

Examining internet use and civic voluntarism in Australian and Canada

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Abstract

Traditional studies of participation have argued that a citizen's propensity to participate in political activity is largely a factor of socioeconomic status, and measures related to that status. Specifically, studies have focused on resources – civic skills, money and free time – and exposure to mobilisation by political candidates or parties, as typified by Verba, Schlozman and Brady's (1995) civic voluntarism model. With the advent of the internet as a communication technology, there is a growing interest in how internet use is changing the nature of political participation – not just from 'offline' to online activities, but also how internet use can encourage or discourage traditional forms of participation, such as voting, party membership, contact with government officials, protest marches and petition signing. The emerging literature on the internet and participation is broadly split between two interests: online behaviours (e-participation); or internet use as an independent variable coexisting with the traditional predictors of offline participation. This exploratory study examines the effects of internet use on the relationship between civic skills, money and free time and several types of participation in Australia and Canada. It finds that the civic voluntarism model of participation is strongest among those who do not use the internet at all, and weakest among those who use the internet to inform themselves about politics. The inference from this result is that internet use may be having some effect in breaking the socioeconomic bias among politically active citizens.

Examining internet use and civic voluntarism in Australia and Canada

This study tests the effects of citizens' internet use on Verba, Scholzman and Brady's (1995) civic voluntarism model of political participation in Australia and Canada. It draws on the mainstream study of political participation to examine how internet use is affecting people's propensity to become politically active. Previous participation studies have focused on those traits common to participants in political life: access to wealth, high educational attainment, previous involvement in voluntary associations, church attendance, age, race and gender among them. Those traits of political participants – or predictors of political participation – are well established. The advent of the internet as a communications technology has offered hope that more citizens will become active in politics, and that the white, wealthy, well educated, middle aged archetype can be broken. While many studies of online political participation have observed a shift towards younger participants, to date few studies have examined the effects of internet use on participation within the framework of those mainstream participation studies. In doing so, this study contributes both to that literature and to the emerging field of the internet and political participation.

The political participation literature

The mainstream study of political participation has a long and fairly linear history. The largest studies have originated in the United States, with some comparative analysis, and have focused on the role of socioeconomic status (SES) in determining who participates in political activities and who does not. The literature is typified by Almond and Verba's (1963) *The Civic Culture*, Verba and Nie's (1972) *Participation in America*, Rosenstone and Hansen's (1993) *Mobilization, Participation and Democracy in America*, and Verba, et al.'s (1995) *Voice and Equality*. Drawing on those major empirical studies, a 'long list' of theorised predictors can be compiled (see Table 1). Combined, these studies are immense in scope and have been enormously influential to our general understanding of the processes of political engagement and participation.

Grouping the wide range of theorised determinants categorically, there is evident overlap between studies and over time. Socioeconomic status is the most enduring factor, although more recent studies have paid increasing attention to the effects of institutions, political circumstances and social networks in mobilising citizens into action. Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) summarise the move away from a primarily socioeconomic model of participation by observing that very few citizens participate in politics spontaneously. Socioeconomic resources can consequently be described as necessary but not sufficient conditions of participation. Mobilising forces are common but not necessary or sufficient conditions of participation. Citizens have the capacity to participate in politics without being mobilised, but they rarely do. On the contrary, even an enthusiastic, heavily mobilised citizen will find participation difficult without basic socioeconomic resources.

Verba et al.'s (1995) civic voluntarism model of political participation encompasses those basic socioeconomic resources, with some refinement. Rather than socioeconomic status (SES), they pinpoint a range of factors including money, free time and civic skills. These factors are differentially related with SES. Money, measured as income, is a key component of SES, and common to all studies since Almond and Verba (1963). 'Free time' describes "the residual time available to an individual after accounting for the hours spent doing necessary household tasks of all sorts including child care, working for pay including commuting and work taken home (for those in the work force), studying or going to school (for those taking courses towards a degree), and sleeping" (Verba et al. 1995, p.289). It becomes apparent, then, that free time is

Table 1: Theorised determinants of political participation in six major studies

	<i>Resources</i>	<i>Engagement</i>	<i>Mobilisation (by institution)</i>	<i>Mobilisation (by networks)</i>
<i>Almond & Verba (1963)</i>	Education Decision-making skills Gender	Family socialisation		
<i>Milbrath (1965)</i>	Social position	Personal factors	Political setting	Stimuli
<i>Verba & Nie (1972)</i>	Social status Age Race			Organisation/ community membership
<i>Verba, Nie & Kim (1978)</i>	Social status		Social/political conflict	
<i>Rosenstone & Hansen (1993)</i>		Attitudes Interests Identification Beliefs	Direct mobilisation	Indirect mobilisation
<i>Verba, Schlozman & Brady (1995)</i>	Time Money Civic skills	Psychological engagement		Recruitment

not necessarily associated with socioeconomic status. For instance, a retired pensioner likely has more free time than money. On the contrary, a 35 year old with full-time employment and two young children is likely to be relatively ‘cash-rich’ but time poor.

‘Civic skills’ are likewise not necessarily related with socioeconomic status. They comprise language, decision-making, public speaking, letter writing and planning competencies (Verba et al. 1995). Civic skills can largely be attained independently of socioeconomic resources: church attendance, for example, is more popular among African-Americans and women than Anglo-Saxon males, considered the embodiment of high socioeconomic status. Membership of a church is also not strongly related to family income; rather, it is distributed evenly among across all income categories (Verba et al. 1995). Educational attainment, however, is broadly related to both socioeconomic status and civic skills. Civic skills are therefore differentially distributed, just as they are differentially useful among participatory behaviours (Verba et al. 1995).

The second category of participatory factors is engagement. Engagement describes how a citizen feels about politics: the subjective feelings of political efficacy, identification with a party, interest in politics generally, as well as attitudes towards civic life, including civic duty and citizenship. Political efficacy measures the extent to which a citizen feels that he can achieve something within the political system, whether that protesting can effect a change in policy, or voting can be an expression of a political preference. Party identification – or partisanship – is a simple measure of a citizen’s attachment to any of the major political parties in a system. Political interest is likewise a straightforward measure of engagement and awareness of

politics. Civic attitudes are more complicated, measured commonly by the importance a citizen places on aspects of citizenship. Dalton (2008, p.30), for example, uses attitudes towards voting, military service, taxation, obedience to the law, social activity, government accountability, parochialism, consumerism and social understanding as proxies for citizenship norms. While some measures of engagement – particularly political interest and efficacy – increase with socioeconomic status, they nonetheless have a significant role in predicting participation after controlling for resources and civic skills (Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995, p.352).¹ Resources and engagement are interdependent in the process of participation:

It is not sufficient to know and care about politics. If wishes were resources, then beggars would participate. Political engagement, however, does not produce resources, and the resource-poor are less politically active than those who are better endowed with resources (Verba, Schlozman & Brady 1995, p.355).

As discussed, resources and mobilisation are related: “people participate in politics for a host of reasons, but mobilization makes citizen participation both more common and more consequential” (Rosenstone & Hansen 1993, p.37). There are two broad types of mobilisation: direct and indirect. Direct mobilisation describes the provision by political actors of opportunities to participate which would not otherwise exist: political party meetings, rallies, circulation of petitions and ‘get out the vote’ phone calls, for instance. This kind of mobilisation is contingent upon the political and institutional environment, including voter registration laws, electoral systems and political party structures. Laws which mandate voting, such as in Australia, have arguably the largest mobilising effect (Lijphart 1997). Indirect mobilisation refers to informal social networks: the influence of friends, family, colleagues and neighbours in encouraging participation. One example is an invitation to go along with a friend to a political party meeting. The internet, by enabling quick, easy and cheap diffuse communications, has the capacity to mobilise large numbers of citizens across time and space (Norris 2002).

Internet use and participation – an adapted civic voluntarism model

There are two gaps in the literature on internet use and political participation. One concerns the

There is an imperative to retest the civic voluntarism model of participation in the current era of prolific internet use. The majority of ‘internet effects’ studies have not drawn greatly on the existing political participation literature, particularly on the major studies by Almond and Verba (1963), Verba and Nie (1972), Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) and Verba et al. (1995). This study draws on those major contributions – but primarily on Verba et al.’s (1995) civic voluntarism thesis – to make several hypotheses about how internet use might affect participation: firstly, in terms of the time it takes to participate, and secondly, in terms of participatory behaviours being enacted online (or ‘e-participation’).

Few studies of internet use and participation (including those concerned with the effects of internet use on participation and those concerned with online participation) make a distinction between ‘time spent online’ and the substance of what a citizen is doing online. This appears to ignore some potential effects of the internet on participation. A person who spends a lot of time using the internet for non-political entertainment, perhaps gaming or shopping, spends less doing other things, such as exercise, voluntary work, or, for example, participating in politics. That is not to suggest that any of the acts are necessarily interchangeable, or that those personal factors that predict whether someone will spend five hours a day playing online computer

¹ Verba et al.’s (1995: 352) analysis finds regression coefficients of 0.24 for political interest, 0.12 for political efficacy and 0.6 for strength of partisan identification, significant at $p < 0.01$.

games are the same as or even like those factors that predict a person's likelihood to participate in politics. What it does suggest is that there is a finite amount of time available to any citizen to apportion on non-work and non-family activities, and that the internet is one extra claim on that time: "... Internet use is bound to come at the expense of previous activities: Which activities?" (Nie 2001, p.429).

Conversely, time spent on political activities online (or 'e-participation') demonstrates the internet's ability to enhance a citizen's overall level of participation. E-participation comprises two advances on traditional, offline participation: one, it makes some traditional behaviours, such as signing a petition or contacting a member of parliament, quicker and easier; and two, it facilitates some new behaviours, which did not exist in the pre-internet era, and even now exist only online, for example online social networking. There is also emerging evidence that 'e-participation' is not only an end in itself, but a means to further 'offline' participation (Schlozman, Verba & Brady 2010); specifically, that the internet can equip citizens with the prerequisite skills to participate in politics, and also that the internet can work as a mobilising device, encouraging citizens to become both engaged and in turn active in politics.

The complex role of the internet in lowering the costs of political participation, and in theory casting wider the net of potential participants, is described in Schlozman et al. (2010). Their study of American citizens shows that, on face value, internet use increases participation among the young (a previously underrepresented group among participants). For instance, among all respondents (ie internet users as well as non-users), there is a distinct decline in online political activity as age increases. There, is however, a more complex dynamic at work; one that emphasises the varied nature of internet use. With the sample restricted to users of social networking websites (as compared to all respondents), more than 50 per cent of users of social networking websites over 70 are politically engaged on those sites, whereas the rate of online engagement among 31 to 40 year old 'social networkers' is less than 30 per cent (Schlozman, Verba & Brady 2010, p.502). This hints at some possible motivations behind internet use: general internet use is far less prevalent among older citizens, but those who use it are more likely to use it to 'do politics'. Internet use is almost ubiquitous among younger citizens, and a smaller percentage engages in political discussion or behaviour on social networking websites. Internet use is arguably a less deliberate component of young peoples' lives; they have grown up with internet access and use it for general, daily activities, which, more often than not, do not include political activity. On the contrary, older citizens who use the internet, particularly those who use social networking websites, which require a base level of internet proficiency, have presumably gone out of their way to acquire the requisite skills and possibly use the internet with a specific activity (for example political discussion) in mind.

Schlozman et al.'s (2010) data tell a similar story with regard to socioeconomic status (SES), internet use and political participation. Internet access and SES are strongly correlated in both the United States and Australia, however this relationship appears to be at least in part an artefact of internet access, particularly the strong concentration of access among citizens with high socioeconomic status. The disparity between the participation rates of low and high SES strata of US society, at least, is smaller among internet users than all respondents; in other words, internet use appears to mitigate some – but not much – of the socioeconomic inequality among participants, but this effect is largely muted by the fact that a far greater percentage of wealthy, well-educated citizens are online than are poor, minimally-educated citizens. What the internet offers by way of easing the pathways to participation, it seemingly takes away by entrenching a socioeconomic 'digital divide' (Gil de Zúñiga, Veenstra, Vraga & Shah 2010; Schlozman, Verba & Brady 2010, p.492).

This study hypothesises that the civic voluntarism predictors of participation will have stronger partial effects among non-internet users than on internet users. This is expected to be most obvious in the relationships between age, time and money and the propensity to participate. Further, those internet users who consume political news online should see the same decrease

in the effects of age, time and money, but also of civic skills. As discussed, it is expected that time spent online and the nature of internet use will be positively correlated with socioeconomic factors. Respondents will be grouped according to their internet use; while socioeconomic resources are likely to be more prevalent among internet users than non-users, they are not expected to be as large a factor in internet users' decision to participate.

It is also expected that r-squared values will change substantially between groups. Overall, the model fit should be highest among non-internet users, and break down as internet use increases. Should these results eventuate, they will provide some evidence that the internet can negate – in some ways – the socioeconomic bias among political participants. It is not anticipated that the two countries will present significantly different results.

Canada and Australia - cases and data

Australia and Canada have long been a focus of comparative political science. The foremost explanation is the logic of studying 'most similar systems': the similarities between the Australian and Canadian polities are both longstanding and well documented. The roots of the comparison stem from the countries' shared history as colonies of the British empire; a heritage which is in turn associated with the persisting institutional similarities, including federal systems of government and Westminster parliamentary systems. Less similar are the respective political cultures, party structures and electoral systems (Alexander & Galligan 1992). Elkins (1992) argues that the starkest difference between Canada and Australia in the broad field of electoral politics is that:

The fundamental premise of Australian political culture as revealed in its electoral arrangements is that one should value equally or more so the means, the setting of the rules, than the ends, or the outcome of the game. In Canada, one may not ignore the rules or the means, but they seem less important because the ends or goals or possible outcomes involve high stakes (p. 67).

This contrasts Australia's history of electoral innovations against Canada's preoccupation with how to "counter American influence, culture or expansion, how to diversify an economy too heavily dependent on the export of raw materials, and how to integrate a small and extremely scattered population in the second largest land mass in the world" (Elkins 1992, p.67). With the passing of 20 years however, Elkins' description of Canada could easily be mistaken for a portrait of contemporary Australian public affairs.

The most comprehensive data available – the Australian and Canadian Election Studies (AES and CES) respectively – do not allow for strict comparison, particularly with reference to different types of internet use. They can however paint broad pictures of what is happening in both countries. The Australian data come from the AES conducted following the most recent federal election in 2010. That study includes a battery of questions on participation in online political behaviours, on top of the baseline questions on internet use asked since the 1998 AES (see Appendix A for AES and CES question wording). Canadian data come from the CES conducted following the 2008 federal election; the range of internet questions asked in the CES is not as comprehensive as the AES batteries, but is nonetheless broad enough to construct a robust measure of types of internet use in Canada. Data from the 2007 and 2010 AES are combined to increase the size of the dataset, while not covering such a time period as to pick up temporal effects in the data, while the multi-wave structure of the 2008 CES allows it to stand

on its own.² Both the AES and CES surveys ask respondents a range of questions on their political behaviours, which for the most part are comparable across the two studies.

Model specification and measurement

To answer these questions, this study firstly defines and categorises internet use to take into account both time spent online and the nature of what a citizen uses the internet for. To capture the potential effects of both time spent online and the type or purpose of internet use, respondents were assigned to one of three categories: non-user; internet user who does not read political news online; and internet user who reads political news online. Frequency data are shown in Table 2. Categorical measurement of the independent variable allows for clear comparison both between categories – which is of primary interest to this study – and between countries. The three-category measurement of internet use represents the most adequate measurement given the available data and the aim of the study.

Following Verba et al. (1995), the independent variables of this study measure free time, financial wealth and civic skills. The condition of having been mobilised by political actors or social networks is not included in this study, for want of clear and comparable measurement by the respective data sources. This is a drawback of the study and would add considerably to future research. The wording of survey questions measuring respondents' free time, financial wealth and civic skills are in Appendix B. Educational attainment is used as a proxy for civic skills.³ A scale of employment status is used as a proxy for free time: respondents who describe themselves as retired are deemed to have the most free time, in a scale down to those employed on a full time basis, who are deemed to have the least free time⁴. Financial wealth is measured by gross annual income among the respondent's family or household, a measure common to both datasets.

Measurement of the dependant variables is more straightforward, as each measure of participation is addressed by a separate survey question variable, in both the AES and CES data. The wording of survey questions measuring participatory behaviours is at Appendix C. There is a high degree of commonality between participation variables in the CES and AES, based on the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems' (CSES) modules. For the purpose of analysis, the participation measures in this study are loosely grouped as electoral and partisan, protest and meeting, donations, and interpersonal activities.

Results and analysis

Internet user groups

The first stage of analysis is the division of the Australian and Canadian datasets into smaller sets by type of internet user. The categories are then compared among themselves and between countries (see Table 1). It must be cautioned at this point that the smaller data sets vary largely in size, from 1991 to as few as 78 respondents. The latter subset – Canadian non-internet users – is included for illustrative purposes.

² The 2008 CES numbers a total of 4,495 respondents; combined, the 2007 and 2010 AES number 3,934 respondents.

³ Educational attainment and experience in job-related civic skills are correlated at .336 ($p < .001$) in the 2010 Australian Election Study.

⁴ Measuring free time as that time not spent at work has a basis in Becker (1965).

Table 2: Characteristics of internet user groups

		<i>Australia</i>	<i>Canada</i>
Total	<i>Non-user</i>	1012	78
respondents	<i>User (no politics)</i>	1846	1395
(n)	<i>User (incl politics)</i>	559	863
Age	<i>Non-user</i>	68 (13)	70 (14)
<i>mean (std dev)</i>	<i>User (no politics)</i>	50 (15)	56 (16)
	<i>User (incl politics)</i>	44 (16)	47 (15)
Income	<i>Non-user</i>	30-35*	31 (23)
<i>mean (std dev)</i>	<i>User (no politics)</i>	70-80*	72 (62)
	<i>User (incl politics)</i>	80-90*	88 (60)
Education	<i>Non-user</i>	Secondary school	Secondary school
<i>median</i>	<i>User (no politics)</i>	Bachelor degree	Technical training
	<i>User (incl politics)</i>	Bachelor degree	Commenced university
Employment	<i>Non-user</i>	Retired	Retired
<i>mode</i>	<i>User (no politics)</i>	Full-time for pay	Full-time for pay
	<i>User (incl politics)</i>	Full-time for pay	Full-time for pay
Gender	<i>Non-user</i>	47	37
<i>(% male)</i>	<i>User (no politics)</i>	46	42
	<i>User (incl politics)</i>	51	54

*Australian income is a categorical measure; median category used in place of scale mean.

The between-group differences are for the most part unsurprising: those who do not use the internet are likely to be past the usual age of retirement (ie 65 years or older), and more likely to be female (particularly in Canada). The highest level of education attained by respondents also increases with their degree of internet use: non-users are less likely than those who read political news online to have any post-secondary qualifications. Similar patterns hold for employment status and annual family income. The distribution of males and females among each group differs slightly between countries, but the common element is the underrepresentation of men among non-users; only among Canadian users who access online political news do men comprise a meaningful majority (the same group in Australia comprises 51 per cent men). The most obvious difference between the countries is the small number of non-internet users in Canada. This is possibly an artefact of how internet use is measured in the CES survey: Canadian respondents were not asked directly about their internet use, rather non-users were identified by their answer to a question about attitudes towards online voting (see Appendix A for question wording). The high number of missing responses to that question suggests that non-users in Canada are possibly not as low in number as the valid data indicate.⁵

The distribution of age, gender and socioeconomic characteristics between groups poses some obstacles for the subsequent analyses. There is some correlation, for instance, between a respondent's internet user category and their education, employment status, gender and annual income. Age, however, appears to be the strongest predictor of internet use among these

⁵ International Telecommunications Union data suggest that 23 per cent of Canadians did not have internet access in 2008.

descriptive variables.⁶ To ensure that the use of these three categories did not mask any possible effects of age on the likelihood of a respondent engaging in political behaviour – that is, that the between-group differences actually represent internet effects, and not age or socioeconomic effects – multivariate regression analyses were run on the complete datasets, before splitting them by internet user groups. With age and internet user group both predictors in the model, both variables have similar effects on a range of dependent variables.

Likewise with internet user groups removed from the same models, the age regression coefficients are too small to be of any consequence. Similarly, the use of employment status as a proxy for free time in the Canadian dataset poses the potential for multicollinearity among predictors (specifically between employment status and annual income). Regression diagnostics were tested in SPSS, with no concerning results. This is likely due to the slight variation in question wording between the income and employment variables: both the AES and CES questions ask respondents for their family or household income, while employment status is directed at the respondent only.

Political interest

Political interest is not a measure of political participation; rather it can be viewed as a necessary condition of participation, as it measures a person's cognitive engagement with politics. To test whether the model is having an effect at the cognitive level, and not just the behavioural level, multivariate analyses were run on both the Australian and Canadian data (Table 3). The model is stronger in Australia than in Canada, although in Canada the analysis better fits the hypothesis, namely that the model has less predictive power as internet use increases. The only predictor to have a consistently significant effect is age: as age increases, so does political interest. The effects of income and education are strong in Australia, but decrease as internet use increases; this is possibly a pointer to how internet use affects citizens' propensity to engage in political behaviours.

Political interest is not used as an independent variable throughout the study, as although it would result in a better overall model fit, the more interesting feature of this analysis is the difference in model fit (or r-squared value) between internet user groups. Including political interest in the model would likely mask those numbers in the multivariate analyses. What is evident from the results in Table 3, however, is that the predictors of political interest do not vary greatly between groups or between countries.

Electoral and partisan participation

Electoral participation comprises what Dalton (2008) describes as duty-based behaviours: activities that work to uphold existing political and social institutions. They include voting in elections, membership of a political party and voluntary work for a party or candidate. The key characteristic of electoral and partisan behaviours is that they occur within traditional political structures; they can be compared with protests, boycotts or petitions, which tend to express displeasure with those existing structures and at times actively seek to change them.

Electoral participation in Canada can be measured by voter turnout. With its system of compulsory voting, voter turnout is not a valid measure among Australians, as voting is mandated and non-attendance at a polling booth is punishable with a fine. The influence of the civic voluntarism predictors on voting turnout in Canada only is therefore presented in Table 4. The total model fit is best non-internet users, which supports the hypothesis that internet use is diminishing the effects of the model. However, when examining the partial effects of each predictor, only age and education have significant effects, and only among both categories of

⁶ Age and user groups are correlated at $-.428$ ($p < .01$) in Australia and $-.323$ ($p < .01$) in Canada.

Table 3: Political interest among internet user groups (OLS estimates)

	Australia			Canada		
	Non-user	User	Pol user	Non-user	User	Pol user
Total household income	.145**	.127**	.004	-.061	.024	.090
Age	.317**	.378**	.277**	-.112	.185**	.130*
Employment status	.029	-.016	.021	.317	-.005	.076
Education	.124**	.081**	.041	-.051	.086*	.111*
Constant (unstandard.)	3.577	3.197	2.002	1.595	.560	4.032
R-squared	.112	.145	.083	.079	.035	.049

* p<.05 ** p<.01

Ordinary least squares regression model (standardised regression coefficients), AES 2007/2010 and CES 2008.

Table 4: Voter turnout among internet user groups – Canada only (OLS estimates)

	Canada		
	Non-user	User	Pol user
Total household income	-.245	.078	-.014
Age	-.055	.215**	.116*
Employment status	.505	.019	.002
Education	.054	.051	.103*
Constant (unstandard.)	4.112	2.972	2.122
R-squared	.483	.051	.024

* p<.05 ** p<.01

Ordinary least squares regression model (standardised regression coefficients), CES 2008.

internet users. Employment status (as a proxy for free time) and income have no significant effect on a Canadian citizen's propensity to vote.

To compare partisan activity between Australia and Canada, the model is applied to two different measures (in lieu of a common measure): voluntary work for a party or candidate in Australia, and party membership in Canada. While the actual behaviour differs, they both represent a citizen's intention to actively support a political party, and are both duty-based behaviours. Results of the analysis are in Table 5. While the model fit decreases as internet use increases in Canada, in accordance with the hypothesis, it varies among groups in Australia.

However, when exploring the partial effects the inverse appears to the case: age and education have strong positive effects in Canada (as they did on voter turnout), but income and education have strong negative effects in Australia. It appears that as internet use increases, the traditional socioeconomic measures – income and education – do not predict Australians' participation in duty-based, institution-affirming – behaviours. This is very much in line with the hypothesis on internet effects on the civic voluntarism model.

Expressive participation

Expressive participation is the flipside of duty-based behaviours: they include protests, meetings and marches, boycotts, divestments and sanctions, petition signing and the occupation of buildings or public areas, as well as emerging activities such as hacktivism (online vandalism for a political purpose). Expressive behaviours range from completely legal to deliberately illegal, but their common element is that they work outside of – and often explicitly against – traditional political institutions and structures. Dalton (2008) describes them as symptoms of

Table 5: Partisan activity among internet use groups (OLS estimates)

	Australia			Canada		
	Non-user	User	Pol user	Non-user	User	Pol user
Total household income	.024	-.065*	-.149**	-.072	.024	.052
Age	.073	.023	-.017	.062	.169**	.184**
Employment status	-.007	-.047	-.091	.078	.076	.077
Education	.090*	.033	-0.90*	.348	.182**	.111*
Constant (unstandard.)	4.089	3.686	2.895	5.988	6.349	6.364
R-squared	.011	.005	.033	.147	.067	.064

* p<.05 ** p<.01

Ordinary least squares regression model (standardised regression coefficients), AES 2007/2010 and CES 2008. nb. Measures differ between countries: Australia data measure voluntary work for a party or candidate; Canadian data measure party membership.

citizen engagement; they are moreover broadly associated with Inglehart's (1977) explication of postmaterialist values.

In this study, three measures represent the wide range of expressive behaviours: working with fellow citizens on a political issue or cause; petition signing; and engaging in a (legal) demonstration or protest. Table 6 presents the effects of the model on a citizen's propensity to 'work with like others' to a political end. The model does a poor job overall of predicting Australian behaviours, but its prediction of Canadian behaviours is in line with the hypothesis: the r-squared value falls as internet use increases. Only education has a strong and significant effect in the Australian data, but that effect likewise supports the hypothesis: the partial effect of education falls as internet use increases.

The influence of the civic voluntarism model on petition signing – in Table 7 – and on participation in a demonstration – in Table 8 – is similar. The overall model fit is poor in Australia, across all internet user categories; however the partial effects of education diminish substantially as internet use increases. Only the effect of age, which is in the model to control for the different age characteristics between groups, increases with internet use. The Canadian data reveal vastly different effects: while the r-squared value decreases as internet use increases, the effect of income increases from negative to positive (and significant). Age and employment status also increase, while education effects fall sharply (although the effects are not significant).

'Chequebook' participation

'Chequebook participation' is a catch-all term describing any financial contributions to a political party, candidate or other actor. While financial donations might be assumed to be the domain of the rich and busy – those who have ample financial resources, but not the resource of free time – Putnam (2001: 118-119) contends that almost the opposite is true: that, mobilised by their engagement in other forms of social associations and networks, the financially poor donate as large (or small) a proportion of their incomes than the rich. The Australian and Canadian data (see Table 9) reveal similar anomalies: in Australia, income has a strong positive effect among non-internet users, and a strong negative effect among political internet users, which supports the hypothesis. In Canada however, the effect of income increases with internet use. The effect of age decreases with internet use in both countries, retaining a positive effect even among internet users. Employment status has a strong negative effect among political internet users in Australia, suggesting that the less a person works (and the more free time they have), the less likely they are to donate financially to a party or candidate. The CES includes

Table 6: Work with like-minded others among internet user groups (OLS estimates)

	Australia			Canada		
	Non-user	User	Pol user	Non-user	User	Pol user
Total household income	-.007	.029	-.052	-.423	-.009	.079
Age	-.009	.046	.004	-.119	.140*	.186*
Employment status	-.021	-.050	-.072	-.893	.049	-.065
Education	.114**	.083**	.008	.504	-.049	.059
Constant (unstandard.)	1.850	1.899	1.595	-11.490	5.056	5.405
R-squared	.014	.012	.005	.649	.035	.036

* p<.05 ** p<.01

Ordinary least squares regression model (standardised regression coefficients), AES 2007/2010 and CES 2008.

Table 7: Petition signing among internet user groups (OLS estimates)

	Australia			Canada		
	Non-user	User	Pol user	Non-user	User	Pol user
Total household income	-.004	.015	.004	-.563	-.033	.178**
Age	.033	-.003	.100*	-.064	-.007*	.055
Employment status	.010	.010	-.012	-.118	-.038	-.005
Education	.153**	.091**	-.073	.746	-.036	.008
Constant (unstandard.)	1.853	1.634	1.484	-11.776	2.180	1.631
R-squared	.024	.009	.014	.494	.021	.033

* p<.05 ** p<.01

Ordinary least squares regression model (standardised regression coefficients), AES 2007/2010 and CES 2008.

further data on respondents' donations to federal political parties (at any time; not only during the election campaign) as well as their local riding association, and the analysis of those data reveals similar effects.

Interpersonal participation

The definition of interpersonal participation does not necessarily comply with the traditional conception of political participation as an activity which seeks to achieve a political outcome; rather interpersonal participation comprises discussion with family, friends or colleagues about politics. It includes discussion of a partisan nature, in which the respondent attempts to persuade a peer to vote for a particular candidate or party (although the AES measures this as a separate behaviour), and more neutral conversation about anything political in nature. Like political interest, it may be viewed as a necessary – but not sufficient – precursor to actually engaging in a political behaviour.

Both the AES and CES ask respondents whether they discussed the most recent election with others (see Table 10). The Australian data support the hypothesis that internet use can diminish the civic voluntarism model: the effects of income and education (as well as age) decline as internet use increases. The results of the Canadian analysis are more varied: the influences of education and age on whether someone discusses politics with other people decreases as internet use increases, but the effect of income increases substantially (although they are not significant among any group). Changes in the r-squared value are for the most part inverse to internet use in both countries.

Table 8: Demonstration/protest activity among internet user groups (OLS estimates)

	Australia			Canada		
	Non-user	User	Pol user	Non-user	User	Pol user
Total household income	-.036	.032	-.012	-.860	.005	.147*
Age	-.099*	-.003	.017	.019	-.017	.081
Employment status	.059	-.015	-.046	-1.02	.075	.017
Education	.009	.087**	-.034	.477	.069	.085
Constant (unstandard.)	1.865	1.934	1.708	-13.696	3.056	3.236
R-squared	.007	.010	.004	.600	.009	.036

* p<.05 ** p<.01

Ordinary least squares regression model (standardised regression coefficients), AES 2007/2010 and CES 2008.

Table 9: Financial donation to party or candidate among internet user groups (OLS estimates)

	Australia			Canada		
	Non-user	User	Pol user	Non-user	User	Pol user
Total household income	.119**	-.031	-.104*	-.854	-.020	.031
Age	.126**	.038	.013	1.097*	.185**	.192**
Employment status	.031	-.061*	-.140**	-.784	.005	-.028
Education	-.021	.021	-.037	.179	.106	-.005
Constant (unstandard.)	4.268	3.928	3.620	8.928	6.770	5.465
R-squared	.021	.003	.020	.603	.042	.032

* p<.05 ** p<.01

Ordinary least squares regression model (standardised regression coefficients), AES 2007/2010 and CES 2008.

Discussion

The results are generally consistent with the hypothesised effects: as internet use increases, the civic voluntarism model is less successful at predicting political participation. Income, education (and the associated civic skills) and employment status (as a proxy for free time) for the most part are better predictors of participation among people who do not use the internet than those who do.

The data also point to the persistence of the 'digital divide', even as internet use proliferates. As discussed, there are substantial differences between the internet users and non-users, and moderate differences between those who use the internet to inform themselves about politics and those who do not. While the evidence that more 'political' internet use seems to diminish the influence of income, education and employment can be viewed as a positive effect on political participation, it conversely entrenches and broadens the differences between those online and those not. A retired pensioner, for example, who is not comfortable with internet technologies and has no desire to 'go online', is still as unlikely to participate as ever. Nor do these results necessarily mean that internet use is mobilising new participants, who without the internet would never have participated; rather what they suggest is that the demographics of internet users who participate are meaningfully different from the demographics of non-internet users who participate in politics. This result mirrors recent evidence that internet use

Table 10: Discuss election with other people (OLS estimates)

	Australia			Canada		
	Non-user	User	Pol user	Non-user	User	Pol user
Total household income	.127**	.140**	.055	-.204	.067	.058
Age	.117*	.094**	.065	.259	.034	.061
Employment status	-.056	.010	-.040	-.060	.093	.022
Education	.056	.025	-.023	.381	.161**	.147**
Constant (unstandard.)	3.038	2.589	1.745	5.236	3.450	2.707
R-squared	.025	.025	.008	.252	.040	.032

* p<.05 ** p<.01

Ordinary least squares regression model (standardised regression coefficients), AES 2007/2010 and CES 2008.

amplifies existing gaps in political knowledge among Australian citizens (McAllister & Gibson 2011). Without a counterfactual scenario (ie would current internet users participate if they did not, and had never had, internet access?), it is not possible to fully assess the effects of internet use.

Overall, the model employed in this study is better at predicting behaviour in Canada than in Australia. This might be attributable to Australia's system of compulsory voting, which has the effect of mobilising voters with the weight of the law⁷. Moreover, it entrenches a positive political 'habit', whereas the opposite – the habit of apathy – is more likely in non-compulsory systems (Hill 2004). There may be further reasons for the stronger results in the Canadian data; it may not be an entirely Australian effect. Blais, Gidengil, Nadeau and Nevitte (2002) argue that generational cohort has the largest effect on voter turnout in Canada (with post-Generation X citizens the least likely to vote), about half of which can be explained by socioeconomic differences between generations; as generations age, their socioeconomic resources increase and their propensity to vote increases accordingly. There is however no evidence that participation in Canada is more heavily affected by socioeconomic resources – or any of the civic voluntarism predictors – than other liberal democracies. It is therefore probable that the differences between the Australian and Canadian data can be explained by the 'levelling' effect of compulsory voting in Australia (Hill 2001). This – as with all aspects of compulsory voting – is worthy of future research.

Finally, it is to be expected that internet use has differential effects on the civic voluntarism model. For instance, the amount of free time available to a person should be less important if that person is able to participate online. The effects of income may not be so easily diminished. The analysis is unclear on any patterns in this regard; application of the model to other datasets in the AES and CES series would add light on the question, as would analysis of other similar democracies, for example the United States and United Kingdom.

The hypothesis of this study – that the civic voluntarism model is better at predicting participation among non-internet users, and diminishes as internet use increases – is broadly supported. There are however many questions emanating from the data: How does internet use specifically affect each of the civic voluntarism predictors? Why do income, employment and education seem to have less effect on Australians becoming politically active? When the model is exposed to measures of affective political engagement, such as political interest or

⁷ The punishment for non-voting is generally punitive, comprising small fines, which are easily and often waived via an 'honour system'; an enrolled voter's excuse for non-attendance is invariably accepted without question (Hill 2004).

party identification, does the civic voluntarism model still hold? Further, what effect are 'internet resources', or a person's capacity to use internet technology, having on his or her propensity to participate? This study provides some justification to ask these more specific questions in the future.

Appendix A

Data files and study descriptions are available at <http://aes.anu.edu/data> (Australian Election Study) and <http://www.ces-eeec.org/pagesE/surveys.html> (Canadian Election Study). Codes altered from the original listed below.

Internet use questions

H10: In general, how often do you use the internet? (AES 2007/2010; recoded)

1. Do not use the internet
2. Less often
3. Every few weeks
4. One to two days a week
5. Three to five days a week
6. About once a day
7. Several times a day
- 1. Missing

A9: Did you make use of the internet at all to get news or information about the 2007/2010 Federal election? (AES 2007/2010; recoded)

1. Don't have access to the internet
2. Have access but didn't use it for election information
3. Yes, once or twice
4. Yes, on several occasions
5. Yes, many times
- 1. Missing

ces08_PES_A7: During the campaign, how much attention did you pay to news about the Federal election on the INTERNET? (CES 2008; scale)

ces08_PES_EC2: If you could vote online, would you be ... to do so? (CES 2008; used to identify non-internet users)

'Free time' (employment) questions

G4: Now some questions about the work you are doing now. Last week, what were you mainly doing? (AES 2007/2010; recoded)

1. Working full time for pay
2. A full-time school or university student
3. Keeping house
4. Working part-time for pay
5. Unemployed – looking for full-time work
6. Unemployed – looking for part-time work
7. Retired
- 1. Missing

ces08_CPS_S4: Are you currently self-employed, working for pay, retired, unemployed... ? (CES 2008; recoded)

1. Caring for family and working for pay
2. Student working for pay
3. Self employed
4. Work at two or more jobs
5. Working for pay (full or part time)
6. Caring for a family
7. Student
8. Retired and working for pay
9. Unemployed/looking for work
10. Retired
- 98/99. Missing

'Money' questions

H15: What is the gross annual income, before tax or other deductions, for you and your family living with you from all sources? Please include any pensions and allowances, and income from interest or dividends (AES 2007/2010)

ces08_CPS_S18A : [Actual] Total 2007 household income (CES 2008; scale)

'Civic skill' (education) questions

G3: Have you obtained a trade qualification, a degree or a diploma, or any other qualification since leaving school? What is your highest qualification? (AES 2007/2010; recoded)

1. No qualification since leaving high school
2. Non-trade qualification
3. Trade qualification
4. Associate diploma
5. Undergraduate diploma
6. Bachelor degree (including Honours)
7. Postgraduate degree or postgraduate diploma
- 1. Missing

ces08_CPS_S3: What is the highest level of education that you have completed? (CES 2008)

Participation questions

Political interest

A1: Generally speaking, how much interest do you usually have in what's going on in politics? (CES 2070/2010)

ces08_CPS_A4: Using the same scale, how interested are you in POLITICS GENERALLY?

Electoral and partisan participation

ces08_PES_B1: Did YOU vote in the election? (CES 2008)

A5P3: A5: Here is a list of things some people do during elections. How often did you do any of these things during the recent election? Work for a party or candidate (AES 2007/2010)

ces08_PES_EC4A: Have you ever been a member of a federal political party? (CES 2008)

Expressive participation

C11P3: C11: Over the past five years or so, have you done any of the following things to express your views about something the government should or should not be doing? Worked together with people who shared the same concern (AES 2007/2010)

ces08_MBS_J1B: In the past 5 years, have you expressed your views by: \n working together with people who shared the same concern? (CES 2008)

C11P4: C11: Over the past five years or so, have you done any of the following things to express your views about something the government should or should not be doing? Signed a written petition (AES 2007/2010)

ces08_MBS_J3A: Sign a petition (CES 2008)

C11P2: C11: Over the past five years or so, have you done any of the following things to express your views about something the government should or should not be doing? Taken part in a protest, march or demonstration (AES 2007/2010)

ces08_MBS_J3C: Attend a lawful demonstration (CES 2008)

'Chequebook' participation

A5P5: A5: Here is a list of things some people do during elections. How often did you do any of these things during the recent election? Contribute money to a political party or election candidate by mail or phone (AES 2007/2010)

ces08_MBS_F7: Have you ever donated money to a candidate in a federal election? (CES 2008)

Interpersonal participation

A5P1: A5: Here is a list of things some people do during elections. How often did you do any of these things during the recent election? Discuss politics with others in person (i.e. face to face or over the phone) (AES 2007/2010)

ces08_PES_A9: During the CAMPAIGN, did you discuss the election with other people? (CES 2008)

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