DETERMINANTS OF ONLINE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN CROATIA

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In this paper we study variables associated with online political participation in Croatia from two perspectives. First, we explain past online political participation using variables implied as important by sociological and political research literatures. Among them are sociodemographic characteristics, political values, past participation in offline political activities, and Internet usage variables. While all these factors were substantially correlated with the past online political participation, political values and past offline political participation were its most important determinants. Second, we study the propensity for future online political participation using an extended version of Ajzen's theory of planned behavior. The determinants of online political participation within this model are attitude toward participating, internalized social pressure, perceived behavioral control, and moral obligation. Three variables – attitudes, internalized social pressure, and moral obligation – contributed almost equally to the predictive power of the model, covering almost a 50% share of variance in the propensity for online political participation. By including past online political participation, the predictive power was further increased to a 65% share of explained variance. A number of open questions remain, pointing to several avenues for future research.

Key words: political participation, e-democracy, online research

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INTRODUCTION

Democracy and political participation

The word *democracy*, coined from Greek words Demos (the people) and Kratos (authority, rule), reminds us that this type of government relies on citizen participation. Indeed, democracy is "that system of community government in which … the members of a community participate … in the making of decisions which affect them all" (Cohen, 1971, p. 7). Depending on the level of citizen participation, Barber (1984) differentiates between "representative" or "thin" and "direct" or "strong" democracy. In the thin democracy, citizens are relatively passive. They elect their representatives who then do most of the real governing. This means that "experts and elites" actually govern the community, while its citizens remain "watchdogs and monitors", mostly concerned with their private lives. On the contrary, citizens in the strong democracy actually participate in governing themselves. They are engaged in a variety of political activities at local and national levels, and participate – if not in all matters all of the time – at least in some matters at least some of the time (Barber, 2003a).

Political participation is a multidimensional phenomenon (Norris & Jones, 1998). For example, Cohen (1971) distinguishes between breadth, range and depth of participation. *Breadth* is determined by the proportion of community members affected by a certain issue who actually participate in deciding about it. *Range* refers to the variety of issues citizens are enabled to make decisions about. *Depth* indicates how many different forms of participation there are in a given community. Voting is only one of the forms, often the most superficial one. There are many other more or less conventional forms of political participation – from collecting signatures for a petition, writing letters to a newspaper about social or political concerns, participating in a non-violent demonstration, collecting money for a social cause, joining a political party, to running for a political position (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

It is generally agreed that participation in developed democracies is constantly declining within the last several decades (Ferdinand, 2000; Putnam, 2000; Schuler, 2003), although the opportunities to participate are abundant. Numerous determinants of (non)participation have been proposed: political tolerance, interpersonal trust, political efficacy, access to information, social capital, perceived costs in terms of time and effort, demographic characteristics, and interest in politics. We will discuss them within the next several paragraphs.

Some theorists argue that a certain level of *political tolerance* is necessary for developing democratic institutions (Co-

hen, 1971; Sullivan & Transue, 1999). Lack of tolerance is shown to be strongly related to perceived threat imposed by opposing groups, which is in turn related to certain personality characteristics, level of education, and political activism. Studies conducted in different societies (e.g., USA, Sullivan et al., 1982; Russia, Gibson, 1992) show that most "ordinary" citizens support basic rules and principles of democracy, but when asked to apply them to specific cases they show much less tolerance. The politically active part of the community, nevertheless, shows much higher levels of political tolerance. That explains how democracy can be sustained even when most citizens have low levels of tolerance (Sullivan & Transue, 1999).

Social capital is another concept frequently used to explain political participation. It refers to the density of social networks in the society. Groups and voluntary associations, such as various clubs, religious communities, sport teams and similar, are crucial for developing and maintaining social capital, which in turn enhances political participation and increases citizen satisfaction with their government (Putnam, 2000, 2003). Civic participation can also influence political participation in a more direct way, through developing skills – such as giving speeches and writing letters – that are directly transferable to engagement in politics (Brady et al., 1995).

One of the main components of social capital is *interpersonal trust*, which is considered to be necessary for the citizens to be able to govern themselves (Cohen, 1971). However, citizen trust in all levels of government has fallen dramatically over the past three decades (Nugent, 2001). In a recent study of British adults, funded by The Electoral Commission (2003), it was found that most of them share a deep sense of disconnection with political process and disillusion about politicians. Related to this is the concept of *political efficacy* (Barnes & Kaase, 1979), or perception of one's own political power. The aforementioned study found the "deep-rooted and widespread skepticism" about the impact of voting on political situation.

A certain amount of *time and effort* must be invested in political participation, but less and less members of the community are ready to pay that price. For example, many UK citizens who did not vote justify that by impracticality and inconvenience of the voting process rather than by their lack of interest in politics (Kearns, 2001). Today's fast pace of living, accentuated by dense working schedules and various media pressures, rarely leaves time for political participation, especially "deeper" forms such as active party membership or political candidacy.

It is a well known fact that politically active parts of the population are *demographically different* than less active citi-

zens. They are more often male, better educated and more affluent (Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Verba et al., 1993). General *interest in politics* is also a significant predictor of political activity (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Although there are some indications that interest in politics has risen within the last few decades due to increased popularity of post-materialist values, politics is still not a high priority for most people; family, work, friends and leisure are far more important (Inglehart, 1997).

Political participation and the Internet

Already in 1984, Barber suggested that "strong democracy requires... a form of town meeting in which participation is direct yet communication is regional or even national" (p. 273), and that new technologies might actually enable this. The Internet could indeed overcome problems inherent to participation in offline associations, such as time and costs related to use of physical meeting halls (Klein, 1999), and thus make participation more likely. Contrary to initial stereotypes, this increased time spent online results in decreased communication with family and social networks (Kraut et al., 1998), more recent sociological research suggests that Internet can actually increase the amount of time spent with family and friends by making everyday activities more efficient (Franzen, 2000). This is confirmed by findings that Internet users are more socially active than nonusers (Robinson et al., 2000), and that there is a positive relationship between intensity of Internet use and civic and political participation (Weber et al., 2003). By providing people the opportunity to build new networks and engage in making important decisions, the Internet can help them to enhance their social capital and break "the depressing spiral of decreasing participation" (Gibson, 2001).

Ways in which the Internet can be used for political participation are numerous (c.f. Brack & Noble, 2001; Nugent, 2001). Citizens can use e-mail, blogs, discussion groups, chats, instant messaging and other interactive online services to connect with other individuals and groups with similar political interests. In this way they can compare their opinions with those of others, and let their own voice be heard. Blogs, or web logs written by private citizens, are becoming a particularly influential source of information about and interpretation of political events.

More and more political parties and other political groups are offering at least some information about themselves on their websites or through e-mail lists. Many are using other, more interactive tools to access their supporters and stimulate them to action. An example of a successful use of the Internet

for political campaign has been given by the 2004 American presidential candidate Howard Dean. He used the Internet – and especially the blogs of his supporters – to gain voters' base and collect the largest amount of donations among all other candidates in the 2004 Democratic presidential primaries. Today, campaigning through the Internet is a standard part of political campaigning strategy in many countries, including Croatia. Services such as You Tube, enabling free and easy posting of videos on the Web, become an important way of communicating as well (like, for instance, in the latest elections for the leader of the Croatian Social-Democratic Party).

Local and national governments are now offering various online services to citizens. They range from basic "consumer services" such as access to laws and regulations, downloading various forms, submitting online applications or paying bills, to services that directly stimulate political participation such as virtual town halls and online broadcasting of governmental meetings (Rosen, 2002). Even voting over the Internet has been considered, but so far it has been considered too vulnerable to cyber attacks to be of practical use. A recent example is the SERVE project of the U.S. government, an Internet voting system that was built for use in general elections, but was shut down after negative security reviews (Jefferson et al., 2004).

Although the Internet undoubtedly offers many opportunities for improvement of political life, some critics suspect that the Internet cannot miraculously change political realities of the society. Barber (2003b) warns that online political debates are often superficial, mindless and one-way instead of interactive. Others point out that the amount of electronically submitted communication might become overwhelming (Nugent, 2001), such as in the case of the American House of Representatives, which receives an almost unmanageable amount of e-mails each year (e.g., more than 100 million in 2001, see Congress Online Project, 2002). Still, others claim that, although the Internet is seemingly free of ownership, it is becoming more and more dominated by several big corporations such as Microsoft (MSN), Google, AOL Time Warner, or Yahoo, which control most of the users' online time (Kessler, 2001; Nugent, 2001; Schuler, 2003). Finally, despite the fact that the majority of the population in democratic societies has access to the Internet, there still remains a portion being excluded (Klein, 1999; Drori and Jang, 2003). This can further increase the socioeconomic bias already present in civic and political participation (c.f. Weber et al., 2003).

The ability of the Internet to "broaden and deepen" participation in the political process is a topic of many discus-

sions. Norris (1999) describes two main streams of thought – mobilization and reinforcement theories. Mobilization theories claim that use of the Internet will facilitate new forms of participation and encourage so far inactive citizens to start participating. They suggest that the Internet can enhance democracy by providing access to information, opening opportunities for political debate, and removing financial and geographical obstacles to participation. Reinforcement theories, on the other hand, suggest that use of the Internet will only strengthen existing patterns of political participation, and perhaps even widen the existing gap between the more and less affluent, and ultimately politically active and inactive. For example, Norris (1999) reports that online communities in both USA and Western Europe are significantly biased towards the younger, better educated, more affluent and politically more active when compared with the rest of the population. The Internet may not be "immensely democratic" (Schuler, 2003) as hoped in its early days. Existing patterns of political involvement may be simply reproduced and further strengthened on the Internet (Barber, 2003b).

AIMS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Although democratic government in Croatia is relatively young, citizens already have plenty of opportunities for political discourse on the Internet. Croatian Webosphere includes a number of web sites, blogs, and forums dedicated to political discussions (e.g. www.pollitika.com, podforum Politika at www.forum.hr, blogs at www.blog.hr). Croatian Government (www.vlada.hr) and most major political parties have their Web sites (www.hdz.hr, www.sdp.hr), and even the sessions of Croatian Parliament are now available via online streaming (www.sabor.hr). In addition, many local municipalities have active Web pages and online forums where citizens can access latest information about their communities and participate in political discussions (e.g. www.varazdin.hr). However, there is not much research on the variables that are related to use of the Internet for political participation in Croatia.

This study aims to clarify these variables within two basic aims. First, we will examine the relationship between online political participation and (1) socio-demographic characteristics, (2) frequency of and experience with Internet use, (3) political values, and (4) past participation in offline political activities. We expect that frequency of Internet use and experience in using it will be positively related to online political participation. Socio-demographic characteristics that are usually related to more frequent use of the Internet, such as male sex, younger age, higher education, and higher income could also be related to heightened online political participation.

Higher education and higher income are expected to be related to online participation also because they were shown to be related to political participation in general (Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Verba et al., 1993). Regarding political values, we expect that people with more liberal, or left-wing leanings – reflected in rating themselves as more left vs. right, and in supporting economic development of Croatia rather than keeping its national identity – will be more open to this alternative form of participation. A similar trend was observed in the 2004 American presidential elections, where the most active and politically engaged Internet users had more often liberal and Democratic than conservative and Republican leanings (Pew Research Center, 2004). We also hypothesize that those who have more trust in political intuitions and feel more empowered to affect them will participate more (c.f. Barnes & Kaase, 1979). Finally, if the reinforcement theory of online political participation (e.g. Barber, 2003b, and Norris, 1999; Schuler, 2003) is true, we can expect a strong relationship between past participation in classical ('offline') political activities and online political participation. If, on the other hand, the mobilization theory is correct, then offline and online political participation will not be strongly related.

Second, we will investigate the psychological underpinnings of citizens' intention to use the Internet for political participation in the future. Following Krosnick (2002), who advocates for "doing a more psychological version of political psychology more often" (p. 187), we focus on an action-theory approach to political participation. Such an action-theory approach to political participation refers mainly to different psychological expectancy-value models, which attempt to predict one's actions by one's subjective goal values and subjective expectancies about goal attainment (c.f. Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980).

One of the most prominent theories grown out of the expectancy-value tradition is the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). This theory posits that a behavioral intention is affected by attitudes towards that behavior and subjective normative pressure to engage in the behavior. Ajzen (1985, 1991) extended this model by adding an additional component called 'perceived behavioral control', restricting the range of possible behaviors to those allowed by available time, financial resources, skills and knowledge. This extended model called 'theory of planned behavior' seems most promising for application to the content area of predicting and explaining political participation over the Internet.

According to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985, 1991), a central determinant of behavior is the individual's *intention* to perform the behavior in question. Intentions cap-

753

ture the goal oriented nature of human behavior. They indicate decisions, or plans of action. As people formulate their intentions, they are assumed to take into account three conceptually independent types of considerations. First, they form beliefs about the likely consequences of a contemplated course of action, which result in a favorable or unfavorable *attitude* towards performing the behavior. A second type of consideration has to do with the assumed normative expectations of relevant referent groups or individuals. These normative beliefs lead to the formation of a *subjective norm* – the perceived social pressure to perform or not perform the behavior. Finally, people are assumed to take into account factors that may further or hinder their ability to perform the behavior. Beliefs about those factors form *perceived behavioral control*, or perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior.

As a general rule, the more favorable the attitude and subjective norm with respect to a behavior, and the greater the perceived behavioral control, the stronger an individual's intention to perform the behavior under consideration will be. The shaded portion of Figure 1 depicts the theory's main components in the form of a structural diagram. As shown, the perceived behavioral control affects the behavior both indirectly (via intention) and directly.

⊃ FIGURE 1
An Extended Planned Behavior Model of intention for and actual political participation over the Internet
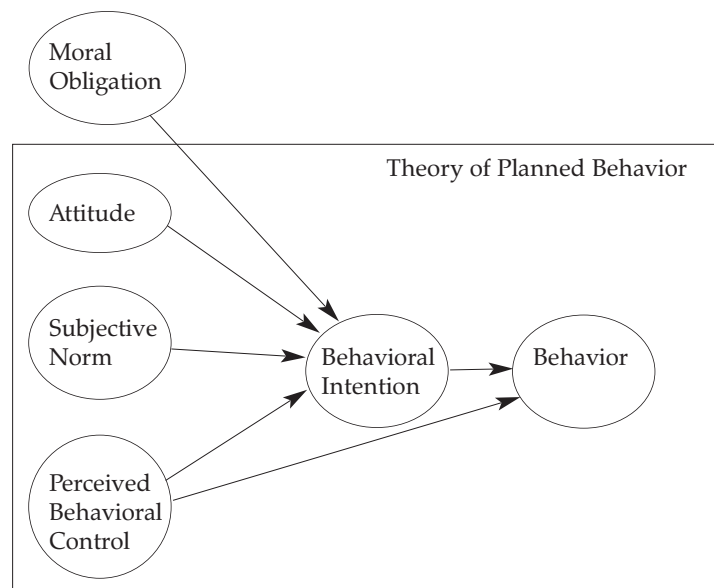
According to Krampen (1991), the extent to which an individual feels to be morally obliged to participate politically plays an important role in explaining the willingness to participate. We therefore added the construct 'moral obligation'

to the basic Planned Behavior Model (unshaded part of the Figure 1). While subjective norm reflects the perceived social pressure as a subjectively represented external force, moral obligations reflect *internalized moral rules*, not perceptions of others' ideas about what one should do. As several authors suggested in other behavioral domains (e.g., Gorsuch & Ortenberg, 1983; Pomazal & Jaccard, 1976; Zuckerman & Reis, 1978), moral obligation should exert an indirect effect on behavior through behavioral intention. Thus, moral obligation should increase the amount of explained variance in intention. The stronger an individual feels to be morally obliged to participate, the stronger the intention to participate should be.

METHODOLOGY

Participants and procedure

	Total	%	Recruited from panel	Recruited through banners
Total	1,505		371	1,134
Sex				
Male	986	65.5	60.4	67.2
Female	519	34.5	39.6	32.8
Age				
18-29	759	50.4	37.4	54.7
30-39	462	30.7	32.6	30.1
40-49	198	13.2	21.3	10.5
50-59	65	4.3	5.7	3.9
60+	21	1.4	3.0	0.9
Education				
Middle	700	46.5	48.2	45.9
High	805	53.5	51.8	54.1
Employment				
No	492	32.7	32.9	32.6
Yes	1013	67.3	67.1	67.4
Household income				
Up to 5,000 Kn	372	24.7	26.1	24.3
5,000-10,000 Kn	615	40.9	42.0	40.5
More than 10,000 Kn	395	26.2	22.6	27.4
Refused to answer	123	8.2	9.2	7.8
Frequency of Internet use				
Daily	1292	85.8	72.5	90.3
Less often	212	14.1	27.5	9.7
Internet experience (years)	M=5.1, SD=2.3		M=5.2, SD=2.3	M=4.7, SD=2.3

↻ TABLE 1
Demographic characteristics of the participants

The study was conducted through a Web questionnaire applied on two different samples, both in Fall of 2003. One sample (n=1,134) was recruited via banners placed on frequently visited Croatian Web sites and political forums. This sample

can be considered as a sample of 'experts', or people who are specifically interested in the topic of political participation. Another sample (n=371) was selected among members of online panel developed by the Croatian research agency Puls. At that stage in the development of this panel, the members were recruited through advertisements on Web sites; they all completed a screening questionnaire and agreed to participate in occasional online surveys on a variety of topics. Neither sample received any incentives for their participation in this study. Demographic characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1. We comment on the differences between respondents recruited from the access panel and via banners in the Results section.

Measures

The questionnaire included items asking about 1) past online and offline political participation; 2) intended online political participation; 3) different concepts from Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (behavioral intentions, attitude towards participating, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control); 4) general political values and beliefs, 5) socio-demographic characteristics, and 6) Internet use. In developing questions and summary scores for the concepts from the theory of planned behavior, we used guidelines described in Ajzen (2002a). The exact text of items in Croatian, as well as English translation, is available at http://additional-materials.bosnjak.eu/. In addition, we asked about respondents' Internet use and demographic characteristics (see Table 1). When possible, we used summary scores of different items asking about the same underlying concept, rather than individual items. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of all variables used in the regression analyses described in the Results section.

Most questions had fewer than 1% of missing values; only the questions about intentions for classical civic participation offline, and the questions about attitudes towards online participation (in a somewhat unusual form of semantic differentials) had average missing value rates of 5%. To avoid losing a large number of data points, we substituted all missing values with the average response of other participants to that question. This method of treating missing values is likely to introduce a slight additional homogeneity of scales presented in Table 2, that is, decrease the intercorrelations among items within the same scale. To avoid losing a large amount of data because a significant number of respondents (n=123) did not provide data about their income, we applied the same method to impute the data about household income for those respondents. To estimate the sensitivity of results to this cor-

rection, we refitted the regression model involving income (see Results) with the income variable without imputed values. There were very few differences, and none of them was significant; all conclusions remained unchanged.

RESULTS

Differences between respondents recruited in different ways

As mentioned before, respondents were recruited in two ways: via banners advertising this specific survey about e-democracy, and from a panel of participants who were recruited via banners advertising the possibility to participate in surveys on a variety of topics. As Table 1 shows, respondents who were recruited via banners were significantly younger ($\chi^2(5)=53.89$, $p<.01$), more frequent Internet users ($\chi^2(1)=73.00$, $p=.001$), had longer Internet experience ($t(1503)=-3.82$, $p=.001$), and somewhat more likely to be male ($\chi^2(1)=5.75$, $p=.02$), than respondents recruited from the panel. There were no significant differences between the two samples in other demographic characteristics, or in past political activity (3.6 vs. 3.7 for panel and banner participants, respectively, $t(1503)=-.87$).

However, participants recruited through banners (advertising this specific survey) were both more politically active online in the past and more interested in future online political participation. Of 12 possible online political activities, the panel participants engaged, on average, in 3.6, while the banner participants engaged in 4.7 ($t(1503)=-7.17$, $p=.001$). Average intention, rated on a 7-point scale, to get involved in 12 online political activities, was 3.6 for the panel participants, and 4.1 for the banner participants ($t(1503)=-5.60$, $p=.001$). The two samples also differed in attitude towards online political participation, which was slightly more positive for banner than for panel (average on a 7-point scale was 5.1 for banner vs. 4.9 for panel respondents, $t(1503)=-3.01$, $p=.001$), and perceived behavioral control (4.9 vs. 4.5, respectively, $t(1503)=-3.54$, $p=.001$).

In sum, the data suggest that the participants recruited through banners advertising the survey on e-democracy were more interested in online political participation than the participants recruited through an unspecific banner. That interest in topic can be a significant motive for survey participation is already known in survey methodology literature (c.f. Groves et al., 2004). In the regression analyses below, we include the recruitment method as a separate predictor. In this way we obtain estimates of effects of the other predictors after controlling for the effects of sample differences, and we get a measure of the recruitment method effect itself.

Past online political participation

Political participation over the Internet in the past was measured with a scale of 12 yes-no questions asking about engagement in different online political activities, such as visiting web pages related to political issues, signing online petitions, writing emails to local or governmental officials, or participating in political polls and online discussions. On average, respondents engaged in 4 to 5 such activities. As shown in Table 2, past online political participation correlates significantly with almost all socio-demographic variables, Internet use, and political values. Participants who were older, higher educated, employed, with higher household income, and who used Internet longer and more frequently, were more likely to say that they've already participated in online political activities. However, in view of the strength of these associations, it must be noted that their magnitude is rather small; correlations are in the .11 to .20 range.

Those who had more trust in political institutions such as local and national government, parliament, and president, were more likely to participate in online political activities (correlations are in the .09 to .22 range); while those who feel powerless in terms of their ability to affect the decisions of politicians were less likely to participate (r= -.20 to -.26). To check whether these effects remain important after accounting for intercorrelations between the explanatory variables, we included all variables in a hierarchical linear regression model. Table 3 shows change in explained variance after each step, and Table 4 shows values of standardized regression coefficients at the final step of the regression model.

Each group of variables contributes significantly to explaining a portion of variance of past online political participation (Table 3). As shown in Table 4, the highest contribution was that of past offline political participation (with an almost 20% increase in explained variance), similarly measured as the number of different activities (10 in total) that respondents engaged in, for instance voting, signing petitions, attending political rallies, party membership, demonstrating, running for a political office. None of the socio-demographic variables remains significant, and the largest effects are carried by past offline political participation and experience in using the Internet. Of the political values, higher trust in political institutions, and belief that economic development of Croatia is more important than national identity, emerge as significantly positively related to past online political participation, while the feeling of powerlessness is negatively related. Finally, the recruitment method has a significant, yet small effect on the result – respondents recruited through banners advertising this

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BOŠNJAK, M.,
GALEŠIĆ, M., KLIČEK, B.:
DETERMINANTS OF...

specific survey were more likely to participate in online political activities. This confirms that one motive for participation of these respondents in our survey was their heightened interest in this particular topic, stemming from their previous experience with it.

⮥ TABLE 2
Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for main variables

	α	k	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
1 Recruitment (0=panel, 1=banner)	-	-	0.8	0.43																			
2 Online political participation – Intentions	.89	12	4.0	1.36	.15																		
3 Offline political participation – Past	.64	10	3.6	1.91	.18	.72																	
4 Online political participation – Past	.74	12	4.5	2.57	.02	.53	.51																
5 Sex (0=male, 1=female)	-	1	0.3	0.48	-.06	.01	-.03	-.03															
6 Age	-	1	31.5	9.79	-.18	.13	.05	.20	-.02														
7 Education (0=middle, 1=high)	-	1	0.5	0.50	.02	.14	.14	.13	.07	.29													
8 Employment (0=no, 1=yes)	-	1	0.7	0.47	.00	.12	.11	.14	.00	.43	.38												
9 Household income[a]	-	1	2.0	0.71	.04	.11	.15	.12	-.04	.11	.19	.18											
10 Internet experience (years)	-	1	5.1	2.29	.10	.14	.24	.11	-.20	-.01	.17	.15	.17										
11 Freq of Internet use (0=less often, 1=daily)	-	1	0.9	0.35	.22	.16	.21	.08	-.12	-.04	.08	.16	.15	.26									
12 Political leaning; Right	-	1	4.5	1.94	-.03	-.08	-.10	.01	-.08	-.02	.08	.00	-.01	-.07	.00								
13 Political trust	.78	5	3.4	1.14	.02	.22	.16	.09	-.06	.01	.01	.02	.07	.01	.02	.14							
14 Powerlessness	-	1	4.1	1.76	-.04	-.26	-.20	-.20	.06	.01	-.03	.01	-.02	-.06	-.08	.03	-.12						
15 Econ. developm. rather than nat. identity	-	1	4.7	1.82	.03	.09	.11	-.01	.05	.03	.06	.03	.01	.06	.04	-.41	.10	-.05					
16 Locus of control: External	-	1	7.2	2.06	.02	.07	.13	.06	-.01	-.12	-.04	.04	.19	.11	.01	.01	.18	-.13	.00				
17 TPB – Attitude	.85	5	5.1	1.28	.08	.52	.42	.29	.03	.04	.04	.05	.11	.07	-.09	-.09	.18	-.17	.07	.07			
18 TPB – Subjective Norm	.72	2	3.5	1.58	.01	.56	.42	.36	.02	.06	.07	.05	.05	.07	.08	-.04	.13	-.24	.00	.06	.44		
19 TPB – Perceived Behavioral Control	-	1	5.3	1.85	.09	.45	.38	.31	.02	.05	.08	.03	.09	.10	.12	-.06	.10	-.20	.04	.08	.37	.49	
20 TPB – Moral Obligation	-	1	3.7	2.00	.04	.47	.34	.28	-.01	.02	.04	.01	.10	.10	.09	-.04	.17	-.18	.04	.07	.34	.37	.25

Notes: Correlations significant at p<.01 are underlined.
[a]See categories in Table 1 for coding of this variable. Category 'Refused to answer' was replaced with the mean for the rest of the sample (2.01)

	R	Adj. R^2	ΔR^2	F	p
Sample membership (banner or panel)	0.18	0.03	0.03	51.86	<0.01
Socio-demographics (sex, age, education, employment, income)	0.26	0.07	0.04	11.85	<0.01
Internet use (frequency, experience)	0.34	0.11	0.04	37.93	<0.01
Political values (leaning, trust, powerlessness, economic development, locus of control)	0.41	0.16	0.05	19.00	<0.01
Past offline political participation	0.60	0.36	0.19	450.52	<0.01

	Beta	t	p
Sample membership			
Banners	0.13	5.84	0.00
Socio-demographics			
Sex: Female	0.03	1.36	0.17
Age	-0.03	-1.13	0.26
Education: High	0.04	1.70	0.09
Employment: Yes	0.00	-0.14	0.89
Household income	0.04	1.72	0.09
Internet use			
Internet experience (years)	0.13	5.60	0.00
Frequency of Internet use: Daily	0.09	3.93	0.00
Political values			
Political leaning: Right	-0.04	-1.52	0.13
Political trust	0.08	3.86	0.00
Powerlessness	-0.06	-2.97	0.00
Economic development rather than national identity	0.07	3.06	0.00
Locus of control: External	0.04	1.85	0.06
Past behavior			
Past offline political participation	0.47	21.23	0.00

Intentions for future online political participation

Intention for future political participation was measured through ratings, on a 7-point scale, of one's intention to participate in each of 12 different online political activities used to assess past online political participation. As Table 2 shows, the average score for all participants is about 4, indicating moderate interest in participating. Older respondents, those who were better educated and with higher household income, had more Internet experience and used it more frequently, expressed somewhat higher intention to participate in online political activities. All predictors from the theory of planned behavior were positively related to future intentions. To investigate to what extent they contribute to explanation of the intentions independently of other variables, we included them in a hierarchical linear regression model.

Step and Variables	r	Beta	R	Adj. R²	ΔR²	F
Step 1						
Sample membership (banner)	0.15**	0.15**	0.15	0.02	0.02	32.33**
Step 2						
Planned behavior model variables added						
Sample membership (banners)	0.15**	0.10**				
Attitudes	0.52**	0.30**	0.66	0.44	0.42	374.54**
Subjective Norm	0.56**	0.35**				
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.45**	0.16**				
Step 3						
Moral Obligation added						
Sample membership	0.15**	0.10**				
Attitudes	0.52**	0.25**				
Subjective Norm	0.56**	0.29**	0.70	0.49	0.05	137.59**
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.45**	0.15**				
Moral Obligation	0.47**	0.24**				
Step 4						
Past online political participation added						
Sample membership	0.15**	0.03*				
Attitudes	0.52**	0.15**				
Subjective Norm	0.56**	0.19**	0.81	0.65	0.16	685.32**
Perceived Behavioral Control	0.45**	0.07**				
Moral Obligation	0.47**	0.17**				
Past Online Participation	0.53**	0.48**				

Notes. *p<.05; **p<.01

ᘯ TABLE 5
Hierarchical
regression analysis
explaining future
intentions for online
political participation
(N=1505)

As shown in Table 5, we have entered attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control in one step – representing the original planned behavior model as proposed by Ajzen (1991), and moral obligation in the next step – as a part of an extended planned behavior model. The original model explained a significant amount of variance in intentions to engage in online political activities (42%). Consistent with the extended planned behavior model as proposed within this contribution, moral obligation significantly improved the model's predictive power (by 5%). Thus, moral obligation proved to be a useful addition since it contributed significantly to the prediction of intention over and above the model components specified in the planned behavior model. The highest effect size among the variables from the TPB model is the one of the subjective norm, closely followed by moral obligation and attitude, while perceived behavioral control has a smaller effect. The highest effect on the intentions has past online political participation – the more online political activities respondents have already participated in, the stronger their intention is to participate in them in the future.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this study we investigated the underpinnings of past online political participation and attempted to predict future intentions for it using Ajzen's theory of planned behavior. In adopting a theoretical perspective for studying online political participation, our study is different from existing surveys on online political participation (e.g. Gibson, Lusoli, & Ward, 2002). Ajzen's theory was used to explain behavior in a number of domains, ranging from health and exercise to consumer behavior and survey participation (c.f. Armitage, & Conner, 2001; Bosnjak et al., 2005; Godin & Kok, 1996; Hagger et al., 2002). Hinkle et al. (1996) applied a modified version of the theory to explain grassroots political action. In all of these applications, the underlying premises are the same: the best predictor of future behavior is behavioral intention, which is in turn affected by one's attitudes towards that behavior, perceived social pressure to perform it (or not), and perceived personal control over performing the behavior. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study that attempts to predict intention to participate in online political activities using Ajzen's theory. The results of this study indicate that the theory of planned behavior is a suitable, yet not sufficient framework for explaining the decision to participate politically via the Internet. Moral obligation, defined here as a variable reflecting internalized rules, seems to be a useful extension.

Participating in political activities through the Internet, ranging from activities such as visiting web pages of governmental bodies, signing online petitions, and forwarding email with political content, to voting in online polls, reading governmental and political documents online, and participating in online political discussions, is related to a number of factors. First, experience in using the Internet is a significant factor, suggesting that certain level of technological competence is important for online political participation. Second, one needs to believe that his or her actions can make a difference and affect political decisions. Individuals who feel politically powerless and who do not have trust in political institutions are less likely to participate in online political activities. Finally, in line with the reinforcement theory of online political participation (c.f. Barber, 2003b; Norris, 1999; Schuler, 2003), we found that online political participation is strongly predicted by past offline political participation. This means that Internet represents just another channel for political actions of those people who are already politically active in more traditional ways, rather than as an opportunity for activation of previously politically inactive people.

In line with the original Ajzen's theory of planned behavior, we found that positive attitudes towards online political

participation, subjective norm (perceived opinions of other people), and perceived behavioral control, are all positively related to intentions to participate in online political activities in the future. Furthermore, in line with our proposed extended version of Ajzen's theory of planned behavior, we found that moral obligation – the extent to which intentions to politically participate online represent one's internalized moral rules – explains an additional portion in the variance of intentions. Together with the original variables, the extended model explains 49% of the variance. Although this is not an unimpressive result, there is likely to be room for improvement, as past online political participation explains an additional portion of the variance. According to Ajzen (2002b), the incremental contribution of past behavior can serve as an indicator of effect of factors that are relevant in explaining a certain behavior but are not included in the model. This means that some factors, for which the model does not account, play a significant role in explaining online political participation. Future studies may try to shed more light on these factors not covered by the model proposed in this paper.

Besides a theory of planned behavior perspective, other theoretical routes may contribute to our understanding of online political behavior. Instead of considering all pros and cons of their choices prior to making a decision, some authors propose that people my be using simple rules that use only a few, or even just one reason to make a decision (c.f. Gigerenzer et al., 1999), or that they set a realistic aspiration level that enables them to find a 'satisficing' solution in a given set of circumstances (c.f. Simon, 1997). For instance, people may be just following what others do, without necessarily giving much thought to other pros and cons of a given activity; or they might be relying more or less exclusively on 'doing what feels right', in the sense of moral obligation investigated in this paper. It is also possible that the Internet provides a 'satisficing' way to engage in political activities (e.g. by participating in online discussions) because it requires considerably less effort than classical ways of political engagement (such as attending meetings). An interesting direction for future research would be to study whether people use such simple strategies in choosing whether to engage in political activities and through which media.

It is important to note that our sample consists of self-selected Internet users and therefore does not permit straightforward generalizations to overall Internet population. Because of the possibility of having biased data, it is important to think about the nature and consequences of such a bias. While we cannot make a strong claim without data from a cross validation study based on a random sample, there are

some clues in our data about how self-selection may have biased our results. First, people who were recruited through banners advertising to this specific study on e-democracy showed greater interest in online political participation than the respondents who were recruited with more general banners, not advertising any specific topic. This effect of interest in the survey topic on sample composition is well documented in classic survey methods (c.f. Goyder, 1987; Groves et al., 2004). However, there is not much research about this issue for online surveys, where it could be particularly prominent because respondents can easily give up after a few questions if they see that the topic is not interesting. Our data show the problem in its basic form: survey invitations that mention the topic of the questionnaire are likely to selectively attract people specifically interested in that topic, and lead to nonignorable nonresponse and biased results in the sense that topic interest correlates with the willingness to participate. However, when looking more closely on the strength of the association between recruitment mode and intentions to participate politically over the Internet, it becomes evident that this effect is rather small, that is nominally below a .20 correlation coefficient. Second, there is a methodological mechanism rendering our study a strong theory test, namely the larger homogeneity of samples due to self-selection. This increased homogeneity (compared to a random sample) attenuates statistical power, leading to an *underestimation* of true effects. Viewed from this point of view, it is imaginable that our results have underestimated the "true" results because of sample selectivity.

In sum, this study is the first systematic attempt to discern mechanisms underlying participation in online political activities in Croatia. Even though the study was conducted in 2003, we believe that the basic tendencies we observed in our data – the importance of positive attitude towards these activities, perceived approval of others, and the weight of feeling that political participation is a civic duty – are still present today.

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Odrednice političke participacije putem interneta u Hrvatskoj

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Cilj je ovog rada istražiti varijable povezane s online političkom participacijom u Hrvatskoj iz dvije perspektive. Prvo, dosadašnje političko participiranje putem interneta objašnjava se varijablama na važnost kojih upućuju prijašnja sociološka i politička istraživanja. Među tim su varijablama sociodemografske karakteristike, političke vrijednosti, klasični oblici političkoga sudjelovanja te obilježja upotrebe interneta. Sve su te varijable povezane s dosadašnjom online političkom aktivnosti, no političke vrijednosti i dosadašnje sudjelovanje u klasičnim oblicima političkih aktivnosti pokazale su se najznačajnijim odrednicama. Drugo, namjere buduće upotrebe interneta za različite oblike političkih aktivnosti istražuju se jednom od psiholoških teorija odlučivanja, odnosno proširenog oblika Ajzenove teorije planiranoga ponašanja. Na temelju toga modela, odrednice online političke participacije jesu stav prema tim aktivnostima, subjektivna norma, percipirana kontrola nad ponašanjem i osjećaj moralne obveze sudjelovanja. Tri varijable – stav, subjektivna norma i moralna obveza – pridonijele su podjednako i značajno prediktivnoj snazi modela, objašnjavajući gotovo 50% varijance namjere sudjelovanja u političkim aktivnostima putem interneta. Nakon uključivanja dosadašnje

politièke participacije udio objašnjene varijance porastao je na 65%. Niz pitanja ostaje otvoreno za daljnja istraživanja.

Ključne riječi: politička participacija, e-demokracija, istraživanje putem interneta

Determinanten der politischen Partizipierung über das Internet in Kroatien

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In dieser Arbeit sollen die mit der politischen Online-Partizipierung in Kroatien verbundenen Variablen aus zwei Perspektiven betrachtet werden. 1) Die bisherige politische Partizipierung via Internet wird anhand von Variablen erklärt, auf deren Wichtigkeit die bisherige soziologische und politische Forschung schließen lässt. Zu diesen Variablen gehören soziodemografische Merkmale, politische Werte, klassische Formen der Teilnahme am politischen Leben sowie die Charakteristiken der Internetnutzung. Sämtliche Variablen stehen in Bezug mit der bisherigen politischen Online-Aktivität, doch haben sich politische Werte und die bisherige Teilnahme an klassischen Formen politischer Aktivität als die bedeutendsten Merkmale erwiesen. 2) Die Intentionen einer zukünftigen Internetnutzung für verschiedene Formen politischer Aktivität werden mittels einer psychologischen Theorie über das Fällen von Entscheidungen, und zwar einer erweiterten Form der Theorie über geplantes Verhalten nach Ajzen untersucht. Aufgrund dieses Modells sind die Determinanten einer politischen Online-Partizipierung: die generelle Einstellung zu solchen Aktivitäten, subjektive Normen, die wahrgenommene Kontrolle über das eigene Verhalten und das Gefühl der moralischen Verpflichtung zur Teilnahme am politischen Leben. Drei Variablen: die generelle Einstellung, subjektive Normen und das moralische Pflichtgefühl haben gleichermaßen und wesentlich zum Prädiktionscharakter des Modells beigetragen, da sie zu fast 50% die Varianzen der beabsichtigten Online-Partizipierung erklären. Berücksichtigt man die bisherige Beteiligung am politischen Leben, steigt der Anteil der erklärten Varianzen auf 65%. Es bleiben auch weiterhin viele Fragen offen, die es zu untersuchen gilt.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Politische Partizipierung, E-Demokratie, Internetforschung