond to e-mail on behalf of their legislator.

Despite variation in e-mail use among organizations, the survey data suggest that organizations do encourage their members to e-mail state

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

legislators. As noted in the previous section nearly 60 of interest group respondents in Vermont and 50 percent of interest group respondents in New York reported that they encourage members of their interest group to e-mail state legislators. Qualitative data support these findings.[106] This is notably highlighted in one interview,

> Yes, we encourage our members to contact state legislators via e-mail. The game is different than it used to be. The role of grassroots activity in moving an issue has gone from nothing 20 years ago to paramount today. This is not an old fart sitting in a bar cutting deals. Who can activate and move their members to make the loudest noise, the greatest public impression and to fork out the most dollars [is most important]. So, it's incumbent upon the organization to facilitate that activity.

E-mail is particularly useful in organizing and mobilizing grassroots efforts as is illustrated and supported by the survey data and interviews. This is important because while organizations in New York do not directly e-mail legislators they do encourage their members to e-mail legislators.

The survey asked interest group respondents whether or not their organization has more or less contact and interactions with state legislators because of e-mail.[107] According to the data a majority of interest group respondents in Vermont and New York reported that they have *more contact* with state legislators as a result of e-mail. When selecting for high-tech and low-tech users the data show that more than 70 percent of users in both categories indicated they have more contact with state legislators because of e-mail. Hence there is no difference between organizations based on their technological capacities. While a majority of non-marginal and marginal groups in Vermont and

---

[106] See Appendix D question 9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

marginal groups in New York asserted that they have more contact with state legislators because of e-mail, a majority of respondents from non-marginal groups in New York indicated that contact *remains the same*. I suspect that non-marginal groups in New York either view traditional modes of lobbying as more effective than e-mail or that they do not use e-mail the same way the other three groups do. The data support the hypothesis that there is increased political participation for non-marginal and marginal groups in Vermont. For marginal groups in New York the data also support the hypothesis but this is not the case for non-marginal groups.

In addition to considering the perceptions of interest group respondents I also asked state legislators whether or not they have more contact with interest groups because of e-mail. [108] A plurality of legislators in both Vermont and New York reported that there is a *slight increase* in contact and interactions because of e-mail and more than a quarter of state legislators in both states reported that there is a *significant increase* in contact and interactions between legislators and interest groups. Collapsing these categories 63 percent of legislators in Vermont and New York report that there is an increase in contact and interactions because of e-mail. Hence there is a perception among both interest group respondents and legislators that e-mail leads to increased contact and interactions. Data from two sources lend support to my hypothesis that there is increased political participation.

---

[107] See Appendix C question 37.
[108] See Appendix A question 14b.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Conducting interviews with executive directors and presidents of interest groups I asked interviewees whether or not e-mail gives their organization an advantage in terms of their ability to participate in state legislative politics.[109] In Vermont a majority of interest groups said that e-mail is advantageous and it helps their organization to participate in state legislative politics. Many interviewees noted the importance of being able to communicate with members of their organization through e-mail. Organizations do e-mail their members and they encourage their members to contact state legislators on certain issues. Like their Vermont counterparts a majority of interviewees from New York also agreed that e-mail is advantageous. For example interviewees said that e-mail allows them mobilize their member base and in turn their members e-mail state legislators.

From the vantage point of state legislators their perceptions of communicating with interest groups differs dramatically from the perceptions of interest group respondents. Given a choice of six modes of communication (phone, US Post, office visit, e-mail, fax and courier service) I asked state legislators to rank from the most frequently to the least frequently how interests groups usually contact their office.[110] According to the data 16 out of 29 state legislators in Vermont (55 percent) ranked contact via US Post first while 13 out of 28 legislators (46 percent) ranked e-mail second. In New York, the data show that 24 out of 44 state legislators (55 percent) ranked US Post first and 13 out of 43 members (30 percent) ranked an office visit second. There are several

[109] See Appendix D question 14.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

possible explanations that account for the differences between the two states. In Vermont members do not have offices at the statehouse and interest groups meet with representatives in locations ranging from the cafeteria to the hallways. Legislators in Vermont are also more receptive to using e-mail than their counterparts in New York, perhaps explaining why interest groups in Vermont use e-mail to contact and communicate with legislators. The formal culture of the New York state legislature in contrast contributes to continued reliance upon formal written correspondence and office visits. Disparate responses from interest group respondents and state legislators might be attributed to the wording of the survey questions. State legislators were asked to rank various modes of communication and one choice listed on the survey was an *office visit*. Had this choice been listed as *personal contact* (which appeared as a choice on the interest group survey) the rankings might have differed.

I also asked state legislators to evaluate how interest groups use e-mail compared to other forms of communication including phone, US Post, fax, office visits and courier service to contact their office.[111] According to the data interest groups use e-mail *more frequently* than phone, fax, an office visit and courier service in Vermont. United States Post is the only medium that interest groups use more frequently than e-mail though, 50 percent of legislators (17 out of 34) indicated as such. Legislators in New York however reported that interest groups use e-mail *less frequently* than phone, US Post, fax and an office visit. What accounts for the differences between the two states? Based upon data from both

---

[110] See Appendix A question 11b.
[111] See Appendix A question 18.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

state legislators and interest groups, organizations in Vermont view e-mail as a mode of communication that is on par with, or perhaps better than, other modes of communication. Since interest groups use the phone, US Post, fax and office visits more frequently than e-mail in New York, the data suggest that e-mail may not be a viable or reliable mode of communicating with state legislators.

Because interest groups rely on a variety of methods to communicate, the survey asked state legislators to indicate how many pieces of US Post and e-mail they receive from interest groups on a weekly basis (Table 3-9).[112] Vermont's informal, open and highly participatory legislature elicits similar levels of e-mail and US Post from interest groups. While US Post is widely used by interest groups in New York fewer groups use e-mail. This is because office visits and written correspondence are highly valued in the New York state legislature. On average 87 percent of the e-mail that Vermont state legislators receive from interest groups in Vermont addresses legislation and 10 percent of the e-mail legislators receive addresses casework.[113] Data analysis reveals nearly identical results for New York. It is not surprising that almost 90 percent of e-mail from interest groups addresses legislation since the primary goal of interest groups is to exert influence over bills.

Given that the data show that interest groups use e-mail to contact legislators, I also asked legislators whether or not they respond to interest group e-mail and if so do they have any official policies or rules guiding how they respond to e-mail. First I asked state legislators whether or not they respond to

[112] See Appendix A question 7b.
[113] See Appendix A question 8b.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Table 3-9
Average Number of E-mail & Pieces of US Post Legislators Receive Weekly From Interest Groups by State

	Vermont	New York
E-mail	22	54
US Post	26	76

Source: State Legislative Data 2002.

interest group e-mail.[114] In Vermont 44 percent of state legislators (15 out of 34) said they *sometimes* respond to e-mail from interest groups. Forty-one percent of state legislators (14 out of 34) reported that *yes* they do respond to e-mail from interest groups. The data show similar results in New York. Voluminous quantities of e-mail compel many state legislators and legislative offices to institute a routinized method of responding to constituent and interest group e-mail. Most offices develop criteria to establish how they will respond to e-mail. If a legislator or legislative office is selective about responding to e-mail, then the criteria the office employs usually mirrors any criteria they employ for US Post. Among the state legislators who indicated that they respond to interest group e-mail, a large number of respondents in Vermont (11 out of 11) and New York (12 out of 12) said that they *do not employ any criteria* for responding to interest group e-mail and that they respond to all requests.[115] Other criteria that many state legislators employ include the following: the interest group *must be based in New York* and the request *must deal with a committee issue*.

Finally I asked state legislators whether or not they perceive there to be increased or decreased contact by interest groups via e-mail compared to other

[114] See Appendix A question 5b.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

modes of communication.[116] Legislators reported there is a *slight increase* in e-mail from educational, environmental, business and health care interest groups compared to other forms of communication. In contrast legislators from both states indicated that there is *no change* in the mode of communication for the following interest groups: agricultural, religious, mentally and physically disabled, children, homeless and the poor. These findings are interesting because most of the interest groups for which legislators reported no change in the mode of communication are marginal groups. From the vantage point of legislators, then, e-mail does not lead to increased contact and interactions, potentially perpetuating and exacerbating differences between non-marginal and marginal groups.

The Internet. In interviews with executive directors and presidents I asked individuals whether or not the Internet allows their organization to better communicate with state legislators.[117] An overwhelming majority of interviewees from non-marginal groups in Vermont said that the Internet allows them to gather information more quickly and to be in regular contact with other organizations around the country. One individual said that he is able to obtain access to more accurate information that can be relayed more quickly to state legislators than prior to the advent of the Internet. In contrast executive directors and presidents of marginal groups in Vermont were divided as to whether or not the Internet enables their organization to better communicate with state legislators. One respondent asserted that the Internet does not lead to better communication

---

[115] See Appendix A question 10b.
[116] See Appendix A question 15a-k.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

claiming, "we use the Internet for personal reasons, however, the Internet does not facilitate communications with legislators." Similarly another individual said, "the Internet is only useful for obtaining contact information." Interviewees from non-marginal groups in New York viewed the Internet as enabling their organization to better communicate with state legislators. For example, heads of organizations from non-marginal groups in New York said that not only does the Internet enable them to have better access to information but also stressed that the Internet allows them to share information with legislators. One individual said,

> I imagine there might be legislators who check out our website. The Internet has to be one of the top things that have helped us to communicate with our members especially over the last three years. When you have a member base as large as ours you need a way to communicate with your membership precisely and economically. A statewide mailing costs about 15 to 20,000 dollars. So this makes the Internet particularly beneficial.

Like their counterparts marginal groups in New York were not convinced that the Internet allows them to better communicate with state legislators. Clearly these findings lend support to my hypothesis that there is increased contact and interactions between interest groups and legislators because of the Internet.

I also asked heads of organizations whether or not they encourage members of their organization to contact state legislators through the Internet.[118] According to the data a minority of interest groups in both states reported that they encourage their members to contact their state legislators via the Internet. The data reveal interesting differences across interest groups. While 30 percent of marginal groups in both states encourage members of their organization to

---

[117] See Appendix D question 26.
[118] See Appendix C question 31b.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

use the Internet to contact state legislators 41 percent of non-marginal groups in Vermont (7 out of 17) and 50 percent of non-marginal groups in New York (7 out of 14) encourage members of their organization to use the Internet to contact state legislators. The difference between marginal and non-marginal groups might be attributed to the fact that non-marginal groups probably have more resources that enable them to orchestrate grassroots efforts through the Internet. Non-marginal groups may see a greater return on having their members contact state legislators through mediums other than e-mail or the Internet. The data do not support the hypothesis that there is increased contact and interactions between marginal groups and state legislators because of the Internet, though there is weak support for the hypothesis that there is increased contact and interactions between non-marginal groups and state legislators because of the Internet.

When asked whether or not the Internet leads to more or less contact with state legislators, more than 55 percent of interest groups in both states reported that the Internet leads to *more contact* with legislators. [119] More specifically 58 percent of non-marginal groups in Vermont and New York contend that the Internet leads to more contact. Significant differences emerge between the marginal groups, however. Fifty-three percent of marginal groups in Vermont (8 out of 15) and 73 percent of marginal groups in New York (8 out of 11) reported that the Internet leads to more contact with state legislators. High-tech and low-tech users view contact with legislators through the Internet similarly. A majority of respondents in both groups reported increased contact with legislators via the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Internet. When selecting for high-tech and low-tech users in each state, the data produce disparate findings as illustrated in Table 3-10. Similarly data from the interviews also produced disparate findings. Heads of organizations from non-marginal groups in Vermont and marginal groups in New York said that contact and interactions *remain the same* as a result of the Internet and responses from interviewees from marginal groups in Vermont were divided half suggesting that contact and interactions remain the same and the other half contending that the Internet leads to increased contact and interactions between their organization and state legislators. Only the individuals from non-marginal groups in New York asserted that the Internet leads to increased contact and interactions. This is not surprising since non-marginal groups in New York have embraced technology using the Internet to facilitate grassroots efforts, to disseminate information on their websites and to share information with state legislators. While weak these data also support the hypothesis that there is increased contact and interactions between interest groups and legislators as result of information technology.

From the perspective of state legislators, the data show that the Internet leads to increased contact and interactions between interest groups and state legislators (Figure3-1).[120] A plurality of legislators indicated that contact and interactions *remain the same* as a result of the Internet. If the categories *somewhat more* and *much more* are collapsed then more than half of all respondents view the Internet as leading to increased contact and interactions. Even if legislator's perception of contact and interaction increase only slightly this is still important.

---

[119] See Appendix C question 37.
[120] See Appendix A question 23d.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Table 3-10
Amount of Contact Via The Internet by
High-Tech & Low-Tech Users in Vermont & New York

	More Contact	Remains the Same
VT High-Tech Users	55% (6/11)	46% (5/14)
VT Low-Tech Users	60% (6/10)	30% (3/10)
NY High Tech Users	71% (10/14)	29% (4/14)
NY Low-Tech Users	33% (1/3)	62% (2/3)

Source: Interest Group Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

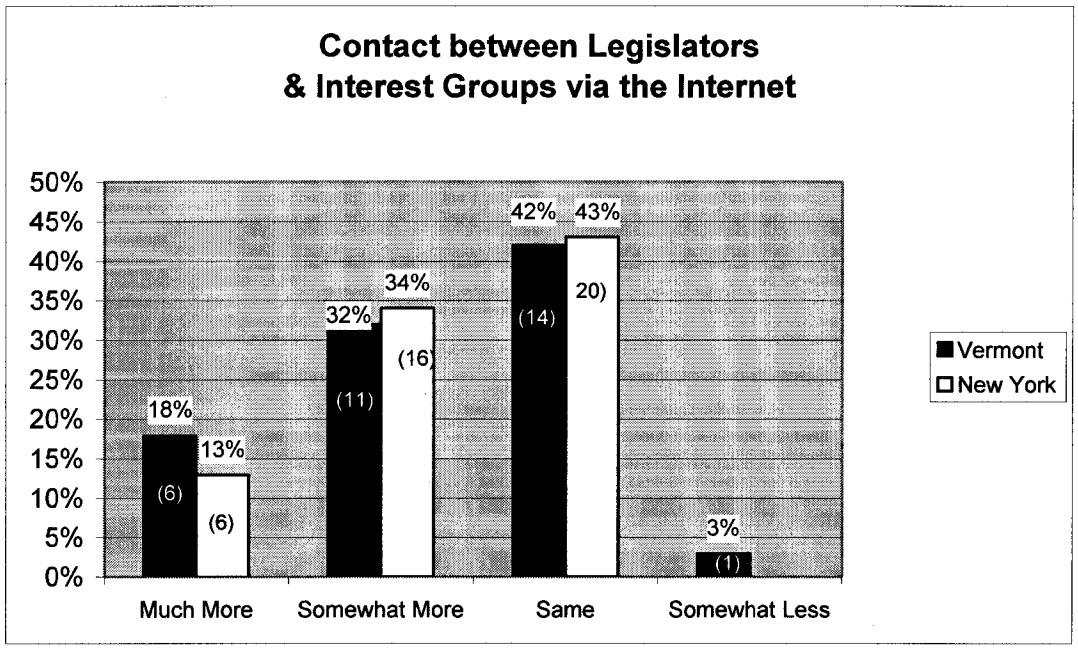
Finally I asked state legislators whether or not interest groups benefit from using the Internet in state legislative politics.[121] According to the data legislators in both states reported that interest groups benefit *somewhat more* or *much more* from the Internet. Approximately 30 percent of Vermont state legislators (11 out of 35) said that interest groups benefit much more from the Internet and the same percentage of legislators (and number of respondents) also reported that interest groups benefit somewhat more from the Internet. A greater percentage of legislators in New York indicated that the Internet benefits interest groups. Thirty-eight percent of legislators in New York (17 out of 45) asserted that the Internet benefits interest groups much more and 40 percent of legislators claim the Internet benefits interest groups somewhat more. A 15 percentage-point difference between the two states is noteworthy. I suspect the differences between the two states might be attributed to fact that a sizable number of marginal groups in Vermont do not have high-speed Internet connections unlike

[121] See Appendix A question 24d.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

marginal groups in New York. Again these findings support the hypothesis that there is increased contact and interactions because of information technology.

Figure 3-1



Source: State Legislative Data.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

Lobbying With Technology

Many organizations engage in advocacy efforts, however, not all groups engage in formal lobbying activities. According to the data 61 percent of interest group respondents in Vermont (33 out of 54) lobby state legislators and 73 percent of interest group respondents in New York (38 out of 52) lobby state legislators.[122] When selecting for high-tech and low-tech users, more than 65 percent of both high-tech and low-tech users reported that they lobby state legislators suggesting that technical capacity does not influence an organization's

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

decision to lobby. Differences between marginal and non-marginal groups are not evident in Vermont, yet there are some differences in New York. Nearly 80 percent of non-marginal groups in New York (15 out of 19) lobby state legislators compared to 70 percent of marginal groups in New York (23 out of 33). Non-marginal groups in New York might be more actively engaged in lobbying. In interviews a majority of marginal groups in Vermont indicated that they both lobby and educate legislators while non-marginal groups defined their roles more expansively.[123] A majority of the interviewees in New York remarked that they contact legislators for purposes related to lobbying, advocacy and education. One individual said, "Our organization emphasizes policy issues that are not necessarily within the purview of a given legislator rather we focus on issues that affect the neighborhood served by that legislator." Many of the marginal group respondents noted that they engage in advocacy efforts, rather than lobbying because the latter implies that huge sums of money are involved. Among the non-marginal groups in New York many executive directors and presidents stated that they engage in lobbying but they contract with a firm that provides lobbying services.

Because interest groups in both states have used new technologies anywhere from the last two to three years to upwards of 14 years, examining e-mail and the Internet's impact are especially germane. In this section I assess how interest groups use information technology to lobby state legislators and to undertake grassroots efforts to mobilize their members. Lobbying efforts by

---

[122] See Appendix C question 46.
[123] See Appendix D question 2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

interest groups are measured in terms of the amount of influence or pressure interest groups exert over state legislators through information technology. Some of the questions that assess lobbying include the following: Does your organization lobby state legislators? How does your organization lobby legislators? Are you able to exert more pressure or influence over state legislators, leadership or committee chairs as a result of e-mail and the Internet? Are you able to exert influence over committee agendas or reporting a bill out of committee via e-mail and the Internet? How much influence are you able to exert over the dispersion of information to committee members because of e-mail and the Internet? How much influence are you able to exert over pending legislation and floor votes through e-mail and the Internet?

E-mail. In general interest group respondents in both states said it is easier to lobby legislators because of e-mail and the Internet and that their lobbying efforts have improved because of new technologies. Looking at the impact of e-mail on lobbying efforts, the data show that interest groups in Vermont view e-mail more favorably than do interest groups in New York. Despite the fact that interest groups in Vermont view e-mail favorably when asked whether or not e-mail allows their organization to exert more pressure or influence over state legislators, leadership or committee chairs, interest group respondents overwhelmingly rejected the notion that e-mail allows their organization to exert more pressure or influence over state legislators, leadership or committee chairs.[124] Approximately 70 percent of all interest groups indicated that e-mail *does not* enable them to exert more influence over legislators, leadership or

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

committee chairs. The data do not support the hypothesis that interest groups will report that they can exert more influence over party leaders, committee chairs and rank-and-file members. These findings are especially noteworthy since 59 percent of interest groups in Vermont use e-mail to contact state legislators. Hence interest group respondents perceive e-mail as having little influence over state legislators, leadership and committee chairs yet organizations and their members continue to e-mail state legislators. During interviews many respondents in both states asserted that personal contact is crucial. Instances in which presidents and executive directors said they needed to exert pressure or influence were more likely to occur in-person or through phone contact. Clearly the data show that interest groups are not confident that e-mail enables them to exercise additional influence. I suspect that organizations continue to e-mail legislators because it provides them with another tool to communicate and disseminate information essentially "getting their position or message" to elected officials though the potency of e-mail is largely unknown.

The variables *exerting influence over leadership and committee chairs* are positively correlated with *an organization's use of e-mail, membership use of e-mail* and *the technological capacity of an organization.* Correlation values suggest that there is a weak but positive relationship between *an organization's use of e-mail and an organization's belief that e-mail exerts pressure over leadership* (*Pearson's r* = .294) *and committee chairs* (*Pearson's r* = .278) both significant at the .05 level. A moderate positive correlation (*Pearson's r* = .317) exists between *organizations that encourage their members to e-mail* and *an*

---

[124] See Appendix C question 49a-c.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

organization's belief that e-mail exerts pressure over rank-and-file legislators, which is significant at the .05 level. Finally there is a moderate positive correlation between *an organization's technological capacity* and *using e-mail to exert pressure over leadership* (Pearson's r = .326) *and committee chairs* (Pearson's r = .309) also significant at the .05 level.

To gauge the degree to which interest groups use e-mail as a tool for lobbying, I asked respondents to indicate on a scale from one to five—a one being almost *no time* and five being *almost all of an organization's time*—how much time their organization spends using e-mail.[125] A plurality of respondents from both states scored e-mail a two suggesting that respondents do not spend much time using e-mail for lobbying purposes. While lobbying via e-mail does not comprise a large amount of organizations' time, respondents do use e-mail to coordinate grassroots efforts. When the survey asked organizations to rate on a scale from one to five—a one being *the least effective method of lobbying* and a five being *the most effective method of lobbying*—how effective e-mail is as a tool for lobbying state legislators, a plurality of interest groups in Vermont scored e-mail a three out of five. In contrast 96 percent of interest groups in Vermont scored *in-person contact* a five indicating that this is one of the most effective means of lobbying legislators. In New York a plurality of interest groups scored e-mail a two out of five and 83 percent of respondents scored in-person contact a five. Interest groups in both states overwhelmingly deem in-person contact as the most effective means of lobbying legislators. Following in-person contact, the next most effective means of lobbying is using the telephone. In Vermont e-mail

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

is the third most effective method of lobbying while in New York interest groups scored fax higher than e-mail.

Finally the survey asked interest groups whether or not e-mail allows them to exert influence over a range of activities including developing the committee agenda, reporting a bill out of committee, distributing information to committee members, and influencing pending legislation and floor votes.[126] Significant differences emerge across the two states. In Vermont almost half of all interest groups reported that e-mail allows them to exert *some* influence over developing the committee agenda, reporting a bill out of committee, distributing information to committee members, and influencing pending legislation and floor votes.[127] In New York respondents indicated that they do not view e-mail as a tool through which to exert influence over the aforementioned activities. Collapsing the values *some* or *a lot* resulted in less than half of the respondents in New York indicating that e-mail allows them to exert influence over the dispersion of information to committee members and pending legislation. Interest group respondents in Vermont are slightly more optimistic about their ability to use e-mail as tool through which they can exert influence unlike interest group respondents in New York who do not feel that e-mail is a viable mode through which to exert influence. Again these findings do not support the hypothesis that interest groups can exert influence through e-mail and the Internet.

---

[125] See Appendix C question 51.
[126] See Appendix C question 52 a-e.
[127] Two categories (reporting a bill out of committee and influencing floor votes) the values are collapsed to include both *some* and *a lot*.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The Internet. Interest groups also said that they use the Internet to lobby, however, to a lesser degree than e-mail. Interest groups frequently use the Internet to mobilize their members at the grassroots level. In interviews many executive directors and presidents of organizations told me that they often ask their members to visit their organization's website since websites provide visitors with an opportunity to communicate with their state legislator. Websites allow visitors to send e-mail and/or form letters, which are more often than not converted and sent to legislators as a fax and/or a piece of US Post.

I also asked interest group respondents how much time they spend using the Internet to lobby and how effective they find the Internet is as a tool to lobby state legislators.[128] In both states 60 percent of interest group respondents indicated that they spend *no time* using the Internet to lobby. Similarly 50 percent of interest group respondents in Vermont (14 out of 28) and 66 percent of interest group respondents in New York (21 out of 32) reported that the Internet is the least effective method of lobbying. As mentioned previously personal contact is the most effective means of lobbying.

Under and unrepresented groups were asked to respond to additional survey questions including whether or not they view e-mail and the Internet as having a *positive, neutral,* or *negative* effect on their ability to lobby legislators.[129] Sixty percent of marginal groups in Vermont (13 out of 22) contend that e-mail and the Internet have a *positive* effect on their ability to lobby state legislators and 41 percent of Vermont marginal groups (9 out of 22) indicated that e-mail

[128] See Appendix C question 50 and 51.
[129] See Appendix C question 58.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and the Internet have a *neutral* effect on their ability to lobby state legislators. The results in New York differed considerably. Fewer than half of the marginal groups in New York (13 out of 28) reported that e-mail and the Internet have a positive effect on their ability to lobby state legislators. Sixty percent of marginal groups in New York said that e-mail and the Internet have a neutral effect on their ability to lobby state legislators. Marginal groups in New York do not view e-mail and the Internet favorably, unlike their Vermont counterparts. This might be attributed to the fact that even though staff read or sometimes respond to e-mail on behalf of state legislators in New York, legislators largely do not read or respond to interest group e-mail. Recognizing this marginal groups in New York rely on personal contact. In selecting for high-tech and low-tech users the data show respondents divided evenly half indicating that e-mail and the Internet have a positive effect on their ability to lobby state legislators and the other half suggesting that these technologies have a neutral effect. Differences between high-tech and low-tech users emerge across the two states. More than 60 percent of high-tech users in Vermont and low-tech users in New York indicated that e-mail and the Internet have a positive impact on their ability to lobby whereas, fewer than 46 percent of low-tech users in Vermont and high-tech users in New York said that these technologies have positive effect on their ability to lobby state legislators.

When asked in interviews whether or not information technology enables their organization to exert more influence over legislators the responses differed slightly from the survey data. A majority of executive directors and presidents of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

interest groups in Vermont asserted that they are able to exert more influence over state legislators as a result of information technology.[130] One executive director said, "Yes...[I think information technology has enabled our organization to exert more influence over state legislators because]....we're better informed. The better informed you are, means you can get yourself in the process at the right moment to be influential." The qualitative data in New York shows that a greater number of non-marginal groups view information technology as enabling them to exert more influence over state legislators while only half of the marginal groups stated that technology allows them to exert more influence over legislators. Comments from an Executive Vice President of a non-marginal group in New York highlight the influence of technology,

> I would say definitely yes [technology allows our organization to exert influence over state legislators] because they [legislators] cannot hide. They [legislators] get e-mail from constituents and lobbyists, which are reinforced by the other. Witness last month the cuts to school and health, which were overrode for the first time in 25 years; 125 veto overrides!

In sum the quantitative and qualitative data are largely disparate. While the qualitative data suggest that interest groups exert influence over legislators as a result of information technology, the responses from interviewees were nuanced, suggesting that these technologies are used in conjunction with more traditional modes of communication.

In addition to asking specific questions about e-mail and the Internet I also asked some broader questions aimed at gauging the overall impact of information technology. When asked whether or not they thought their lobbying

---

[130] See Appendix D question 34.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

efforts had changed because of information technology, an overwhelming number of interviewees from non-marginal groups in Vermont said that their lobbying efforts have changed.[131] Only about half of the interviewees from marginal groups said that their lobbying efforts have changed as a result of information technology. The qualitative research yielded a variety of explanations as to how lobbying techniques have changed. One individual asserted that there is much more written information disseminated to more people, more quickly. Further this individual remarked that while her organization depends on information, publications in particular, the rate at which action is taken is substantially faster. Another change in lobbying is that action occurs in writing rather than by phone. Increased responsiveness is another factor noted in interviews. An executive director said,

> Previously I depended heavily upon the phone; we used to mail things. The Internet has enabled us to facilitate our advocacy efforts. We can get people activated in ways that are not difficult. We don't have to worry about [sending out a] mailing. Information technology is less cumbersome and provides a lot of convenience. The Internet allows us to get more people who can respond in a timely manner. A bulk mailing can take two to three weeks and even a regular mailing takes at least three days.

Another way lobbying has changed is that lobbyists can insert changes directly into the text of a proposed bill. With e-mail both legislators and lobbyists can directly view additions and deletions to a bill. Lobbyists have an opportunity to submit precise and exact language directly to the individuals responsible for drafting and revising bills. In an interview one individual remarked, "you can really have tremendous say [input] when you can propose and submit the wording."

---

[131] See Appendix D question 33.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Finally while the daily personal contact associated with lobbying remains the same information technology concretely demonstrates how many people are interested in a particular issue. "When a state legislator receives 50 e-mails on a particular issue it is likely that he will listen to you," reported one interviewee.

A majority of interviewees in New York also reported that their lobbying efforts have changed because of information technology. A common response echoed in interviews conducted with interest groups in New York is that the rate of communication with legislators and the organization's membership is quicker than it was prior to information technology. Organizational heads asserted that they can respond more quickly and their responses are "better, smarter and more up to date." Accessing information and responding to inquiries more quickly were two comments that were expressed frequently in interviews in New York. One interviewee told me, "With the ability to access information more quickly and to track bills more quickly, we can respond more quickly and proactively to state legislators when we support or oppose legislation." Similarly another interviewee stated, "I think we are more on top of certain developments that matter and that helps us to be more effective and active." The data show that the response rate is of greater import in New York than in Vermont. This might be attributed to the fact that New York is a professional legislature, however, interest group respondents mentioned the rate of responding in Vermont, only not as frequently.

Interest groups were also asked whether or not it is easier or more difficult to lobby state legislators with e-mail and the Internet.[132] As illustrated in Table 3-11 a plurality of interest groups in Vermont and a majority of interest groups in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

New York reported that it is *somewhat easier* to lobby legislators with the advent of e-mail and the Internet. Interest groups in Vermont viewed information technology as facilitating their lobbying efforts. Differences between marginal and non-marginal groups were not significant except among marginal groups in Vermont. Forty-one percent of marginal group respondents in Vermont (7 out of 17) reported that lobbying is somewhat easier compared to 24 percent of respondents (4 out of 17) who said it is *much easier* to lobby state legislators as a result of e-mail and the Internet. With smaller staff and fewer resources, e-mail and the Internet noticeably aid lobbying efforts.

Table 3-11
Ease of Lobbying Through Information Technology by Interest Groups

	Much Easier	Somewhat Easier
VT Interest Groups	22% (6/27)	44% (12/27)
NY Interest Groups	6% (2/28)	50% (18/34)

Source: Interest Group Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

When asked whether or not they thought lobbying their lobbying efforts improved or worsened as a result of information technology 21 percent of interest group respondents in Vermont (6 out of 29) noted that their lobbying efforts *significantly improved.*[133] An additional 38 percent of interest group respondents (11 out of 29) remarked that their lobbying efforts are *somewhat improved* as a result of information technology. A smaller percentage of interest group respondents in New York said that their lobbying efforts significantly improved. A greater percentage of interest groups in New York, however, reported that their

[132] See Appendix C question 47.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

lobbying efforts are somewhat improved as a result of new technologies. Forty-seven percent of interest group respondents in New York (17 out of 36) said their lobbying efforts have somewhat improved and six percent of respondents (2 out of 36) reported that that their lobbying efforts have significantly improved. When selecting for marginal and non-marginal groups, the data reveal significant differences between marginal and non-marginal groups, illustrated in Table 3-12. A plurality of marginal groups in Vermont and New York contend that lobbying *remains the same*—neither improving nor worsening—as a result of information technology. Non-marginal groups in both states responded more positively. A plurality of non-marginal groups in Vermont and a majority of non-marginal groups in New York indicated that lobbying is *somewhat improved* as a result of information technology. These findings suggest that non-marginal groups are using technology to lobby state legislators while marginal groups are not taking advantage of these new technologies in quite the same ways.

Table 3-12
Improved Lobbying Through Information Technology by Interest Groups

	Significantly Improved	Somewhat Improved	Remains The Same
VT Non-Marginal Groups	25% (3/12)	42% (5/12)	33% (4/12)
VT Marginal Groups	18% (3/17)	35% (6/17)	47% (8/17)
NY Non-Marginal Groups	7% (1/14)	57% (8/14)	36% (5/14)
NY Marginal Groups	5% (1/22)	41% (9/22)	55% (12/22)

Source: Interest Group Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

[133] See Appendix C question 48.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Democracy: More Access for the Underrepresented?

While theories of democracy typically focus on electoral politics, Lenski (1966) and Bollen (1980) offer more expansive definitions of democracy. Lenski suggests that individuals should be able to organize and rise in opposition to government while Bollen posits that the political power of non-elites ought to be maximized. These theories of democracy are important because they argue that individual and group participation in politics is essential to preserving individual liberties while coexisting with elites. In this section I assess whether or not information technology facilitates interest group politics by maximizing the power of non-elites like marginal groups. Democratization is primarily measured in terms of access. Openness and inclusiveness are also measures of democratization. Some of the questions that attempt to gauge access, openness and inclusiveness are the following: Do you feel that your organization has increased or decreased access to state legislative leaders and committee chairs as a result of e-mail? Do marginal groups have the same amount of access to legislators as non-marginal groups? Is state legislative politics more open and inclusive as a result of e-mail and the Internet?

E-mail. During interviews I asked executive directors and presidents of interest groups whether or not legislative politics is more open and inclusive as a result of e-mail. A majority of individuals in Vermont said that legislative politics is more open and inclusive. Commenting about access an executive director explained, "You can get documents that the legislature is currently working on [and distribute them] to a wide range of citizens and other people who are interested

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

who never before had access." Respondents who offered the opposing view contend that politics in Vermont has been and is already open. One individual remarked, "Vermont politics has always been open but in terms of being more inclusive e-mail allows more people to become involved." A more nuanced view as to whether or not legislative politics is more open and inclusive as a result of e-mail suggested, "While the legislature is more open and inclusive e-mail is not without debate. For example whether forwarded e-mails and petitions make politics more open and inclusive is questionable." In contrast an overwhelming majority of non-marginal and marginal groups in New York maintain that e-mail does not result in more open and inclusive politics. A Vice President of Governmental Affairs candidly said, "I don't think it's [e-mail] made a difference. In New York state I think it's the same three men in a room or maybe two. I don't think e-mail has had an impact on health care policy at this point. It could potentially but not right now." A minority of interviewees conceded that politics might be more inclusive but not necessarily more open.

The survey also asked interest group respondents whether or not their organization has increased, decreased or the same amount of access to state legislative leaders and committee chairs through e-mail.[134] As illustrated in Table 3-13 the results across the two states are disparate with a majority of respondents in Vermont indicating that there is *increased* access to legislative leaders and committee chairs. Instead a majority of interest group respondents in New York reported that access to legislative leaders and committee chairs *remains the same*. These results are not surprising and on par with the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

quantitative data. The views of high-tech and low-tech users differ dramatically on this variable. Sixty percent of high-tech users (22 out of 37) asserted that access to legislative leaders and committee chairs increases compared to 40 percent of low-tech users (11 out of 29). Technical capacities might influence perceptions of access to legislators. As illustrated in Table 3-14 except for high-tech users in Vermont fewer than 40 percent of users in the other categories said access to legislative leaders and committee chairs increases because of e-mail and the Internet. These findings confirm the notion that access to legislative leaders and committee chairs in New York has not changed with the advent of new technologies. Differences between non-marginal and marginal groups are noteworthy. In Vermont there is a 23 percentage-point difference between non-marginal and marginal groups with a greater percentage of non-marginal groups reporting that there is increased access to legislative leaders and committee chairs via e-mail. Conversely a greater percentage of marginal groups in New York indicated that there is increased access to legislative leaders and committee chairs because of e-mail. Many of the marginal groups in New York can be classified as high-tech users, perhaps explaining the difference between marginal groups in Vermont and New York. These data support the hypothesis that interest groups have increased access to legislators because of information technology in Vermont, however, the data do not support the hypothesis in New York.

---

[134] Appendix C question 40.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Table 3-13
E-mail Access to Legislative Leaders & Committee Chairs by Interest Groups

	Increased	Stayed the Same
VT Interest Groups	59% (23/39)	40% (15/39)
NY Interest Groups	39% (14/36)	61% (22/36)

Source: Interest Group Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

Table 3-14
Access to Legislative Leaders & Committee Chairs by High-Tech & Low-Tech Users in Vermont & New York

	Increases	Remains the Same
VT High-Tech Users	93% (13/14)	7% (1/14)
VT Low-Tech Users	40% (8/20)	60% (12/20)
NY High Tech Users	39% (9/23)	61% (14/23)
NY Low-Tech Users	67% (6/9)	33% (3/9)

Source: Interest Group Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

In addition to asking interest groups whether or not they thought they have more access to state legislators through new technologies, I also asked state legislators whether or not they thought e-mail fosters a more open political process for interest groups in general and marginal groups in particular.[135] Just over fifty percent of state legislators in Vermont (19 out of 34) said that e-mail fosters a *much more* or *somewhat more* open political process for interest groups. Through interviews (and personal observation) it is evident that Vermont state legislators view their system as already being open. A greater percentage

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of state legislators in New York, 64 percent, feel that e-mail fosters a much more or somewhat more open political process for interest groups. In sum legislators' view e-mail favorably. The data from state legislators suggest that state legislative politics is more open for all interest groups. Conversely, the findings from the interest group data vary some respondents asserting that politics is more open while others contend that access to legislators remains the same even with the advent of new technologies. Clearly these data lend support to the hypothesis that information technology gives interest groups increased access to legislators in Vermont. The data, however, produce disparate findings in New York that do not strongly support the hypothesis.

The Internet. Interest groups potentially have increased access to legislators through the state legislatures' website, organizational websites and other websites. During interviews executive directors and presidents of interest groups were asked whether or not state legislative politics is more open and inclusive as a result of the Internet.[136] Just over half of the interviewees from non-marginal groups in Vermont asserted that state legislative politics is more open and inclusive because of the Internet. A majority of interviewees said that state legislative politics is somewhat more open because information is available online that was nearly impossible to obtain in hardcopy. Individuals stated that obtaining information about bills online is markedly easier. More pessimistic, one person I interviewed said, "No [the process is not more open or inclusive] they don't put the backroom deals on the Internet." In New York non-marginal groups

---

[135] See Appendix A question 41b and 41c.
[136] See Appendix D question 28.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

were divided as to whether or not the Internet results in more open and inclusive state legislative politics while a majority of marginal groups said that state legislative politics is more open and inclusive. One individual remarked that, "The state legislative process is more open and inclusive but the politics isn't. This [the politics] is still underground."

In addition to asking interest group respondents their perception of whether or not the Internet gives them more access to legislators I also asked state legislators whether or not the Internet fosters a more open political process for interest groups.[137] A sizable disparity between responses from legislators in Vermont and New York emerges. Few state legislators in Vermont said that the Internet fosters a more open political process for interest groups in general and marginal groups in particular. A plurality of legislators said that the political process is the *same* even with the advent of the Internet. In contrast 52 percent of legislators in New York (25 out of 48) reported that the political process is *somewhat more* open and 25 percent of state legislators (12 out of 48) claim the political process is *much more* open. The differences between the two states might be attributed to the fact that legislators in Vermont believe that the legislative process was already open and inclusive prior to the advent of the Internet. This is not the case in New York since the legislature has rarely been characterized as open and inclusive.

I also asked state legislators whether or not they thought non-marginal and marginal groups have more access through state legislators' websites.[138]

---

[137] See Appendix A question 42b and 42d.
[138] See Appendix A question 34b and 34c.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Since few state legislators in Vermont have individual websites a majority of respondents reported that this question was not applicable. In New York all state legislators have individual websites. Almost 40 percent of New York state legislators (17 out of 44) noted a *slight increase* in access to the state legislature and 36 percent of state legislators (16 out of 44) said there is a *significant increase* in access to the legislature as a result of individual legislator's websites. Based on the qualitative data from interest groups it is not entirely clear whether or not the Internet leads to more open and inclusive state politics. On the contrary state legislators perceive there to be more access because of member websites. Half of the state legislators reported a slight increase in access to the state legislature and 32 percent of legislators indicated that there is a significant increase in access to the state legislature for marginal groups because of individual websites.

When interest groups were asked how much access they have to legislators, leadership and committee chairs with e-mail compared to when they did not have e-mail, a majority of respondents in Vermont reported that there is *increased* access to state legislators, leadership and committee chairs via e-mail compared to when they did not have e-mail (Table 3-15). [139] In contrast a majority of interest group respondents in New York reported that they have *the same* amount of access to legislators, leadership and committee chairs as they did prior to the advent of e-mail and the Internet. In selecting for high-tech and low-tech users, the former are slightly more confident that there is increased access to legislators, party leaders and committee chairs through e-mail than compared

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to when they did not have access to e-mail. The data also show that more than 70 percent of high-tech users in Vermont asserted that there is increased access to legislators, party leaders and committee chairs through e-mail than compared to when they did not have access to e-mail. This is not the case for other groups (high-tech users in New York and low-tech users in Vermont and New York). The data lend support to hypothesis that interest groups have increased access to legislators because of information technology in Vermont, however, the data do not support this hypothesis in New York.

Table 3-15
Comparison of Pre-Technology to Post-Technology Access to Legislative Leaders & Committee Chairs by Interest Groups

	Increased	Stayed the Same
VT Legislators	60% (16/27)	41% (11/27)
VT Legislative Leaders	56% (14/25)	44% (11/25)
VT Committee Chairs	54% (13/24)	46% (11/24)
NY Legislators	42% (15/36)	56% (20/36)
NY Legislative Leaders	44% (16/36)	53% (19/36)
NY Committee Chairs	43% (13/35)	54% (19/35)

Source: Interest Group Data 2002.
Note: The numbers in parentheses denote sample size.

Finally interest group respondents were asked whether or not they thought their state legislature is more open and inclusive as a result of information technology.[140] According to the survey data an overwhelming majority of interest groups in Vermont reported that *their state legislature is more open and inclusive*. There is not a significant difference between non-marginal and

[139] See Appendix C question 54.
[140] See Appendix C question 41.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

marginal groups in Vermont. The data in New York however show that a majority of interest groups *do not* view their state legislature *to be more open and inclusive* as a result of information technology. When selecting for non-marginal and marginal groups a greater percentage of marginal groups are convinced that state legislatures are more open and inclusive because of information technology. There is a 23 percentage-point difference between non-marginal and marginal group respondents in New York with 54 percent of marginal groups (13 out of 24) reporting that information technology leads to more open and inclusive state legislatures.

Conclusions

The data do not support the hypothesis that interest groups will report that they exert more influence over party leaders, committee chairs and rank-and-file members because of e-mail and the Internet. Overall interest groups in both states rejected the notion that lobbying via e-mail and the Internet allows them to exert more influence over legislators. It is important to remember that the qualitative data offers more nuanced findings varying slightly from the survey data. Interviewees stressed the importance of maintaining and facilitating personal relationships, which they claim are paramount to lobbying. Marginal and non-marginal groups in Vermont and marginal groups in New York also said that information technology allows them to exert influence because they have access to information through new technologies and they can become involved in the legislative process at the right moment. While half of the interest groups in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Vermont reported that e-mail allows them to exert some influence over specific tasks such as the development of the committee agenda, reporting a bill out of committee, and influencing pending legislation and floor vote,s interest groups in New York do not view e-mail as enabling them exert any influence over these tasks.

The data largely confirm the hypothesis that marginal and non-marginal groups perceive there to be increased political participation as a result of information technology. For marginal groups in both states and non-marginal groups in Vermont there is a perception of increased political participation via e-mail. Legislators also indicated that there is a slight increase in contact and interactions via e-mail. While the data largely confirm the hypothesis, non-marginal groups in New York reported that contact and interactions via e-mail remain the same. Interestingly, state legislators said that there is a slight increase in contact via e-mail from non-marginal groups, contradicting the findings from the interest group data. Legislators reported that e-mail contact with marginal groups remains the same. This is particularly noteworthy because marginal groups report that they have increased contact and interactions with legislators because of e-mail. Through my research I found that marginal and non-marginal groups do not use technology in the same manner. I discuss this in Chapter Four in greater detail. In terms of the impact of the Internet findings from the survey data show that a majority of interest groups reported that contact and interactions with legislators increased as a result of the Internet. Qualitative data are somewhat disparate with half of the marginal groups in Vermont and a

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

majority of the non-marginal groups in New York indicating that participation has increased as a result of the Internet. From the perspective of state legislators a majority of state legislators reported that contact with interest groups increased as a result of the Internet.[141]

The data do not support the hypothesis that information technology will not have an adverse impact on marginal interest groups and their interactions in the political process. Instead the data show significant disparities between marginal and non-marginal groups in terms of access to technology, use of technology and their ability to lobby. While between 86 and 100 percent of non-marginal organizations have Internet access for all their employees the percentage of marginal groups that have Internet access for all their employees is far lower. In contrast between 52 and 78 percent of marginal groups have Internet access for all their employees. That said marginal groups in Vermont can be classified as low-tech users with 65 percent of organizations connecting to their ISP via modem. Significant differences emerge in terms of how non-marginal and marginal groups use technology. Compared to non-marginal groups a smaller percentage of marginal groups use e-mail to contact legislators. Similarly a smaller percentage of marginal groups than non-marginal encourage their members to contact legislators via e-mail. In terms of using the Internet more than half of the non-marginal groups analyze website activity and fewer than 38 percent of marginal groups analyze activity on their websites. Marginal groups update their organizational websites on a monthly basis whereas other non-marginal groups tend to update their sites on a weekly basis. Lastly the data

[141] The categories *increased a lot* and *increased a little* are collapsed.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

show that marginal and non-marginal groups' use of information technology to lobby varies considerably. While a plurality of non-marginal groups in Vermont and a majority of non-marginal groups in New York indicated that information technology *somewhat improves* their ability to lobby, fewer than 40 percent of marginal groups reported that information technology somewhat improves their ability to lobby state legislators.

The hypothesis that interest groups will perceive there to be increased access to state legislators is confirmed in Vermont and not confirmed in New York. In Vermont survey data and qualitative data suggest that the state legislature is more open and inclusive as a result of information technology. Many of the executive directors and presidents asserted that the Vermont legislature has always been open. Citizens can sit in committee meetings and party caucuses and freely walk onto the floor of the Vermont legislature. Similarly legislators in Vermont perceive interest groups as having more access to them as a result of information technology. In contrast, the data do not support my hypothesis that interest groups find the New York state legislature more open and inclusive as a result of information technology. While interest groups in Vermont asserted that they have more access to party leaders and committee chairs, interest groups in New York reported that access to party leaders and committee chairs remains the same. Contradicting the findings from the interest group data, state legislators in New York view interest groups as having more access to them as a result of information technology. I suspect that legislators in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

New York think that they are more accessible by virtue of the fact that they have e-mail and individual websites.

Finally the data show that interest groups spend very little time using e-mail or the Internet to lobby legislators. Respondents noted, however, that they do use e-mail and the Internet in their grassroots efforts encouraging members of their organization to contact state legislators through e-mail and the Internet. E-mail offers interest groups a more efficient way of communicating with their members. For the member base this has really changed the face of lobbying. Communication between lobbyists and legislators continue to rely upon personal relationships and information technology is largely supplemental, being used to disseminate information to legislators usually as a means of following-up.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters I investigate how legislators and interest groups—and to a lesser degree constituents—use information technology in state legislative politics and the degree to which these actors employ information technology. With more than 68 million Americans visiting government agency websites to contact public officials, file taxes and apply for public benefits since January 2002, e-democracy[142] has taken root. Although e-democracy has taken root its application is by no means universal. This is best illustrated in the case of the marginal interest groups. In this concluding chapter I return to the two major and minor specific hypotheses tested in Chapters Two and Three. I also address the following questions raised in Chapter One:

1. What effect do e-mail and the Internet have on constituents and interest groups?
2. What impact do e-mail and the Internet have on state legislatures? Are state legislatures more democratic because of information technology?
3. How do e-mail and the Internet affect state legislators and are state legislators better representatives as a result of e-mail and the Internet?

Finally I address the prospects for future research and offer some concluding remarks.

---

[142] "E-democracy represents the use of information and communication technologies and strategies by democratic actors within political and governance processes of local communities, nations and on the international stage. Democratic actors/sectors include governments, elected officials, the media, political organizations, and citizen/voters. To many, e-democracy suggests greater and more active citizen participation enabled by the Internet, mobile communications, and other technologies in today's representative democracy as well as through more participatory or

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Representation

Findings from my research suggest that both e-mail and the Internet significantly enhance communication and the provision of constituent services, two components of representation discussed by Jewell (1982). All state legislators in Vermont and over half of the state legislators in New York use e-mail. As explained in Chapter Two legislators use e-mail for a variety of reasons from contacting constituents to scheduling meetings. Behaving similarly, state legislators in Vermont and New York use e-mail to contact constituents, to send/receive attachments and to request information or documents. Nearly 80 percent of legislators in both states use e-mail to contact constituents and almost 70 percent of state legislators use of e-mail to send/receive attachments and to request information or documents. While an overwhelming number of legislators in Vermont use e-mail to contact other state legislators and to schedule meetings, only 14 respondents in New York reported e-mailing other state legislators. Despite the fact that legislators in New York use e-mail less frequently to communicate with other legislators nearly all staff indicated that they use e-mail to contact staff in other offices. Because staff play a crucial role in professional legislatures their use of e-mail is extremely important, if not more important than legislators' use of e-mail.

State legislators also use the Internet to communicate and to provide constituent services, though legislators in Vermont asserted that the Internet does not help them provide constituent services. State legislative websites, for

---

direct forms of citizen involvement in addressing public challenges"

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

example, facilitate communication and dissemination of information to constituents, interest groups and other visitors. These sites also provide biographical and contact information, the calendar and journal, bills, press releases, committee information and frequently asked questions. Constituents and interest groups often bypass their legislators obtaining information directly from their state legislature's website.

Findings from my research show that e-mail enhances legislators' ability to gauge the policy preferences of constituents while the data produce disparate results regarding the Internet's usefulness in gauging the policy preferences of constituents. Collapsing the categories very helpful and somewhat helpful, more than 70 percent of legislators in both states said that e-mail is helpful in gauging the policy preferences of constituents. This is a significant finding because e-mail acts as a conduit for policy formulation. In Vermont state legislators find the Internet less useful for gauging the policy preferences of constituents whereas New York state legislators asserted that the Internet is especially useful for gauging the policy preferences of constituents. A plurality of legislators in Vermont said the Internet has a neutral effect on their ability to gauge the policy preferences of constituents. Legislators in Vermont use e-mail or the phone to speak to constituents. Hence they do not see a direct correlation between the Internet and their constituents. In contrast almost 50 percent of legislators in New York reported that the Internet is somewhat or very helpful for gauging the policy preferences of constituents. Legislators and staff in New York commented in

---

(http://www.publicus.net/articles/edemresources.html).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

interviews that constituents often referred directly to a bill's number—which rarely occurred before the advent of the Internet—suggesting that the constituent obtained this information from the Internet. Even if the Internet is somewhat helpful for gauging the policy preferences of constituents, this is arguably important if representation is based on policy responsiveness as asserted by Jewell (1982).

I hypothesized that information technology facilitates communication among legislators, and between legislators and constituents regardless of place. Because of information technology I expected legislators to report that they are "better representatives." The data support this hypothesis. As indicated above, the data support the notion that e-mail and the Internet facilitate communication between legislators and constituents in both Vermont and New York.[143] While there is a growing tendency to use e-mail and the Internet in both legislatures, New York state legislators have been much slower to embrace these technologies. Legislators use e-mail slightly more frequently than US Post in Vermont. In New York postal use still exceeds e-mail use. Legislators in Vermont also use the Internet more frequently than their counterparts in New York. More than 80 percent of legislators in Vermont use the Internet compared to less than half of the state legislators in New York. Despite lower rates of Internet use almost all staff in New York reported using the Internet for tasks related to casework and policy formulation. The frequency with which legislators use e-mail

---

[143] Information technology also leads to increased communication between legislators and constituents, discussed in greater detail in the section entitled *Political Participation*.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and the Internet compared to other modes of communication provides context explaining how and to what degree legislators use e-mail and the Internet to communicate.

I also asked legislators whether or not they are more or less efficient because of e-mail and the Internet and whether or not these technologies improve or worsen their ability to represent constituents. As noted in Chapter Two efficiency is a measure of better representation. Legislators in both states said they are more efficient because of e-mail. If the values somewhat more efficient and much more efficient are collapsed more than 75 percent of legislators in Vermont are more efficient because of e-mail compared to 61 percent of New York state legislators. While legislators in Vermont said that e-mail improves their efficiency, they are less convinced that the Internet improves efficiency. A 20 percentage-point difference between legislators in the two states is evident, with more than 80 percent of legislators in New York reporting that they are more efficient because of the Internet. Though the preference for e-mail and the Internet varies in the two states, both technologies allow legislators to be more efficient. In addition to being more efficient, an overwhelming majority of legislators in both states indicated that e-mail improves their ability to represent constituents. Respondents were less convinced that the Internet improves their ability to represent constituents. Half of the legislators in Vermont and 66 percent of legislators in New York asserted that Internet improves their ability to represent constituents. In the end legislators in Vermont find that e-mail improves their ability to represent their constituents more than the Internet; the opposite is

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

true in New York. Legislators' preference for the Internet in New York might be attributed to the extraordinary amount of casework legislators perform. In interviews legislators and staff told me that they rely heavily upon the Internet to address casework.

Studying whether or not representation is better because of e-mail and the Internet is important because there are significant empirical and theoretical implications. Empirically e-mail gives state legislators and constituents another tool through which to communicate. E-mail allows constituents who might not visit their state legislator or who might not pick up the phone another avenue to express their ideas. With the advent of the Internet legislators have immediate and expanded access to information to assist their constituents and to make laws. State legislative websites provide a plethora of information and websites act as a conduit that facilitates communication and service provision between legislators and their constituents. Clearly e-mail and the Internet play a very practical role in state legislative politics providing a forum for more voices, enhancing the distribution and dissemination of information and internal communications between state legislators. To date scholars have theorized about the probable impact of information technology on political participation and democratization yet few studies provide empirical evidence. Moreover none explicitly discuss how information technology will affect legislatures. The findings from my research provide strong evidence that information technology impacts communication, policy responsiveness and constituent services—core components of representation put forth by Jewell. If information technology does

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

indeed enhance representation, the findings from my research might be applied to other legislative bodies.

Institutional Behavior

The data largely do not support the hypothesis that information technology alters interactions between individual legislators, party leaders and committee chairs. The data show that a plurality of legislators in Vermont and a majority of legislators in New York reported that e-mail does not result in a change in interactions. However, when the categories slightly increased and significantly increased are collapsed, almost 60 percent of legislators in Vermont said interactions between legislators, party leaders and committee chairs increased because of e-mail. This finding is interesting because scholars and Vermont legislators consider the Vermont legislature to be a very open legislature in which rank-and-file members have tremendous access to party leaders and committee chairs. If information technology results in increased interactions, these findings suggest that the legislature might not have been as decentralized and open as scholars and legislators originally thought. Further, the data show that e-mail leads to increased interactions between rank-and-file members in Vermont. Conversely there is no change in interactions between rank-and-file members in New York because of e-mail. Despite having a fairly significant impact on constituent communications and policy formulation in both states, e-mail has a minimal impact on interactions between legislators in New York. Finally legislators in both states reported that there is no change in interactions between

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

legislators, party leaders and committee chairs, and interactions between rank-and-file members because of the Internet.

I hypothesize that information technology leads to decreased power[144] among legislative leaders regardless of the level of professionalization in state legislatures. The data produce disparate results confirming the hypothesis in Vermont and disconfirming the hypothesis in New York. The data from state legislators in Vermont show there is increased communication via e-mail between rank-and-file members, party leaders and committee chairs. There is no change however in interactions between rank-and-file members, party leaders and committee chairs because of the Internet. Neither e-mail nor the Internet leads to increased communications between rank-and-file members, party leaders and committee chairs in New York. To further assess legislative power I also asked interest groups whether or not they have more influence over party leaders and committee chairs because of e-mail. Interest group respondents in both states overwhelmingly rejected the notion that e-mail allows their organization to exert more pressure or influence over state legislators, leadership and committee chairs. Interest group respondents in Vermont reported that e-mail allows them to exert some influence over developing the committee agenda, reporting a bill out of committee and distributing information to committee members. In contrast interest groups in New York do not view e-mail as a tool

---

[144] As defined in Chapter One power in state legislatures is measured in terms of access to leaders (is there more access or is it easier to meet or communicate as a result of e-mail); who determines what is on the agenda; and who makes decisions (do e-mail or the Internet affect how committee decisions are made or whether or not bills are reported out of committee or whether or not information is widely dispersed).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

through which to exert influence over the aforementioned activities. In the end neither rank-and-file members nor interest groups have much influence over leaders because of information technology. Since rank-and-file members, party leaders and committee chairs all have varying degrees of access to information technology, e-mail and the Internet do not result in diminished power between rank-and-file members, party leaders and committee chairs. Rank-and-file members and interest groups do have access to information at an earlier point in the process than compared to when they did not have e-mail or Internet access. Timing in the legislative process is crucial. Interest groups can potentially alter bills and individuals can exert influence over a committee or floor vote if legislators have access to information both substantively—about the bill—and procedurally—where the bill is in the legislative process. Repeatedly executive directors and presidents in both states said in interviews that personal contact is crucial.

At the macro-level I hypothesize that information technology alters organizational and individual behavior in state legislatures. The data disconfirm the notion that information technology alters organizational behavior and it supports the idea that information technology alters individual behavior. First, information technology has not dramatically changed organizational behavior. While legislators schedule party and committee meetings via e-mail, and legislators send memoranda in support of and opposition to legislation and drafts of legislation through e-mail, the legislature continues to operate as it did prior to the advent of e-mail and the Internet. Information previously sent by US Post or

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

hand delivered by courier service is now sent via e-mail. As noted above information technology leads to increased access to leaders in Vermont but it does not alter centralization of authority and procedures within the legislature.

Second, findings from the data show that information technology alters individual behavior. As illustrated in Chapter Two an overwhelming number of state legislators in Vermont use e-mail and more than half of all state legislators in New York use e-mail. E-mail facilitates communication between constituents and legislators and it enables legislators to better gauge the policy preferences of constituents. In Vermont a majority of legislators rely upon e-mail to communicate with their colleagues while legislators in New York tend to contact their colleagues by phone or in-person when in Albany. With the advent of e-mail legislators have another mode of sending and receiving information. Often e-mail merits a faster response than other forms of communication. On average legislators take between four and five days to respond to US Post whereas the rate of responding to e-mail is between two and six days. Simply put legislators cannot afford to take longer to respond to e-mail, otherwise constituents may deem them unresponsive.

The Internet has also led to transformations in legislative behavior. An overwhelming number of legislators reported using the Internet in Vermont compared to just under half of all legislators in New York. Despite low levels of Internet use by legislators in New York almost all staff indicated that they use the Internet for tasks related to casework and legislation. State legislative websites and individual websites also alter individual behavior. Constituents and interest

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

groups can access a variety of information through state legislative websites, which was slightly more difficult to obtain before the advent of state legislative websites. This has two effects. First, legislators are no longer the primary conduit for information. Legislators have more time to focus on other matters since they are more or less freed from disseminating information related to the status of bills. Second, constituents and interest groups who access their state legislature's website are equipped with more detailed information regarding legislation. Individuals can download the text of bills and obtain the status of bills. Legislators in turn must be prepared to discuss bills in greater detail because constituents are much more knowledgeable about bills then they were before the advent of the Internet. The Internet facilitates participation in legislative politics because individuals and groups have access to information at nearly the same point in the process as when legislators receive information. Timeliness within the legislative process is crucial. If a bill is being discussed in committee, concerned individuals and interest groups can contact committee members to express their views or to exert influence over committee votes. Finally legislative behavior has also changed with the introduction of individual websites for members, which appear more frequently in New York than in Vermont. With individual websites legislators have an additional mode through which to communicate and disseminate information. If communicating is a primary component of representation constituents are arguably at a disadvantage if their legislator does not maintain and regularly update an individual website.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Maintaining an individual website is now an integral part of their job as a legislator. Legislators can no longer deny the relevance of the Internet.

Political Participation

Findings from my research suggest that information technology leads to increased political participation for individuals and interest groups. Constituents in particular benefit from new technologies. While I am cautiously optimistic about the impact of information technology on constituent participation I am less hopeful about the impact of information technology on interest group participation. The findings from Chapter Three show that there is increased political participation for interest groups. The data also support the idea that those who already wield significant power—non-marginal interest groups—will retain power. Information technology does not benefit marginal groups as much as I expected.

Constituent Participation via Information Technology as Reported by Legislators. The data support the hypothesis that there is a perception of increased constituent participation. Constituents are clearly using e-mail and the Internet to contact their state legislators, though differences between the two states are evident. Findings from Chapter Two show that Vermont state legislators receive 20 to 38 times as many e-mails per capita and between six and 13 times as many letters per capita as New York state legislators. This demonstrates that not only do constituents in Vermont contact their representatives more frequently but also that they use e-mail more frequently than US Post. Legislators in Vermont

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

receive more correspondence due to the highly participatory nature of Vermont state politics and the willingness of legislators to use e-mail. Despite variations in the amount of e-mail and US Post received by legislators in the two states, more than 90 percent of state legislators and staff said that they respond to e-mail from constituents.

In addition to significant per capita e-mail state legislators reported increased political participation by constituents especially through e-mail. In Vermont a majority of legislators said that e-mail results in a significant increase in contact and interactions between their office and constituents. Respondents in New York also reported increased contact and interactions. Rather than suggesting contact increased significantly, respondents in New York indicated there is a slight increase in political participation. Even if political participation only increases slightly this is still an important finding, especially in light of Putnam's claim that civic participation is on the decline. From the perspective of constituent participation, my research supports the Verba, Scholzman and Brady (1995) and Ridlen Ray (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999) analyses and the findings from my dissertation suggest that there is indeed meaningful participation—in which the voices of citizens are clear, loud and equal—occurring through e-mail.

Constituents use the Internet for a variety of purposes related to state legislative politics. State legislative websites provide a plethora of information ranging from contact information for state legislators to the status of bills. Similarly individual websites provide information often specific to the legislator's district. For example press releases, photos, proposed bills and district issues

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

are a few of the items that typically appear on individual websites. Traffic to state legislative and individual websites is significant. One legislator told me that he receives between 900 and 1000 hits on a monthly basis to his website. A majority of legislators in both states asserted that more constituents contacted them because of their state legislature's website. Additionally legislators said that their state legislature's website is an excellent way to disseminate information to constituents and organizations. Use of the Internet by constituents to contact elected officials is undoubtedly a form of political participation. Obtaining information via legislative and individual websites is certainly a form of participation since visitors would otherwise be compelled to call, to write or to visit their legislators to obtain information. Accessing information from the Internet can lead to interactions between an individual and their legislator or an interest group. Hence, the Internet acts as a conduit for political participation.

Measuring actual participation via the Internet is somewhat problematic so I rely upon the perceptions of legislators. Nearly 60 percent of legislators in both states perceive there to be increased political participation by constituents via the Internet. Legislators in Vermont were more convinced that the Internet leads to increased political participation. Almost 30 percent of state legislators in Vermont reported a significant increase in political participation through the Internet compared to 15 percent of legislators in New York. The qualitative data offer more nuanced findings. Many legislators and staff remarked that they are not entirely certain if there is increased political participation by constituents because of the Internet. Legislators and staff said they are not always able to discern

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

whether or not constituent contact is a result of constituents accessing a website. Some legislators and staff contend that participation is underrated because constituents can bypass state legislators and access information directly through state legislative websites. Because the mode of participation has changed it may be difficult to detect increased participation. Until research can be conducted that measures how constituents use the Internet, a perception of increased participation via the Internet is still an important finding. Legislative and individual websites are portals for communicating and disseminating information. These findings support the claims made by the optimists illustrating that technology leads to increased political participation.

Interest Group Perception of Participation Via Information Technology. The data largely support the hypothesis that marginal and non-marginal groups perceive there to be increased political participation because of information technology. A majority of interest groups in both states reported that e-mail leads to more contact with legislators. When selecting for the type of interest group, differences between the two states emerge. All interest groups except non-marginal groups in New York reported increased political participation through the Internet. Respondents from non-marginal groups in New York said that political participation remains the same. Data from state legislators confirm the above findings with a majority of legislators indicating that there is increased contact and interactions between themselves and interest groups.

While the perception of increased political participation is important perhaps equally important is that significant differences emerge in terms of how

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

interest groups use e-mail. Sixty percent of interest groups in Vermont e-mail state legislators compared to 38 percent of interest groups in New York. While more than 85 percent of non-marginal groups in Vermont and New York ask their members to e-mail legislators fewer than 60 percent of marginal groups encourage their members to e-mail their state legislator. Despite these differences e-mail provides interest groups yet another way of communicating with members of their organization and state legislators. This mode of communication is especially beneficial for interest groups who have already formed relationships with legislators. Findings from my research suggest that e-mail significantly changes the face of grassroots lobbying. Interest groups are more likely to use e-mail to communicate with their member base since e-mail enables interest groups to contact an unlimited number of their members in a more expedient manner. Because of the costs and resources associated with sending information through US Post e-mail is a viable alternative that allows many organizations to have more frequent contact with members of their organization. For example, organizations can notify their members through e-mail about issues that require immediate attention. And as noted previously timing is a crucial element of legislative politics.

In the end interest groups view e-mail as just another tool in their arsenal though an important one. Not only does e-mail facilitate communication between interest groups and their members, and between interest groups and legislators but it also advances communication between lobbyists and interest groups. Organizations use e-mail to send updates and to communicate lobbying

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

strategies. This significantly enhances information dissemination especially for organizations that contract out for lobbying services. For example, lobbyists e-mail executive directors and presidents requesting that information be sent to a legislator or that they need to testify at an upcoming hearing. Contact and interactions between interest groups and lobbyists have increased with the advent of e-mail. Enhanced communication—including the ability to discuss lobbying strategies—is a precursor to increased political participation.

The data from interest groups and state legislators lend further support to the hypothesis that there is a perceived increase in political participation via the Internet. Nearly 60 percent of non-marginal groups in Vermont and New York reported that the Internet leads to more contact with state legislators. The findings for marginal groups are disparate with a 20 percentage-point difference between marginal groups. More than 70 percent of marginal groups in New York indicated that they have more contact with legislators because of the Internet. Differences in perceptions of participation are noteworthy. Some of the differences might be attributed to how groups use the Internet. In Vermont non-marginal groups use the Internet more expansively than marginal groups. For example 75 percent of non-marginal groups use the Internet to perform research, to check on pending legislation, to obtain news, to visit state legislative websites and to inform members. Though 75 percent of marginal groups use the Internet to perform research, only 50 to 60 percent of groups use the Internet to check on pending legislation and to visit state legislative websites. In New York non-marginal and marginal group use of the Internet is not as disparate as in

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Vermont. For example more than 75 percent of non-marginal and marginal groups use the Internet to perform research and to obtain news, and between 60 and 70 percent of the aforementioned groups use the Internet to check on pending legislation, to visit state legislative websites and to inform members. One reason for the pronounced difference between the marginal groups and non-marginal groups in Vermont might be attributed to technological capacity. Marginal groups in Vermont are low-tech users. This might also explain why the perception of political participation is not as robust for marginal groups in Vermont.

Data from state legislators also support the hypothesis that there is a perception of increased political participation by interest groups as a result of the Internet. When I collapsed the categories much more and somewhat more slightly more than half of the legislators in both states asserted that the Internet leads to contact between interest groups and state legislators. Findings from the state legislative data are consistent with findings from the interest group data. This is important because it suggests that perceptions of increased political participation via the Internet are not limited to interest group respondents; two sets of actors support the notion that there is increased political participation in legislative politics.

The data does not support the hypothesis that information technology will not adversely impact marginal interest groups and their interactions in the political process. Information technology does not mute the differences between marginal and non-marginal groups. Several key findings emerge. First non-

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

marginal groups provide more of their employees with access to the Internet than marginal groups. Arguably marginal groups are at a disadvantage if their entire workforce does not have Internet access. In general 61 percent of interest group respondents in Vermont can be classified as low-tech users and 65 percent of marginal groups in Vermont are low-tech users.

Second fewer than 60 percent of marginal group respondents in both states encourage members of their interest group to e-mail state legislators compared to more than 85 percent of respondents from non-marginal groups. Differences, however, are not evident between marginal and non-marginal groups when asked whether or not their organization e-mails legislators. Instead differences emerge between the two states with almost 60 percent of interest group respondents in Vermont indicating that their organization e-mails state legislators and 38 percent of respondents in New York saying that their organization e-mails legislators. From an organizational perspective there is not a significant difference in terms of how marginal and non-marginal groups use e-mail to contact legislators. However, the data suggest that efforts to mobilize members of interest groups are undertaken more frequently by non-marginal groups than marginal groups. With such a large percentage of non-marginal groups using e-mail to mobilize their members, these findings suggest that mobilizing members through e-mail is a particularly useful strategy for contacting legislators. It can be argued that marginal groups that do not employ this method are not using e-mail to its fullest capacity. This of course this depends on

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

whether or not the interest group has a member base and the size of said membership.

Third, fewer than half of the marginal groups in Vermont reported they have a website compared to 86 percent of non-marginal groups in Vermont. In contrast 96 percent of marginal and non-marginal groups in New York have an organizational website. Organizational websites provide members of interest groups and visitors to the site with information ranging from contact information for government officials to information about pending legislation. Having an organizational website allows organizations to mobilize their members both virtually and in-person. Fewer than half of the marginal groups in Vermont have websites. This is a plausible explanation for why marginal groups in Vermont typically do not engage in grassroots efforts through the Internet.

Fourth, and related to organizational websites, findings from my research show that marginal groups in Vermont update their websites less frequently than other groups. Updating an organizational website on a regular basis suggests that the organization is engaged and actively informing visitors of new developments and demonstrating that their organization is concerned with state politics. Even more striking fewer than 40 percent of marginal groups in both states analyze their websites compared to more than half of all non-marginal groups in both states. Analyzing website traffic is important if groups wish to use their sites in their grassroots. Non-marginal groups are unequivocally more sophisticated and savvy in their approach to using information technology. If the Internet is going to bolster the position of marginal groups then these groups

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

must draw from the experiences of the non-marginal groups, otherwise the marginal groups will remain on the fringes.

The above findings which depict differences between marginal and non-marginal groups are especially important in light of Berry's (1997) analysis, which argues that the explosion of interest group activity results in inequities in the political process—especially for under and unrepresented groups. Berry asserts that the sheer number of interest groups and their collective power undermines American democracy. The author's work is important since it addresses the role of marginalized groups as well as assessing the prospects for political participation by interest groups. Information technology undoubtedly dilutes the power of marginalized groups, reinforcing Berry's analysis and lending support to the pessimists.

Democratization

Findings from my research offer mixed results regarding the impact of information technology on democracy[145] in state legislatures and interest groups. The data support the hypothesis that state legislators will report there to be more democratization in their state as a result of information technology, supporting claims made by the optimists. In contrast data from interest group respondents are disparate. While interest groups in Vermont perceive there to be increased access to state legislators, confirming the hypothesis, the findings for interest groups in New York however disconfirm the hypothesis that information

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

technology leads to increased access to state legislators by interest groups. Information technology is not a panacea for interest group participation especially in legislatures that are less open and democratic.

Are State Legislatures More Democratic With Information Technology?

Historically citizens and legislators in the Vermont legislature enjoy high levels of access to information and legislative leaders. One would expect legislators to continue to enjoy high levels of access to information with the introduction of e-mail and the Internet. Paradoxically legislators have limited access to personal computers when in Montpelier because legislators share four personal computers located in the member's lounge. The allocation of an additional 27 personal computers to all committee chairs expanded access to e-mail and the Internet in the statehouse. Still legislators in Vermont contend that limited access to personal computers negatively impacts their ability to read and respond to constituent and interest group e-mail. Since each legislator does not have a personal computer access to information technology is uneven and not comprehensive.

Access to information and party leaders in contrast has been restricted the New York state legislature. Before advances in technology party leaders and committee chairs often had access to information that other members did not have. Leaders and committee chairs received information days or weeks before rank-and-file members received the same information. Because access to e-mail and the Internet in the New York state legislature is universal, the time differential

---

[145] To measure whether or not legislatures are more democratic as a result of information

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

between party leaders receiving information and rank-and-file members receiving information is dramatically reduced if not eliminated. Unlike Vermont, all members of the New York state legislature have at least one personal computer with e-mail and Internet access though the number of personal computers varies from office to office with more computers for legislators in the majority party. In New York the implementation of a networked system and e-mail enhances the sharing of information between the district office and Albany. Information technology arguably improves the transparency of state legislatures such as New York where citizen access is more limited.

Contrary to analyses such as Putnam's (2000), which suggest that there has been a decline in democracy, the data support the hypothesis that state legislators perceive there to be increased democratization in their state because of information technology. When I collapsed the categories much more and somewhat more between 75 and 82 percent of legislators in both states indicated that constituents have more access to them because of e-mail. A striking example of this was articulated by a staff member in New York who asserted that there are constituents who would never drop by the office or call however these same constituents would send an e-mail. Certainly e-mail leads to expanded access. Constituents in Vermont for example have direct access to their legislator with e-mail. Moreover, the data show that 40 percent of legislators in Vermont and 31 percent of legislators in New York perceive the political process to be much more open for constituents as a result of e-mail and nearly half of all

---

technology democracy is defined as access, inclusiveness and diversity.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

legislators in both states perceive the political process to be somewhat more open for constituents because of e-mail. According to Rosenthal (1998), the openness of state legislatures has been criticized, however, he contends that legislatures are much more democratic than previously thought. Evidence from my dissertation suggests that information technology improves constituent access to legislators. Finally a majority of legislators in both states also reported that their state legislature is more open because of e-mail. While Vermont has historically been very open New York has not. Hence these findings are especially important in New York where three individuals—the Governor, Senate Majority Leader and the Speaker of the Assembly—dominate decisions, and access to information is not infrequently difficult to obtain.

In terms of the impact of the Internet on democratization, the data are incongruous. Nearly 48 percent of legislators in Vermont said the Internet leads to somewhat or much more access for constituents and 35 percent of legislators reported that constituent access remains the same. The Internet does not appear to enhance constituent access in Vermont. A 20 percentage-point difference in legislator's perceptions of constituent access via the Internet emerges between Vermont and New York. Legislators in New York feel more strongly that the Internet gives constituents more access to them. This is important especially because New York has traditionally been viewed as being less open. For example, while constituents can easily walk up to a party leader in Vermont (because committee meetings and party caucuses are open to the public), this is not the case in New York. Constituents and interest groups may attend

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

committee meetings however party caucuses are closed to the public. Furthermore individuals are welcome in the gallery but they may not appear directly on the floor unless escorted by a legislator or guard. With the advent of the Internet constituents and interest groups in New York can view session online through SenNet TV, and audio and video in the Assembly. While viewing session online does not provide direct access to legislators, it does provide indirect access. Viewers can see and listen to their legislator, party leaders and committee chairs.

I also evaluated how information technology impacts access to the legislature. Legislators in both states reported their states' legislature to be more open as a result of the Internet. Sixty percent of legislators in Vermont and 80 percent of legislators in New York asserted that the Internet leads to more access in their state legislature. Legislators in Vermont said in interviews that their legislature was open even prior to the advent of e-mail and the Internet, though several legislators conceded that the Internet moderately improves the openness of the political process. State legislative websites further contribute to the openness of legislatures especially in New York. Accessing information via the New York state legislature's website is much easier. Visitors to the site have access to the text and memoranda of bills as well as to the status of bills. This allows constituents to be better informed and to use information in a timely manner. If citizens do not have access to information or if the information is no longer germane their participation is devalued.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In the end it appears that there are significant gains in access for constituents and modest gains in access for state legislatures with the advent of e-mail and the Internet. Even if there is only slightly more access—as in the case of Vermont—this is arguably still important. Not only is there increased access but technology also leads to increased transparency in New York. These findings lend support to Putnam's (2000) assertion that the Internet may improve civic engagement.

Do Interest Groups Have More Access With Information Technology? The data confirm the hypothesis that interest groups will report increased access to state legislators with advances in information technology in Vermont and disconfirm the hypothesis for New York. Nearly 60 percent of interest group respondents in Vermont reported that there is increased access to legislative leaders and committee chairs because of e-mail. Seventy-nine percent of non-marginal group respondents in Vermont (11 out of 14) indicated that there is increased access to legislative leaders and committee chairs compared to 50 percent of marginal group respondents (12 out of 24) in Vermont. In addition to increased access to legislative leaders and committee chairs a majority of executive directors and presidents said in interviews that legislative politics is more open and inclusive as a result of e-mail. While interest group respondents in Vermont asserted that e-mail leads to increased access, this does not hold true in New York. Fewer than 40 percent of interest groups in New York said there is more access to legislative leaders and committee chairs as result of e-mail. As illustrated in Chapter Three executive directors and presidents of interest groups in New York overwhelming

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

rejected the notion that legislative politics is more open and inclusive because of e-mail. As noted in Chapter Three, one respondent candidly said, "I don't think it [e-mail] has made a difference. In New York state I think it's the same three men in a room or maybe two. I don't think e-mail has had an impact on health care policy at this point. It could potentially but not right now."

The findings on interest group access to legislators through information technology are disparate. E-mail only modestly improves access for interest groups in Vermont in what was repeatedly described as an "already open and inclusive" legislature prior to the advent of technology. In this regard the findings from the state legislative data are on par with the findings from the interest group data. A majority of legislators in Vermont indicated that e-mail fosters a much more or somewhat more open political process for interest groups. In contrast scholars and legislators do not describe the New York legislature as being open. E-mail does not lead to increased access and a more open and inclusive political system for interest groups in New York. The findings from my research show that the interest group data confirm observations made by scholars and outside observers that the New York legislature is not open. At odds with these findings are data from state legislators. While overwhelming majorities of interest group respondents said that the legislative system is not open and that access to legislative leaders and committee chairs remains the same because of e-mail, 65 percent of legislators reported that e-mail fosters a much more or somewhat more open political process for interest groups. The disparity between responses

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in New York is not surprising. Legislators are not necessarily objective. Moreover they want to believe that the legislature is open even if it is not.

Findings from the data regarding whether or not the Internet leads to increased access and openness produced disparate results. A plurality of legislators in Vermont stated that the political process remains the same even with the advent of the Internet. Qualitative data differ from the survey data in Vermont. A majority of interviewees noted that state legislative politics is more open and inclusive because of the Internet. In contrast legislators in New York are much more optimistic, with more than 50 percent of legislators in New York reporting that the political process is somewhat more open because of the Internet. Another 25 percent of legislators indicated that the process is much more open as a result of the Internet. Assessing the impact of the Internet is arguably more difficult than assessing the impact of e-mail. It is unlikely that state legislators have access to reports that analyze their state legislature's website though legislators with individual sites have a better sense of their own site if they analyze activity. Legislators are more knowledgeable about how e-mail affects access because legislators (or their staff) read and respond to it and many legislators track it.

In the end, the Vermont state legislature was very open prior to the advent of e-mail and the Internet. So it does not seem that the legislature is much more open, but new technologies do provide additional tools for communicating and disseminating information. Additional tools arguably enhance existing access and improve access for individuals with access to e-mail and the Internet. With

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

political culture that is less open New York initially appears to be slightly more democratic with the advent of e-mail and the Internet. New technologies provide another means through which to access state legislators. Constituents can e-mail their state legislators or they can access their state legislator's website. In addition, constituents can watch session online. Ultimately, however, decisions are still made by the same three individuals, so whether or not improved access is significant is debatable. Even if interest groups have slightly more access to e-mail and the Internet, this is important because new technologies provide the tools for non-elites the to rise in opposition to government (Lenski 1966).

Directions for Future Research

My research assesses how and the degree to which state legislators and interest groups use e-mail and the Internet. For this initial exploratory study I chose two state legislatures—a professional legislature and a non-professional legislature. Studying additional legislatures would enable me to make generalizations about the impact of e-mail and the Internet, which cannot be made examining two cases. Not only will more cases enable me to make broad generalizations but it will also allow me to investigate whether or not differences emerge between professional and non-professional legislatures.

Studying how constituents and interest groups use e-mail and the Internet will enhance our understanding of political participation. To better assess constituent participation I hope to survey constituents. A large-scale survey of constituents will provide detail about constituent participation in the context of

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

state politics. Obviously this is a more difficult undertaking requiring greater resources. Surveying and interviewing interest groups in other states will provide a more complete picture of state level interest group participation both empirically and theoretically. Clearly these data from the two cases point to a digital-divide at an organizational level. Further research will help to substantiate or disprove the claims made by the pessimists.

Finally this research has the potential to extend beyond the scope of state legislatures in the United States and other questions might build on this research. For example how can legislators, constituents and interest groups use technology to participate? Are there limitations to technology? How does technology impact race and gender in the context of state legislative politics?

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Appendix A

Survey of E-mail & Internet Use by State Legislators & Staff

This survey seeks to assess e-mail and Internet use in your state legislature.
All answers will be kept confidential.

Do you work in the Assembly/House or Senate? O **Assembly/House** O **Senate**
Are you a state legislator or staff member? O **State legislator** O **Staff**
Do you work in Vermont or New York? O **VT** O **NY**
What year was the state legislator first elected? _____
What district name/number does the state legislator represent? _____

1. How important do you feel e-mail and the Internet are to state legislative politics? Please rate the following on a scale from 0-10, 0 meaning *not at all important* and 10 meaning *very important.*

E-mail _____ Internet _____

How State Legislators & Staff Use E-mail

2. Do the following individuals or entities in your office use e-mail for legislative business or casework? (Please mark an X in the appropriate box.)

	Yes	No	Don't Know	Not Applicable
State Legislator				
Staff Members				
District Office				

3. In your office, what type of e-mail account do the following individuals or entities use? (Please mark an X in the appropriate box or boxes.)

	State-Issued E-mail Account	Private E-mail Account (e.g. yahoo, sovernet, hotmail, aol)	Don't Know	Not Applicable
State Legislator				
Staff Members				
District Office				

4. On average, how often do the following individuals in your office check their e-mail accounts?

	Several Times Daily	Daily	Several Times Weekly	Weekly	Several Times Monthly	Monthly	Never	Don't Know	Not Applicable
State Legislator	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Staff Members	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

	Yes	No	Sometimes	Don't Know	Not Applicable
5. Does your office respond to e-mail from:					
a. Constituents	O	O	O	O	O
b. Interest groups	O	O	O	O	O
6. Does your office keep track of or log e-mail from:					
a. Constituents	O	O	O	O	O
b. Interest groups	O	O	O	O	O

7. On a weekly basis, approximately how many pieces of postal mail and e-mail does your office receive from constituents and interest groups?

a. Constituents	**b. Interest groups**
E-mail _____	E-mail _____
US Post _____	US Post _____

8. Of the e-mail that your office receives from constituents and interest groups, what percentage of e-mail pertains to casework and what percentage of e-mail pertains to legislation?

	Casework	Legislation
a. Constituents	_____ %	_____ %
b. Interest groups	_____ %	_____ %

9. How does your office usually respond to constituent and interest group e-mail?

a. Constituents	**b. Interest groups**
O e-mail	O e-mail
O US Post	O US Post
O phone	O phone
O other _____	O other _____
O don't know	O don't know
O not applicable	O not applicable

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

10. If your office responds to e-mail from constituents and interest groups, what criteria, if any, does your office use? (Please check all that apply.)

Constituents	Interest Groups
O	O.....no criteria—we respond to all requests
O	O.....a complete mailing address must be included
O	O.....must reside in the district or state
O	O.....must be a registered voter
O	O.....the request must deal with a bill that the member is sponsoring
O	O.....the request must deal with a committee issue
O	O.....other _____
O	O.....don't know
O	O.....not applicable

11. How do constituents and interest groups usually contact your office? Please rank the following modes of communication from top to bottom, giving a 1 to the mode of communication that is used most, 2 the second most and so on until you have ranked all six modes of communication.

a. Constituents

_____ phone
_____ US Post
_____ office visit
_____ e-mail
_____ fax
_____ courier service

b. Interest groups

_____ phone
_____ US Post
_____ office visit
_____ e-mail
_____ fax
_____ courier service

12. How, or for what purposes, does your office use e-mail? (Please check all that apply.)

O to send or receive attachments
O to request information or documents
O to schedule meetings
O to contact other state legislators
O to contact constituents
O to contact interest groups or lobbyists
O other _____
O don't know
O not applicable

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

13. Please compare the *length, formality* and *detail* of letters sent by US Post with e-mail messages. (Please check all that apply.)

US Post is:
a. O shorter in length
O about the same
O longer in length
O don't know
O not applicable

US Post is:
b. O more formal
O about the same
O less formal
O don't know
O not applicable

US Post is:
c. O more detailed
O about the same
O less detailed
O don't know
O not applicable

14. Overall, has e-mail resulted in a *significant increase, slight increase, no change, slight decrease,* or *significant decrease* in contact and interactions between your office and the following:

a. Constituents
O significant increase
O slight increase
O no change
O don't know
O not applicable

b. Interest groups
O significant increase
O slight increase
O significant decrease
O don't know
O not applicable

15. Has e-mail from the following interest groups *significantly increased, slightly increased, not changed, slightly decreased,* or *significantly decreased* compared to other modes of communication?

	Significantly Increased	Slightly Increased	No Change	Slightly Decreased	Significantly Decreased	Don't Know	Not Applicable
education	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
environmental	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
business	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
agriculture	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
religious	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
healthcare	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
elderly	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
physically/ mentally handicapped	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
children	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
homeless	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
poor	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

16. Please rank-order the 4 interest groups that e-mail your office most frequently, beginning with the group that sends the most e-mail.

_____
_____
_____
_____

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

17. *There are a number of ways constituents can contact state legislators. Compared to the following methods, is e-mail used* more frequently, less frequently, *or about* the same*? (Please place an X in the appropriate box.)*

	E-mail is used more frequently than:	*E-mail is used the same as:*	*E-mail is used less frequently than:*	*Don't Know*	*Not Applicable*
Phone					
US Post					
Fax					
Office Visit					
Courier Service					

18. *There are a number of ways interest groups can contact state legislators. Compared to the following methods, is e-mail used* more frequently, less frequently, *or about* the same*? (Please place an X in the appropriate box.)*

	E-mail is used more frequently than:	*E-mail is used the same as:*	*E-mail is used less frequently than:*	*Don't Know*	*Not Applicable*
Phone					
US Post					
Fax					
Office Visit					
Courier Service					

19. *During an average month, please indicate how many e-mail messages your office sent and received from the governor or his staff?*

	Sent E-mail	Received E-mail
Governor		
Governor's Staff		

20. When sending newsletters, letters or campaign literature does your office include the state legislator's e-mail or website addresses?

a. E-mail
- O yes
- O no
- O sometimes
- O don't know
- O not applicable

b. Website
- O yes
- O no
- O sometimes
- O don't know
- O not applicable

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

How Your Office Uses the Internet

(Note: All questions pertaining to the Internet do not include e-mail.)

21. In your office, do the following individuals or entities use the Internet for legislative business or casework?

	Yes	No	Don't Know	Not Applicable
a. State Legislator	O	O	O	O
b. Staff Members	O	O	O	O
c. District Office	O	O	O	O

22. For what purpose(s) does your office use the Internet? (Please check all that apply.)

- O to perform research
- O to check pending legislation
- O to check committee information
- O to obtain news
- O to respond to constituent requests or concerns
- O to draft legislation
- O leisure
- O other _____
- O don't know
- O not applicable

23. Have contact and interactions between your office and the following individuals or groups *increased a lot, increased a little, stayed the same, decreased a little* or *decreased a lot* as a result of the Internet?

	Increased A Lot	Increased A Little	Stayed The Same	Decreased A Little	Decreased A Lot	Don't Know	Not Applicable
a. State Legislators	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
b. Staff Members	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
c. Constituents	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
d. Interest groups	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

24. In your estimation, do you think the following individuals or groups have benefited *much more, somewhat more, the same, somewhat less,* or *much less* from using the Internet in state legislative politics?

	Much More	Somewhat More	The Same	Somewhat Less	Much Less	Don't Know	Not Applicable
a. State Legislators	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
b. Staff Members	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
c. Constituents	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
d. Interest groups	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

25. When your office is working on casework and legislation, which websites are used most frequently? Please rate the following websites on a scale from 0-5, 0 indicating *never used* and 5 indicating *very frequently used.*

Casework	Legislation	
_____	_____	the site of your state legislature
_____	_____	state agency sites
_____	_____	state governor's site
_____	_____	federal agency sites
_____	_____	other federal government sites
_____	_____	news sites
_____	_____	nonprofit sites
_____	_____	National Conference State Legislatures site
_____	_____	web-based Legislative Retrieval System
_____	_____	other _____

26. Does your office have a website? (Do not include campaign-related websites.)

O yes (If yes, how many sites: _____)
O no
O don't know
O not applicable

27. Was your office's website publicly or privately funded?

O publicly funded
O privately funded
O don't know
O not applicable

28. Was your website designed to target specific individuals, groups or populations?

O yes
O no (Skip to question 30)
O don't know
O not applicable

29. If yes, what individuals, groups or populations? _____

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

30. How often is your website updated?

O weekly
O monthly
O every few months
O 6 months or more
O don't know
O not applicable

31. Does your website record the number of visits or "hits" to the site?

O yes (If yes, how many sites: _____)
O no
O don't know
O not applicable

32. Apart from the number of "hits," does your office regularly analyze website activity?

O yes
O no
O don't know
O not applicable

33. Please indicate what information can be found on your office's website(s). (Please check all that apply.)

O information on bills or pending legislation
O speeches
O candidate information
O committee information
O information on signed bills
O other _____
O don't know
O not applicable

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

34. In your estimation, do the following individuals or groups have *much more, somewhat more, the same, somewhat less,* or *much less* access to the state legislature as a result of your office's website?

	Much More	Somewhat More	The Same	Somewhat Less	Much Less	Don't Know	Not Applicable
a. State Legislators	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
b. Staff Members	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
c. Constituents	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
d. Interest groups	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

*Marginal groups are defined as organizations that represent the poor, physically or mentally handicapped, or children.

Perceptions of Institutional Behavior

35. Have interactions between state legislators and party leaders (or committee chairs) *significantly increased, slightly increased, not changed, slightly decreased,* or *significantly decreased* as a result of the following technologies:

	Significantly Increased	Slightly Increased	Not Changed	Slightly Decreased	Significantly Decreased	Don't Know	Not Applicable
a. E-mail	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
b. Internet	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
c. Special legislative software	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

36. Have interactions between state legislators and members <u>other than</u> party leaders *significantly increased, slightly increased, not changed, slightly decreased,* or *significantly decreased* as a result of the following technologies:

	Significantly Increased	Slightly Increased	Not Changed	Slightly Decreased	Significantly Decreased	Don't Know	Not Applicable
a. E-mail	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
b. Internet	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
c. Special legislative software	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

37. Have e-mail and/or the Internet changed the way state legislators conduct state legislative business?

O yes
O no
O don't know
O not applicable

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

38. Is your office *much more, somewhat more, the same, somewhat less,* or *much less* efficient as a result of e-mail, the Internet and your office's website?

	Much More	Somewhat More	The Same	Somewhat Less	Much Less	Don't Know	Not Applicable
a. E-mail	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
b. Internet	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
c. Office website	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

39. Please indicate the average number of days it usually takes your office to respond to letters sent via US Post and e-mail:

US Post _____ days **E-mail** _____ days

40. Have e-mail and the Internet been *very helpful, somewhat helpful, neutral,* or *not at all helpful* in helping to gauge the policy preferences of constituents?

	Very Helpful	Somewhat Helpful	Neutral	Not At All Helpful	Don't Know	Not Applicable
a. E-mail	O	O	O	O	O	O
b. Internet	O	O	O	O	O	O

Information Technology & Levels of Democratization

41. In your opinion, has e-mail fostered a *much more, somewhat more, the same, somewhat less,* or *much less* open political process for the following:

	Much More	Somewhat More	The Same	Somewhat Less	Much Less	Don't Know	Not Applicable
a. Constituents	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
b. Interest groups	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
c. Marginal groups	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
d. Legislature	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

42. In your opinion, has the Internet fostered a *much more, somewhat more, the same, somewhat less,* or *much less* open political process for the following:

	Much More	Somewhat More	The Same	Somewhat Less	Much Less	Don't Know	Not Applicable
a. Constituents	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
b. Interest groups	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
c. Marginal groups	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
d. Legislature	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

43. Please indicate how your communication with the following groups or individuals has changed as a result of e-mail. Please rate the following groups or individuals on a scale from 0-10, 0 indicating *much less communication* and 10 indicating *much more communication*. If communication has stayed the same give it a score of 5.

Constituents _____
Interest groups _____
Committee chairs _____
Party leadership _____
Other rank-and-file members _____

44. Do you feel e-mail and the Internet have allowed your office to have *much more, somewhat more, the same, somewhat less,* or *much less* input on legislation in the following policy areas?

	Much More	Somewhat More	The Same	Somewhat Less	Much Less	Don't Know	Not Applicable
agriculture	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
budget	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
business	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
children	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
economic development	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
education	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
environment	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
health	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
housing	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
labor	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
mental health	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
social services	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
transportation	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
tourism	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

45. Have e-mail and the Internet *significantly improved, slightly improved, not changed, slightly worsened,* or *significantly worsened* your office's ability to represent constituents?

	Significantly Improved	Slightly Improved	Not Changed	Slightly Worsened	Signifcantly Worsened	Don't Know	Not Applicable
a. E-mail	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
b. Internet	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

46. Have new or different constituent or interest group concerns been raised via e-mail that previously went unarticulated?

O yes (If yes, what issue(s) has/have been raised? _____)
O no
O don't know
O not applicable

47. Do constituents and interest group have *much more, somewhat more, the same, somewhat less,* or *much less* access to your office or the legislative process as a result of e-mail, the Internet and your office's website?

	Much More	Somewhat More	The Same	Somewhat Less	Much Less	Don't Know	Not Applicable
a. E-mail	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
b. Internet	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
c. Office website	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

48. Does your office know how many constituents in your district have home computers and/or Internet access? If yes, please indicate what percentage of constituents have home computers and/or Internet access.

a. Home computers
O yes, _____ %
O no
O don't know
O not applicable

b. Internet access
O yes, _____ %
O no
O don't know
O not applicable

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated. Please return the survey in the enclosed envelope to: Antoinette Pole, 226 East 10 Street, #5, New York, NY 10003. If you would like to receive a complimentary copy of the final report please include your e-mail address:

_____

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Appendix B

State Legislative In-Depth Interviews

- Introduce self & establish rapport
- Explain project—my dissertation examines how state legislators use e-mail and the Internet in their jobs as state legislators.
- The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes.
- 3 parts interview: e-mail, the Internet; finally some general questions

E-mail

1. **Do you receive a lot of e-mail from constituents? How much e-mail do you receive on a daily basis from constituents?**

2. **Can you describe the e-mail that you typically receive from constituents? What do they write about?** [Probe: Is it primarily casework or legislation? Content? What type of issues are often addressed?]

3. **Do you receive a lot of e-mail from interest groups? How much e-mail do you receive on a daily basis from interest groups?**

4. **Can you describe the e-mail that you typically receive from marginal groups? Marginal groups are defined as organizations that represent the poor, physically or mentally handicapped, or children.** [Probe: Is it primarily casework or legislation? Content? What type of issues are often addressed?]

5. **How does this compare to e-mail that you typically receive from non-marginal groups?** [Probe: Is it primarily casework or legislation? Content? What type of issues are addressed?]

6. **Do you think that e-mail has given marginal groups an advantage or disadvantage in terms of their ability to participate in state legislative politics?** [Probe: Can you explain how e-mail has given this group an advantage/disadvantage?]

7. **Do you think that e-mail has given non-marginal groups an advantage or disadvantage in terms of their ability to participate in state legislative politics?** [Probe: Can you explain how e-mail has given this group an advantage/disadvantage?]

8. **Do you give e-mail the same level of importance as other modes of communication, like phone or US Post?**

9. **What percentage of e-mail is casework versus legislative business?**

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

10. **Why, in your opinion, do constituents and interest groups use e-mail rather than other modes of communication like the phone or US Post or vice versa?** [Probe: What are the advantages or disadvantages of the various modes of communication?]

11. **Do you use e-mail internally for state legislative business?**

12. **Have you used e-mail to contact a party leader or committee chair? Can you give me an example of a time when you used e-mail to contact one of these individuals?** If **no example**, can you tell my why you haven't contacted these individuals via e-mail and how you typically do contact these individuals?

13. **Can you give me an example of a time when you used e-mail to contact another state legislator?** If **no example**, can you tell my why you haven't contacted these individuals via e-mail and how you typically do contact these individuals?

14. **Why did you choose e-mail rather than another mode of communication?**

15. **What challenges, if any, does e-mail present in doing your job?**

16. **Has e-mailed helped you to do a better job?** [Probe: Is your response rate any different than other modes of communication? Do you have a better sense of constituent concerns?]

17. **Has the level or amount of political participation changed as a result of e-mail?** [Probe: has the mode of communication changed?]

18. **Do individuals or interest groups have greater access as a result of e-mail?** [Have different issues been raised? Different or new groups]

Internet

19. **Can you describe how you have used various websites on the Internet to respond to constituent request or problems?** [Probe: state agency sites; federal government sites; etc]

20. **Can you describe how you have used various websites on the Internet to develop legislation?** [Probe: civil union legislation; other state websites; newspapers; etc.]

21. **Are there any other ways that you have used the Internet in your job as a state legislator?** [Probe: To schedule meetings; minutes from meetings; ACOM; etc.]

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

22. **What role has the New York legislature's website played in state legislative politics?** [Probe: Do you think constituents or interest groups are contacting you because your phone number or e-mail is listed on the site? Or are constituents or interest groups contacting you regarding bills or issues, which are listed on the site?]

23. **Has the Internet effected political participation among constituents and interest?** [Probe: Do interest group websites direct visitors to call or write you?]

24. **How important is your website, and if you don't have a website, are you possibly thinking about developing a website?** [NY: Is there a dedicated staff person that deals with the website? What kind of information appears, and of the information on your site, what two things are most important or useful for visitors to the site?]

25. **Has the Internet helped you to do a better job as a state legislator?** [Probe: Do you think the Internet has enabled you to provide constituents with more information or are you able to provide information more quickly or are your response rates only marginally faster?]

26. **Is the New York/Vermont state legislature more open and inclusive as a result of the Internet? Open and inclusive refers to individuals or groups that now have access or contact that previously didn't. Issues have been raised that had not been previously.**

Final Set of Wrap-Up Questions

27. **Has either e-mail or the Internet had any impact—either internally or externally—on how decisions are made in the state legislature?** [Probe: Does it take the same amount of time; Do interest group or constituent e-mails influence your final decisions?]

28. **Has either e-mail or the Internet had any impact on who makes decisions?** [Probe: Are the same people making decisions or are different people involved in the decision making process? Do more junior members have more input as a result of e-mail or the Internet? Have you personally been able to exert more influence as a result of e-mail or the Internet?]

29. **Is there anything that you would like to add to our discussion that I haven't asked?**

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Appendix C

Survey of E-mail & Internet Use Among Interest Groups

This survey seeks to assess e-mail and Internet use among interest groups. All answers will be kept confidential.

About Your Organization

1. Name of organization _____

2. When was your organization founded? _____ year(s) _____ month(s)

3. Is membership in your organization voluntary?

O yes
O no
O don't know

4. Do members pay a fee?

O yes
O no **(Skip to question 6)**
O don't know

5. Is this fee:

O optional
O mandatory
O don't know

6. Which of the following best describes your organization's interests: (Please check all that apply.)

O education
O environment
O business
O economic development
O healthcare
O elderly
O physically/mentally handicapped
O children
O social services: food assistance, work assistance, welfare, homelessness, housing **(Please circle those that apply.)**
O other_____

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

7. In your estimation, is your organization primarily concerned with 1 major issue (environment) or more than 1 issue (health care and environment)?

O 1 issue
O more than 1 issue
O don't know

8. How many people belong to your organization? _____

9. How many individuals are employed by your organization? _____

10. Of the individuals employed by your organization, how many of these individuals have regular access to a computer? _____

11. How many employees are connected to the Internet?

O all
O some _____ **(Please indicate how many.)**
O none/not applicable
O don't know

12. What type of Internet connection does your organization have?

O modem
O ISDN
O DSL
O cable modem
O T-1 or greater
O don't know
O not applicable

13. Is your organization networked?

O yes
O no
O don't know

14. What year did the organization obtain: E-mail _____ Internet _____

Your Organization's Presence in Cyberspace

A listserve is an e-mail based discussion group that individuals subscribe to and is accessed only by members of the list.

15. Does your organization subscribe to or participate in any listserves?

O yes
O no
O don't know

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

16. Does your organization *operate or manage* a listserve?

O yes
O no
O don't know

17. For what purpose(s) does your organization use the Internet? (Please check all that apply.)

O to perform research
O to check on pending legislation
O to obtain news
O to visit state legislative websites
O to know where a particular member stands on a bill/issue
O to inform members
O leisure
O other _____

18. Does your organization have a website?

O yes
O no **(Skip to question 28)**
O don't know

19. How often is the website updated?

O weekly
O monthly
O every few months
O 6 months or more
O don't know

20. Does the website record the number of visits to the site or "number of hits" received?

O yes
O no
O don't know

21. Does your organization analyze activity on your website regularly?

O yes
O no
O don't know

22. Does the website have political material or content?

O yes
O no
O don't know

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

23. Does the website provide information about *federal, state,* or *local (city)* government? (Place an X in the appropriate box.)

	Yes	No	Don't Know	Not Applicable
Federal government				
State government				
Local/City government				

Skip to question 27, if you answered "no" to state.

24. In your estimation, what percent of the organization's website is devoted to issues that pertain only to state politics? _____%

25. What type of information on state politics does this site provide? (Please check all that apply.)

O campaign information
O information on bills/pending legislation
O candidate information
O committee information
O information on signed bills
O voting records
O other _____

26. Does the website have links to the state legislature or other state government websites?

O yes
O no
O don't know

How Your Organization Communicates With Its Members

27. Does your organization use e-mail to inform its members about pending legislation or committee hearings at the state level?

O yes
O no **(Skip to question 32)**
O don't know

28. Does your organization use a listserve to inform its members about pending legislation or committee hearings at the state level?

O yes
O no
O don't know

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

29. How frequently are e-mail messages sent to members of your organization that pertain to state politics:

O several times a day
O daily
O weekly
O monthly
O never
O don't know
O not applicable

30. How frequently are listserve messages sent to members of your organization that pertain to state politics:

O several times a day
O daily
O weekly
O monthly
O never
O don't know
O not applicable

31. Does your organization encourage its members to contact their state legislators through e-mail or the Internet?

a. E-mail

O yes
O no
O don't know

b. Internet

O yes
O no
O don't know

How Your Organization Communicates With Elected Officials

32. Does your organization use e-mail to communicate with state legislators?

O yes
O no **(Skip to question 39)**
O don't know

33. For what purposes does the organization use e-mail to communicate with state legislators? (Please check all that apply.)

O to persuade state legislators in committee or on a floor vote
O to provide information to state legislators
O to discuss the details of a bill
O to set up a meeting
O other _____

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

34. On average, how frequently does your organization e-mail state legislators:

O several times a day
O daily
O weekly
O monthly
O every few months
O never
O don't know
O not applicable

35. On how many different issues do you e-mail state legislators during an average month?

O 1-4 issues monthly
O 5-7 issues monthly
O 8-10 issues monthly
O 11-15 issues monthly
O 15 or more issues monthly
O don't know
O not applicable

36. Does your organization have special software like *Congress Merge* that sends targeted e-mail to specific state legislators depending upon the issue?

O yes
O no
O don't know

37. In your opinion, have e-mail, the Internet, listserves, and special software led to *more contact, the same amount of contact,* or *less contact* with state legislators? (Place an X in the appropriate box.)

	More	The Same	Less	Don't know
E-mail				
The Internet				
Listserves				
Special software				

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Pre-Information Technology: Your Organization & State Legislators

38. Did your organization contact state legislators prior to the introduction of:

a. E-mail?

O yes
O no
O don't know
O not applicable

b. Internet?

O yes
O no
O don't know
O not applicable

c. Special software?

O yes
O no
O don't know
O not applicable

39. In your opinion, has your organization's ability to access leadership and committee chairs at the state level *improved, stayed the same,* or *diminished* as a result of e-mail?

a. Leadership

O improved
O stayed the same
O diminished
O don't know
O not applicable

b. Committee Chairs

O improved
O stayed the same
O diminished
O don't know
O not applicable

40. Do you feel that you have *increased, the same amount, or decreased* access to state legislative leaders and committee chairs as a result of e-mail?

O increased
O stayed the same
O decreased
O don't know
O not applicable

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

41. In your opinion, are state legislatures more open and inclusive as a result of information technology?

O yes
O no
O don't know

42. In your estimation, has the content of your organization's message to state legislators changed as a result of information technology?

O yes
O no
O don't know

43. In your opinion, has information technology changed decision making in state legislatures *very much, somewhat,* or *not at all*?

a. House/Assembly

O very much
O somewhat
O not at all
O don't know
O not applicable

b. Senate

O very much
O somewhat
O not at all
O don't know
O not applicable

44. In your opinion, has the development of e-mail, the Internet and special software programs changed the organizational structure of state legislatures?

O yes
O no **(Skip to question 46.)**
O don't know

45. In your estimation, has new technology resulted in *more centralization and increased hierarchy* or *less centralization and decreased hierarchy* in state legislatures or some *other* change?

O more centralized & increased hierarchy
O less centralized & decreased hierarchy
O other _____

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Lobbying & Information Technology

46. Does your organization lobby state legislators?

O yes
O no **(Skip to instructions following question 53.)**
O don't know

47. In your opinion, is it *much easier, somewhat easier, neither easy nor difficult, somewhat more difficult,* or *much more difficult* to lobby state legislators as a result of new technologies like e-mail and the Internet?

O much easier
O somewhat easier
O neither easy nor difficult
O somewhat more difficult
O much more difficult
O don't know

48. In your estimation, have your lobbying efforts *significantly improved, somewhat improved, stayed the same, somewhat worsened,* or *significantly worsened* as a result of information technology?

O significantly improved
O somewhat improved
O stayed the same
O somewhat worsened
O significantly worsened
O don't know

49. In your estimation, has e-mail allowed you to exert more pressure or influence over:

a. State Legislators

O yes
O no
O don't know

b. Leadership

O yes
O no
O don't know

c. Committee Chairs

O yes
O no
O don't know

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

50. Please indicate how much time your organization spends lobbying using the following methods, where 5 is "almost all the organization's time" and a 1 is "no time."

	No Time				Almost All My Time
Letter	1	2	3	4	5
E-mail	1	2	3	4	5
Listserve	1	2	3	4	5
Internet	1	2	3	4	5
Special software	1	2	3	4	5
Telephone	1	2	3	4	5
Fax	1	2	3	4	5
In-person	1	2	3	4	5
Other	1	2	3	4	5

51. Please assess how effective you find the following methods of lobbying state legislators, where 5 is the "most effective" and 1 is "least effective."

	Least Effective				Most Effective
Letter	1	2	3	4	5
E-mail	1	2	3	4	5
Listserve	1	2	3	4	5
Internet	1	2	3	4	5
Special software	1	2	3	4	5
Telephone	1	2	3	4	5
Fax	1	2	3	4	5
In-person	1	2	3	4	5
Other	1	2	3	4	5

52. In the following questions, 52a-e, please mark an X in the appropriate box.

a. How much influence are you able to exert over committee agendas as a result of:	**A Lot**	**Some**	**Very Little**	**None**	**Don't Know**
E-mail					
Listserve					
Special software					

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

b. How much influence are you able to exert over votes to report a bill out of committee as a result of:	A Lot	Some	Very Little	None	Don't Know
E-mail					
Listserve					
Special software					

c. How much influence are you able to exert over the dispersion of information to committee members as a result of:	A Lot	Some	Very Little	None	Don't Know
E-mail					
Listserve					
Special software					

d. How much influence are you able to exert over pending legislation as a result of:	A Lot	Some	Very Little	None	Don't Know
E-mail					
Listserve					
Special software					

e. How much influence are you able to exert over floor votes as a result of:	A Lot	Some	Very Little	None	Don't Know
E-mail					
Listserve					
Special software					

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

53. Does your organization serve an *underrepresented population* such as the poor, handicapped, homeless, children, etc.?

O yes
O no **(If no, skip to end)**
O don't know

54. Compared to pre-information technology—before there was e-mail, the Internet etc.—does your organization now have *more access, the same amount of access,* or *less access* to state legislators, leadership and committee chairs as a result of e-mail?

a. State legislators

O more access
O the same
O less access
O don't know
O not applicable

b. Leadership

O more access
O the same
O less access
O don't know
O not applicable

c. Committee chairs

O more access
O the same
O less access
O don't know
O not applicable

55. If you use information technology, do you feel that it has provided your organization an *advantage, neither an advantage nor disadvantage,* or a *disadvantage* in contacting or lobbying state legislators?

O advantage
O neither an advantage nor disadvantaged
O disadvantage
O don't know
O not applicable

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

56. As a result of information technology, do you feel that your organization has the same amount of access to state legislators as interest groups that do not serve underrepresented populations?

O yes
O no **(Skip to question 58)**
O don't know

57. If you feel that you have similar levels of access to state legislators as other groups, to what do you attribute this:

O budget
O e-mail
O the Internet
O the mission
O lobbying
O other _____
O don't know

58. In serving an underrepresented population, do you feel that e-mail and the Internet have had a *positive, neutral,* or *negative* effect on your ability to lobby state legislators?

O positive
O neutral
O negative
O don't know

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Please return the survey in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope to Antoinette Pole, 226 East 10 Street, #5, New York, NY 10003. Please feel free to provide the following optional information:

Organization's address _____

Executive Director_____ Phone _____

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Appendix D

Interest Group Interviews

1. **Has your organization had contact with a state legislator in the past 12 months?**

2. **Is this contact only lobbying or are there reasons for contact?**

3. **How does your organization typically contact state legislators?**

E-mail

4. **Has your organization contacted any state legislators using e-mail?** (If, no, skip the next question.)

5. **Can you give me an example of a time when you used e-mail to contact a state legislator (or several legislators)?**

6. **For what purposes have you used e-mail to contact a state legislator(s)?** [Probe: Do you use e-mail primarily to disseminate information; to persuade state legislators to vote a certain way; to send invites; to request/propose legislation?]

7. **How important would you say e-mail is compared to other modes of communication, more important, just as important, or less important?** [Probe: How does e-mail compare to an office visit, a letter sent via US Post, a phone call or fax?]

8. **If you were to rank the various modes of communication that your organization uses, beginning with mode that is most important, what would you rank first? And second, etc.**

9. **When or why do you use e-mail as opposed to another form of communication to contact state legislators?**

10. **How frequently do you e-mail state legislators during session? And when they are not in session?**

11. **Is there a member base in your organization? How many members?** (If no, skip the next 2 questions.)

12. **Does your organization encourage its members to contact state legislators via e-mail?**

13. **Does your organization have a listserv* for its members or employees? When and for what purposes is this listserv used for? Do you know if there are any state legislators who subscribe to this list? Does this listserv notify members about state-level legislation or issues related to state politics?**

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

[*By a listserv I mean an e-mail based discussion group that individuals subscribe to and is accessed only by members of the list.]

14. **Do you think e-mail has given your organization an advantage, a disadvantage or neither an advantage nor a disadvantage in terms of your organization's ability to participate in state legislative politics? How so?** *[*****Probe: What advantages or disadvantages does it provide?]*

15. **What drawbacks does e-mail provide in terms of your ability to participate in state legislative politics?**

16. **Do you think e-mail has given marginal groups an advantage, a disadvantage or neither an advantage nor a disadvantage in terms of their ability to participate in state legislative politics? By marginal groups I mean organizations that serve or work in the interest of the poor, physically or mentally handicapped or children.**

17. **Do you think that e-mail has given non-marginal groups an advantage, disadvantage or neither an advantage nor a disadvantage in terms of their ability to participate in state legislative politics**

18. **Has e-mail improved, diminished or had no impact on your organization's ability to contact state legislators? How so?**

19. **Has e-mail led to increased, the same or decreased contact or interactions between a) your organization and state legislators; b) your organization's members (or the population that you serve) and state legislators? How so?**

20. **Is state legislative politics more open and inclusive as a result of e-mail? How so?**

Internet

21. **Does your organization have a website? If not, why not?** (If no skip the next two questions.)

22. **Does the website provide information about state legislative politics?**

23. **What kind of information does your site provide about state politics?** [Probe: links, bill information, form letters to be e-mailed or faxed.]

24. **For what purposes does your organization use the Internet as it relates to state legislative politics?**

25. **Does your organization use the New York State (Vermont State) legislature's website? When and for what purposes?** [Probe: To contact state legislators; to look up bills; to look up committee information; etc.]

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

26. **Has the Internet enabled your organization to better communicate with state legislators? How so?**

27. **Has the Internet to increased, the same or decreased contact or interactions between a) your organization and state legislators; b) your organization's members (or the population that you serve) and state legislators? How so?**

28. **Is state legislative politics more open and inclusive as a result of the Internet? How so?**

29. **Does your organization have links to national level lobbying groups? Have you used information technology to communicate? How so?**

30. **Does your organization have any special software that it uses to contact state legislators?** (If no skip the next question.)

31. **What type of software do you use and can you describe how it works?**

32. **How long have you been using these technologies to lobby? Do you have a modem, dsl or t-1 connection?**

33. **Have your lobbying efforts changed as a result of information technology? How so?**

34. **Do you think information technology has enabled your organization to exert more influence over state legislators?**

****Keep contact & interactions or replace this with participation?**

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Bibliography

Abramson, Jeffrey B., F. Christopher Arterton, and Gary R. Orren. 1988. *The Electronic Commonwealth: The Impact of New Media Technologies on Democratic Politics.* New York: Basic Books.

Anderson, David M., and Michael Cornfield. 2003. *The Civic Web: Online Politics and Democratic Values, Campaigning American Style.* Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.

Barber, Benjamin R. 1984. *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Barber, Benjamin R. (Editors) Roger G. Noll and Monroe E. Price. 1998. "The New Telecommunications Technology: Endless Frontier or the End of Democracy?" A Communications Cornucopia Markle Foundation Essays on Information Policy. Washington DC: Brookings Press Institution, pp. 72-98.

Barley, Stephen. 1990. The Alignment of Technology and Structure Through Roles and Networks. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 35 (1990):61-103.

Bennett, Daniel, and Pam Fielding. 1999. The Net Effect: How Cyberadvocacy is Changing the Political Landscape. Merrifield, VA: e-advocates Press.

Berry, Jeffrey M. 1997. *The Interest Group Society.* 3rd ed. New York: Longman.

Bimber, Bruce A. 2003. *Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power, Communication, Society, and Politics.* Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Bollen, Kenneth. 1980. Issues in the Comparative Measurement of Political Democracy. *American Sociological Review.* Vol. 45 (Number 3):370-390.

Browning, Graeme. 1996. *Electronic Democracy Using the Internet to Influence American Politics.* Wilton, CT. Pemberton Press.

Dahl, Robert Alan. 1989. *Democracy and Its Critics.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Danziger, James and William Dutton, et al. 1982 *Computers and Politics High Technology in American Local Governments.* New York: Columbia University.

Davis, Richard. 1999. *The Web of Politics: the Internet's Impact on the American Political System.* New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Davis, Steve, Larry Elin, and Grant Reeher. 2002. *Click on Democracy: The Internet's Power to Change Political Apathy into Civic Action.* Boulder, CO; Oxford: Westview Press.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Etizioni, Amitai. The Spirit of Community: Rights and Responsibilities, and the Communitarian Agenda. New York: Crown Publishers. 1993.

Fox and Rainie. 2001. Time Online. Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet & American Life Project.

Galbraith, Jay R. 1973. *Designing Complex Organizations.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Goodman, Paul S., and Lee Sproull. 1990. *Technology and Organizations.* 1st ed, *The Jossey-Bass Management Series.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Grossman, Lawrence K. 1995. *The Electronic Republic: Reshaping Democracy in the Information Age.* New York, NY: Viking.

Hill, Kevin A., and John E. Hughes. 1998. *Cyberpolitics: Citizen Activism in the Age of the Internet, People, Passions, and Power.* Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.

Hrebenar, Ronald J., and Clive S. Thomas. 1993. *Interest Group Politics in the Northeastern States.* University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Janofsky and Lee. 2003. Net Group Tries to Click Democrats to Power. The New York Times. Tuesday, November 18, 2003, Sec. A, p22.

Jewell, Malcolm Edwin. 1982. *Representation in State Legislatures.* Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

Jewell, Malcolm Edwin, and Marcia Lynn Whicker. 1994. *Legislative Leadership in the American States.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Kurtz, Karl. 1992. Understanding the Diversity of State Legislatures. Boulder, CO: Center for the Study of American Politics, Dept. of Political Science, University of Colorado-Boulder.

Larsen, Elena and Lee Raine. 2002. How Local Officials Use the Internet and the Civic Benefits They Cite From Dealing With Constituents Online. Washington, D.C.: Pew Internet & American Life Project.

Lawrence, Paul R., and Jay William Lorsch. 1967. *Organization and Environment; Managing Differentiation and Integration.* Boston: Division of Research Graduate School of Business Administration Harvard University.

Lenski, Gerhard. 1966. *Power and Privilege.* New York: McGraw Hill.

Maestas, Cherie, Grant W. Neeley and Lilliard E. Richardson, Jr. Spring 2003. The State of Surveying Legislators: Dilemmas and Suggestions. *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* Vol. 3 (No. 1):pp. 90-108.

Morris, Dick. 1999. *Vote.com.* CA: Renaissance Books.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Newburger, Eric. 2000. Home Computers and Internet Use in the United States. US Census Bureau. Issued September 2001:1-9.

Nicholson-Crotty, Sean, and Kenneth J. Meier. 2002. The Practical Researcher Size Doesn't Matter: In Defense of Single-State Studies. *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* 2 (Number 4):411-422.

Perlman, Ellen. 2001. E-Gov on the Cheap. *Governing* (September 2001):p. 52.

Perrow, Charles. 1970. *Organizational Analysis; A Sociological View*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co.

Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. 1967. *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Pole, Antoinette. 2000. "The Role of Computing Technology and the New York State Legislature." Garson, G. David (ed). *Handbook of Public Information Systems*. New York: Marcel Dekker Inc.

Price, Monroe Edwin, Roger G. Noll, Lloyd Morrisett, and NetLibrary Inc. 1998. *A Communications Cornucopia. Markle Foundation Essays on Information Policy*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Ridlen-Ray, Marcella. 1999. *"Technical Change and Associational Life." (Chapter 8) Civic Engagement in American Democracy*. Skocpol, Theda, and Morris P. Fiorina (eds). Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press Russell Sage Foundation.

Rosenthal, Alan. 1993. *The Third House: Lobbyists and Lobbying in the States*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Rosenthal, Alan. 1998. *The Decline of Representative Democracy: Process, Participation, and Power in State Legislatures*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Schlozman, Kay Lehman, and John T. Tierney. 1986. *Organized Interests and American Democracy*. New York: Harper & Row.

Schneier, Edward, and Brian John Murtaugh. 2001. *New York Politics: A Tale of Two States*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.

Thompson, James D. 1967. *Organizations in Action; Social Science Bases of Administrative Theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Verba, Sidney, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Wallace, Nicole. 2001. Taking Action Online. *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, December 13, 2001: 29-31.

Walker, Jack. 1991. *Mobilization of Interest Group Politics in America: Patrons, Profession and Social Movements*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Wilhelm, Anthony G. 2000. *Democracy in the Digital Age: Challenges to Political Life in Cyberspace*. New York: Routledge.

Woodward, Joan. 1965. *Industrial Organization: Theory and Practice*. London, New York: Oxford University Press.

Yin, Robert. 2003. Applications of Case Study Research. Sage Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Zeigler, L. Harmon, and Michael A. Baer. 1969. *Lobbying; Interaction and Influence in American State legislatures*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co.

http://www.publicus.net/articles/edemresources.html

http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/digitaldivide/Execsumfttn00.htm

http://bangaloreit.com/html/egovern.htm

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.