

Kathy Bowrey, "Book review: Andrew Chadwick, *Internet Politics: State, Citizens and New Communicative Technologies*", *International History Review* Vol 29 (4) Dec 2007 935-7

Chadwick, Andrew. *Internet Politics. States, Citizens and New Communications Technologies*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Pp. xiii, 384. \$64.95 (CND), paper.

Given the globally diffuse and decentred nature of the internet, it can be difficult to address its politics. Nonetheless, the internet is a technological tool and a force of change in the politics of communication that deserves some accounting for. While Chadwick is aware that the information society is a subject in its own right, in this work his underlying concern is with the effect of the internet on the policies and practices of the nation state. Chadwick conscientiously tracks how State politics and governmental practices have been transformed because of the new communicative networks and possibilities. Changes for citizens and community engagement are also critically assessed, in light of the perception that the internet supports more democratic dialogue.

Part One gently educates the reader into the language and theories conventionally associated with the information society, especially alerting readers to technological determinism and its limits. There is a significant literature survey, exploring political themes including decentralization, participation, community, globalization, postindustrialization, rationalization, governance, and libertarianism. It moves on to a largely factual prehistory of the internet, and then draws out debates surrounding the statistics and policy interpretations of the significance of a digital divide for the development of the information society.

Part Two tracks the potential of e-empowerment - changes to representative democracy and the potential for new forms of democratic engagement between citizens and their representatives, that comes with e-democracy, e-mobilization, e-campaigning and e-government. This institutional focus includes debate about the contemporary state of the public sphere. Examples of new forms of participation, where citizens use networks to influence bureaucratic, party political and legislative policy making, and vice versa, are largely drawn from the US. However care is taken not to over-hype the potential of these new networks. Readers are discouraged from drawing overly generalised conclusions about the potential for deliberative dialogue from such diverse accounts of government-citizen interactions. Nonetheless the tone remains optimistic.

The numerous new global institutions that influence internet policy direction are canvassed in Part Three. The morass of sites that deal with different aspects and levels of internet administration, with which nation states interact and respond, are detailed well. Familiar controversies surrounding governance of the internet - surveillance, privacy, intellectual property - are primarily used to highlight the ongoing significance of State policy in defining citizen's internet 'rights'.

The political economy of the media and entertainment industries is also canvassed in Part Three, in some detail in relation to intellectual property and content issues. This

discussion of media power would have been assisted by linking the discourse to convergence issues, and relating this chapter to the earlier one on internet governance. United Nation bodies such as the International Telecommunications Union and World Summit on the Information Society actively promote free market principles for developing the information economy and society. Treaties associated with the World Trade Organization and the World Intellectual Property Organization have strong intellectual property maximalization agendas. The policy role of global agencies, supported and implemented through international, regional and bi-lateral treaties, affects the independence and autonomy of all Nation-States. In my view reflection on this political trend associated with globalisation is rather underplayed across the chapters, and the question of sovereignty is left relatively unexplored. Perhaps this concern resonates much more outside of the UK and USA.

The text eases the reader into the breadth of the subject with clear, summary point overviews of chapter content and objectives. “Exhibit” boxes highlight key issues for further reflection, serving as additional learning aids. There are suggested discussion points, further readings and a companion website and blog which is rich in further material. *Internet Politics* would be a most reassuring and accessible “covers the field” text for political science students and teachers.

This is solid work that throughout draws on many examples, comparisons and weighs up the pros and cons of various writers and points of view in each section. It is light on in references to new media, communications theory and jurisprudence. This limits the use of this work in these disciplines. It is also a bit difficult to extract original insights of the author from the weight of the scholarly material summarised, which makes for a more challenging read for the more informed reader. However there is sufficient depth to simply pick up and start with a preferred topic. Despite primarily targeting the textbook market, the book is still deserving the attention of a more scholarly reader.

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