Taking Our Country Back: The Crafting of Networked Politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama, by Daniel KreissThe MoveOn Effect: The Unexpected Transformation of American Political Advocacy, by David Karpf

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Book Reviews

Taking Our Country Back: The Crafting of Networked Politics from Howard Dean to Barack Obama, by Daniel Kreiss. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012. 248 pp. $26.95 paper.

The MoveOn Effect: The Unexpected Transformation of American Political Advocacy, by David Karpf. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012. 256 pp. $27.95 paper.

Reviewed by Darren G. Lilleker

There is a wealth of recent scholarly attention devoted to ways in which digital communication technologies have impacted upon political life. In particular, studies have explored to what extent democracy has been invigorated through the interactive affordances of social media tools and platforms which are used for talking about politics, alongside more mundane social activities, as well as for political campaigning. The works by Kreiss and Karpf approach these questions from the perspective of political organization and organizing, and in particular how U.S. politics has been transformed over the past decade or so to see organizations becoming more grassroots and invoking the power of the citizen in order to attain political goals.

Kreiss charts the period 2003 to 2008 through six chapters, from Howard Dean entering the 2004 contest to be Democratic presidential nominee to the election of Barack Obama five years later. Through a combination of interviews, participant observation, and documentary analysis, including the analysis of memoirs of key players, he documents how a new model of campaigning emerged within the Democratic Party. Neither Dean nor Obama necessarily sought to develop this new model per se. Dean, rather, became the beneficiary because his political platform appealed to the progressives behind the My Due Diligence (MyDD) blog, *Daily Kos*, and a number of other interactive platforms that opposed George W. Bush's foreign and domestic policy. Dean was the right candidate politically but lacked resources. Those who gravitated to his campaign engaged in "taking up new media tools, creating new ones, and crafting new organizing practices around them" (Kreiss, p. 7); the story is one of constant innovation in order to overcome challenges (Kreiss, p. 37). For Kreiss what are important are the organizing practices and philosophies. Disparate activism around progressive politics, in particular against the war in Iraq, needed to be harnessed. The model which made Dean, albeit for a short time, the leading candidate involved what

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Kreiss describes as "structured interactivity" (Kreiss, p. 11), the channeling of energy into specific tasks. The Dean campaign provided the infrastructure for what might be called campaigning 2.0.

The infrastructure involved the "technical artifacts, organizational forms and social practices that provide background contexts for action" (Kreiss, p. 13). The key context was that of the "we" who both Dean and Obama claimed to be with them in "taking our country back." Creating a "we" meant creating a community based on "voluntaristic collaboration" where supporters chose to participate. To motivate supporters, it was necessary to make them feel their contributions were valued and worthwhile. The campaign borrowed philosophies and tools from customer relationship management to provide simple tasks that could be incremental and lead supporters to climb the "ladder of involvement," from joining to donating to attending meetings and events, to volunteering locally; this was certainly the model that would be developed for the Obama campaign.

One gets a sense from Kreiss's description of the Dean campaign that there was an experimental culture (Kreiss, p. 46), highly innovative yet also disorganized and somewhat rudderless, more driven by the scale of support than clear objectives. The "chaotic creativity" was apparent to all involved, but as Dean's campaign collapsed the innovations would underpin a range of platforms created by those who had cut their teeth with Dean and moved on to serve the progressive movement more broadly and then would reconvene to staff the Obama campaign. By 2007 the creativity became more channeled and structured. As Party Chairman, Dean brought much of the innovation to the Democrats, and the Voter Activation Network (VAN) infrastructure was built to collect and manage data and support campaigning across all states. As VAN morphed into VoteBuilder, it provided the interface to underpin the core aims of the Obama campaign—"money, message and mobilization" (Kreiss, p. 121). Supporters needed to donate, to extend the reach, and to volunteer to ensure success. That they did is of course not the result of innovations in technology, but the innovations channeled enthusiasm for the charismatic and historic candidate into real-world achievements. As many studies have noted, the Obama campaign became a single narrative multi-authored by a semi-autonomous collective of staffers and supporting citizens as "richly polyglot as America itself" (Kreiss, p. 143).

The control exercised over supporters should not be downplayed. Voluntarism was channeled ruthlessly, return on investment tracked carefully; as Kreiss notes, his story is about "electoral mobilization not transformatory politics" (Kreiss, p. 197). This raises an interesting question: To what extent did the "participatory ethos and rhetoric that these [Dean and Obama] campaigns deployed to mobilize supporters" (Karpf, p. 15) incubate a demand for a more participatory politics that was unfulfilled following Obama's election? If it did, then how that demand is met is explained by Karpf who situates the Dean/Obama innovations within the wider context of the American progressive movement, largely omitting conservative politics due to the lack of innovation on the American right. Karpf challenges the notion of "online" politics as "organizing without organizations," arguing that what he found through his interviews and participatory observation was organizing with different organizations and different organizational models. His focus is on advocacy groups incentivized by their exclusion from national politics during the George W. Bush years and offers an agency-driven understanding that "it is the people who make use of this new technology that affect the contours of political speech" (Karpf, p. 7). One might add, reflecting on his story, that they also affect who speaks, where, and to whom.

Karpf draws on a wealth of political science literature to reconceptualize the notion of civic organizations' role in building social capital to argue that this has now become the

preserve of "Internet-mediated organizations" as opposed to labor unions or neighborhood groups. The progressive organizations, he argues, set themselves up as "Internet-mediated issue generalists" (Karpf, p. 23) that facilitated motivated citizens to increase their political voice. The organizations are defined by their values and ethos; they launch campaigns in reaction to events and then draw supporters to their campaigns. Largely, the activities were structured around opposing the Bush administration. The low cost and efficiency of e-mails to provide "online tools for offline action" (Karpf, p. 19), he argues, is a defining feature of what we might call advocacy 2.0.

Karpf identifies three types of organization models which were precursors to the revolution in online social communication: (a) membership and fundraising organizations as exemplified by MoveOn; (b) networked communities, or "netroots," as exemplified by the *Daily Kos* blog; and (c) proto-organizational forms exemplified by Democracy for America. An overview of these forms is the basis for the first three empirical chapters. Karpf then describes the links between these organizations, the network that they instantiate, and the Democrat campaigns 2004–2008, highlighting the importance of the campaign innovations Kreiss details. The final chapters deal with the failures of the right to mirror innovations in progressive politics prior to providing a discussion of the impact upon political engagement and participation.

Karpf demonstrates the difference between the high-resource traditional civic organizations and the majority of these new, online-oriented startups. His analysis of MoveOn, the first case study, demonstrates how having a minimal core staff and a lack of physical infrastructure facilitates networked, hybrid organizational practices. Basically the picture is painted of there being a few politically active technical experts who have leveraged the power of the online network from cafés and bars using Wi-Fi access. MoveOn allows these activists to identify an issue (issue grazing), craft a message, and mobilize those interested in a matter of minutes. The power lies in the back-end database. Organizations like MoveOn require a huge membership, but membership only entails having permission to contact through citizens giving their e-mail addresses. The database of e-mails permits reaching a mass of citizens and, to an extent, tailoring messages to suit the intended targets. MoveOn concentrates on requesting simple actions: signing e-petitions, local activism (such as boycotting or buycotting), donating or contacting Congress, all at the touch of a button to activate the "netroots nation."

Weblogs share the notion of community with MoveOn, but the community is more connected. *Daily Kos* and similar sites frame issues and offer solutions while also inviting community members to contribute. Karpf recognizes them as ideologically homogenous, and if not Daily Me style certainly offering a "Daily We"; this highlights how they encourage "engagement in a public sphere" which can lead to "online collective action" which then "increases polarization through participation" (Karpf, p. 71). The suggestion here is that the ties to the cause become stronger through connectedness and collaboration. The observation that these forms of collective action "properly channeled, could be converted into valuable resources such as campaign volunteers, media coverage and financial support" (Karpf, p. 78) drove the philosophy underpinning Howard Dean's campaign. The technology was insufficiently developed in 2004, but was refined in time for Obama's campaign launch in 2007, which was to effectively harness the loose, progressive coalition of online activists. The progressive advantages online are argued to have stemmed from being out of government and the Internet's progressive ideological framework of openness and participatory democracy. Progressive advantages also mean they have more trolls, Internet provocateurs posting inflammatory comments, who can hijack conservative weblogs and

forums. For these reasons, Karpf argues, the progressive advantage is maintained despite noteworthy innovations within turn-of-the-century campaigns. The right is locked into persuading and informing, not collaborating and crowdsourcing; while the Tea Party tapped into netroots Karpf sees this as a meta-brand on the right and so lacking the core values to replicate the MoveOn "Internet-mediated issue generalists" model. Like MoveOn they tend to be against an incumbent president, but the divisions between Republicans and Libertarians lead to further polarization. Progressive advocacy groups remain only loosely tied to the Democrats, and campaigns for specific candidates over others are based on policy stances rather than partisan attachment.

Perhaps more importantly, rightist groups tend to eschew interactivity while progressive groups appear to seamlessly blend three types of communication: organization-to-member/online; member-to-member/online; and member-to-member/offline. The progressives therefore provide a framework for interpreting politics for their supporters but rely more on self-mobilization and community-based mobilization than on the persuasive power of the group itself. The fact that citizens are gravitating online, locating other citizens based on shared political values and joining collective actions, would seem to support the longstanding arguments of cyber-optimists who have long sought such developments. However, the progressive blogs and forums usually have far more radical views than those whom campaigns support for election. *Daily Kos* may have had some responsibility in bringing down Virginian Senator George Allen after he was caught on camera calling a colored activist by the offensive and racist term *macaca*, and the blog's support for his Democrat replacement James Webb through primaries and the election may have secured his narrow victory (Karpf, p. 62), but influencing a candidate once elected is more difficult.

In fact, Karpf perhaps hints the netroots environment is actually making the grass-roots voices easier to ignore. He notes how digital technologies have created the space for a denser, noisier communications environment. Within this environment issues develop a half-life; they become hot topics but only within specific spaces and only until the next topic comes along. While he concludes on a positive democratic note that "political advocacy has become more interactive" (Karpf, p. 172) this is preceded by concerns regarding the amateurishness of the DIY political advocacy that emerges in some spaces. The Obama campaign may have been used symbolically to provide evidence of the power of netroots, but both authors note many caveats when considering this argument. One can argue the community organizing which underpinned the Dean campaign, the reform of the Democratic party machine, and subsequently the Obama campaign were crucial. However, one can also note the political context favored the Democrats in 2008 anyway and Obama as candidate gained unprecedented levels of interest and was a very attractive package to a wide range of progressives. As Kreiss notes when questioning the broader implications of the Obama victory, focusing on innovations made by the Tea Party in 2012, "the most powerful new media political tools in the world had very little to translate into electoral resources" (Kreiss, p. 198).

The works of Kreiss and Karpf are therefore very important. They offer in-depth insights into organizational challenges the broad progressive movement faced in developing a new campaign model. Equally, while highlighting how 2007–2008 represented the perfect storm, where innovations and context were married to create a movement that helped deliver a famous victory, they demonstrate how quickly the storm dissipated. Thus, long term, we do not see a huge revival of democratic engagement. In fact, Karpf notes advocacy groups can boast no more than 0.38% of the population as activists, a figure not far removed from those who were politically active in the pre-Internet era (Karpf, p. 161). The model has been borrowed and adapted by myriad political parties and advocacy groups

across advanced democracies with mixed successes. While beyond the remit of these studies, it might be the case that accidental exposure to political information is accelerated as these advocacy groups colonize social media platforms and their messages are shared by activists. Such secondary and indirect effects from this campaigning model are worth consideration and should not be overlooked. Equally, many political actors may have to be more careful when voting, speaking publicly, or even semi-privately as they can become immediately targeted by activists. This suggests we may be in an age of increased and accelerated accountability. However, the polarization of activism can equally mean that trolling predominates, and any form of activism can be dismissed as partisan and expected rather than evidence of a mass of the represented standing up to their representatives and demanding to be heard. While the expressive nature of U.S. politics can appear somewhat unique, across democracies, driven by the politics of austerity, progressive activists are finding a voice. Within many nations market leaders appear in the field of advocacy. European groups are less connected to mainstream parties, so as is the case with progressives and the Democrats, there is a sense that activists are waiting to be organized. Whether the campaigning model can become fully implemented elsewhere is a moot point, as is what ideological position will emerge as dominant given the resurgence of the European right. In differing ways, Kreiss and Karpf provide a road map for political organization which highlights the challenges, benefits, and pitfalls for organizations, citizens, and democratic systems. As with many studies of the Internet, these works raise many important questions regarding the future of democratic engagement.

Who Governs? Presidents, Public Opinion, and Manipulation, by James N. Druckman and Lawrence R. Jacobs. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015. 192 pp. $25.00 paper.

The Impression of Influence: Legislator Communication, Representation, and Democratic Accountability, by Justin Grimmer, Sean J. Westwood, and Solomon Messing. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014. 204 pp. $29.95 paper.

  Reviewed by SHARON E. JARVIS

How do strategic politicians talk to their constituencies? Do they craft communications to respond to current citizen interests? Or do they develop messages to move public sentiment closer to their own preferred policy positions? Do they actively promote the benefits they bring home to their districts? Or do they take a more calculated approach in disclosing such information? Political observers have long noted the advantages of shaping the political conversation to an elite's advantage (Edelman, 1988; Riker, 1986; Rochefort & Cobb, 1994; Schattschneider, 1960; Zarefsky, 2004). The current two books at the intersection of messaging and representation measure this premise in rigorous ways, offering new empirical data on these questions and much, much more. Both texts are guided by key

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