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Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK

Journal of E-Government

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wzeg20>

“Down Periscope”

Rachel K. Gibson^a & Andrea Römmele^b

^a ACSPRI Centre for Social Research, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia

^b Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES), University of Mannheim, Germany

Version of record first published: 21 Oct 2008.

To cite this article: Rachel K. Gibson & Andrea Römmele (2006): “Down Periscope”, Journal of E-Government, 2:3, 85-111

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J399v02n03_05

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“Down Periscope”: The Search for High-Tech Campaigning at the Local Level in the 2002 German Federal Election

Rachel K. Gibson
Andrea Römmele

ABSTRACT. This paper examines the growth of high-tech campaigning techniques among local level actors in Germany by studying website adoption among parties and candidates in the 2002 federal election. Arguing that election websites form a key tool of the new high-tech campaign trade we investigate the extent of their use at the local level as well as some of the triggers to their uptake and possible longer-term effects on campaign style, in terms of interactivity and independence from central party control. Our findings reveal that this form of high-tech campaigning is prominent across Germany and is promoted by factors linked to higher levels of local campaign activity more generally, i.e., party resources, competition and incumbency. Content analysis of sites, however, reveals little support for the notion that election websites are introducing a more participatory style of campaigning. Also, while some

Rachel K. Gibson is Senior Research Fellow and Deputy Director of the ACSPRI Centre for Social Research at the Australian National University, Canberra, Australia (E-mail: rachel.gibson@anu.edu.au). She has published widely on the topic of e-campaigning and parties' use of new media, with particular emphasis on the UK, Germany and Australia.

Andrea Römmele is Senior Research Fellow at the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES), University of Mannheim, Germany, and Director of the Volkswagen Foundation-funded project, “New ICTs and the Innovation Capacity of Political and Commercial Organisations” (E-mail: andrea.roemmele@mzes.unimannheim.de). Her research focuses on political communication and electoral campaigning.

Journal of E-Government, Vol. 2(3) 2005
Available online at <http://www.haworthpress.com/web/JEG>
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doi:10.1300/J399v02n03_05

parties appear to be inclined toward controlling local actors' message through the medium, for the most part, candidates and parties appear to be left alone to develop their online profile. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

KEYWORDS. Web campaigning, cyber campaigning, high-tech campaigning, Germany, local elections, parties

INTRODUCTION

Within the past decade, campaign styles and practises have changed dramatically worldwide. While initially the new techniques were referred to in generic terms as an "Americanized" style of campaigning (Negrine and Papathanassopoulos, 1996), over time a more temporal or developmental perspective has been adopted with labels such as "postmodern" (Norris, 2000), "phase 3" (Farrell and Webb, 2000), "post-Fordist" (Denver and Hands, 2000) and "professionalized" (Gibson and Römmele, 2001) being applied to the new era. Despite the differences in nomenclature, there is considerable agreement between scholars about the central features of this new era in political campaigning. One key area of change lies in the new tools or mechanics being deployed in campaign communication. Technologies such as the Internet, along with techniques such as direct mailing and use of telephone banks are now commonplace in most modern democratic elections. Indeed, such have been the advances in this area of campaigning that the label of "High-Tech" has also emerged as shorthand to describe the changes (Strachan, 2002; Selnow, 1996).

The adoption of the new technologies has been accompanied by an intensification of existing methods for divining voters' thoughts with opinion polling and focus groups being conducted on an almost continuous basis. Indeed, within this literature the growing affinity between politicians and the marketing profession has been widely noted. Like advertising specialists in product development, party operatives during a campaign are seen increasingly as moulding and delivering the policies and personalities that best accord with popular preferences, in return for their votes, time and monetary contributions (Kotler and Kotler, 1999; Wring, 2005).

These shifts have inevitably led to changes in the overall tone or culture of campaigning. The message now being delivered to voters arrives in a more direct and personalized manner, as opposed to being distilled through second-hand television or radio coverage. The general focus and presentation of the campaign message has become more slick and stylized and tends to concentrate on the person of the leader and/or more well known “dignitaries” within a party. Finally, in organizational terms, significant changes to the internal working of parties have also been associated with the move into the professional era, as power is seen to have shifted upward and outward to the leaders and their externally appointed media and public relation consultants (Gibson and Römmele, 2001).

Amidst this agreement, however, questions have arisen about how these trends have affected relations between the national and local levels of the party organization. Certainly the “modern” era of campaigning, defined largely through the emergence of television, saw a lowered emphasis on local issues and correspondingly greater emphasis on national level affairs. This was the era of the electoral professional (Panebianco, 1988) or catch-all party (Katz and Mair, 1995) where the center assumed a dominant role, particularly in planning and managing constituency campaigning. During the current “postmodern” era, however, alongside the increasing focus on photogenic leaders and their coterie of media advisors, a return to more grassroots forms of communication present in the very early days of campaigning has also been noted. As Norris (2000) observes, the new technologies allow for new forms of more grassroots and personalized political communication that can be located somewhere between the local activism of the early days (the direct town hall meeting and political rally) and the “national-passive” forms of communication characteristic of the modern television campaign. Such developments, she argues, mean that:

Instead of being . . . linear [mean that] . . . the postmodern campaign symbolizes a return to some of the more localized and interactive forms of communication that were present in the premodern period. (p. 149)

Such developments, if they were in fact taking place would certainly signal a considerable change in parties’ campaign styles and internal organizational relations. At present, however, such shifts remain largely a talking point since there is very little empirical evidence at the local level to inform the debate. This paper attempts to address that gap

by focusing on the development of one particular aspect of the professionalized campaign-web or cybercampaigning-among local actors during the 2002 federal election in Germany. As well as mapping the general growth of these new practises among local parties and candidates we pay particular attention to the question of what is behind the adoption of the new high-tech methods and how this is affecting their campaign practises and style, as well as their relations with the national level. While questions about impact of these methods on electoral outcomes and voter opinion are also of interest in such a study, they are beyond the scope of this analysis. Aside from our being concerned primarily with the uptake of the new high-tech methods, a study examining the Web's causal effects on voter support levels, to be convincing, would require party and candidate website data to be linked to individual attitudinal and behavioural data at the constituency level. This is a resource that is unavailable for the German election at this stage.

THE LOCAL CAMPAIGNS LITERATURE AND PROFESSIONALIZED CAMPAIGNING

Confusion over whether local parties are being strengthened or weakened as a result of the new era of campaigning is not too surprising given the limited attention that this tier of party activity has received in general, particularly in electioneering terms. Much of the early empirical work on local campaigning tended to be descriptive, focusing on how the campaign was conducted by the party organization and the different campaign methods used, i.e., posters, town hall meetings, distributing literature, canvassing, movies, direct mailings, etc. (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, 1944; Gemmecke, 1967; von Beyme, 1974; Salmore and Salmore, 1985). Subsequent studies adopted a more causal perspective, examining the impact of local campaigning on levels of voter mobilization. This work revealed essentially that local campaigns do indeed matter, with more active campaigns proving more effective at getting the vote out than are moribund campaigns (Whiteley, Clarke, Sanders and Stewart, 2001). Related work by Pattie, Johnston and Fieldhouse (1995) in the UK and Jacobson (1976) in the US underscored the importance of local campaign effort, as measured by constituency spending, in securing victory.

More recently, work on local campaigning in the UK and the US has begun to link constituency campaigning to the "postmodernization" of national campaigns. Denver, Hands, Fisher and McAllister (2003)

reported survey results that showed an increasing use of telemarketing, direct mailing and computers by local party organizations in the UK. Comparable work by Strachan (2003) in the US has also shown professionalized campaigning is starting to take hold in the US. In analysis of state and local campaigns during 1997 Strachan reported that a sizable number of candidates in mid-sized electoral districts were using sophisticated tactics such as new ICTs, direct mailing and telemarketing as well as professional assistance to employ at least a core group of general political consultants.

The existing empirical evidence, therefore, does suggest that the new “postmodern” or professional style of campaigning is taking place at the local level. The extent to which this may be occurring outside the US and UK, however, has not been the subject of systematic enquiry so far. Even among those countries that have been studied, little has been done to identify what may be triggering the shift and what it may mean for the content and style of the local campaign. This paper aims to fill this gap by examining web campaigning by parties and candidates at the local level in the German federal election of 2002.

Why the Web? Focusing on web campaigning by local parties and candidates is considered a valid and effective means of studying the growth of the new professionalized techniques at the local level for a number of reasons.

First, on practical grounds it would seem reasonable to assume that parties and candidates currently using the Web would also be using, or at least be cognizant of the value of the other applications integral to the “hi-tech” trade, such as computers, databases and email communication (Selnow, 1996). Indeed it is arguable that for local parties and candidates seeking to incorporate more professionalized tactics, use of websites might now be the first step in the chain; websites being relatively cheap compared with these other technologies.

More importantly, however, from a substantive perspective the new information and communication technologies (ICTs), of which the Web is a principal component, constitute a central component of the new high-tech approach. These digital technologies, along with tools like telemarketing and direct mailing, are ideal for promoting the more individualized and targeted type of communication that is favored in the new era. In stark contrast to the messages sent via standard electronic broadcasting, Internet-based messages can be directed to individual users and customized to meet their particular information needs. Websites can be constructed to recognize registered users when they visit and offer up a fresh range of news and options for them each time.

E-newsletters can be distributed to people's email inboxes that are tailored to fit their expressed interests. New ICTs, therefore, provide political actors with a high level of control over the content and "dosage" of the material that they transmit to supporters and the broader public than has hitherto been possible.

In addition to this greater control over the message sent out, the new ICTs also provide a means for two-way, if not multi-way, communication. Websites can offer interactive features that allow for questions or opinions to be emailed in, as well as pledges of financial support (Römmele, 2003). Such openness, while it allows politicians to appear more closely connected and responsive to their constituents wishes, is perhaps even more important in that it offers a new and very efficient means for soliciting the all-important voter feedback that will be used to shape the parties policies or "products."

In focusing on the Web it should be made clear that we are not discounting the role other Internet applications such as email in election campaigns. However, the existing empirical evidence comparing the impact of the two technologies has pointed to the Web as the more useful "campaign" tool in the sense of reaching the wider and more passively interested public, while email better serves internal communication purposes, keeping activists informed and in touch with one another and central HQ (Ward and Lusoli, 2005; Ward, Lusoli and Gibson, 2002).

Finally, from an empirical and methodological perspective we consider websites to be a particularly efficient indicator of the new high-tech campaigning. Although in the early days candidate and local party sites could be difficult to track down, listings on national party home page as well as a range of specialized politics indices and of course the Google search engine have made the task much easier in recent times. In contrast, tracing the use of other high-tech campaigning practises such as database development and direct mailing among local level actors remains a time and resource-consuming activity that is ultimately dependent on cooperation and release of information by party operatives.

Why Germany? In addition to studying the rise of professionalized campaigning among local actors through the specific lens of web campaigning, we examine the practise in the particular context of parties and candidates in the 2002 German federal elections. Germany is considered to offer a relevant setting for this analysis for a number of reasons. First, Germany, is an established parliamentary democracy where both professionalized and web campaigning have been evident for some time now (Gibson, Römmele and Ward, 2003; Schmitt-Beck,

2002; Römmele, 2002). Second, Germany offers a vibrant multiparty system that allows for detection of the influence of major and minor party dynamics. In addition, as a federal system with 299 constituencies, there are sufficient cases to enable systematic study of the factors triggering web campaigning but not so many as to render in depth analysis of site content and analysis unmanageable. Finally, in structural terms, the mixed electoral system that operates, whereby candidate-centered and party-centered elections are conducted alongside one another in the same constituency, means that it is possible to compare the importance of organizational and individual incentives in establishing a website, a topic as yet unexplored in this literature.¹ Are candidates keener to use the medium and engage in professionalized campaigning than local parties? Further do both types of actors use the Web in the same way, or do candidates opt for a more interactive and direct communication style?

In summary, therefore, the research questions posed by our analysis of the German federal election 2002 are three-fold:

1. What is the extent of the new high-tech or professionalized style of campaigning at the local level in Germany during national elections in 2002, as measured by frequency of website adoption by local parties and candidates?
2. What are the triggers to this new form of high-tech campaigning at the local level? More specifically, are the factors associated with a greater intensity of local party campaigning in general (such as resources and competition) important in explaining the adoption of these new practises?
3. What are the consequences of the new style of campaigning for parties in terms of (i) promoting a new more direct and interactive campaign style, and (ii) providing local actors with an independent platform to speak to voters, that is not controlled by central HQ? How far is the Web revealing a diversity and individuality in local campaign styles, or do we see a more uniform “top-down” party strategy emerging?

DATA AND METHODS

The data to investigate these questions were gathered from July 2002 to September 2002 by a team of four coders based at the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES).² The sites included were all local-party and candidate sites for the five parliamentary parties in

299 constituencies (see Table 3 for a complete listing of parties). Sites were identified from national party links pages, as well as several specialist politics indices produced by the media and the federal government itself.³ In order to be included, sites had to be operated independently by the local party or candidate, as identified by the URL or web address. Any sites that were simply pages within the national or regional party sites were not considered eligible for analysis. Sites were identified as one of two types—"under construction" or "valid." To be under construction, sites were either labelled as such on their home page, or at least three of the four functional indices listed below could not be calculated due to a lack of content or the browser was unable to access the pages. Those that were fully (or almost fully) accessible were considered valid. If a local party or candidate did not have a site this was also noted.

One structural limitation of these data that should be noted and that will be familiar to scholars of German elections, is that in some instances, the geographic boundaries of the Wahlkreisen (federal electoral districts) do not match exactly to those of the covered by the local party organizations. Based on the 2002 electoral districts, the official estimate provided by the federal government was that around eighty percent of party organizations mapped to constituency boundaries, leaving a minority of cases in which the local parties' operated in more than one district, or districts that have more than one local party organization within them.⁴ The implications for this study are minimal in that the problem affects only a minority of local parties and does not affect candidates. Further, the only research question for which it may be relevant is that dealing with constituency level triggers to local party sites (we return to this below in the discussion of the results). Findings about frequency and content of local party sites would not be expected to be affected by the issue of constituency borders.

To examine the our third set of questions about the content and style of local web campaigning, sites were analyzed using a functional coding scheme adapted from existing studies of parties and candidates' use of the Web (Gibson and Ward, 2000)⁵. Four key functions of sites relevant to examining the questions posed above were identified: (1) information dissemination, or downward communication from the party to the voter; (2) participation, or interactive and upward communication from the voter to party and to other voters; (3) organizational networking or lateral/outward communication with other sections of the party; and (4) electioneering, or direct efforts to mobilize voters' support. The emphasis on each of the functions was measured by four

indices that ranged from zero to a maximum score of seven. The indices comprised items that related to the particular function, thus, press releases and biographies were included in the information dissemination index, email and feedback forms for participation, hyperlinks to other branches of the party for networking and special election pages for electioneering. The full coding scheme is listed Appendix 1. Once coded, the scores on each index were converted to a zero to ten scale for comparison purposes.

NEW ICTS AND LOCAL CAMPAIGNING: DISTRIBUTION, TRIGGERS AND CONTENT

Distribution of Sites

In this first stage of the analysis we focused on establishing the extent to which the Web was used by local parties and candidates during the 2002 German federal election campaign. Table 1 reports the overall totals from across the 299 constituencies in terms of how many local parties and candidates maintained sites.

The figures reveal a reasonably robust level of activity at the constituency level, particularly among the local party organizations. Overall, the local branches of the five parliamentary parties were more likely than not to maintain a website during the election with 60 percent of them maintaining a valid web presence across the 299 constituencies.⁶ One-third obviously did not consider establishing a virtual identity to be a priority. Candidates were less likely to use the Web, with just less than half showing up as having no site during the election. The figures for

TABLE 1. Frequency of Local Party and Candidate Websites in 2002 Federal Election

	Website Status		
	Valid Website (%)	Under Construction	Missing
Local parties	897 (60)	103 (7)	495 (33)
Candidates	633 (42)	22 (1.5)	840 (56)
Combined total	1530 (56)	125 (5)	1335 (39)

Note: Raw figures are followed by % (based on row totals) in parentheses.

“missing” here, however, are inflated by the fact that all PDS candidate sites were categorized as such. This was because the sites were run from the national party site rather than being independently maintained. If the numbers for candidates sites are recalculated to exclude the PDS entirely, the candidate activity level rises to 53 percent, a level more comparable to that of the local parties.

If we re-examine the figures from Table 1 from a geographic or regional perspective some additional and interesting findings emerge. As Table 2 shows, according to the raw number of sites, Bayern and Nordrhein-Westphalen are the most active Länder for web campaigning in Germany. However, once these figures are standardized by number of constituencies, Schleswig-Holstein and Hessen actually emerge as the most “Web active” during the 2002 election and the Eastern states of Saarland and Sachsen-Anhalt, the least.

On average, constituencies in Schleswig-Holstein saw six websites being operated by the five parliamentary parties (either by a local party or candidate or both). By contrast, constituencies in Saarland only had three sites on average. The presence of a state effect is confirmed by the ANOVA results which report significant differences in the average level of constituency website activity across the states (F statistic of 4.797 is significant at the 0.001 level). Post-hoc pairwise comparisons using Tukey’s HSD confirm Schleswig-Holstein and Hessen’s significantly higher levels of activity and Sachsen-Anhalt’s lower website incidence (see Table 2 for full results). Given that some of the states only comprise as few as two constituencies, however, these results should be treated with some caution.

Overall, Table 2 also tells us that the average number of sites in a constituency across Germany was five sites. Given that the maximum number possible was 10 sites in a constituency (based on there being five parties counted, each of which could run a local party and candidate site) this figure confirms the initial comment that overall, while levels of activity were not spectacular, they were respectable. The lower incidence of high-tech campaigning in the East makes sense in light of global findings about the more limited level of Internet use in regions of slower socioeconomic development (Norris, 2001). The prominence of web campaigning in the more rural and less densely populated states of the West such as Schleswig-Holstein, however, is more unexpected. The level of aggregation here prevents more definitive conclusions from being drawn about the spatial factors promoting web campaigning, and by extension, high-tech campaigning. However, at first glance

TABLE 2. Frequency of Local Party and Candidate Websites by State in 2002 Federal Election

State	No. of Valid Websites	No. of Constituencies	Average no. of Websites per Constituency
West			
Schleswig-Holstein	70	11	6.4
Hessen	127	21	6.0
Nordrhein-Westphalen	361	64	5.6
Thüringen	55	10	5.5
Berlin	66	12	5.5
Rheinland-Pfalz	80	15	5.3
Baden-Württemberg	190	37	5.1
Bremen	10	2	5.0
Hamburg	28	6	4.7
Niedersachsen	139	29	4.8
Bayern	198	44	4.5
Saarland	12	4	3.0
East			
Brandenburg	57	10	5.7
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	29	7	4.1
Sachsen	70	17	4.1
Sachsen-Anhalt	33	10	3.3
Thüringen	55	10	5.5
Germany (as a whole)	1530	299	5.1

Anova F statistic = 4.797 significant at 0.001 level

Pairwise Tukeys HSD reports significant differences at the 0.05 level or less for the following pairs:

Schleswig-Holstein and Sachsen-Anhalt, Sachsen, Bayern, Saarland;
Sachsen-Anhalt and Berlin, Nordrhein-Westphalen, Rheinland Pfalz and
Baden-Württemberg; Nordrhein-Westphalen and Sachsen, Bayern;
Hessen and Sachsen, Bayern Saarland.

they do appear to challenge the notion of cyber campaigning as a more urbanized and metropolitan phenomenon.

Triggers to Establishing Sites

We now attempt to identify some of those factors that may be triggering local high-tech campaigning in the form of website development.

To guide us in this exercise we examine those factors that have been associated with promoting local level campaigning more generally.

Party Status. If we first compare overall levels of party and candidate activity, according to Table 3 we can see that the two major parties, the SPD and CDU/CSU were the best represented across Germany, both running over 400 websites in the 299 constituencies.

The CDU/CSU was actually the most wired party, with a total of 433 sites across the country. If we consider that the total number possible for any party was 598 sites, (i.e., assuming they ran a party and candidate site for each constituency) this means that the CDU/CSU delivered 72% of potential sites, and the SPD, 69%. The FDP managed 337 sites overall, delivering a respectable 56% of possible sites. The Greens (B'90/Grüne) also fared quite well for a small party, offering a total of 238 sites, or 40% of the total possible. The PDS were notably the least

TABLE 3. Frequency of Constituency Websites by Party and Candidate for 2002 Federal Election

	Website Status		
	Valid Website	Under Construction	Missing
Local Parties			
(1) CDU/CSU	229 (77)	10 (3)	60 (20)
(2) FDP	212 (71)	18 (6)	69 (23)
(3) SPD	179 (60)	33 (11)	87 (29)
(4) B'90/Grüne	170 (57)	32 (11)	97 (32)
(5) PDS	107 (36)	10 (3)	182 (61)
Total	897 (60)	103 (7)	495 (33)
Candidates			
(1) SPD	236 (79)	0 (0)	63 (21)
(2) CDU/CSU	204 (68)	0 (0)	95 (32)
(3) FDP	125 (42)	12 (4)	162 (54)
(4) B'90/Grüne	68 (23)	10 (3)	221 (74)
(5) PDS		No independent websites	
Total	633 (52)	22 (2)	541 (47)
Combined total	1530	125	1036

Note: Raw numbers of sites are followed by % (based on row totals) in parentheses. T-tests comparing % of valid party and candidate websites reported significant differences at the 0.01 level between:

Parties: SPD-CDU, the FDP and PDS

CDU-PDS and Greens

FDP-Greens and PDS

Candidates: All

enthusiastic users of the Web at the local level, with an overall total of 107 local sites or 18% of the total possible. This marked absence was mainly due to the fact that the PDS only ran local party sites, with all candidates sites being run off the main national party home page.

Party vs. Candidate. We can also examine the results of Table 3, comparing the results for parties and candidates. Confirming the overall picture reported in Table 1 and discussed above, we see that local parties were more frequent users of the Web than candidates. Overall there were 897 independent party websites for the election and 633 candidate sites. There is a difference, however, across parties in terms of this distribution. Among local party sites, the smaller and larger parties are generally more evenly matched. Indeed, the FDP actually exceeds the SPD in numbers of local party sites rivalling the CDU, and the Greens also make a very strong showing. Statistical tests confirm these findings, with the difference between the CDU and FDP in number of sites found to be non-significant. Most of the other party comparisons, however, do result in significant differences being detected (see notes to Table 3 for details). When we look at the numbers of candidate sites by party, however, the two large parties clearly separate from the rest. The SPD moves to the fore, having the highest incidence of candidate websites (236) and the CDU runs a close second with 204 (the difference is statistically significant, however). The drop-off to the FDP as the third placed party, however, is quite pronounced with only 125 candidate websites across the 299 constituencies.

Overall, therefore, these results appear to confirm that resources—as measured by status as a major party—do make a difference to parties' web efforts at the local level, most notably in terms of the support available to candidates. The SPD in particular emerge as having the most active candidates online. Comparing the local party organizations, however, the differences are not so pronounced. The local branches of the FDP in particular were seen to maintain a web presence similar to that of their larger rivals. These more comparable levels of Web activity between major and minor local party organizations is perhaps accounted for by “two-ballot” electoral system that operates in Germany whereby the 1st vote for the candidate is operated on a plurality or first-past-the-post basis and the 2nd for the party works on a proportional representation basis. As such, the 2nd vote clearly provides the smaller parties with a much greater chance of success and means that they are more likely to focus their campaign efforts on securing voters' support for the 2nd or party vote rather than the 1st vote for a candidate. The greater incidence of local party sites among the minor players, therefore,

compared with that of candidates may be a reflection of their lower commitment overall to promoting individual candidates.

While electoral context may explain some of the gap in minor party candidates' presence online it does not account for the differences observed between the two major parties, with CDU/CSU candidates trailing behind the SPD in this regard. Assuming a reasonable equivalence of financial and technological support between the two sides it would seem that there may be something about the party's orientation or outlook that may predispose its candidates to exploiting new high-tech modes for campaigning. Alternatively of course, it could be that as the governing party they feel more pressure to be seen as keeping up with contemporary trends. Without further probing of candidate attitudes, however, it is not possible to be definitive on this point.

Competition. The literature on local campaigning profiled earlier has pointed strongly to a relationship between campaign activity and closeness of race, showing that political actors tend to invest more money, time and effort into close races. This has also been a finding from some of the empirical work on website development in House, Senate and Gubernatorial elections in the US (Kamarck, 2003) and the UK (Ward and Gibson, 2003). To investigate whether this proved to be the case for web campaigning in Germany, constituencies were assigned one of five levels of competitiveness for both the first (candidate) and second (party) vote, with the most competitive category being those races where the margin of victory in 1998 had been less than 1.5% and the least being those where the margin was greater than 20%. These categories of competitiveness were then compared with a web activity score that was calculated for local parties and the candidates in each constituency. The scores ranged from zero to ten and were calculated based on whether sites were valid, under construction or missing.⁷ The scores were re-coded to produce five levels of web campaigning within a constituency—zero, low (1-2), moderate (3-5), high (6-8) and very high (9-10). Tables 4 and 5 report the findings for the parties and candidates.

The tables reveal an interesting story in that while local parties' use of the Web does not appear to be influenced by the closeness of the race, for candidates there is a significant relationship. Thus, although local party web activity is higher than average in the more competitive constituencies (25% of the most competitive constituencies saw all parties online versus 15% constituencies overall), as shown by Table 4, this is also found to be the case in the least competitive constituencies (23% of the least competitive constituencies have all parties online). For candidates, however, as Table 5 reports, an increasing level of competition

TABLE 4. Level of Local Party Web Activity According to Competitiveness of Constituency

1998 Margin of victory (1st vote) (%)	Local Party Web Activity Index					Total
	Zero	Low	Moderate	High	Very High	
+ 20.5	5	5	15	53	23	20
10.5-20.4	3	6	22	58	12	29
5.5-10.4	6	3	21	58	14	24
2.5-5.4	4	6	19	64	6	16
1.5-2.4	7	7	0	67	20	5
0-1.4	0	6	19	50	25	5
Total	4	5	18	58	15	100 (N = 299)

All figures are reported as %

Chi square statistic 14.52 not significant at 0.05 level

Kendalls tau-b -0.19 not significant at 0.05 level

TABLE 5. Level of Local Candidate Web Activity According to Competitiveness of Constituency

1998 Margin of victory (2nd vote) (%)	Local Party Web Activity Index					Total
	Zero	Low	Moderate	High	Very High	
+ 20.5	4	30	46	20	0	18
10.5-20.4	4	22	39	34	0	30
5.5-10.4	6	18	42	34	0	22
2.5-5.4	5	19	44	33	0	14
1.5-2.4	0	11	32	58	0	6
0-1.4	0	8	46	46	0	9
Total	4	20	42	34	0	100 (N = 299)

All figures are reported as %

Chi square statistic 16.633 not significant at 0.05 level

Kendalls tau-b 0.147 not significant at 0.05 level

does appear to be linked to higher levels of web activity.⁸ This is statistically confirmed by Kendalls tau-b measure of association which is found to be negative and significant for the candidate data but non-significant for the party data.⁹

The finding that candidates are more likely to set up a website in a close race than local parties makes sense given the greater sensitivity of

the former to the electoral environment. Candidates, by definition have a short shelf life and are driven entirely by electoral incentives. Local parties, by contrast, enjoy a more durable presence in the constituency and are more insulated from direct electoral pressures. A decision to adopt a website, therefore, might just as easily happen in “peace-time” as in “war-time.” It should be noted here, however, that the failure to find an association between electoral competition and the incidence of local party websites may also be related to the inclusion of a number of local party organizations that do not fit exactly within the boundaries of the Wahlkreis or election district (as discussed above).

Incumbency. As has been noted already, national party strength does seem to make a difference to the level of web campaigning a party can achieve at the local level, with the major parties operating more sites than minor parties. Individual level characteristics, however, may also prove important to promoting these efforts. One key individual resource that has been shown to enhance local campaign efforts is incumbency. Those holding office are generally more experienced and enjoy greater voter familiarity and finances to invest in their campaign than challengers (Plasser and Filzmaier, 2000). The web campaigning literature is less clear about the benefits of incumbency however. While early evidence from the US showed that challengers were more likely to use the Web than incumbents, the gap has since eroded (Kamarek, 2003).

The findings reported in Table 6 incumbency provides only a slight impetus to web campaigning. The candidates from both major parties seeking re-election are more likely to have established a website than are challengers. However, significance tests reveal that the differences are not significant for the CDU and rest on the cusp of significance at the 0.05 level for the SPD. Together with the findings about competition therefore, these results would suggest that the conventional political and electoral triggers to increased local campaigning are linked to adoption of the new high-tech mode.

Content of Website Communication

Finally, the results of the site content analysis are presented in Table 7. These data were used to address three questions: first, what types of functions or purposes the sites were fulfilling? Second, and more specifically, was the Web promoting a more responsive and feedback-driven style of campaigning, consistent with the professionalized era? And finally, were local sites operating independent of national control

TABLE 6. Web Activity Among Incumbent and Challenger Local Parties and Candidates

Party	Website	No Website
SPD Candidate		
Incumbent	82% (154)	18% (33)
Challenger	73% (80)	27% (30)
CDU/CSU Candidate		
Incumbent	72% (79)	28% (31)
Challenger	66% (123)	34% (64)

% refers to proportion of overall incumbents/challengers having a site, % total row-wise; figures in parentheses are raw numbers of site.

Chi square for CDU 1.16, not significant at the .05 level.

Chi square for SPD 3.85, not significant at .05 level (p value = 0.05).

or were signs of nationalisation and uniformity detectable? Looking first at the overall functionality scores presented in Table 7, it is apparent that between the four functions, candidates and local parties were most inclined toward using the medium as tool to disseminate information and network with other elements of the party.¹⁰

The table reports the average score for the local parties and candidates on each of the functions, by party (reading row-wise) and function (reading column-wise).

Beyond these priorities, however, the scores also reveal that parties and particularly candidates did take the medium seriously as an electioneering tool. On a zero- to ten-point scale the local parties scored just over half of the points for electioneering on average, and candidates did better with an overall average of 6.4. In terms of our original coding this meant that while not so many of these actors had a “full blown” separate election site, candidates in particular were likely to offer a significant number of pages dedicated to the election. Comparing the scores by party, it is clear that overall the local parties did not differ strongly in the extent of their electioneering, with the major parties actually scoring slightly lower than the minor parties, particularly the FDP on this measure (this being reflected in significant t-tests reported at the bottom of the table). For the candidates, however, this story was reversed with those from the SPD and CDU/CSU being significantly more likely to

TABLE 7. Functionality Scores for Party and Candidate Websites*

	Information Provision	Participation	Networking	Electioneering	Total n	Overall Site Functionality Mean
Party						
SPD	7.3	2.6	8.5	5.1	179	5.9
CDU/CSU	6.0	3.5	8.2	4.9	229	5.7
FDP	5.7	3.9	8.7	5.8	212	6.0
PDS	6.6	3.0	7.9	5.5	107	5.8
B'90/ Grüne	6.1	3.6	8.1	5.6	170	5.9
<i>Individual function mean</i>	<i>6.3</i>	<i>3.3</i>	<i>8.3</i>	<i>5.4</i>	<i>897</i>	
Candidates						
SPD	7.9	3.5	8.6	7.1	236	6.8
CDU/CSU	7.8	3.5	9.2	7.5	204	7.0
FDP	5.5	3.9	6.0	5.5	125	5.3
PDS	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
B'90/ Grüne	5.0	3.3	7.3	5.6	68	5.3
<i>Individual** function mean</i>	<i>6.6</i>	<i>3.6</i>	<i>7.8</i>	<i>6.4</i>	<i>633</i>	

*Scores re-scaled on each measurement index to 0-10: Only valid websites were used to calculate figures.

** Candidate averages calculated excluding PDS.

NA = Not applicable. PDS candidate sites were all hosted from national party home pages.

Pairwise t-tests on the differences in mean scores for local parties and candidates resulted in no significant differences being found for candidates on the participation index or for parties on their networking scores. However, significant differences at the 0.01 or 0.05 (*) level were found in the following pairs:

Candidates–Information provision: SPD and FDP; SPD and Greens, CDU and FDP, CDU and Greens

Electioneering: SPD and FDP; SPD and Greens; SPD and CDU*; CDU and FDP; CDU and Greens

Networking: SPD and FDP; SPD and FDP; SPD and Greens; CDU and FDP; CDU and Greens*; FDP and Greens.*

Parties–Information provision: SPD and CDU; SPD and FDP; SPD and Greens; CDU and FDP*; FDP and PDS

Participation: SPD and CDU; SPD and FDP; SPD and Greens; CDU and FDP*; FDP and PDS*

Electioneering: SPD and FDP; CDU and FDP.

focus on the election on their site than those from the minor parties. These results, and particularly the greater level of electioneering by the local minor parties may again be due to the stronger emphasis they place overall on campaigning for the second or party vote in federal elections, compared with the first vote for individual candidates (as noted above).

In regard to whether the new media were used to foster a more interactive and participatory campaign style, the evidence from this election at least, does not support this. Of all the functions measured, local parties' and candidates' sites score the lowest on this index, both averaging a score of three on the standardized 10 point scale. Across the parties there are no significant differences in the extent of participatory features on the sites, according to the t-test results (reported at the bottom of the table). To probe this question further, the type of interactivity that was present on the sites was examined by breaking down the scores on the index and identifying which items were most popular by party. According to Table 8, the most universally embraced feature was email contact and providing an email list subscription was also a common feature.

Opportunities to join the party were, not surprisingly, more frequently found on local party sites, while search engines were more commonly found on candidate sites. Overall, less common features were chat rooms and petitions or surveys. Opportunities for donation were more frequent on candidates sites than parties, particularly among FDP candidates, although in general this facility was the least likely to be present.¹¹ These more nuanced findings reveal, therefore, that even when the websites were being deployed in a participatory manner, the type of communication encouraged was largely one-way and de-personalized rather than genuinely interactive. Participation largely consists of users submitting requests for information, either through search engines or signing up for an email news list. More structured opportunities to send in views and opinions were largely absent.

Turning at last to the question of diversity in site content, we can see from re-examining the results reported in Table 7 that there is a remarkable similarity across parties and candidate websites in terms of the relative emphasis placed on these four functions. Information dissemination and networking through hyperlinks are widely practiced, whereas participatory elements are far less common. Electioneering lies somewhere between the two poles. Of course comparing parties using their mean scores may mask significant internal variation within the parties. To better address this question, therefore, we calculated the standard deviation of candidates' and local parties' scores on the four-functional indices (using the original raw scores) by party. This resulted in a statistic that ranged in

TABLE 8. Interactive Features of Local Party and Candidate Websites (% of Sites with Feature)

	Search Engine	Email List	Chat Room	Email Contact	Petition/Survey	Donate	Join
Party							
SPD	13	30	26	98	7	0	11
CDU/CSU	35	55	26	61	9	5	51
FDP	42	48	29	72	18	18	50
PDS	11	7	44	93	1	4	49
B'90/Grüne	43	54	15	75	14	18	37
<i>Overall average of party sites</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>40</i>
Candidates							
SPD	53	43	31	98	6	5	6
CDU/CSU	48	44	29	98	3	11	10
FDP	47	32	16	88	16	36	19
PDS	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
B'90/Grüne	41	53	19	75	16	16	12
<i>Overall average of candidate sites*</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>90</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>12</i>

*Candidate average calculated excluding PDS.

value from 0.6 up to 1.4. Overall, Green candidates were found to display the widest diversity in site content and CDU/CSU candidates the lowest. The function on which parties and candidates displayed the greatest amount of variance was participation.

To probe these findings further and provide a more substantive interpretation we re-examined the scores on the participation index for the Greens and CDU/CSU. This revealed that approximately 60 percent of Green candidates sites' scored mid-way on the participation index, meaning they contained half of the features measured on their sites, and 40% had more than half. Looking at the same figures for CDU/CSU candidates the spread is less wide, however, with up to 80 percent of candidates scoring at the halfway mark for participation. For electioneering, a similar story emerges, about two-thirds of Green candidate sites offered minimal coverage or a few pages devoted to the election and one-third provided extensive election material, with one in ten actually offering a separate site. For the CDU/CSU, however three-quarters of candidates offered extensive elections coverage, although only three percent had a separate site.

Drawing out the implications of these results for parties' campaign style and also national-local relations, a number of observations present themselves. First, although parties and particularly candidates do appear cognizant of the value of the new media for electioneering, they are not interested at this stage in developing a more innovative and responsive style. Campaign sites, in general, are not being used to promote extensive dialogue with voters. Where input is sought from the public it is through controlled and structured feedback via opinion polls and purpose-built forms. Second, although a remarkably consistent pattern emerges across all parties in terms of a preference for top-down information provision there does not appear to be a conscious effort by central parties to control local party and candidate website content. The notable exception to this is the PDS, which ran all of its local candidate sites from its main home page. Elsewhere, however, parties do appear to be allowing their local operatives to run their own show, with very little templating or standardization in evidence, particularly among Greens. As such, one can argue that the decentralizing tendencies of the Web appear to be winning out currently, with any standardization of sites taking place in the structure and balance of the material placed on them rather than the substantive content.

CONCLUSION

Returning to our first and most basic question posed, therefore, of how far local campaigns can be seen as undergoing the professionalization seen on the national level, our evidence suggests that within Germany at least, the spread of such tactics has become quite widespread. Using website adoption as an indicator of the move toward the more hi-tech practises we find that over half of local parliamentary parties were online for the 2002 elections and their candidates were not far behind.

When we probe further to look at some of the factors promoting the rise of the hi-tech methods, it appears that a story of normalization is emerging in that it is the local branches and candidates of the major parties that are the most prolific in cultivating a web presence. The smaller parties are hardly down and out, however. The FDP local parties in particular have a notable online presence. Perhaps their status as a potential governing partner with a small but quite sophisticated support base means the FDP feel a stronger pressure and/or incentive to stay abreast of new technology and trends. The local context also appears to play

a role in motivating candidates to set up sites, with those candidates facing a close race being more likely to pursue the hi-tech option.

Finally, what do our findings say about the future direction of local campaign style and the role of the local level in a national campaign? Overall, there does seem to be a lack of imagination in using the technology to develop more responsive and interactive campaigns. Most websites contained links and information, but few had opportunities for genuine dialogue with voters. While this imbalance was detectable across the websites of all parties, with the exception of the PDS, there was no evidence of a concerted attempt to “clone” sites at the local level. Sites varied considerably within parties, with the almost endearingly amateur and cluttered sitting alongside more sleek and sophisticated election focused sites. The idea that this type of campaigning may bring the local level back into the equation, does gain some support, therefore, from this research. Divergence and individuality are in evidence in German parties’ and candidates’ web presence, at least in their most recent national election.

Based on the content analysis results, however, it is clear that local actors will need to develop the participatory elements of their sites if they want to connect with their constituents and realize the opportunities they offer for enhancing their local profiles. In addition, the decision by the PDS to operate all of its candidate sites shows how easy centralized message control would be using this medium, challenging those who think decentralist imperatives as inherent within the technology. Indeed one wonders if, by the next election, the other parties may begin to see the merits to such a top-down strategy. Thus, as well as providing a comprehensive insight into the state of modern campaigning at the local level in Germany at the start of the new millennium, we hope this study also provides a benchmark from which to compare and evaluate the course of future developments.

Received: 01/19/2005

Revised: 05/16/2005

Accepted: 11/02/2005

NOTES

1. Germany employs a two-ballot system for federal parliamentary elections. Each voter has two votes: a candidate vote for a district candidate, and a list vote for party lists. Candidate votes are aggregated on the district level by plurality rule. List vote shares are aggregated on the national level and determine the proportion of the total

number of seats to which a party is entitled. As in all PR systems, parties have to overcome an institutional threshold in order to win seats. Parliamentary seats in Germany are awarded only to parties that have gained at least 5% of the party list vote.

2. All the assistants worked independently, but collected data across parties, rather than any one individual being responsible for a particular party or parties.

3. For example, www.spiegel.de, www.zdf.de, www.bundeswahlleiter.de.

4. This information was obtained from the special election site operated by the Bundeswahlleiter at <www.bundeswahlleiter.de> during the 2002 campaign. The site was taken offline in mid-2004 and has been archived according to staff (personal communication contacted 18/01/05).

5. Given the possible number of sites to be coded (10 per constituency * 299 constituencies), a truncated version of the full coding scheme for partisan sites developed in a previously published work was necessary.

6. Proportions for candidates and party sites are calculated on the basis that 100 percent means all 5 parliamentary parties ran local party or candidate sites in all 299 constituencies.

7. A missing site for a party/candidate was scored zero, under construction as one and valid as two. Given that there were five parties in the analysis, a maximum score of ten indicated that all local parties/candidates had websites and zero, indicated that none had a site.

8. The lack of any constituencies with very high levels of candidate web activity is explained by the exclusion of the PDS from the analysis, due to the lack of any independent sites. As a result only scores up to 8 or "high" were possible on the candidate web activity index.

9. Pearson's *r* correlation coefficient was also calculated as a measure of association between the two variables using the actual scores on the candidate and local party web activity index (0-10) and the 1998 1st (candidate) and 2nd (party) vote margins respectively. For the parties, a coefficient of 0.074 was recorded and was not significant, for candidates, however, a coefficient of -0.157 was recorded and was significant at the 0.001 level.

10. The very high scores for networking should be treated with some caution since the original index was a three-point scale—the smallest range of any of the indices. The standardization of this to a ten-point scale exaggerates the likelihood of higher scores compared with scales based on five, six or seven points (as was the case for electioneering, participation and information).

11. Even though candidate sites have more fund-raising features on their sites than the parties, overall the low profile given to donating via the German sites is notable compared with US studies (Greer and LaPointe, 2004). The generous system of subsidies and regular membership income the parties receive may in part explain this.

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APPENDIX 1

**German State and Local Parties and Candidates:
Web Coding Scheme**

ELECTIONEERING
(Ordinal Index 0-5)

- 5 a separate election site:** this is distinguished by being (a) self-contained such that all election information were available in this area of the site (i.e., it is a site within a site and resembles a main party web site). (b) multiple sources of information (i.e., the features listed below in B are contained within it). (c) the site if prioritised during the campaign and is updated frequently. (d) there is a prominent link to the site from the home page.
- 3 pages for the elections:** pages were more limited in scope than a site. (a) some but not all election information is contained in pages (i.e., press releases kept in separate section). (b) limited amount of information on elections available—generally candidate lists and manifesto. (c) the pages remain static.
- 1 minimal coverage:** very limited information (a) 1 page with 1 feature (list of candidates for e.g) (b) page remains static (c) not linked to from the home page.
- 0 no coverage**

Note: For each of the items scored it is also useful on the coding sheet to note what level down from the home page it is (i.e., how many clicks before you got there). This type of information can be used later to assess the complexity of the site, and also the prominence given to the feature.

INFORMATION PROVISION

(Additive index 0-6, 1 point assigned for each item present)

Policies (A) National More specific discussion of commitments and priorities of the party in areas such as employment, health, education, defence, etc. Note this is NOT the manifesto which is coded below.

Policies (B) Regional/Local

Media releases Can include speeches, statements, interview transcripts.

People/Who's Who Page or pages providing an overview or biography of key personnel within the party.

Event Calendar Carrying information on dates of upcoming or recent events the party has organised for the public or members such as rallies and demos, or fundraising or awareness raising events.

Article Archive or Library Special section carrying research papers or articles, written by the party itself, its supporters and/or from taken from government and media sources designed to provide in-depth coverage of issues of importance to the party.

PARTICIPATION

(Additive index 0-14, 1 point assigned for each item present)

Information Gathering (A) Does the site offer search engines, cookies, games/gimmicks, audio and video, etc., whereby the user can gather more information about the organisation.

Information Gathering (B) More active engagement required, with users signing up for direct email updates and newsletters.

Political dialogue Does the site offer a facility or some kind of bulletin board or chat room for interested visitors to exchange views with one another and/or Q&A sessions with leaders?

Contacting Does the site offer email contacts for itself and/or other individuals/organisations that encourage people to express opinions and provide feedback.

Petitioning/Opinion Poll Does the site offer some kind of online petition or opinion poll to sign?

Donating Can you donate financially to the organisation directly on the site?

Joining (full) Can you join the organisation directly on the site?

NETWORKING INTERNAL

(Additive 0-3, 1 point for each item present)

Link to national party

Link to regional party

Link to local party/candidate