Online participation in democratic processes: The case of the Green Party Germany

Gefion Thuermer[1]   Silke Roth[1]   Kieron O'Hara[2]   Steffen Staab[2]

[1]Social Sciences   [2]Electronics and Computer Science
University of Southampton, Southampton, UK
{gefion.thuermer, silke.roth, k.m.o'hara, s.r.staab} @soton.ac.uk

Abstract

Much of the research in the online participation area focuses on citizen participation or social movements, while the internal processes of political parties have so far been neglected. We will address this gap, focusing on the introduction of online participation methods for internal democratic decision-making processes in the Green Party Germany. Use of technology in a democratic process makes higher demands off organisation, since exclusion can delegitimize the outcome. Specifically, we investigate the launch of two new processes: a regular grass-roots survey that feeds into the policy development process, and an online verification process for members' submission and support of proposals to the party assembly. These processes both support and challenge the strong grass-roots mentality of the party: access is maximised, while participation costs for certain groups may increase. We will discuss the expectations and conflicts related to the introduction of these new online process. In particular we will address the expected risks and opportunities of facilitating online participation, including the potential for changing or reinforcing the current experience of participation, and the risk of perpetuating biases relating to online access. The analysis is based on preliminary data, in particular observations and interviews with selected members.

Zusammenfassung

Viel Forschung zu Onlinebeteiligung bezieht sich auf Bürgerbeteiligung und Soziale Bewegungen, während die internen Prozesse politischer Parteien bislang meist vernachlässigt wurden. Wir beschäftigen uns mit diesem Zwischenraum, und konzentrieren uns auf die Einführung von Online Beteiligungsmöglichkeiten für interne demokratische Entscheidungsprozesse bei Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen. Die Nutzung von Technologie für demokratische Prozesse ist anspruchsvoll für Organisationen, weil das Ausschließen von bestimmten Personen(-kreisen) die Legitimität des Prozesses mindern kann. Daher liegt unser Fokus insbesondere auf der Einführung von zwei Onlineprozessen: Einer Basisbefragung die die Programmentwicklung unterstützt, und ein Onlineverifikationsverfahren für Einzelanträge für Bundesdelegiertenversammlungen von Mitgliedern und die jeweiligen Antragsunterstützer. Diese Prozesse sind zugleich Herausforderung und Unterstützung für die starke Basisorientierung der Partei: Der Zugang zu Entscheidungsprozessen wird maximiert, während der Beteiligungsaufwand für bestimmte Gruppen erhöht wird. Wir werden die Erwartungen und Konflikte im Kontext dieser Einführung neuer Onlineprozesse besprechen. Insbesondere geht es uns um die zu erwartenden Risiken und Vorteile von Onlinebeteiligung, sowie um die potentiellen Effekte der Verstärkung, Vertiefung oder Veränderung von Beteiligung und das Risiko der Fortführung bestehender Ungleichheit durch Internetnutzung. Die Analyse basiert auf Daten aus teilnehmenden Beobachtungen und Interviews mit ausgewählten Parteimitgliedern.

Introduction

The discussion about online participation happens mostly in the context of citizen participation (Gibson & Cantijoch 2013; Kneuer 2014) – there is not much research about online participation in specific democratic decision-making contexts such as political parties (Van Dijk 2013). Most of the research about parties, in turn, is with regards to their external communication, such as politicians' use of social media (Fuchs 2014; Lietz et al. 2014), how parties collect input from citizens (Hanel & Marschall 2014), or communicate in election campaigns (Lilleker & Jackson 2010). Our approach is novel and has so far been neglected – we are going to focus on the use of the internet as embedded in democratic decision-making processes.

Using the internet for democratic decision-making is inherently problematic: Democratic decisions require equal participation (Jacob 2015), but use of the internet is not equal across society (Hargittai 2008). While offline participation has the same drawbacks, at least we have plenty of research to help us understand these inequalities, and develop techniques to mitigate them. For online participation, these techniques still need to be established. To be able to find these mitigation techniques for online participation, we first need a deeper understanding of the challenges in this particular context.

There are two main theories about the effect online participation has on participation. Mobilisation theory (Ward et al. 2003) argues that as more participation opportunities become available, more people will participate. Participation becomes broader as new participants are drawn into the process. For a political party, this can either mean activating previously passive members, or recruiting new members altogether. Reinforcement theory (Norris 2001) on the other hand argues that, as new online participation methods become available, these are picked up by those who are already active, thus reinforcing their existing advantage. A third, not as frequently discussed option is normalisation, or as we would like to call it, replacement (Margolis et al. 1997). This poses that as new online participation methods become available, those who are already active change their behaviour, and do things online that they would previously have done differently. There seems to be no reason why these three effects cannot occur simultaneously, for different groups.

Based on a case study of the Green Party Germany, we analyse the adoption of online decision making within a political party. In Germany political parties are subject to the Political Parties Act[1], which stipulates that a general or delegate assembly at national level is the highest decision-making body of the party, and that parties have to ensure the "democratic" participation of their members. The law does not however define exactly how democratic participation has to take place. Parties regulate this in their statutes, which leads to very different participatory processes, both offline and online. This makes Germany a good context to study the introduction on online decision making within parties.

The Green Party Germany has a strong tradition of grass-roots participation (Frankland 2008). Having been founded out of a social movement in the 1980s, before the World Wide Web was widely adopted, the party has established strong offline processes, and is now supplementing and gradually replacing these with online alternatives. In this implementation process, we will look at the current experiences and related assumptions about participation, and the expectations members have of online participation.

---

[1] Political Parties Act (*Parteiengesetz*), version of the announcement as of 31st January 1994 (BGBl. I p. 149), last changed through Article 1 of 22nd December 2015 (BGBl. I p. 2563)

However, the aim to introduce online participation opportunities within the party might backfire. Rather than mobilising currently inactive members, and ideally recruiting new members and thus engaging a larger proportion of active members, the gap between those who are already active and those who are not might increase. This is problematic, not only because it would not be in the interest of the party to introduce or increase power imbalances, but it may also be perceived as undemocratic, thus undermining the legitimacy of established decision-making processes. This is especially so when the new participation opportunities favour certain groups over others; for example, when members who are already active online gain larger benefits than those who just started using the internet.

The case of the Green Party Germany

The Green Party Germany was founded in 1980, out of the women's, peace and environmental movements (Frankland 2008). The foundation happened bottom-up, with local branches assembling across the country and finally creating the national party as their umbrella organisation (Switek 2012). The party gained seats in several state parliaments, and subsequently entered the Bundestag[2] in 1983. After the unification of West and East Germany in 1990, the Green Party merged with the Eastern 'Bündnis 90', thus founding the party in its current form.

In the national election in 1990, after the German unification, the party missed the 5% threshold to enter the Bundestag, and spent the following four years reforming their internal structure and regulations (Frankland 2008). One of the main changes in this interim phase was the establishment of formalised wings within the party. The main line of conflict ran between the fundamentalists (*Fundis*), who would hold up the party ideals regardless of circumstances, and the realists (*Realos*), who took a more pragmatic approach and were willing to compromise in order to achieve at least some of the parties' political goals (Switek 2012). Both wings still exist at the time of writing (July 2017), with rather unchanged stances, but they re-branded to leftists (*Linke*) and reformers (*Reformer*), respectively.

The party re-entered the Bundestag at the next election in 1994, and has been represented there ever since. Between 1998 and 2005 they formed a government coalition with the Social Democratic Party (SPD). In 2011, right after the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, the party gained a majority in the state election in Baden-Württemberg – the third largest state in Germany. With that they gained their first minister-president, who was re-elected in 2016[3].

The party has grown from just under 20,000 members in 1980 to 62,000 in 2017, and was at the time of writing the third largest party in Germany (Niedermayer 2016). It is also one of very few growing parties in Germany, while all other major parties (CDU/CSU, SPD, Linke and FDP) are shrinking. The party also has the highest proportion of female members at 38.6%, and the youngest average age, at 50 years (Niedermayer 2016). It currently holds 10% of seats in the national parliament[4].

Grass-roots Democracy

The parties' foundation in social movements means that it has a strong philosophy of grass-roots participation (Raschke & Heinrich 1993). It still very much functions bottom-up. The participation of individual members is promoted, which shows for example in the speakers' lists at assemblies, which

---

[2] German Federal Parliament
[3] http://www.wahlrecht.de/news/2016/landtagswahl-baden-wuerttemberg-2016.html
[4] https://www.bundestag.de/de/parlament/plenum/sitzverteilung_18wp/sitzverteilung18/245230

are drawn by lot so as to give an equal opportunity to speak to all delegates[5]. All party members can to submit proposals for decisions of the national delegate assembly. There is a conscious effort to support women's participation to achieve as equal a participation level as possible. This is done, for example, through a quota system, in which all positions in the party must be filled with at least 50% women, and gender-separated speakers' list at assemblies, which are called up in turns, ensuring that at least 50% of speakers are women.

Since its foundation, the Green Party has seen itself as an alternative to traditional parties, which was exemplified by their stance of grass-roots democracy (*Basisdemokratie*). Members participation is seen as key to the identification of the members with the party, and this view is and always has been part of the parties (self-)image (Heinrich & Spitz 2014). However, the party still has the largest proportion of passive members, as 55% do not participate at all, compared to an average of 47% across all parties (Treibel 2012). This seems surprising given the social-movements roots of the party – but we do not know how this was measured, or what the definition of 'active' members is. It could be that members of the Green Party have a higher threshold for what they consider to be 'participation'.

The role of the members is traditionally very strong, and the party has implemented several measures to prevent oligarchisation. This included the requirement for MPs to rotate (swap seats with their seconds halfway through the term in parliament), and a strict division between party internal and public offices, so that members of the executive board could not also be MPs (Rudzio 2015). In the wake of their failure to re-enter the Bundestag in 1990, some of these regulations were softened, though not altogether abolished (Frankland 2008). While the imperative mandate and rotation are no longer requirements, until this day the accumulation of too much power in any one person is prevented through a cap on positions: only a third of the members of the executive board may also be MPs, and leaders of parliamentary groups or members of governments beyond the regional level may not be on the executive board of the party as well. The role of the executive board is fairly weak in comparison to those of other parties. As Heinrich et al. (2002) argue, members are not in favour of directly electing the national executive board, as this would give them too strong a mandate.

On the other hand, the local branches have an important role in the parties' decision-making processes. In line with the German Political Parties Act, the parties' highest decision-making body is a national delegate assembly, to which each local branch sends delegates based on the number of their members. During the Kosovo conflict[6] in 1999, 44 of the local branches forced an extraordinary national assembly to decide about the parties' stance towards military interventions. Part of the government group and realists supported this intervention, but large parts of the party – especially those with roots in the peace movement – opposed them. The assembly finally decided against the favoured solution of the party leadership, which was followed by most of their MPs. This can be seen as a display of the power that party members have over policy and government activity of the party (Switek 2012).

The party makes decisions through several routes, the most important of which is the national delegate assembly (Thuermer 2015). Several party bodies, such as the executive board, national task forces, the youth organisation, local branches, but also 20 members collectively, are entitled to

---

[5] Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen. 2015. Grüne Regeln (Satzung). Retrieved from https://www.gruene.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/Satzung/150425_-_Satzung_Bundesverband.pdf
[6] A NATO-deployment of armed troops to gain control over the Kosovo area, and the first deployment of German armed troops in a foreign war since WW2

submit proposals. Typically, the executive board will draft lead proposals, which are then amended through change proposals submitted by these groups. A commission is elected specifically for the task of negotiating the proposals. This 'proposal committee' is supported by the executive board, and makes process recommendations about how the proposals should be treated. These include options such as including a proposal, including parts of it, having the assembly vote upon it, or passing it on to a more suitable position, such as a parliamentary group. It is important to note that the committee does not make suggestions as to how delegates should vote – it only suggests how the voting should be structured. The final decision is always made by the delegate assembly.[7]

Online Participation

Since the party was founded before the World Wide Web was invented, all its processes are designed around co-presence, representation and on paper. The party uses common communication methods such as emails, mailing lists and an outward facing website (Heimrich 2013). It has also experimented with online participation, such as an online portal for election campaigns (Heinrich & Spitz 2014), or one of the first online assemblies. This was a successful attempt to make binding decisions online, which was not repeated as it was lacking in two important aspects of physical assemblies: social interactions and media representation (Westermayer 2003). Technology is being adopted into the parties' processes, though initially in purely administrative ways. For example, the statutes stipulate that proposals for national assemblies must be sent to all local branches ahead of the assembly. Instead of sending files of paper, this is now done by email. The party set up an internal online platform, the *Wurzelwerk,* in 2009. Initially designed as an internal social network, is was subsequently transformed into an information portal, and superseded by the *Grünes Netz* (Green Network), a single sign-on portal that allows access to a series of tools, one of which is the *Wurzelwerk*, but also includes an appointment finder, etherpads, a sharepic generator, and other tools that can be useful for members[8]. Different from other parties, it is important to note that the Green Party online portal is accessible for members only, while most other party portals are also open to their supporters or the general public (Heimrich 2013).

One element that was added to the portal in 2014 is the *Antragsgrün* (proposal green), a tool that allows members to submit proposals for national assemblies. This was initially simplifying the administrative process, as proposals had previously been sent by letter, then fax, and most recently by email. Submitting them through an online platform made the process easier both for members and administrators (Thuermer et al. 2016). On their national delegate assembly in November 2016, the party made an important decision about the future of this tool: The submission process was amended, so that the person who sends the proposal does not simply list the 20 supporters necessary for individual proposals, but each of the supporters has to validate their support by logging into the tool and clicking a 'support'-button for each proposal. The suggestion and subsequent discussion of this process amendment showed how the change of technology has also changed the perception of the process – this will be discussed in more detail below.

One thing that the party does not do is hold online discussions. Members use social media platforms such as Facebook to coordinate, form groups and discuss amongst those, but the discussion functions on party internal platforms, though technically possible, are not used. This is a conscious decision, as holding discussions that not all members may be able to access is perceived as exclusionary, and as such not compatible with the parties' ideals for participation (Thuermer et al. 2016).

---

[7] For more detail on the process, see Thuermer 2015
[8] https://www.gruene.de/ueber-uns/2016/das-gruene-netz.html

Other, less formal parts of the discussion process are happening online. Specifically, the party holds frequent grass-roots surveys, which are designed to gather views from members on specific issues. The results of these surveys are in turn used as the foundation for lead proposals and debates. As part of a wider proposal about online participation, the delegate assembly in November 2016 decided to hold these surveys regularly amongst the membership. Members can respond to these surveys both online and offline. However, since the invitations to the surveys are only sent to members who have registered an email address with the party, the number of members who want to respond to the survey on paper is very low.

The party is now actively working towards more, and more formal, ways of letting their members participate online. This is challenging for multiple reasons:

1. Scale and transparency: The parties' processes are simply not designed to be implemented at scale. The way proposals are amended lead to 2,200 change proposals at the last delegate assembly (in June 2017), all of which have to be negotiated by an eight-person-strong proposal committee. The amount of proposals that are submitted means, that it becomes impossible for delegates to actually read all of them, and be familiar with the text of the proposals they are ultimately voting upon. This can potentially reduce the perceived legitimacy of the decisions.

2. Perceptions of democracy: Party members, especially from the two opposing wings, have differing perceptions of grass-roots democracy. While the policy-level conflict between the wings has been mostly resolved, or is continuously managed, the underlying ideological differences remain; also, the ideological is not the only divide in the party, as others, such as between cities and rural branches, may become more relevant in the future. A change to the way in which decisions are made could lead to a conflicts about the modes and purpose of participation, if different groups in the party have incompatible expectations.

3. Equality of participation opportunities: The party wants on the one hand to use online participation in order to allow more members to participate, but at the same time to stay true to their ideal of equal opportunities. Online participation may advantage members who already use the internet for participation over those who do not, and create new or deepen existing divisions.

The history and grass-roots ideals of the Green Party, as well as their commitment to online participation to increase inclusion, make it an ideal case to study the effects of the implementation of online decision-making methods.

Opportunities and Obstacles to Online Participation

In order to understand the challenges that the Green Party faces, it is important to recognise factors that influence the context, such as democratic decision-making, and the way 'democracy' is understood by party members; the situation of political parties in Germany, which are legally obliged to meet certain minimum criteria that define how they function; and the digital divide, which affects how individuals may or may not be able to use online technology for participation.

Democratic Decision-making

Dahl describes democracy as the "process of making collective and binding decisions" (1989, p.5), which are based on equality: If all members of a group are equal, then they all ought to have the same influence on decisions that affect them. At its core, democratic decision-making is about ensuring legitimacy of results through processes. Equality among participants is a key requirement, as only decisions that everyone has had the same influence on will be perceived as legitimate, and

thus accepted by those it affects. Consequently, inequalities between participants may weaken the legitimacy of decisions. However, equality should be understood as equality of opportunity, not of circumstances, as the latter would be impossible to achieve in practice.

The main distinction between types of democratic decision-making is the mode in which the decisions are made: through discussion, with the aim of achieving consensus amongst all participants, or by vote, with specified majority rules; and whether participants are involved directly, or through representatives.

The role model for consensus decision making is Habermas' (1990 [1962]) 'ideal speech situation', in which some citizens – or the bourgeoisie – meet up in coffee houses to discuss politics and achieve consensus about issues. Pateman (1970) also argues that participation in itself educates citizens about democratic procedures, thus enabling them to participate more and better, and ultimately increase the legitimacy of decisions that are made. According to Cohen (2003), ideal deliberation is free, meaning participants respect results because they believe in their legitimacy, it is reasoned, as reason is the only thing that is criticised in the process, it is equal, in that every participant has the same status and rules do not give preference to any of them, and it is consensual, in that all participants have to agree to the final decision. Overall, consensus decision making means that the more people talk, the more they can agree on things, and the more democratic a decision will be perceived (Cohen 2003). However, deliberation also has certain limitations, such as the time and space required to deliberate in large groups. Also, where power imbalances between participants exist, these cannot typically be overcome through deliberation (Brent Edwards 2010).

Contrary to decisions by consensus, voting implies that different views are either irreconcilable, or that the time and effort required for creating a consensus is not worthwhile (Smith 2009). This is often the case in large democracies such as nation states, where debates in parliament – or society – are concluded by a vote. The main distinguishing factor then is who gets to vote, how voting is conducted, and how results are counted and measured, e.g. with a first-past-the-post system or proportional representation, or the kind of majority that must be achieved for certain decisions, such as two thirds of votes being required to change statutes or constitutions. Voting solves the main issues of deliberation, but has other shortcomings, especially in combination with direct participation, such as majority domination (Smith 2009).

Direct participation requires extensive knowledge and skill of participants. They must not only understand the process by which they make decisions, but ideally also the context and implications of the issues they are deciding about (Laird 1993). Representatives on the other hand are used to cope with the scale of polities. Since it is impossible in practice for everyone to participate in every decision (unless at very small scales), representation happens naturally, when those who participate represent those who do not. Thus, a system by which representatives are selected and accountable to their constituents is considered more democratic than self-selection of those who have the time, skill, or resources to participate (Dahl 1989).

Social movements – out of which the Green Party evolved – have different forms of making decisions. Often their ideals are deliberative, such as in the Occupy movement which decides about all issues in general assemblies. These contexts are not always perceived as 'democratic', as not all members have equal opportunity to participate, either in the event itself, or the discussion that happens there. This is due to inequalities, for example with regards to financial means, education, gender (Smith & Glidden 2012). Social movements have developed techniques to overcome these issues, such as the 'progressive stack', a way to order speakers' lists to support typically underrepresented speakers (Roth et al. 2014).

Each of these types of decision making comes with advantages and disadvantages, and ultimately organisations need to decide about their own terms and rules, based on their internal culture and ideology (Korte 2012; Thuermer et al. 2016). The Green Party Germany uses a mixture of representation (e.g. the delegate system for national assemblies) and direct participation (e.g. the general members' surveys). All decisions are made by vote, but with a preceding, extensive deliberation phase.

Online participation is seen as working in all four of these contexts. Deliberation is enabled through tools such as online forums (Wright & Street 2007) or argument mapping (Spada et al. 2014), and voting through a multitude of different applications (e.g. Agre 2002; Blum & Zuber 2015). There is an underlying assumption that through the internet, broader participation is possible, as it becomes easier for people to participate. However, parties are still important intermediaries, as they aggregate and process the views of their members. Thus, they are a crucial part of the democratic process that cannot be replaced by technology (Agre 2002).

Digital Divide

The digital divide has been discussed broadly and in many different contexts. The term generally refers to the divisions in society through use or non-use of the internet (Ferro et al. 2007). It has multiple layers, referring to access, age, and use of or benefits derived from use of the internet.

On a pure technology level, access or non-access to the internet was assumed to have a dividing effect: Those who could access the web had better and more information, and more opportunity to learn about and discuss issues. Hague & Loader (1999) recognise that providing hardware, internet access and training alone does solve the issue of unequal access, and that what would be required in addition is practical experience and use-cases in people's individual circumstances. The inequality of access was soon connected to underlying divides in socio-economic factors, such as income and education (DiMaggio & Hargittai 2001). Hargittai (2008) also showed how an individuals' socio-economic status mediates not only how they can access the internet, but also the benefit they can derive from using it. Along the same line, Halford & Savage (2010) argued that social inequalities that occur offline are perpetuated online, and Zhang (2010) showed how online participation requires technical capital, which is unequally distributed in itself, and based on financial and social capital, whose unequal distribution is already the source of inequalities in offline participation. Thus, those who are already disadvantaged offline stay disadvantaged when they use the internet. However, internet use can also help build up capital among marginalised groups (Brock et al. 2010), and Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2010) showed that online and offline activities "are highly complementary and mutually supportive".

Further divides were shown by Ferro et al. (2007), who discussed the division through different skill levels, even if access is provided. They showed that IT skills as a requirement for participation were acquired mainly through self-learning or a specific requirement to learn. This is also supported by Vowe (2014), who showed in a long term study of internet adoption in Germany that the strongest explanatory factor for differences in internet use was habit: Only those who are already used to using the web for other things will also adopt it for political participation. Age is important in this context, as habits form with age, and those who were older when the web spread will be less likely to change already existing habits. Benefits for those who use the internet for participation are mostly in the area of political information and discussion, and the group that benefits most, dubbed 'digital citizens', are males in their mid-twenties, with university education, no children and low income.

In the context of the Green Party, three of these factors are important: age, since their membership is growing older; skills, as political participation in itself is already demanding, and even more so when conducted online; and social capital, as party-internal networks influence the information members have access to, and how they can participate, both online and offline.

Mobilisation, Reinforcement, Replacement

Equality in participation processes is particularly important to the Green Party. They do expect online participation to change the types of members who participate, and the way in which they do so. After all, that is the purpose of introducing the new methods. Specifically, the party leadership would like more members to participate, e.g. encourage currently inactive members to become active, and also recruit more members who should use these new tools.

In the literature, the intended effect is described as **mobilisation.** Ward et al. (2002) predicted its occurrence based on the participatory opportunities offered by emails in the late '90s, calling it "deepening" or "widening" participation. They argued that party members could use emails to communicate their views to the party elite, and saw this as an opportunity to involve "the house-bound, such as the elderly, single parents and the disabled" (2002, p.202). This is supported by Kerr & Waddington (2014), who argued that by motivating inactive members to become active, organisations can increase diversity in their decision-making, especially where under-represented groups are concerned. Both Ward et al. (2002) and Jensen (2013) found that younger persons were easier to recruit online than offline, as they are more likely to participate politically through the Internet. Lusoli et al. (2002) described this as an 'equalisation'-effect, balancing the powers of individual party members with groups within the party, and argue that use of the internet may make it easier to challenge dominant actors. But Emmer et al. (2011) concluded that political participation slightly increased with the rise of the internet, but there was no significant mobilisation of previously inactive citizens. Overall, there is broad evidence that mobilisation effects do occur – but it does not seem to apply to the same group, or a coherent group at all.

When an organisation offers new forms of participation, even if it happens with a goal to mobilise new or inactive members, the new participation opportunities will also be picked up by existing active members. When already active members use these additional opportunities to enhance their participation, their influence can intensify. This can not only lead to (further) over-representation of this already active group, but also cause shifts of power between groups, if one group adopts better than another. Thus, existing divides can intensify following the introduction of new participation opportunities – this is described as **reinforcement.** The term has been used in varying contexts and with different definitions. Introduced by Margolis et al. (1997) it refers to the replication of power structures when parties adopt internet technology. They concluded that drastic changes to the political system through the internet are possible, but unlikely, because those with most funds will dominate the new space, thus replicating the existing power balance. Norris (2001) further developed the theory, and while investigating the claim that new online participation opportunities could either reinforce or mobilise citizens' participation, found only evidence for reinforcement. The same effect is described by Lusoli et al. (2002), leading to a Matthew-effect ('The one who has will be given more'). For example, an online election in Germany held in 2001, in parallel to the state election in Mecklenburg, showed that those voting online were more likely to be male, higher educated, and younger than those voting offline (Kersting 2014) – the same group that Vowe (2014) identified as 'digital citizens'.

Lastly, new opportunities to participate do not necessarily lead to change in participation intensity at all. It is perfectly possible for the new process to simply replace similar offline activities that are still conducted by the same persons and groups. Ward et al. (2002; 2003) found this effect, in the way

already predisposed new members joined the Liberal Democrats through the internet, rather than signing up with a party office, and concluded that the internet would not have any dramatic influence (Ward et al. 2003, p.1). Jensen (2013) refers to this effect of one kind of media replacing another to fulfil the same role as '**replacement**'.

Mobilisation and reinforcement are typically seen as opposites. Mobilisation is associated with the optimistic view that the internet will increase participation, against the more pessimistic views in the digital divide literature, which pose that only those already better off actually use these benefits (Norris 2001; Spada et al. 2015). However, Vissers & Stolle (2014) argue that these effects are not mutually exclusive, but can be observed simultaneously for different groups. They found that internet use reinforced existing advantages (those already politically active did more online), and simultaneously mobilised a previously disengaged group.

The same applies to political parties, where young members – more used to and thus eager to do things online – might be mobilised through the introduction of online participation, while older active members might transfer some of their previous offline activity to the new platform. When young, active members use the new platform to intensify their participation, this might increase their influence on party decisions in the process. This would mean simultaneous mobilisation (of new young members), reinforcement (of active young members) and replacement (for older active members). A similar effect has been observed, for example by Kerr & Waddington (2014), when online participation methods were introduced, both to replace some of the previous offline methods, and increase activity of under-represented groups. Both of these goals were achieved, but not as expected: Already active members quickly transferred some of their activity to the new participation platform, pointing to a process of replacement, and the overall proportion of active members, and their respective activities, increased only very slowly, indicating a low level of mobilisation over time. Ward et al. (2002) also found counterintuitive results in this area, stating that the online methods that encourage most enthusiasm are least attractive for members in practice. Spada et al. (2015) found that the introduction of online voting significantly increased voting turn-out, and included 8% of voters that would not have voted without the online process. However, those who were mobilised belonged to an already advantaged part of the society (being male internet users with above average education and income). This can be seen as evidence that while one group was mobilised, another's existing advantage was reinforced.

Gerl et al (2017) investigated whether mobilisation or 'normalisation' (replacement) occurred during the introduction of an online participation tool in one of the state branches of the Green Party Germany. They found that internet skills were the most important differentiator for online participation, and that already active members used the platform the most. There was no evidence of mobilisation of previously inactive members through the online tool. Instead, those who are very active online were already very active offline, so that transferring participation online lead to no change of the underlying power structure. However, the tool in question had no statutory role in making binding decisions, and thus the overall influence of the process was fairly low.

In short, mobilisation theory argues that more participation opportunities make participation broader by drawing in previously inactive persons; reinforcement theory argues that existing divides are deepened and participation becomes more unequal; and replacement theory argues that online methods do not actually change anything, as online participation methods simply replace previously existing offline methods, without affecting the underlying power structures. The Green Party aims to achieve mobilisation, to include more members in their processes; replacement, to bring previously offline process online and make them more efficient; and prevent reinforcement, as all members should still have equal participation opportunities.

Methodology

Based on the above issues, we aim to answer the following questions regarding the introduction of online participation in the Green Party Germany:

1. What are the *conflicts*?
2. What are the *opportunities and risks*?
3. How likely are *mobilisation, reinforcement or replacement* to occur?

To answer these questions, a mixed methods approach is taken, following several stages of the introduction of the new online participation processes within the national branch of the party. These online processes include the verification or proposal supporters through the party-internal portal, and the grass-roots survey, which is regularly conducted among members to inform policy debates and decisions.[9]

Observations

Participant observation was conducted at the parties' national delegate assembly in November 2016, where both of these new processes were discussed and decided. The assembly was focused on the topic of social justice, and preceded by a period of motion proposals, discussions and negotiations. The most relevant discussions for the purpose of this work were not the policy but the process decisions that were made (or not made) at the assembly. Specifically, the party discussed three proposals concerning participation, two of which were about online processes.

One proposal included the introduction of a set of new participation methods, such as the regular grass-roots survey that will be held at least annually to prepare debates about key topics, and a grass-roots demand, which is a completely new process by which 250 members can collectively demand some (re-)action from the national executive board. A second proposal was concerned with the process for the development of the new election manifesto for the next general election. It changed the process for proposal submissions, such that the supporters of an individual members' proposal need to individually log into the party-internal network to support each proposal separately, instead of confirming their support informally to the proposal owner. Lastly, a suggested change to the statutes would have increased the number of members needed to support a proposal from 20 to 60. Both proposals about online participation were accepted, while the statutes change was declined.

These three proposals lead to discussions about the way the Green Party conducts participation, and which values and rules should govern it, both at the assembly and in the subsequent interviews. Observation notes were taken throughout the three days of the assembly, and some of the debates were recorded to allow transcription and analysis of the arguments used.

Interviews

In addition, a total of 11 interviews were conducted with participants in the discussion about these proposals, either on the parties' online platform or at the assembly. Participants were recruited at the assembly and afterwards by email. Some were contacted through their local branches, as they had not published any contact details online. Interviews were conducted in person and over Skype, and later transcribed for analysis. The goal was to gain a deeper understanding of members' views of the proceedings and the proposals, as well as their views of party-internal democracy.

The age distribution was very balanced, with participants between 18 and 62 years old, slightly younger than the party overall. The gender balance was near equal, at 45:55%, and thus with a
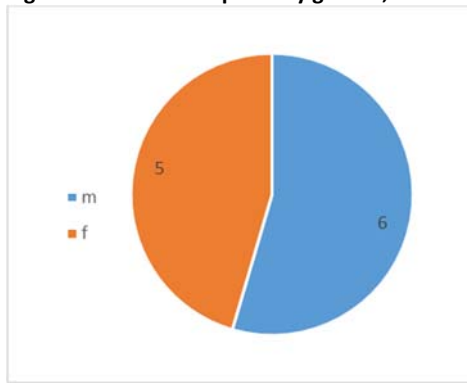
---

[9] All fieldwork was carried out by the first author in the context of their PhD Thesis.

slightly higher percentage of women than in the party overall, which is about 38% (Niedermayer 2016).

Figure 1   **Participants by age; N = 11**
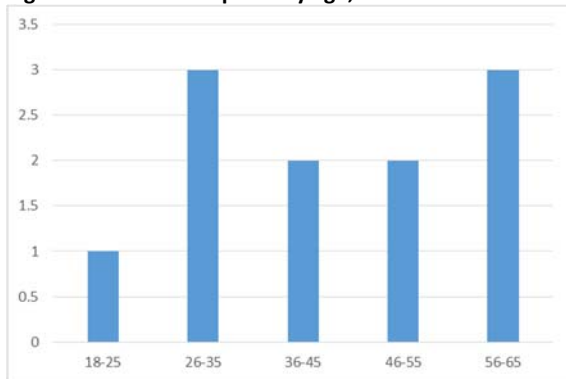
Figure 2   **Participants by gender; N = 11**

Regarding their position in the party, participants held positions or mandates at different levels. This is not surprising, as positions on local level are typical for active members, and these members were more likely to participate in this discussion. There is a slight over-representation of participants leaning towards the left wing of the party. Although there is no reliable data on the size of the wings, they are consistently described as broadly balanced, somewhere between 20 and 30% of members in each.

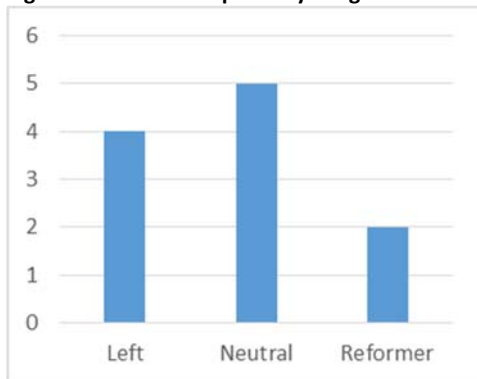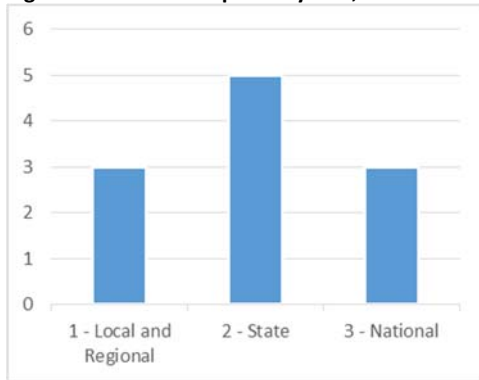**Figure 3**   **Participants by wing association; N = 11**

Figure 4   **Participants by role; N = 11**

Their self-reported IT and internet skills are roughly normally distributed.

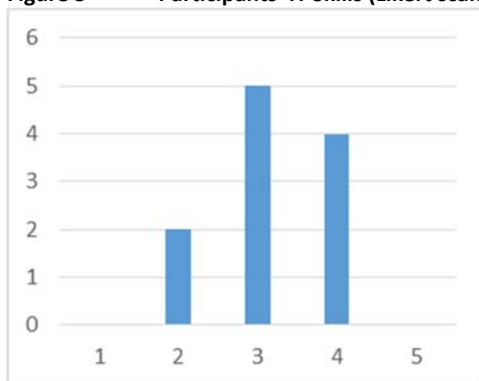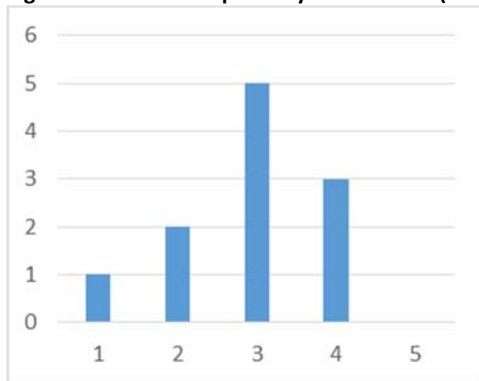**Figure 5**   **Participants' IT Skills (Likert scale); N = 11**

**Figure 6**   **Participants by internet use (Likert scale); N = 11**

Most participants (7/11) live in cities, in well distributed areas in Germany (across both North / South and East / West axis). In line with the membership of the party, the participants are mostly highly educated, with more than 50% holding a university degree.

Figure 7 **Participants by state of residence; N = 11**

Figure 8 **Participants by degree type; N = 11**
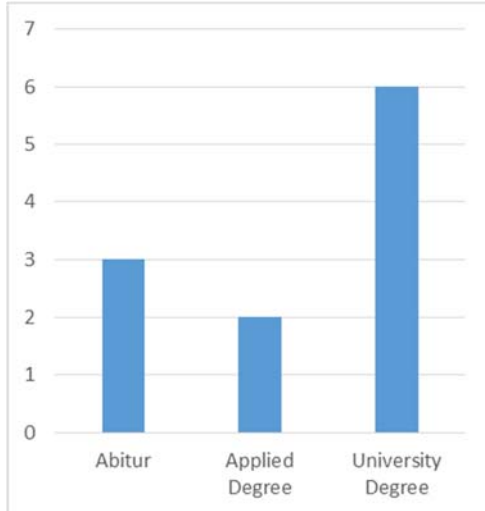
Analysis

Both observations and interviews were coded thematically, with the broad themes being attitudes towards participation, views on democracy, factors there were perceived as relevant for participation, views on different forms of participation, views on the Green Party and what participation means in the context of the party, and views on technology and how it is and should be used. The results were used to define the problem space of democratic decision-making, participation in general, and online participation specifically.

The analysis of survey data is not completed yet, and the results are used only to supplement the qualitative data where appropriate.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the interviews and observations, we find that there are multiple interlinked conflicts in the party, concerning participation both *offline* and *online*.

Conflicts

We found two main conflicts, which are clearly interlinked. Both concern the way party members support and submit proposals. The tool at the core of these conflicts is the proposal submission system, which has been in use for several years. This was now extended through an online

verification process, which was very controversial. However, it appears that at the core of these conflicts is not the use of technology, but the process it is supposed to support.

Barriers through Technology

Both our interviews and observations showed how the proposal submission tool, which is used to submit and track the progress of proposals for national assemblies, is seen through very different lenses. It is online, and therefore potentially exclusive for members with limited internet access or skills. Using the tool on the other hand is described as easy enough, and its capacity to make the proposal process transparent is appreciated. The existing functionality can be used to make the negotiation process – in which the proposal committee discusses what should happen with each proposal with those who submitted them – more transparent. For that reason, it is mostly seen as an opportunity, which is not yet sufficiently used. The status of proposals is not updated in real-time, and the procedural recommendations – the results of the negotiation process – are not displayed on the tool at all, so the tool is not as useful for delegates as it could be.

While the proposal tool itself, despite some requests for improvements, is quite universally liked, the online verification process is a distinct **conflict**. Its introduction was approved only after a debate about the complexity of the process. The new process requires not just one of twenty, but all twenty members who support a proposal to navigate the online system, with some members claiming that this requirement would exclude members. For others, this verification is a necessity to ensure the statutory implementation of the proposal process, which stipulates that „Eligible to make a proposal are (…) 20 members who collectively submit a proposal."[10] This **conflict** follows the lines of the digital divide. Members assume that those who are older and have less technical skills will be excluded from the process. Because not everyone can participate with the same ease, the legitimacy of the process is doubted, with one interviewee claiming that this constitutes "a sensitive restriction of members' rights". However, none of the interview participants struggled to follow the process themselves. Other participants were convinced that the process was less legitimate in its previous form, as there was no control mechanism to ensure that those who were listed as supporters were actually supporting proposals. This shows that changes in the process itself can lead to conflicts, and the democratic legitimacy of the process is doubted because of the change through technology.

The Medium changes the Process

The debates does not concern the question whether things happen online or offline so much as it concerns how the medium changes the process itself. In the past, the above mentioned statutory rule about 'twenty members collectively' was interpreted as signatures, and that is how the process was implemented ever since the party was founded. Supporters always had to sign the submissions individually, and signatures were collected on paper. The online verification process is now implemented as a perfect equivalent of the old offline process. Instead of signing on a sheet of paper, members sign in to an online platform and click to support proposals there, digitally. In theory, this would have made the process easier, if it were not for the process that was used in practice in the interim.

Through the internet, the process has shifted, and instead of collection signatures, members collected support through various routes: in meetings, by email or through social media platforms. Then, only one person submitted the proposal, simply listing the 20 members who supported it. This was done by email, and later through the proposal tool. The large amount of proposals and supporters made it impossible to manually validate all submissions, which in turn made the process easier. Now, with the introduction of the verification process, arguments are not only brought

---

[10] Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen. 2015. Grüne Regeln (Satzung). §12(3)

forward against the online process, but much more so against the offline counterpart, which is the same as the original process. In the view of some members, the online verification process re-introduces a complication that had previously been *solved* by technology. Because they did not have to collect signatures for some time, they are no longer willing to do this additional work. The problem is not that it happens online – the problem is that it happens at all. This points to a new expectation of the process in general, which is an effect of the introduction of technology.

This change is twofold: The participation itself is happening online (with an offline alternative), and the way participants are recruited to support these proposals is also expected to happen online, through email, social media and the like, and enabled by the party-internal networks. All of this shows how the use of technology changes the process itself, and how legitimacy needs to be re-defined as a result of the introduction of a new tool.

Opportunities and Risks

The opportunities of online participation were seen in its potential to increase participation in general, and specifically for groups who are currently not as involved in the party as maybe they could or would like to be. Members both in interviews and observations expect that online participation will be easy to use, make processes faster and more scalable, and thus help mobilise their fellow members. However, none of them were particularly keen on using online methods themselves. While all of these are possible outcomes, in their totality, the sum of expectations should be seen as a risk. Further risks are the exclusion of members with limited resources and skills, and an increased importance of networks and resulting increased imbalance in the member base.

Exclusion from Participation

The parties' offline participation processes are prone to be affected by inequalities, such as financial resources, which mediate where and when members can attend events; networks which mediate access to information and informal participation; and time spent on participation, especially for those members who are employed by the party or their representatives, and thus can spend the majority of their time working on politics.

Our interviews showed that most members are aware of at least of some of these issues, though mostly if they are affected themselves: Members from rural branches are more aware of the difficulties in meeting fellow Greens than those in big cities; members with little financial resources are the only ones talking about money as an issue; and surprisingly, especially given the roots of the Green Party in the women's rights movement, only women talk about gender as a factor for participation. These inequalities have been well documented in the literature (e.g. Smith & Glidden 2012).

For online participation, this appears to be the other way around: members we interviewed were acutely aware of at least some of the elements of the digital divide, mostly with regards to age and skills, and want to actively prevent their disadvantaged fellow members from being excluded. They expect that online participation will make participation more inclusive and open new routes for those who are currently disadvantaged. Many participants have described their own positive experience with online participation, such as using mailing lists to develop proposals, or finding supporters for their proposals on social media, and no-one experienced or feared negative effects that online participation might have *on themselves*. All hopes and fears were on behalf of others. For example, grass-roots members assume that online methods would be great for the party leadership, while those higher up in the hierarchy expect great benefits for grass-roots members. Those with no children assume that it would be great for parents, older members assume it will be great for younger members, as they are constantly online anyway, while young members think that older

members might be able to participate better through the web, since they do not need to travel as much.

With regards to our research questions, we see this as a **risk**: Existing offline exclusion, though obvious for the observer, is not considered by members, while online exclusion is considered very carefully. This puts the party in a difficult position if – as previous studies suggest – online participation cannot deliver against the expectations for inclusion. Moreover, if members only see the advantages of online participation as 'great – for somebody else', but do not see the opportunities that it provides for them personally, there is a risk that they may not use it at all.

Because nobody should be excluded, there is a universal demand for parallel on- and offline routes to participation among participants in interviews and at the assembly: Whenever an online opportunity is introduced, a parallel offline method is expected. To a large extent, these concerns are for others who may not be able to use online participation. Rather than expecting disadvantages through the new processes, the non-availability of advantages that some members might face if they are unable to use these new processes is perceived as a disadvantage. For example, if some members were not to use the online proposal submission system, sending proposals by post would take longer, real-time communication would not be possible, and therefore members who used this option would have a disadvantage. These disadvantages should be avoided, which causes the slightly odd expectation of some members that there should be offline alternatives which have the same ease of use as the online procedures. This is a **risk**, because given the effects that are possible online – speed, scale, low costs – this expectation can only be disappointed. This impossibility might nevertheless reduce the perceived legitimacy of online participation.

On one hand, members are hardly aware of their current advantages, unless they do not have them, but they also do not feel that online participation would inhibit their participation in any way. All our interviewees already found coping mechanisms for disadvantages they have, such as financial support through positions they hold, or networks that help them recruit support when it is needed. The perceptions and assumptions members overall have of inequalities in participation point to a case of privilege-blindness (Ferber 2012; Current & Tillotson 2017): Only those who have a particular disadvantage are able to see it, while those who do not, are not aware of their own privilege. For offline participation, this means that party members who are male, well off financially, or from cities, do not realise that their counterparts struggle to participate without these contexts. This can be seen as a **risk**, if members are no longer aware of all the advantages they already have. As O'Hara (2011) has argued, this could reduce the perceived legitimacy of processes, and thus may affect the acceptance of newly introduced online processes.

Importance of Networks

There are several existing divides within the party, the most obvious of which is between the two wings, who reflect the ideological differences in the party. In addition, task forces work on different topics, and local branches are the main route for participation through representatives, as all delegates are elected on this lowest tier of the party. All of these constitute different networks within the party.

Our interviews showed that all of these three groups constitute different networks, access to which mediates participation. Members felt that these networks are relevant for several reasons, such as access to information and discussions that they otherwise would not have, particularly concerning the party wings, and their discussion of proposals for national delegate assemblies. The size of networks is important for how easily members find support for proposals, if they want to make individual ones. This is especially important for members whose own branch is in a rural area. These

branches are smaller, have less financial resources, and members are dispersed across a wider area. This creates barriers for personal contact, especially for those members who are not able to travel frequently, for example due to lack of financial resources or disabilities.

While the different networks in the party have been widely documents (Frankland 2008; Switek 2012), the diversity in responses in our interviews suggests a new effect of the internet: the distribution of contacts any one member can have seems to have grown wider. There appear to be more members with much larger networks, but still a significant number of members with fairly small ones. Members' experiences are that while previously networks evolved around local groups and escalated to the national branch, it is now easier to connect with members across the country who are interested in the same topic or hold similar values. This does not happen on party-mediated platforms though, but rather on private websites such as Facebook, or through mailing lists which may or may not be hosted by the party. As a result, the role of local branches seems to decrease, while the wings and task forces gain more traction.

This is both a **risk** and an **opportunity**: Since local branches are the route for formal participation, this might be reduced while informal or not institutionalised participation is increased. Meanwhile, a members' network size influences how they can rally support for proposals, and if network sizes indeed diverge, there is a risk of increased disadvantages for those who are less well set-up to build networks – those in rural areas, with little financial resources, and less skills for internet use – and an opportunity for those who are well equipped to make best use of the internet to expand their networks. This, in combination, may lead to a reinforcement effect.

Conclusion

Returning to our initial questions, we can identify two main risks. One of these – the potential exclusion of members from participatory processes due to the digital divide – the party is very aware of. This is addressed, for example through offering parallel offline processes. Another, likely bigger, risk can be seen in the potential for non-use. The fact that party members describe benefits of online participation primarily for other groups – those they assume have a requirement for this form of participation – suggests that they are not aware of the benefits online participation may offer for themselves. Especially for those online participation options that are not formally embedded into the decision-making processes, such as the grass-roots survey, there is a danger that this will not be used by a representative group of members. This is especially dangerous given that invitations to these surveys are already biased in that they are only sent by email. The party should at least test to which degree the views of members who participate online in this form are the same as those who are excluded through the medium of using emails. Otherwise, the use of the surveys may well lead to a reinforcement effect for those members who are already online, as their influence on the policy development process would be magnified. However, whether this is the case would depend on the formal use of the survey results. The danger of a reinforcement effect with regards to the online verification is lower, since it is part of a very formal process. Members are already used to collecting supporters for their proposals, and have established routes to do this. Although some members may indeed not be able to use the tool, the offline route and the support the party provides should be sufficient to enable all members to participate seamlessly.

Overall, the opportunities provided through online participation, particularly the possibility for more members to get involved, seem worthwhile to take these risks. Certainly this is the dominant view among party members. This goal enjoys broad support from the grass-roots members as well as party leadership, since the main goals – inclusion and mobilisation – are closely aligned with the parties' ideology of grass-roots participation. The processes are expected to become faster and more

scalable, both of which are likely to come to pass. The only caveats may be that expectations may be too high, and that too much mobilisation could have a negative effect on scalability, for example if processes get overloaded due to too many proposals being submitted.

The views on online verification appear to be incompatible, as barriers can either be raised or not, a tool used or not. Apart from the underpinning issue around the change of the process regardless of technology, the argument to limit online use does not speak so much to a fear of reinforcement or hope for mobilisation, as it shows fear of further disadvantaging those who already struggle to participate. This is a kind of inverse reinforcement: not strengthening an advantage, but reinforcing an existing disadvantage. Whether this is what would happen with a fully implemented online process remains to be seen.

Concerning the likelihood of mobilisation, reinforcement or replacement, it appears that replacement will be the most common effect. Reinforcement often suggests that simply because things happen online, advantages are reinforced. This could be the case, especially where online networks are concerned. However, reinforcement can only occur if the underlying power-structures change, too. Whether processes are carried out online or offline is not as important as the influence a process can have to begin with. If online participation methods are not embedded in overall decision-making procedures, their value for participants – and the influence they have, and can therefore reinforce online – is limited. As we have shown for the surveys, this may well be the case. What became clear in this context though is that to determine whether reinforcement or replacement occurs, it is not sufficient to look at the mode of participation (online or offline) on its own.

Reinforcement, as the confirmation of existing divides, can only be meaningful if something happens *in addition* to what is already there – if the effect on the outcome grows stronger. Most studies only measure inequalities in participatory processes by a variety of typically socio-demographic factors, such as skills, age, or time, and combine these with their effect on participation (Gibson et al. 2000; Norris 2001), or how they affect influence (Kersting 2014). Replacement, on the other hand, implies that the same biases continue, but nothing else changes. One mode of participation is replaced by another, and the influence – or the underlying inequalities or power structures? – stay the same. Most studies measure whether people do one thing or another, but not whether it happens in addition or instead of something else.

What our analysis suggests is that the way online participation is embedded into existing processes (the binding nature and possible influence to be had through the process) and the effect of and reasons for (non-)participation need to be considered as well. By combining the mode of participation (how it happens), its influence (the effect it has) and the underlying inequalities (the reasons for non-/participation and its intensity), we expect to get a clearer and more realistic picture of the true effects, which we will investigate in the next phase of the project. For now, the biggest risk for online participation seems to be neither of these effects, but rather disinterest and non-use, especially if online participation methods are not embedded in already existing processes. Ideological beliefs that members hold about equality in participation processes may not be sufficient to encourage behaviour change, and with it, adoption of online participation.

Acknowledgement

Literature

Agre, P.E., 2002. Real-Time Politics: The Internet and the Political Process. *The Information Society*, 18(5), pp.311–331.

Blum, C. & Zuber, C.I., 2015. Liquid Democracy: Potentials, Problems, and Perspectives. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 24(2), pp.162–182.

Brent Edwards, D., 2010. Trends in Governance and Decision-Making: a democratic analysis with attention to application in education. *Policy Futures in Education*, 8(1), pp.111–125.

Brock, A., Kvasny, L. & Hales, K., 2010. Cultiural Appropriation of Technical Capital. *Information, Communication & Society*, 13(7), pp.1040–1059.

Cohen, J., 2003. Deliberation and democratic legitimacy. In D. Matravers & J. Pike, eds. *DEBATES IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY. An anthology*. London and New York: Routledge & The Open University, pp. 342–360.

Current, C.B. & Tillotson, E., 2017. Hipster racism and sexism in charity date auctions: individualism , privilege blindness and irony in the academy. *Gender and Education*, pp.1–10.

Dahl, R., 1989. Democracy and its Critics.

Van Dijk, J. a G.M., 2013. Digital Democracy: Vision and Reality. In *Public Administration in the Information Age: Revisited*. pp. 49–62.

DiMaggio, P. & Hargittai, E., 2001. From the "Digital Divide" to "Digital Inequality": Studying Internet use as Penetration Increases. *Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies, Princeton University*, 15, pp.1–23.

Emmer, M., Vowe, G. & Wolling, J., 2011. *Bürger online: die Entwicklung der politischen Online-Kommunikation in Deutschland*, Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft.

Ferber, A.L., 2012. The Culture of Privilege: Color-blindness, Postfeminism, and Christonormativity. *Journal of Social Issues*, 68(1), pp.63–77.

Ferro, E., Gil-Garcia, J.R. & Helbig, N., 2007. The digital divide metaphor: understanding paths to IT literacy. In *Electronic Government*. Springer, pp. 265–280.

Frankland, E.G., 2008. The Evolution of the Greens in Germany: From Amateurism to Professionalism. In E. G. Frankland, P. Lucardie, & B. Rihoux, eds. *Green Parties in Transition: The End of Grass-Roots Democracy?*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, pp. 19–42.

Fuchs, M., 2014. Facebook, Twitter und Co. in der deutschen Politik. *Der Bürger im Staat*, 64(4), pp.230–237.

Gerl, K., Marschall, S. & Wilker, N., 2017. Does the Internet Encourage Political Participation? Use of an Online Platform by Members of a German Political Party. *Policy & Internet*, 9999(Im Erscheinen).

Gibson, R. & Cantijoch, M., 2013. Conceptualizing and Measuring Participation in the Age of the Internet: Is Online Political Engagement Really Different to Offline? *The Journal of Politics*, 75(3), pp.701–716.

Gibson, R.K., Howard, P.E.N. & Ward, S., 2000. Social Capital, Internet Connectedness & Political Participation: A Four-Country Study. *International Political Science Association*.

Gil de Zúñiga, H. et al., 2010. Digital Democracy: Reimagining Pathways to Political Participation. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 7(1), pp.36–51.

Habermas, J., 1990. *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Hague, B.N. & Loader, B.D., 1999. Digital Democracy: an introduction. In B. N. Hague & B. D. Loader,

eds. *Digital Democracy. Discourse and Decision Making in the Information Age*. Routledge, pp. 3–22.

Halford, S. & Savage, M., 2010. Reconceptualizing Digital Social Inequality. *Information, Communication & Society*, 13(7), pp.937–955.

Hanel, K. & Marschall, S., 2014. Der Einsatz von Online-Tools durch Parteien – Am Beispiel von onlineantrag.spd.de. *Internet und Partizipation. Bürgergesellschaft und Demokratie 42*, pp.337–348.

Hargittai, E., 2008. The Digital Reproduction of Inequality. In D. Grusky, ed. *Social Stratification*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, pp. 936–944.

Heimrich, L., 2013. *Parteien digital: Mitgliederkommunikation im Zeitalter des Internets*. Technische Universität Ilmenau.

Heinrich, R., Lübker, M. & Biehl, H., 2002. *Parteimitglieder im Vergleich: Partizipation und Repräsentation*, Potsdam.

Heinrich, R. & Spitz, M., 2014. Relevanz gewinnt - Online-Partizipation im Wahlkampf bei den Grünen! In *Internet und Partizipation*. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, pp. 223–236.

Jacob, D., 2015. Every Vote Counts: Equality, Autonomy, and the Moral Value of Democratic Decision-Making. *Res Publica*, 21(1), pp.61–75.

Jensen, J.L., 2013. Political Participation Online: The Replacement and the Mobilisation Hypotheses Revisited. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 36(4), pp.347–364.

Kerr, A. & Waddington, J., 2014. E-Communications: An Aspect of Union Renewal or Merely Doing Things Electronically? *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 52(4), pp.658–681.

Kersting, N., 2014. Online Beteiligung -- Elektronische Partizipation--Qualitätskriterien aus Sicht der Politik. In *Internet und Partizipation*. Springer, pp. 53–87.

Kneuer, M., 2014. Mehr oder weniger demokratische Qualität durch das Internet? *Der Bürger im Staat*, 64, pp.196–205.

Korte, K.-R., 2012. So entscheiden Parteien: Umfeld-Bedingungen innerparteilicher Partizipation. *Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft, Sonderband*, (2012), pp.267–286.

Laird, F.N., 1993. Participatory Analysis, Democracy, and Technological Decision Making. *Science, Technology & Human Values*, 18(3), pp.341–361.

Lietz, H. et al., 2014. When Politicians Talk: Assessing Online Conversational Practices of Political Parties on Twitter. *eprint arXiv:1405.6824*, pp.285–294.

Lilleker, D.G. & Jackson, N. a., 2010. Towards a More Participatory Style of Election Campaigning: The Impact of Web 2.0 on the UK 2010 General Election. *Policy & Internet*, 2(3), pp.67–96.

Lusoli, W., Ward, S. & Gibson, R., 2002. Political organisations and online mobilisation: Different media - same outcomes? *New Review of Information Networking*, 8(1), pp.89–107.

Margolis, M., Resnick, D. & Tu, C.-C., 1997. Campaigning on the Internet - Parties and candidates on the World Wide Web in the 1996 primary season. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 2(1), pp.59–78.

Niedermayer, O., 2016. *Parteimitglieder in Deutschland: Version 2016-NEU*,

Norris, P., 2001. *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide*, Cambridge: Cambridge Universiy Press.

O'Hara, K., 2011. *Conservatism*, Reaktion Books.

Pateman, C., 1970. *Participation and Democratic Theory*, Cambridge University Press.

Raschke, J. & Heinrich, G., 1993. *Die Grünen: Wie sie wurden, was sie sind*, Bund-Verlag.

Roth, S., Saunders, C. & Olcese, C., 2014. Occupy as a free space - Mobilization processes and outcomes. *Sociological Research Online*, 19(1), pp.1–23.

Rothschild-Whitt, J., 1979. The Collectivist Organization: An Alternative to Rational-Bureaucratic Models. *American Sociological Review*, 44(4), p.509.

Rudzio, W., 2015. Innerparteiliche Demokratie oder Gesetz der Oligarchie? In *Das politische System der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, pp. 141–174.

Smith, G.C.N., 2009. *Democratic innovations: designing institutions for citizen participation*, Cambridge University Press.

Smith, J. & Glidden, B., 2012. Occupy Pittsburgh and the Challenges of Participatory Democracy. *Social Movement Studies*, 11(3–4), pp.288–294.

Spada, P. et al., 2014. A First Step toward Scaling-up Deliberation: Optimizing Large Group E-Deliberation using Argument Maps. *Under Review*, (June 2015), p.36.

Spada, P. et al., 2015. *Effects of the Internet on Participation: Study of a Public Policy Referendum in Brazil*.

Switek, N., 2012. Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen: zur Entscheidungsmacht grüner Bundesparteitage. In K.-R. Korte & J. Treibel, eds. *Wie entscheiden Parteien? Prozesse innerparteilicher Willensbildung in Deutschland (ZPol Sonderband 2012)*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, pp. 121–154.

Thuermer, G., 2015. *Differences in decision-making processes between web-native and non-web-native political parties*. University of Southampton.

Thuermer, G. et al., 2016. Internet use, in- and exclusion in decision-making processes within political parties. In *Proceedings of the 8th ACM Conference on Web Science*. Hannover: ACM New York, NY, USA, pp. 205–214.

Treibel, J., 2012. Was bedeutet innerparteiliche Willensbildung? Forschungsstand und theoretische Zugänge. In K.-R. Korte & J. Treibel, eds. *Wie entscheiden Parteien? Prozesse innerparteilicher Willensbildung in Deutschland (ZPol Sonderband 2012)*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, pp. 7–34.

Vissers, S. & Stolle, D., 2014. The Internet and new modes of political participation: online versus offline participation. *Information, Communication & Society*, 17(8), pp.937–955.

Vowe, G., 2014. Digital Citizens und Schweigende Mehrheit: Wie verändert sich die politische Beteiligung der Bürger durch das Internet? Ergebnisse einer kommunikationswissenschaftlichen Langzeitstudie. In *Internet und Partizipation*. Springer, pp. 25–52.

Ward, S., Gibson, R. & Lusoli, W., 2003. Online Participation and Mobilisation in Britain: Hype, Hope and Reality. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 56(4), pp.652–668.

Ward, S., Lusoli, W. & Gibson, R., 2002. Virtually participating: A survey of online party members. *Information Polity*, 7, pp.199–215.

Westermayer, T., 2003. Politische Online-Kommunikation unter Wirklichkeitsverdacht: Der Virtuelle Parteitag von Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen Baden-Württemberg. *kommunikation @ gesellschaft*, 4, pp.1–26.

Wright, S. & Street, J., 2007. Democracy, deliberation and design: the case of online discussion forums. *New Media & Society*, 9(5), pp.849–869.

Zhang, W., 2010. Technical Capital and Participatory Inequality in E-Deliberation. *Information, Communication & Society*, 13(7), pp.1019–1039.