Slipping through the net: Digital and other communication divides within South Africa

Zakes Langa*, Pieter Conradie and Benjamin Roberts

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Background

- Kanungo (2002: 407): " The use of information technology in rural and underserved settings is receiving increasing attention because of the immense potential it brings for improving the quality of life and reducing the digital divide.
- Huggins and Izushi (2003: 111): " ICTs have the potential to improve the quality of life of individuals by providing 'easy' access to a wealth of information, goods, and services".
- Other benefits conferred by Internet access for example, include working from home, acquiring new skills using distance learning, making better informed decisions about healthcare needs and getting more involved in children's education.
- Some writers (e.g. Ming-te Lu, 2001), argue that for citizens of developing countries, lagging behind in internet access entails further lagging behind in economic progress and falling further behind in the quality of life.

Why study the digital divide?

- South Africa: a generally pervasive optimistic view that the increased uses of digital technologies and applications will **contribute to the well-being of the country**.
- However, since technologies are often highly unevenly distributed, **concerns** have also been expressed about the emergence of a **widening 'digital divide'**

Definition: Digital Divide

- " **....disparities in access to telephones, personal computers (PCs) and the Internet across certain demographic groups...**" (U.S. NTIA, 1998)
- Include those that occur along racial, gender, and income lines.
- Digital divide refers not only to disparities in access only but also to **infrastructure**
  - In SSA and other LDCs remains grossly sub-standard, with landline telephones more a rarity than the norm across households.
  - Average teledensity (telephone lines per 100 people) across the region is less than 1, compared to 65 for developed countries (Musa et al, 2005)

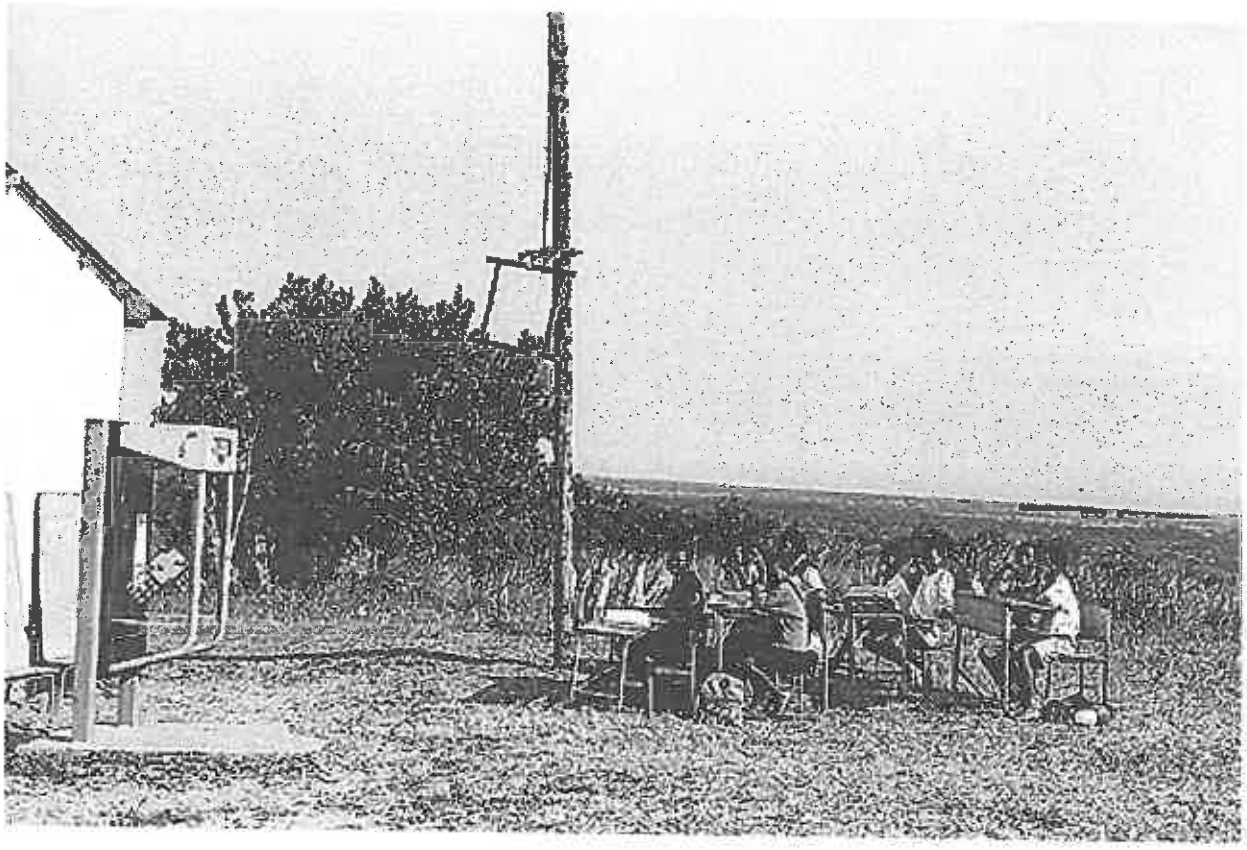
Definition Digital Divide (Continued)

- Many deep-rural communities experiencing basic problems such as a lack of electricity and other basic services, and here digital access has a low priority.

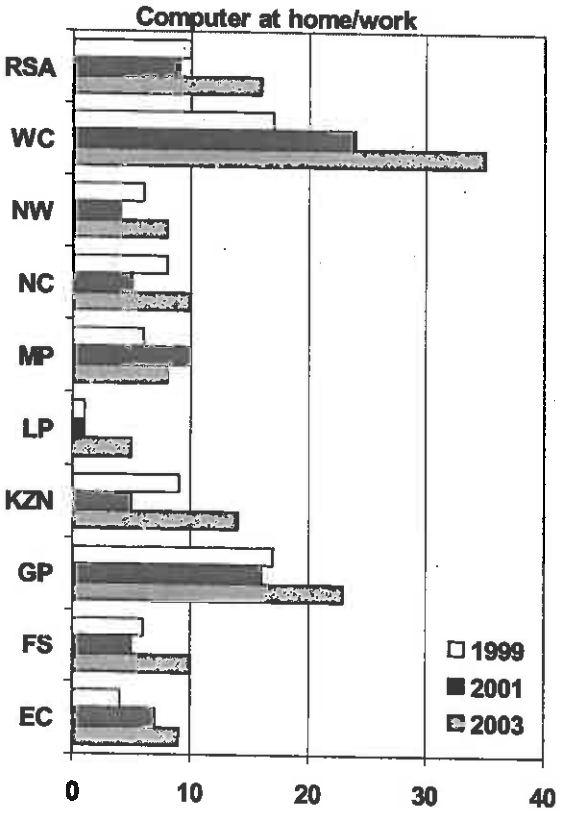
Methodology

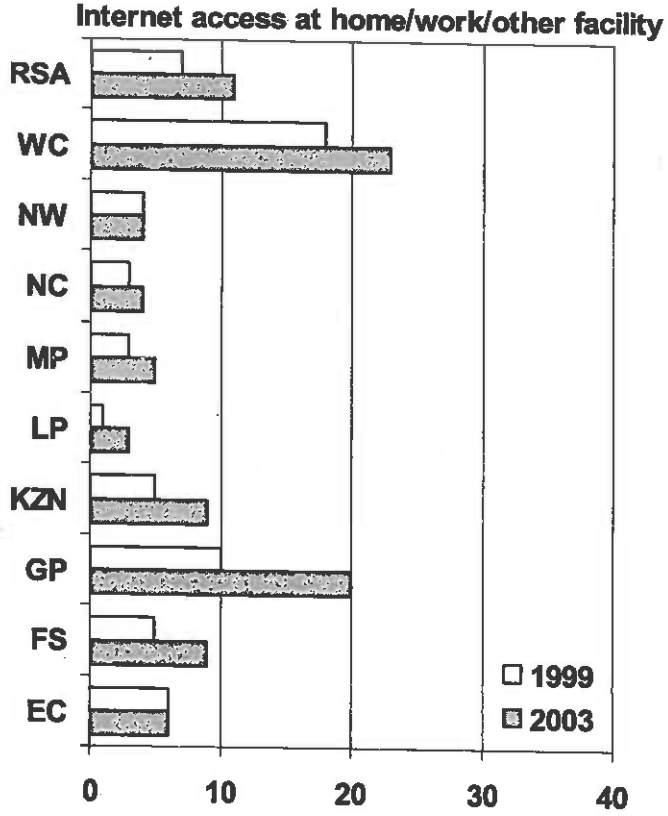
- South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS)
- Conducted annually since 2003.
- Gathers information on the attitudes, beliefs, behaviour patterns and values of a representative sample of 7000 individuals aged 16 and older.
- Intention: to measure specific attitudes and opinions on a diverse set of topics of national relevance, including democracy and governance, poverty, social identity, and moral issues.
- Response rate: 78% (2003)
- Sampling frame: HSRC's Master Sample.

Nature of the Digital and Other Media Divides

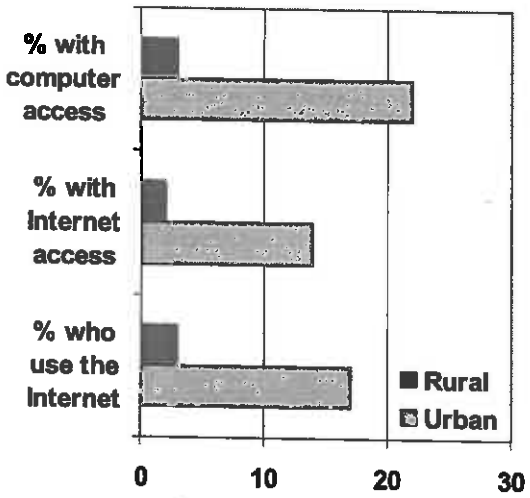


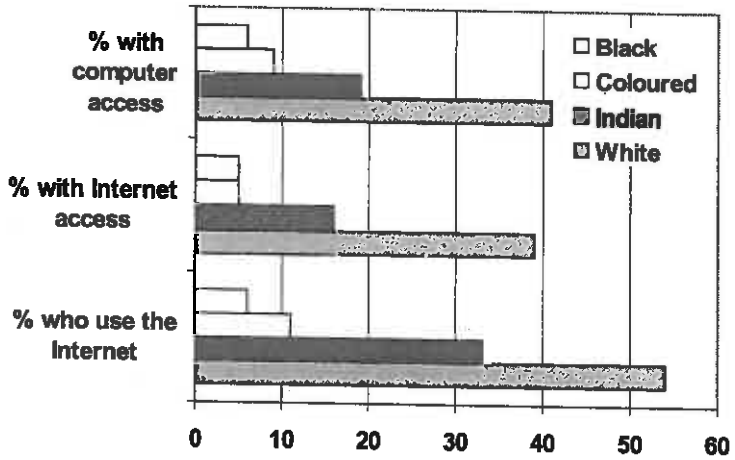
Trends in computer and Internet access, by province

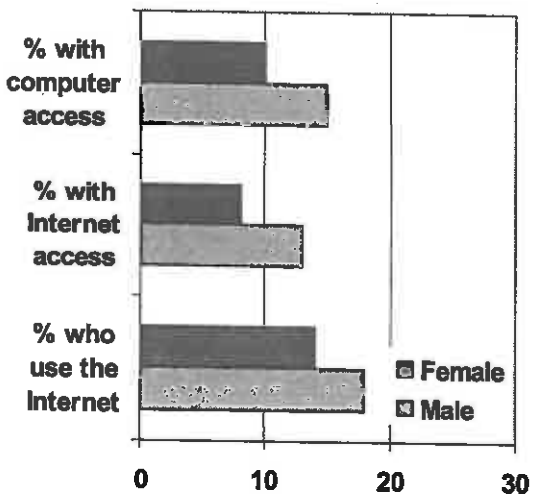


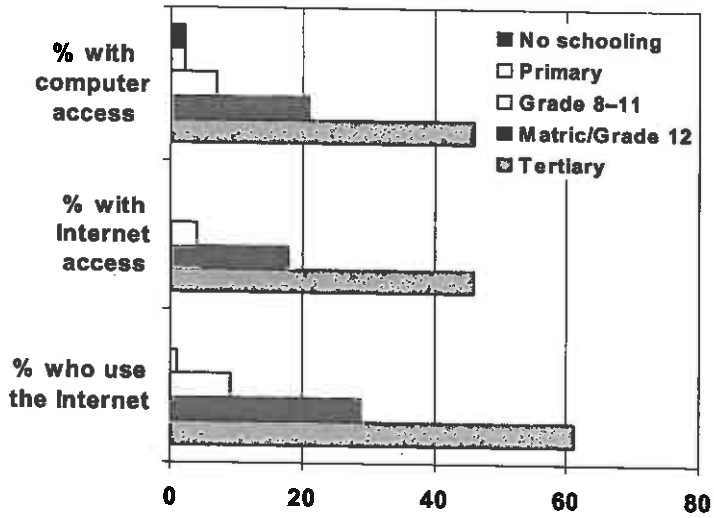


Computer & Internet access and usage, 2003





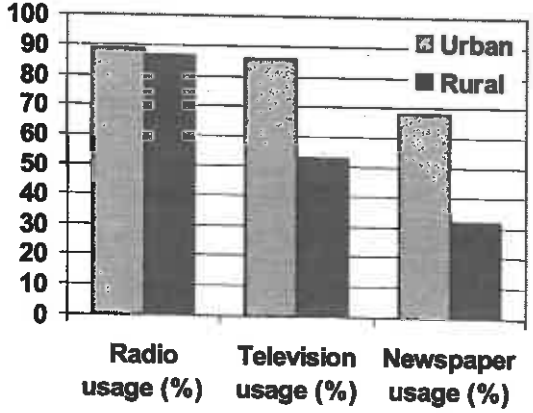


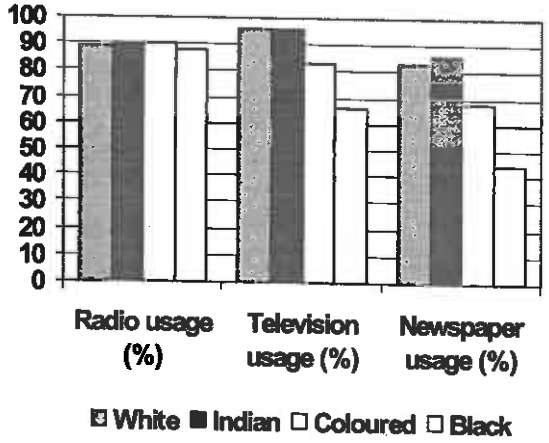


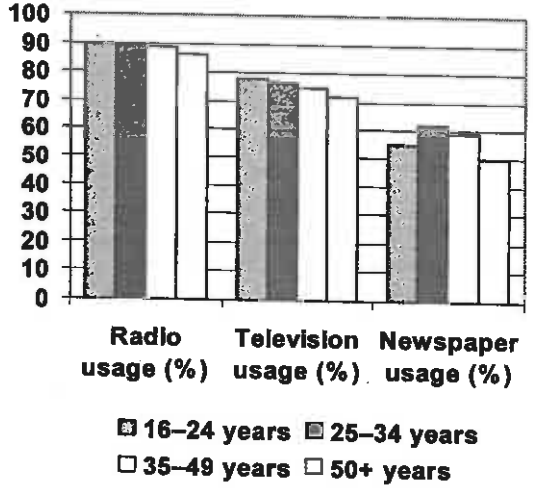
Predictor Variables: Internet Access & Use

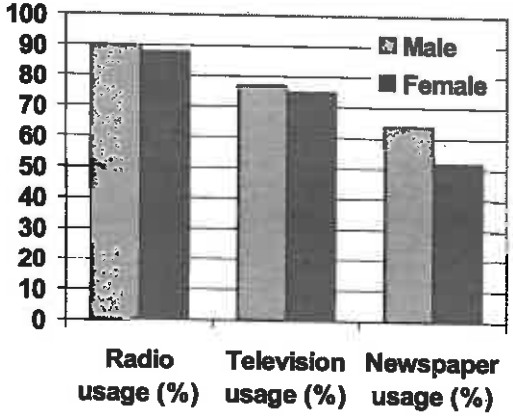
- significant predictor variables for Internet access= gender, age, and education
- being male, younger than 50 years, and having passed Grade 12 or obtained tertiary education most significant predictors of having access to the Internet
- significant predictor variables for Internet use =age, education (tertiary qualification), race

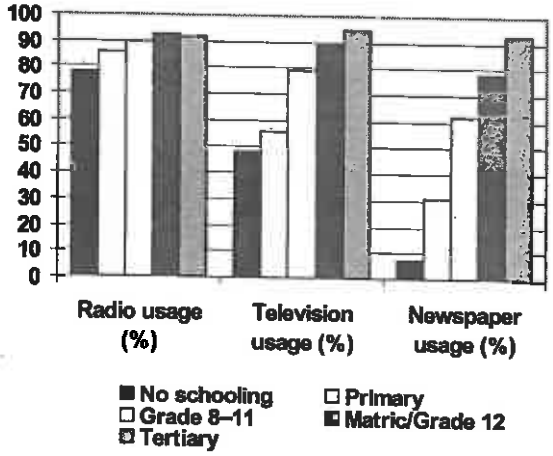
Radio, television and newspaper usage, 2003







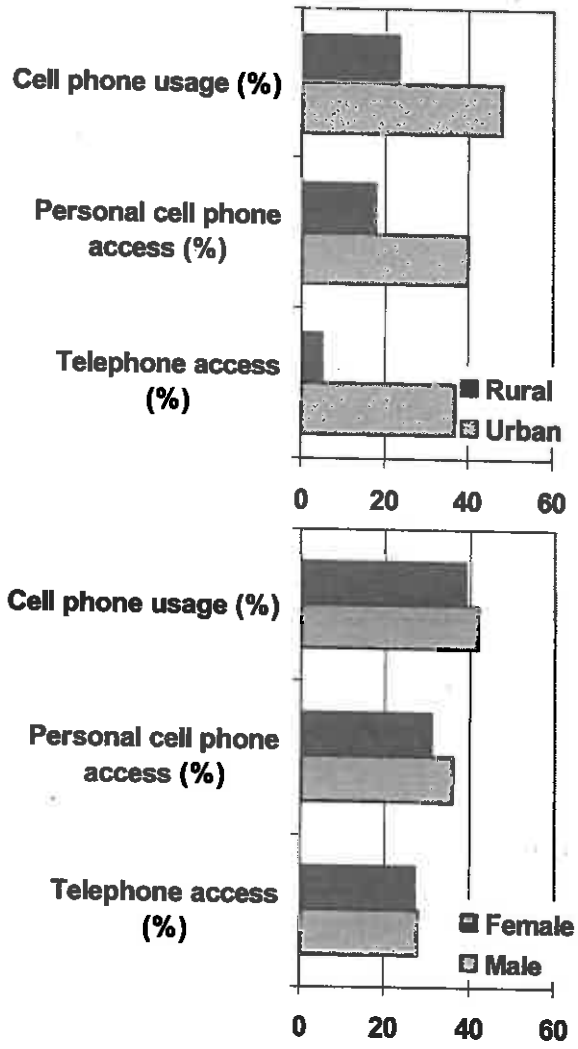


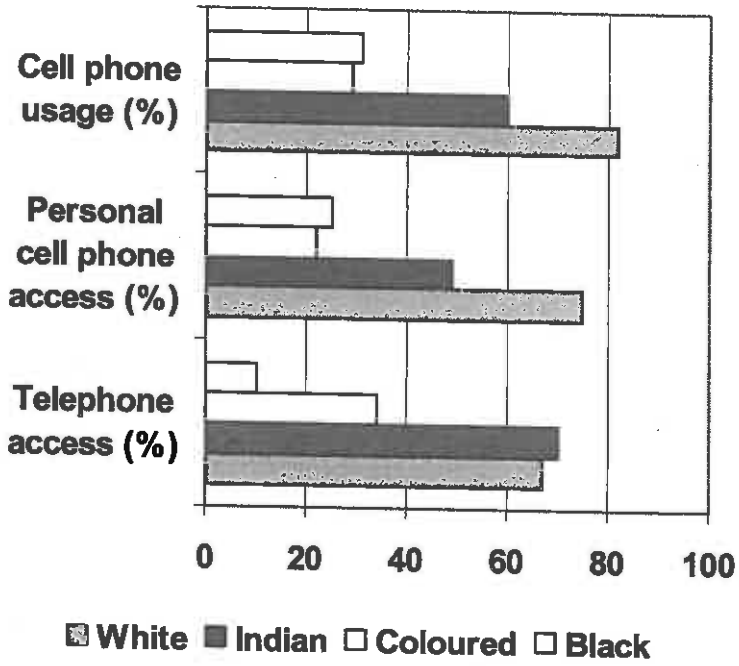


Access to landline telephones & cell phones, 1999-2003

EC	17	14	17	7	10	29
FS	30	28	27	5	14	32
GP	46	36	25	15	33	45
KZN	22	21	31	6	9	34
LP	7	4	8	5	8	32
MP	17	16	19	6	12	29
NC	25	26	21	4	15	20
NW	11	20	18	5	14	38
WC	51	58	56	13	38	47
RSA	28	26	26	8	28	36

Telephone and cell phone access and use, 2003





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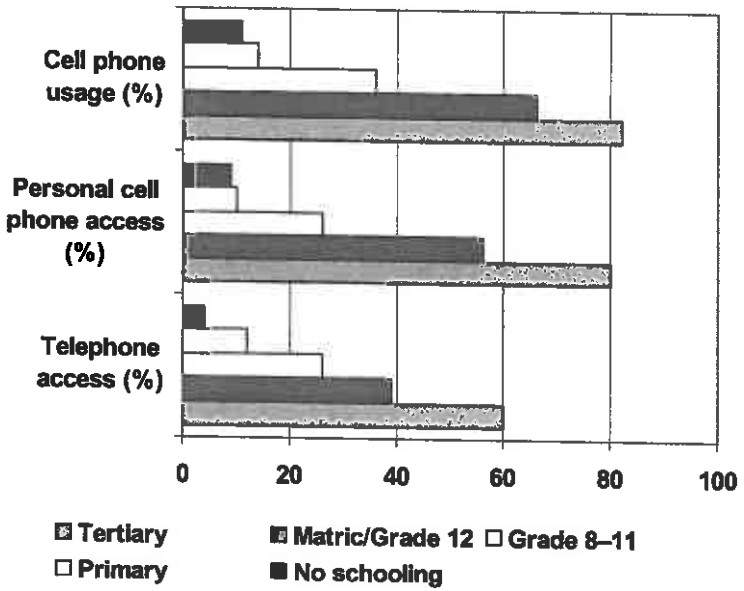
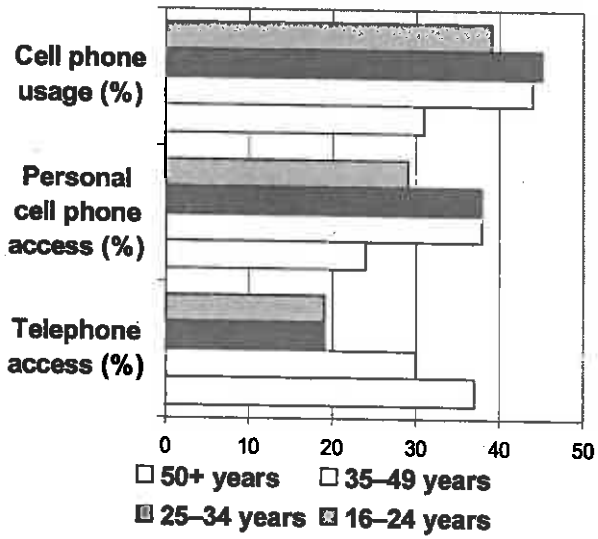




Access to communication technologies, by computer and Internet access, 2003

Computer access	–	–	6	91
Internet access	1	65	–	–
Television in HH	64	98	66	97
Radio in HH	71	87	72	89
Hi-fi in HH	41	90	44	89
Landline phone	19	65	21	62
Access to cell phone	27	84	29	89
Grid electricity	70	95	72	90

Civic Engagement

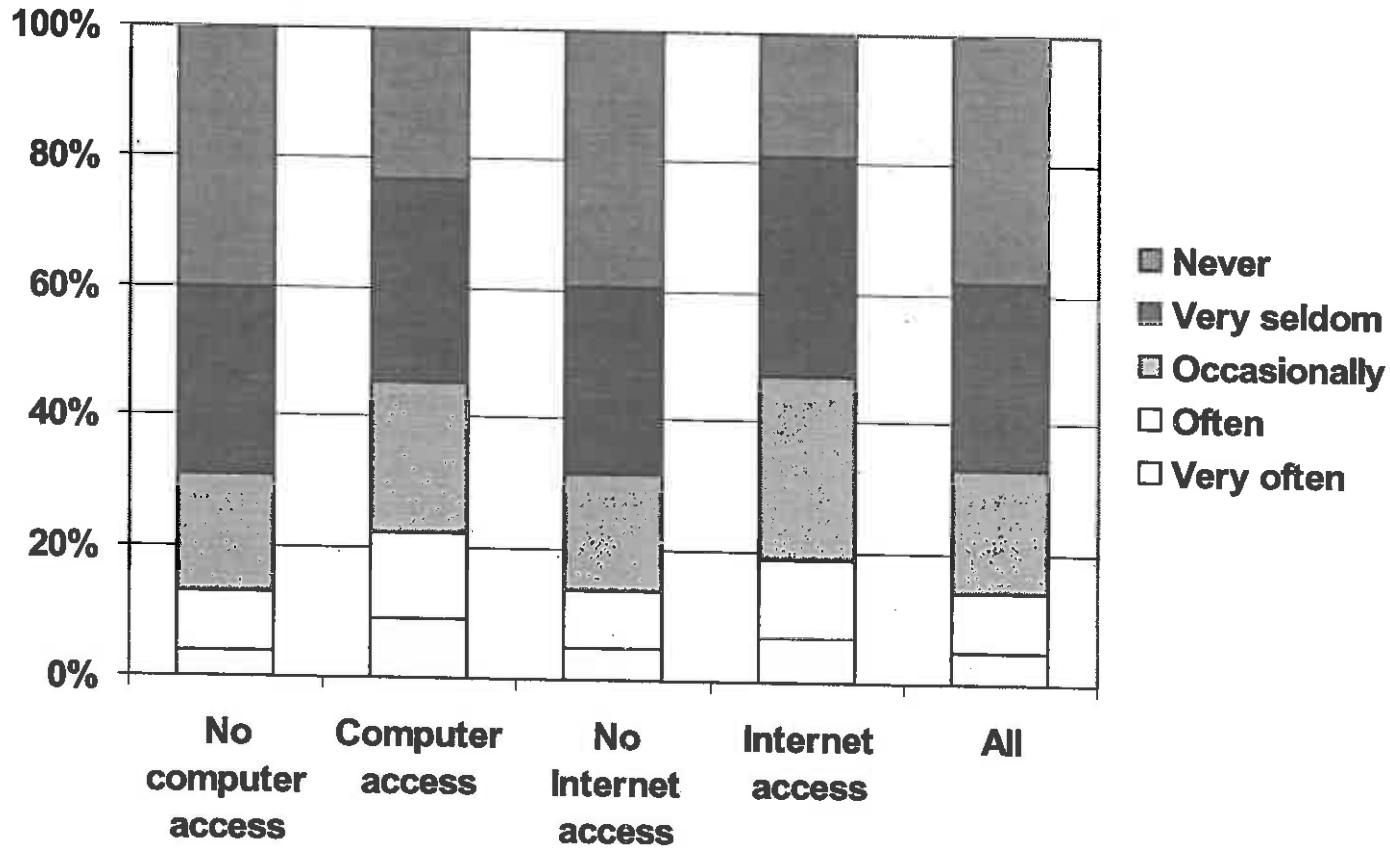
Civic Engagement

- Norris (2001) categorises 'civic engagement' into 3 distinct dimensions.
  - (i) **political knowledge**, which relates to what people learn about public affairs;
  - (ii) **political trust**, addresses the public's level of support for the political system; and
  - (iii) **political participation**, involvement in activities intended to influence government and the decision-making process

Trust in institutions by computer and Internet access, 2003

Churches	84	79	84	81	83
SABC	79	56	77	57	75
IEC	65	53	64	56	63
Defence force	64	53	63	57	63
National govt	59	43	59	46	57
Parliament	61	38	60	39	57
Big business	57	53	57	52	57
Provincial govt	54	42	54	43	52
Courts	50	46	50	49	50
Local govt	47	37	46	39	45
Police	43	38	43	38	42

Talk about politics, by computer and Internet access, 2003



Participation in national elections, by computer and Internet access

Percentage participation in 1999 elections (23 years+)					
Voted in 1999	78	65	77	73	76
Did not vote	11	18	12	12	12
Uncertain / DK	2	3	2	2	2
Refused	9	14	10	13	10
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Percentage intended participation in 2004 election (18 years+)					
Intend to vote	64	46	62	52	61
Will not vote	7	13	8	9	8
Uncertain / DK	19	27	19	26	20
Refused	10	14	11	13	11
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Attitudes on the importance of voting, by computer and Internet access

(Mean score on a 5-point agreement scale:
1=strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)

It is the duty of all citizens to vote.	4.09	3.99**	4.09	4.07	4.08
Politics is too complicated these days for people like me to understand.	3.24	2.51**	3.21	2.41**	3.12
Whether I vote or not makes no difference.	2.70	2.41**	2.67	2.41**	2.65

Conclusions (1)

- Evidence suggests that the **digital divide** in South Africa – whether based on computer access, Internet access or Internet usage – **reflects wider social inequalities** in the country, notably along race, geographic, income, education and, to a lesser extent, gender lines.
  - Those who have adopted computer technology and the Internet are typically from groups with higher socio-economic status.
  - Their higher levels of education, literacy and social status equip them with the necessary financial and information resources to be able to effectively and flexibly adapt to such innovative technologies.

Conclusions (2)

- Access to and use of **digital technologies:** Patterns of income, race, education and geographic inequalities are **relatively similar** to those observed in **older forms of ICTs**.
  - Again implies that deeply entrenched patterns of social stratification in South Africa explain the disparities in access to and use of the newer digital technologies.
  - Respondents with computer and Internet access were shown to be more likely to live in households that possess multiple consumer durables for entertainment and communication, for example televisions, cell phones, hi-fis, and so on.

Conclusions (3)

- With regard to whether having access to a computer or the Internet in South Africa exerts an influence on **political trust and participation**...
  - Users more frequently discussed politics than the general public and recognised the importance of the vote.
  - Yet they were less trusting of government and other institutions, less likely to vote in the 1999 national elections, and more uncertain about their voting intentions in advance of the 2004 general election.

Conclusions (4)

- Active **interventions and programmes** initiated by the state and other stakeholders are important in trying to broaden technological access and bridge the divide
    - Focused primarily on wiring schools and classrooms, training, and providing community access in poorer geographic localities,
- Nonetheless, most initiatives are still in their relative infancy and there is a **need to improve their reach** in the coming years.
- Given the deep socio-economic barriers to access that have been shown to exist (even in relation to some of the older media and technologies), the **digital divide is likely to remain with us in the medium to long term**, thus reinforcing the gap between the included and the excluded.

Thank You