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New Media, New Politics: The Emergence of the Internet in American Politics

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New Media, New Politics
The Emergence of the Internet in American Politics

by

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Abstract

The Internet is viewed by some as a great tool for democracy. Indeed, if we believe in the value of a marketplace of ideas, there is no greater forum through which individuals can express any and every opinion on a variety of issues than the Internet. However, it is unclear whether this free and unfettered expression of ideas has been helpful or harmful to American democracy. This dissertation demonstrates, through the use of National Election Studies (NES) data that those using the Internet tend to have more negative attitudes toward political leaders and institutions than their counterparts who either do not use the Internet or make use of more traditional media. In particular, the dissertation explores the possibility that unique features of online news (namely comment sections for the purposes of this study) exacerbate the lack of trust and confidence that individuals have in their government. Additionally, data from the Pew Center shows that those taking advantage of the opportunity to post in these online comment sections tend to have demographic characteristics suggestive of increased levels of social isolation relative to those who do not post comments. Finally, a unique experimental design on the University of Missouri-St. Louis campus shows that articles with online comment sections are viewed as being more “rude” or “hostile” in tone than the same articles without the presence of a comment section. Ultimately, the findings suggest that there are reasons to be concerned about the way in which individuals gather political information and formulate political attitudes in this digital age.

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Chapter 1: How did we get here? The Internet's emergence in American Politics

Advances in communication technology have changed the way that American citizens relate to their families, friends, co-workers, and even individuals they may never meet in person. This new technology has even served to alter the landscape of American politics by changing the way that individuals acquire news, financially support their preferred candidate, and organize campaign events. Ultimately, these developments make it imperative to reevaluate our traditional understanding of political campaigns, civic engagement, and the media.

In the 2008 election there was a great deal of discussion regarding the use of the Internet by the campaign of presidential candidate Barack Obama. Indeed, Obama was able to utilize social networking, online fundraising, and online volunteer mobilization in a way that was, to this point, never before seen in American politics.

However, while the scale of Obama's online campaign was unique, the use of this new technology as a political tool had already become a feature of American politics. Indeed, the success of the Howard Dean campaign in 2004 made the use of the Internet in the 2008 presidential election inevitable. Additionally, Hillary Clinton became the first presidential candidate in American history to announce her candidacy via her campaign website. This was a sign of things to come as Obama and Clinton each made strong online efforts a critical component of their campaign strategies. While the Obama, Clinton, and McCain presidential campaigns each attempted to generate online constituencies, even lesser known candidates such as Dennis Kucinich, Ron Paul, and Mike Gravel took advantage of the potential of the Internet as a means of attracting voters, volunteers, and especially money.

In addition to the increased use of the Internet in political campaigns, an increasing number of Americans are relying on online sources to gather their political information. While the literature has demonstrated strong connections between other forms of media, such as television, and corresponding political attitudes, it has been relatively silent with regard to the impact of the Internet on public opinion. The dissertation will attempt to address the following research question:

Do individuals using the Internet as a source of political information think differently about politics than those who use more conventional sources of information?

This question is one which is especially timely given recent data which suggests that individuals are turning to the Internet as their primary source of information about American electoral politics. In 2008, 44% of all adults and 60% of Internet users went online to find information about politics (Smith 2009). Additionally, the Pew Center indicates that between 2009 and 2010 there was a 17% increase in the number of people turning to online news sources, the only major media source to experience a growth in audience during that time period (including local television, network television, newspapers, audio, magazines, and cable television) ("The State of the News Media: An Annual Report on American Journalism" 2011). Ultimately, these numbers suggest a need for a concerted effort to evaluate whether this emerging media source is altering the landscape of American politics and public opinion.

Additionally, further study of the Internet is imperative for, given the unique features of online news, the Internet is decidedly different than other sources of information. More specifically, the Internet affords individuals the ability to access a wider array of sources than ever before, to interact with their sources through social

networking, and to exclusively use media sources which align with their ideological predispositions. Additionally, the Internet has given rise to the citizen journalist and has allowed any individual with a computer to become an amateur political commentator.

This chapter will discuss foundational literature concerning the role of the media in American politics as well as some of the more recent literature regarding the implications of online political news. Additionally, the chapter will posit hypotheses which will guide the analysis of the proceeding chapters and will discuss the unique experimental design used to evaluate those hypotheses.

Media Effects: Agenda Setting, Priming, and Framing

The evaluation of media usage and corresponding political attitudes has been a cornerstone of American political research. More specifically, researchers have coined the terms agenda setting, priming, and framing to describe similar but distinct ways in which media usage can shape the way that the public thinks about political leaders, issues, and institutions. Ultimately, these foundational studies demonstrate that the media has an important role in the formation of political attitudes in American politics.

Paul F. Lazarsfeld in 1940 evaluated the role of the media with regard to voting behavior in his classic experiment known as the Erie County Study. While commonplace in political science today, Lazarsfeld's approach marked one of the first attempts at a quantitative analysis of voting behavior (Rogers 2004, 5) His study of the 1940 presidential election used survey data and content analysis of local newspapers as a means of determining whether or not exposure to various forms of

campaign coverage led to specific voting behavior. However, much like many experiments following his analysis, Lazarsfeld found that the role of the media was minimal at best (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944). Decades after Lazarsfeld's study, scholars began to challenge the "minimal effects" hypothesis by arguing that the media played an important role in the formation of public opinion in American politics. Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in "The Agenda Setting Function of the Mass Media" posited that simply by choosing the degree to which they will cover a certain issue the media conveyed to the public the corresponding degree of importance that they should attach to said issue (McCombs and Shaw 1972).

Shanto Iyengar, Mark D. Peters, and Donald R. Kinder (1982) in their classic article "Experimental Demonstrations of the 'Not-So-Minimal' Consequences of Television News Programs" utilized a psychological theory of priming to expand on the agenda setting role of the media. The authors argued that agenda setting not only changes the degree of importance attached to an issue but that it also changes, through a process known as priming, the criteria used by the public when evaluating their political leaders (Iyengar et al. 1982). Priming and agenda setting have been used to evaluate many political issues ranging from the role of the media in shaping attitudes toward a president's foreign policy (Iyengar and Simon 1993; Krosnick and Kinder 1990) to domestic issues such as media coverage of crime (Valentino 1999).

Another means by which the media influences public opinion is known as "framing" defined by Robert Entman (1993, 52) as the attempt by the media to present a news story or series of stories in a way that will "promote a particular

problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.” While priming and agenda setting deal with the media’s choice to cover, or not to cover, certain issues the theory of framing suggests that the substance of the reporting also has an important influence on public opinion. Framing has also been used to evaluate a number of political issues including the media’s coverage of the Lewinsky scandal (Shah et al. 2002), the media’s analysis of the state of the economy (Hetherington 1996), and the way in which media outlets opt to cover political campaigns (Kahn and Goldenberg 1991; Iyengar et al. 2004).

However, it is important to note that not all scholars agree with the media effects literature presented above. Indeed, Druckman (2001) posited that the framing capability of the media depends largely on the source attempting to engage in said framing. More specifically, he argued that elite media have a more difficult time using framing as a way to influence the public. Additionally, Lenz (2009) contended that alternative explanations exist for the priming effects presented in the media effects literature. Indeed, the findings presented by Lenz suggest that when the media focuses on an issue it simply alerts citizens to candidate positions on said issue and, correspondingly, the citizens align themselves with the side of the issue held by their preferred candidate.

The media effects literature suggests that the nature of media coverage holds important implications for the direction of public opinion. Ultimately, it is the goal of the dissertation to expand on this conclusion by discussing the ways in which the emergence of the Internet has likewise served to alter the means of information gathering as well as the direction of public opinion in American politics.

Incivility in American Politics

The current landscape of American politics is increasingly described as divisive and hostile. Using an experimental design which exposed individuals to coverage of politics on television, Dianna Mutz and Byron Reeves (2005) found that while television programs were effectively holding the interest of the public, the incivility depicted within these programs led to a corresponding distrust of government. In other words, the frames deployed by the television programs served to create more negative attitudes of government more generally. As the access of information increases, Mutz (2006, 244) argued that “the increased *visibility* of uncivil conflicts on television seems indisputable. Although politicians of past eras may frequently have exchanged harsh words, without television cameras there to record these events and to replay them for a mass audience their impact on public perceptions was probably substantially lower.”

Incivility through online news outlets was the subject of an article authored by Terry F. Buss and Nathaniel J. Buss (2006). The authors presented a rather pessimistic view of online news and suggested that the Internet only serves to exacerbate the most negative elements of the devolving shape and character of American political discourse. In other words, while anecdotal discussions of the Internet often suggest the ability of the new technology to bolster democratic participation, the authors suggested quite the opposite (Buss and Buss 2006). For example, Buss and Buss (2006) argued that the anonymity afforded to Internet users allows individuals to disseminate information without accountability and that, without said accountability, these individuals post outrageous, hostile, and, often, incorrect

information. Additionally, they concluded that it is the most sensational reporting that seemingly attracts the widest audience. Indeed, the description of Internet journalism posited by Buss and Buss (2006) is reminiscent of the “yellow journalism” that characterized the early history of the American press, utilizing sensationalism as a means of attracting a wider array of readers. Much like Mutz and Reeves (2005), Buss and Buss suggested that this incivility in news coverage is disruptive to effective political discourse and substantive debate.

Not all scholars are as pessimistic about the Internet’s contribution to political discourse. Surin (2010) argued that because of the proliferation of journalists and news sources online, it is much easier to hold the traditional media accountable. Consequently, the author argues that democratic discourse is, in some ways, promoted by online sources of information.

These trends are perhaps most significantly problematic as they relate to Internet use among American youth. If the content of Internet news truly perpetuates hostility in American politics then this trend would likely be most pronounced for those who are younger and have had, perhaps, more significant exposure to Internet content compared to other sources of political content. The dissertation in Chapter 4 will focus on individuals of this younger age group and attempt to determine whether this supposed negativity exists and, if so, what that means for the future of public opinion and political discourse.

Credibility and Young Americans

In 2008, Martin P. Wattenberg published a book entitled *Is Voting for Young People?* which evaluated the lack of political knowledge amongst those classified as

young Americans. The Internet affords these younger individuals the opportunity to engage in politics and to access information in new and innovative ways.

While the Internet has the potential to alter the avenues for younger Americans to become involved in politics, the new technology also affords them greater access to a wider range of information than ever before. However, many question whether or not information disseminated via the Internet is as credible as that information which is presented through more traditional media. Some have even argued that interventions need to be created in order to protect younger Americans from the dangers of the Internet, including addressing their inability to accurately evaluate the credibility of information they receive from online sources (James et al. 2011). Clearly, the scope of available information online necessitates a more critical examination by the reader when determining whether or not particular sources are or are not credible.

Indeed, the ability for young Americans to engage in effective credibility assessment when viewing online information holds implications for the entirety of the educational system. Andrew J. Flanigan and Miriam J. Metzger (2008) argued that youth in America express very little concern for the credibility of the information which they are utilizing and, as such, they are unlikely to take the steps necessary to ensure the sources on which they are reliant are trustworthy.

Additionally, Jacobson Harris (2008) argued that young people simply do not have the appropriate knowledge base to place the information that they are viewing online into context, thus making credibility assessment problematic. Without the ability to evaluate the information itself, these young people simply make judgments

based “heavily on design and presentation features rather than content” (Harris 2008, 161). These findings suggest that the Internet may serve a counterproductive role in the effort to educate the youth of the nation. Fred W. Weingarten (2008) went so far as to argue that the government has “enjoyed a longstanding responsibility for education, on the assumption that an educated, literate public is vital to democracy, economic strength, and social stability” (2008, 181). However, not all researchers are pessimistic regarding the role of Internet information on the education of America’s youth.

Soo Young Reih and Brian Hilligoss (2008) interviewed twenty-four college students and concluded that the media habits of these students were more nuanced than other research on this question suggest. Rieh and Hilligoss (2008, 64) suggested that their students were aware of credibility problems regarding Internet content and, as such, they were likely to use websites that were suggested by those they consider “knowledgeable,” such as a professor, or those they deem “trustworthy,” such as a friend or relative. Additionally, some of the interviewees claimed to have used multiple sources to verify the information obtained online. However, even the authors acknowledged the limited ability to generalize the results from their rather small sample of college students to overall media trends amongst young people in the United States. Ultimately, one of the goals of this dissertation will be to further explore the issue in a way that will help to more fully illuminate the process by which young people do, or perhaps do not, engage in the credibility assessment of online sources.

These studies all point to the importance of better understanding the way in which individuals process online information. Young people are becoming more and more reliant on the Internet for entertainment, school, and news and, as such, it is important to research the quality of the information which they are utilizing.

Hypotheses

The centerpiece of the dissertation is an experimental design meant to determine whether certain features of online news increase negative attitudes toward political leaders, institutions, and policies amongst online news consumers. More specifically, the experiment isolates comment sections as a way in which online political news is decidedly different than more traditional media. Comment sections are an important feature of online news as they afford any news consumer the ability to publicly present their perspective on a given issue, to interact with other citizens regarding that issue, and to do so instantaneously and under a veil of anonymity. This feature of online news speaks to the larger debate concerning the nature of online discourse. In order to analyze the role of comment sections, the following hypotheses were examined using data from the experiment:

Participants reading an article with a comment section at the conclusion will exhibit more negative attitudes toward the policies, the institutions, and the individuals in their respective article compared to those reading the same article without a comment section.

Mutz and Reeves (2005) demonstrated that incivility depicted on television during political debates create a corresponding distrust of government. Additionally, the analysis in the third chapter of the dissertation will suggest that online media consumers have more negative attitudes toward government and political leaders than those who use more traditional media. The first hypothesis posits that comment

sections may be, in part, responsible for this negativity. Comment sections are anonymous, lacking with regard to editorial standards, and allow for immediate, emotional reactions to news stories. These factors would seem to encourage rawer, potentially more negative content.

Participants reading an article with a comment section at the conclusion will have more negative attitudes related to the performance of the media in reporting on politics.

The second hypothesis is an extension of the first and suggests that heightened levels of negative content in the media will also produce lower confidence in the trustworthiness of the media. Buss and Buss (2006) contend that information online is reminiscent of the “yellow journalism” era. If this is correct, it could be expected that those exposed to such information would, over time, distrust the Internet as an information source. However, if Surin (2010) is correct and the Internet can provide an avenue through which journalists can be held accountable, perhaps online news can positively improve citizen evaluations of the media.

Participants reading an article with a comment section at the conclusion will have a difficult time differentiating between content in the article and content in the comment sections, when questioned after reading said material.

The credibility assessment literature also suggests that individuals will have a difficult time differentiating between good sources of information and bad (James et al. 2011; Flanigan and Metzger 2008; Harris 2008; Weingarten 2008). In this instance, the hypothesis posits that individuals reading an article with a comment section will, over time, forget whether the source of their acquired information was the text of the article or the comment section. If this hypothesis is correct the findings would hold important implications for political knowledge.

Ultimately, the above hypotheses will speak to the ability of the Internet to serve as either a facilitator of education and constructive political debate or as an impediment to constructive discourse in American politics.

Chapter Overview

The following chapters of the dissertation will provide insight into how, or perhaps if, the Internet is shaping both the present and the future of American politics.

Chapter 2: Who is online and what are they doing there?

The first step in understanding the importance of the role of the Internet in American politics is to determine who is using the Internet to gather political information as well as how they are going about doing so. The second chapter will accomplish this analysis with the help of data from the Pew Internet & American Life Project. While seemingly a simple concept the idea of online news is one that could mean a number of different things, from those sites that mirror traditional newspapers to online political blogs. This chapter will attempt to identify some national trends with regard to which sources individuals rely on when they are turning to online sources for their political news.

Additionally, Chapter 2 will set the stage for the experimental portion of the dissertation by examining the Pew data for information regarding who is most likely to post on online comment sections. The findings suggest that males who are unemployed and unmarried are significantly more likely than others to opt to post on said comment sections. These findings may or may not suggest that social isolation is often a predictor of whether an individual will seek online comment sections as a venue of expressing one's thoughts on a variety of issues.

Chapter 3: Why is everyone so angry? An examination of the political attitudes of online media consumers

The third chapter will explore whether or not individuals that use the Internet to acquire political information think about politics in a fundamentally different way than those that opt to use more conventional media such as the radio, television, magazines, or newspapers. In evaluating these relationships the chapter will make use of data from the American National Election Studies datasets compiled during the election cycles throughout the past decade. In particular, it is this chapter which will discuss the efficacy of the findings presented by Buss and Buss (2006) that online news presents a decidedly negative portrayal of politics and political leaders that, consequently, limits the development of more positive political discourse in America.

Ultimately, the analysis shows that those claiming to use online news had decidedly negative views of President Bush in the 2004 election, Barack Obama in the 2008 election, and the federal government as whole in 2008. Interestingly, support for John McCain during the 2008 election increased amongst Internet-users compared to non-users. The findings suggest that those using the Internet seem to have an anti-establishment attitude. Those seen as in control or likely to be in control (in the case of Obama) of the federal government are distrusted amongst this segment of the population. These relationships are explored in greater detail in the third chapter.

Chapter 4: Who reads this stuff? An experimental approach to understanding the role of comment sections in online news consumption

In order to more fully explore the relationship between Internet use and political attitudes, a unique experimental design was utilized. This experiment is the subject of the fourth chapter and was designed primarily to determine how individuals

process online information. More specifically, the experiment analyzed whether or not the comment sections that are often part of online news articles serve to shape the way that younger Americans think and learn about political leaders, events, and issues. These comment sections often contain inflammatory statements directed at the subject of the article, the author of the article, or sometimes even at other posters on the thread. Consequently, it is possible that, to some extent, these comment sections contribute to the incivility of online political discourse as posited by Buss and Buss (2006). Ultimately, the goal was to isolate a feature of online news that is unique to that particular medium.

The findings of the experiment suggest that comment sections, in this instance, did not seem to create negative attitudes toward political leaders, institutions, or issues. However, those exposed to comment sections were more likely to identify the content of their article as being hostile or rude in nature. Likewise, some respondents exposed to comment sections had more negative attitudes of people with opposing perspectives relative to respondents in the control group without comment sections. Additionally, the participants were successfully able to differentiate between the content they read in the article and the content they were exposed to in the comment section. These findings suggest that college students may be more capable of navigating the online news environment than much of the literature would suggest.

While this experiment focuses on comment sections it has broader importance with regard to our approach to evaluating the Internet. When exploring the role of the Internet in American politics it is essential to explore the implications of increased

interactivity with regard to news consumption. Without the ability to post comments or share links, videos, and pictures the world of online news starts to look very similar to other forms of media. Consequently, studies of online news necessarily need to isolate features, specifically those tools that encourage interactivity, of online news which make it decidedly different than more traditional media.

Chapter 5: Where do we go from here? The future of online news consumption and media research

The final chapter will review the findings from the preceding chapters and spend some time detailing the possible implications of negativity in online news consumption. While the experiment does not serve to isolate specific ways in which attitudes change as a result of the reading of comment sections there are still reasons to be concerned about the erosion of civil discourse in American politics. Additionally, the chapter will provide some suggestions for future research in the study of the Internet and the role that it will play in American politics.

Importance of the Research

Online news is rapidly displacing more traditional sources of news, such as local and regional newspapers. This new form of news is fundamentally different than other sources of information in a variety of ways. The Internet is more interactive than other media, providing individuals with the ability to post blogs, utilize social networking sites, and post on comment sections all in the pursuit of gathering the news of the day. Additionally, the growth of Internet technology has made information on any subject accessible within moments.

Markus Prior (2005) argues that the Internet has both positive and negative consequences for the American electoral process. For some the increased presence of

the Internet affords them the opportunity to become even more knowledgeable about politics and thus improves the democratic process. On the other hand, for individuals that prefer entertainment to substantive news the Internet allows them to avoid political news altogether. Consequently, the success or failure of the Internet is not dependent on the medium but on individuals evaluating how to use the new technology.

If, as Prior posits, there is a growing gap between those selecting to use the Internet for news gathering and those using the new technology as a way to avoid exposure to said news then attempting to understand the way in which Internet users interact with political leaders and institutions should be an increasingly important endeavor.

Additionally, Internet users have the opportunity to avoid news sources that disagree with their own political ideologies. Democrats can utilize liberal news sites, Republicans can rely on conservative websites, and both can avoid exposure to the other side. Given the prevailing assumption that polarization breeds gridlock, anger, and apathy the Internet could perhaps be seen as problematic to the pursuit of a more cooperative and effective system of governing throughout the country.

These trends are especially important to evaluate amongst younger Americans given their overwhelming reliance on the Internet as a source of information. College age students use the Internet to communicate with their friends, research papers, shop, and to acquire their news. Ultimately, the current generation of younger Americans has grown up with the Internet and represents the first chance that researchers have to

analyze a group of individuals that have perhaps only limited exposure to more traditional news media.

Has the Internet made these young Internet users more knowledgeable about the political process? Does the Internet serve to create more negative attitudes about political leaders and institutions? Does the Internet create a brighter future for American politics or does it serve as an impediment to the type of discourse which is necessary to break down the current political divisions which preclude cooperative governance between the two major parties? New media is often understood as revolutionizing the way that individuals acquire their information. However, it is essential to also evaluate whether this new technology changes the way that individuals think about politics and, correspondingly, changes the American political landscape.

Chapter 2: Who is online and what are they doing there?

In early 2012 the Stop Online Piracy Act was one of the most hotly contested pieces of legislation before Congress. The legislation was aimed to crack down on the illegal distribution of copyrighted material, but was seen by many in the online community as a danger to the continued maintenance and growth of some of the most influential sites, including Google, Facebook, and YouTube. The outrage over the proposed legislation was indicative of the degree which the public had become attached to some of their favorite sites. Over 7 million individuals signed a petition from Google protesting the legislation and a similar petition from Wikipedia experienced the same success ("SOPA petition gets millions of signatures as internet piracy legislation protests continue" 2012). Given the level of attachment and reliance individuals have toward their favorite online venues, a study of American political behavior would be decidedly incomplete without an evaluation of how and what said individuals are doing online.

Some of the existing literature suggests that young people are more likely than their older counterparts to use the Internet (Coleman and McCombs 2007). However, there is not a great deal of scholarly research examining the degree to which demographic characteristics influence media selection and, in particular, the decision to use the Internet over more conventional sources of information. The data employed in this chapter will supplement the existing research and attempt to gauge the demographic characteristics that are most prevalent amongst online news consumers.

The Pew Center's Internet and American Life Project has an impressive array of data available regarding the new media and the way the new media interacts with American politics. In 2008, the project compiled information related to Internet use during the course of the 2008 election cycle ("November 2008 - Post Election" 2008). Additionally, this same project released a more limited dataset evaluating the use of Internet news in 2010 ("January 2010--Online News" 2010). Given the 2010 dataset's focus on Internet news, it is lacking in questions related to the way individuals choose or choose not to interact with political campaigns through online environments. Consequently, in some instances comparison between 2008 and 2010 will not be possible. In addition to speaking to the demographic characteristics of Internet users this chapter will also serve to lay the groundwork for the proceeding chapters and the experimental design presented in the Chapter 4.

Who Uses Online News?

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the 2008 presidential election cycle marked a surge in the use of online sources to gather political information.

[Insert Figures 2.1 and 2.2 about here]

Figure 2.1 demonstrates that 43% of individuals claim that the Internet is their main source of national and international news. From 2001 through 2011, the Internet and the radio were the only two sources that saw an increase in the number of individuals identifying them as their preferred media source ("Internet Gains on Television as Public's Main News Source " 2011). Likewise, Figure 2.2 shows a 17% increase in the number of individuals using online news sources between 2009 and 2010 and indicates that the rise of the Internet in 2008 was more than just a

passing trend ("The State of the News Media: An Annual Report on American Journalism" 2011).

First and foremost, it is important to analyze the demographic characteristics of those individuals that select to read online news.

[Insert Tables 2.1 and 2.2 about here]

The first two tables examine predictors of online news consumption during the 2008 election. The dependent variable for the first table is a 6-point variable measuring whether the respondent selected to use online news sources to read about the 2008 elections (ranging from 1 meaning "No, never" and 6 representing "Yes, more than once a day"). The independent variables selected for this analysis include a wide range of demographic as well as attitudinal (in the party identification variables) characteristics. The hope is that, by casting a wide net, this research will be able to paint a more complete picture of the average online news consumer.

In this instance, one's gender (a binary variable where 1 represents "men" and 0 represents "women"), income (a 9-point variable ranging from "less than \$10,000" to "\$150,000 or more"), affiliation with the Democratic Party (a binary variable where 1 represents "Democrat" and 0 represents "other"), education (a 7-point variable ranging from "None, or grades 1-8" to "Post-graduate training/professional"), their student status (a binary variable where 1 indicates the respondent is a student and 0 means that they are not a student), and their age (divided into 6 categories ranging from "Gen Y (18-31)" to "After work (72+)") are significantly related to their use of online news in the 2008 election cycle.

The expectation is that those with higher levels of income and education will be more likely to take advantage of the Internet as a news source. Additionally, it is expected that younger individuals would be more likely to use the Internet than their older counterparts. Higher levels of income may be related to increased access to the Internet at home, on smart phones, tablets, at work, etc. Additionally, education levels may suggest a greater desire to learn more about the local, state, and national news. In terms of age, it is expected that those who are younger are more digitally savvy and connected than those who are older. However, this gap is likely decreasing as more and more individuals are becoming reliant on online sources at home or at work.

In other words, when it comes to the elections of 2008 men were more likely than women, higher income individuals were more likely than those with less income, Democrats were more likely than Independents, those with more education were more likely than those with less education, students were more likely than non-students, and younger individuals were more likely than older individuals to use the Internet as a news source during the 2008 campaign.

The second table uses a similar dependent variable and asks whether or not the respondent relied on the Internet for information regarding the 2008 campaign more than any other media source (the variable is binary and 1 represents “Internet” and 0 represents “Other”). Given the nature of the variable the second table makes use of a logistic regression. Ultimately, the results are very similar to the first table and the respondent’s gender, income, education, and age are all significantly correlated to one’s choice to rely on the Internet over other media sources in the

election cycle of 2008. However, unlike the analysis above, in this instance the respondent's party identification and one's status as a student are not significant.

Predicted probabilities can help to better understand the relationships indicated in Table 2.2. Specifically, analyzing predicted probabilities for the age variable demonstrate that, moving from the youngest age category to the oldest, there is approximately an 18 percentage point decrease in the likelihood of using the Internet as the primary source of information. Additionally, moving from those with the lowest levels of education (none, or grades 1-8) to those with the highest levels of education (post-graduate training/professional) there is roughly a 10 percentage point increase in the likelihood of selecting the Internet over all other possible news sources. In terms of income, the likelihood of the wealthiest respondents (\$150,000 per year or more) relying on Internet news is 8 percentage points greater than those who are in the least wealthy category (less than \$10,000 per year). Finally, men are approximately 3% more likely than women to choose the Internet as their preferred source of information.

While a number of respondents claimed to use the Internet as a means of following the 2008 election cycle, the majority choose specifically to follow the presidential election. Indeed, 68% claimed to follow the presidential election online whereas only 42% followed senatorial elections, 31% followed House races, 21% followed gubernatorial races, and 37% followed local races online. This would follow conventional wisdom which suggests that individuals pay less attention to statewide or local races than they do the presidential races. Additionally, this information serves to clarify that the dependent variables in the above tables are primarily about the

seeking of online news related to the presidential race. Given that in 2010 the dichotomy between presidential and other national elections did not exist similar variables were not accessible through the Pew Internet and American Life Project. However, the following tables attempt to use the 2010 data to explore some of the same patterns evaluated with the 2008 data.

[Insert Table 2.3 about here]

The dependent variable for this table is whether or not the respondent gets news online (a binary variable where 1 represents “Yes” and 0 represents “No”). Unlike in the 2008 analyses, this dependent variable is about online news gathering more generally and not specifically related to election news. Given the nature of the dependent variable the model employed is a logistic regression. The respondent’s age (the respondent’s actual age), gender (categorized the same way as above), party affiliation (categorized the same way as above) and education level (categorized the same way as above) are all significantly related to whether or not said respondent used the Internet to read online news stories. In other words, respondents were more likely to read online news if they were younger, male, Democrats, and highly educated. In order to more specifically examine these relationships changes in predicted probabilities were examined.

In terms of age, moving from the youngest respondent (18 years of age) to the oldest (96 years of age), the probability of selecting to get news online decreased by approximately 32 percentage points. For 18 year olds the probability of using online news sources was approximately 91%. In terms of gender, men were 4% more likely than women to take advantage of the Internet as a source of information. However,

both men and women used the Internet for this purpose to a rather large extent, 85% and 81% respectively. Additionally, those satisfied with the direction of the country were approximately 9% less likely to use the Internet as a news source than those who were dissatisfied with the direction of the country. Those dissatisfied with the country had an 85% probability of seeking online news. Those identifying as Democrats had a 5% greater probability of using online news than Independents, 86% to 81% respectively. Additionally, moving from those with the lowest levels of education (none, or grades 1-8) to those with the highest levels of education (post-graduate training/professional) there is roughly a 38 percentage point increase in the likelihood of selecting the Internet over all other possible news sources. Those with the highest level of educational attainment have a roughly 90% probability of using the Internet for news gathering.

The preceding analyses present a picture of the individuals most likely to utilize the Internet as an information source in American politics. Clearly, gender plays an important role, as men are decidedly more likely, in both 2008 as well as in 2010, to use the Internet than their female counterparts. Additionally, it appears that the role of education is a durable and powerful influence on one's decision to use the Internet to follow political events as more educated individuals, in both 2008 and 2010, choose to do so. Additionally, there is some evidence that party affiliation matters, as Democrats in 2008 and 2010 showed an increased likelihood of taking advantage of online news when compared to Independents. Perhaps this is related to the lingering effect of Obama's highly successful online mobilization efforts or, possibly, there is something related to the demographics of the Democratic Party

which make its members more likely to access online news. Likewise, younger individuals were consistently more likely, in both years, to use the Internet compared to older respondents.

The role of income is less clear as it was a significant indicator of one's use of the Internet during the 2008 elections, but was not significant in 2010. Perhaps this relates to the increased accessibility to online news sources. Additionally, one's status as a student was significant in 2008, but there was not a measure for that variable in the 2010 dataset. Interestingly, the 2010 data suggests that education level is an even more important indicator of an individual's likelihood to use the Internet to gather information. Specifically, the gap between those with the highest level of education and lowest level of education, with regard to their probability of using the Internet for news, grew by 28 percentage points in that two year span. Overall, a large majority of these relationships held constant between 2008 and 2010 and provide valuable insight into which citizens are more likely to access online news as a way of gaining political information.

How Do Citizens Interact with Online News?

While we understand that the Internet has become a prominent source of information in recent years, it is less clear how or if this changes the way that individuals read and interact with the news. The proceeding analyses are an attempt to isolate some features that are unique to Internet news as compared to more traditional media sources (television, newspapers, radio, etc.) and determine which individuals are most likely to utilize said features. Whether or not use of these features

corresponds to a change in the way that individuals understand and think about political institutions, leaders, and issues will be the subject of Chapter 4.

Do Citizens Prefer Unbiased News Sources?

With the emergence of the Internet the American people have access to a wider range of political information than ever before. Unlike in the early history of television, for example, those interested in acquiring information about politics in today's media environment have a range of media choices including partisan, non-partisan, satirical, and foreign sources. One theory of biased information processing holds that the Internet affords individuals the opportunity to only expose themselves to news that agrees with their political perspective (Prior 2005). In other words, conservatives can use exclusively conservative sources of information and liberals can choose to acquire news from decidedly liberal outlets. A presumed consequence of this trend is that individuals are becoming more polarized as they are rarely confronted with opportunities to evaluate the positions held by those with contrasting political philosophies.

According to the Pew Center data for 2008, approximately 44% of respondents indicated that they prefer to use sites that share their political views, 31% want to use sites that do not have a particular political viewpoint, and 25% would prefer to use a site that challenges their existing political attitudes.

[Insert Table 2.4 about here]

Table 2.4 explores the characteristics of individuals who claim to prefer news sources that validate their own political perspective. The dependent variable asks the respondents whether or not they use sites that challenge their point of view and ranges

from 1 (uses sites that share their point of view) to 3 (uses sites that challenge their point of view). The results indicate that Democrats are significantly more likely to use sites that agree with their perspective than are Independents. Additionally, those with higher levels of education are inclined to use sites that agree with their political views as well. Finally, those who are employed are significantly more likely to use sites that challenge their point of view than those who are unemployed.

The difference between Democrats and other political parties perhaps is based on the assumption that news on the Internet tends to be more liberal-leaning generally. Whether or not this is true, that assumption may lead Democrats, and discourage others, from using online news sources. However, these are trends for 2008 and as the Internet grows, and both sides of the political aisle start to take advantage of online opportunities, it is possible that this partisan distinction will erode. The significance of the education variable is interesting in that it suggests that the more educated the respondent the more likely he or she will be to seek sources that agree with his or her perspective. Perhaps this is not surprising in that one would have to have a certain level of political knowledge in order to differentiate between the ideological slants of various online news sites. The employment variable, while significant, is difficult to explain. Perhaps being employed decreases the personal investment one has in politics and consequently he or she is more likely to expose him or herself to viewpoints which challenge his or her perspective. However, this seems contradicted by the insignificance of the income variable which should, presuming that assumption, have a similar effect.

Do Comment Sections Matter?

One of the ways in which Internet news sources are decidedly different than more conventional sources is the ability for individuals to respond instantaneously and often anonymously to the subject or author of the article or even other readers. While some see this as a democratic victory, allowing citizens to have their voices heard and facilitating discussion amongst the electorate, others are not quite as encouraged. For example, Buss and Buss (2006) criticize the ease with which individuals can post often hostile and incorrect information. Thus, while these comment sections may facilitate discourse said discourse may actually be damaging to thoughtful political discussion and debate. Mutz and Reeves (2005) also speak to the power of media sources, television in their research, in creating a sense of incivility through the nature of their coverage. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 as the experiment addresses the role of comment sections in a more thorough manner. However, this section will attempt to identify the demographic characteristics of individuals inclined to post on these comment sections.

According to the 2008 Pew Center data only 11% of individuals claimed to comment on a web site of any kind, such as a political news site. The following represents an empirical attempt to determine which factors led those individuals to elect to post online comments:

[Insert Table 2.5 about here]

The dependent variable is a binary variable where 1 indicates that the respondent did comment on a web site and 0 indicates that the respondent did not comment on any web sites. The logistic regression indicates that gender, employment

status, and marital status are statistically significant in determining whether or not the respondent posted a comment on a web site. In terms of gender, men were 4 percentage points more likely to post online comments compared to women. Specifically, approximately 14% of men claimed to post online comments. Additionally, for married individuals the probability of posting online comments was roughly 7 percentage points lower than for unmarried respondents, 16% and 9% respectively. Finally, being employed decreased the likelihood of posting by approximately 11 percentage points. Unemployed individuals had a predicted probability of posting of roughly 21%.

Taking a closer look at these relationships, for men who are unemployed the likelihood that they will select to post online comments is approximately 25%. However, for those same individuals, if they are also unmarried the odds increase to roughly 33%. This contrasts starkly with men who are employed and married who have a likelihood of posting of only 10%. In order to determine whether or not these trends hold true over time it is possible to evaluate the 2010 Pew Center data.

[Insert Table 2.6 about here]

Interestingly, it appears as if the results are almost identical in 2010. The dependent variable is again binary where 1 signifies that the respondent posted a comment on an online news article and 0 suggests that the respondent did not post a comment.¹ The data indicate that 24% of the respondents claimed to post a comment online. Once again, the regression indicates that the gender, marital status, and

¹ The dependent variable in this regression is slightly different than the one used in the 2008 regression. Specifically, the 2008 variable measures whether the respondent posted a comment on any website such as an online news site whereas the 2010 variable is specific to whether or not the respondent posted a comment on an online news article.

employment status of the respondent are important indicators of whether or not they posted a comment on an online news site. With regard to gender, the predicted probability of a man posting an online comment was approximately 7 percentage points greater than for women. More specifically, men had a predicted probability of 28%. Additionally, being married decreased the predicted probability of posting by approximately 5%. Unmarried individuals had a predicted probability of posting of around 27%. Finally, being employed decreased the probability of posting by about 6 percentage points relative to those who were unemployed. Unemployed individuals had a predicted probability of posting of approximately 29%.

Looking more in depth at the results, the likelihood of an unemployed man posting a comment online was approximately 33% (or 37% if that man was also unmarried). This compares to a predicted probability of posting a comment of roughly 24% for men who were employed and married. While the same relationships exist in the 2010 dataset, the predicted probabilities have increased for all of the examined populations. Perhaps this is related to an increased use of comment sections more generally. This is evidenced by the fact that the percentage of all respondents claiming to post comments changed from 11% in 2008 to approximately 24% in 2010.

Comment sections represent one way in which online news can be differentiated from more conventional news sources. Additionally, it appears as if there are more and more individuals taking advantage of the opportunity to post within these sections and the implications of this trend are still largely unknown.

Hopefully the experiment in Chapter 4 will help to illuminate what, if any, role that comment sections have played and will play in the formation of political attitudes.

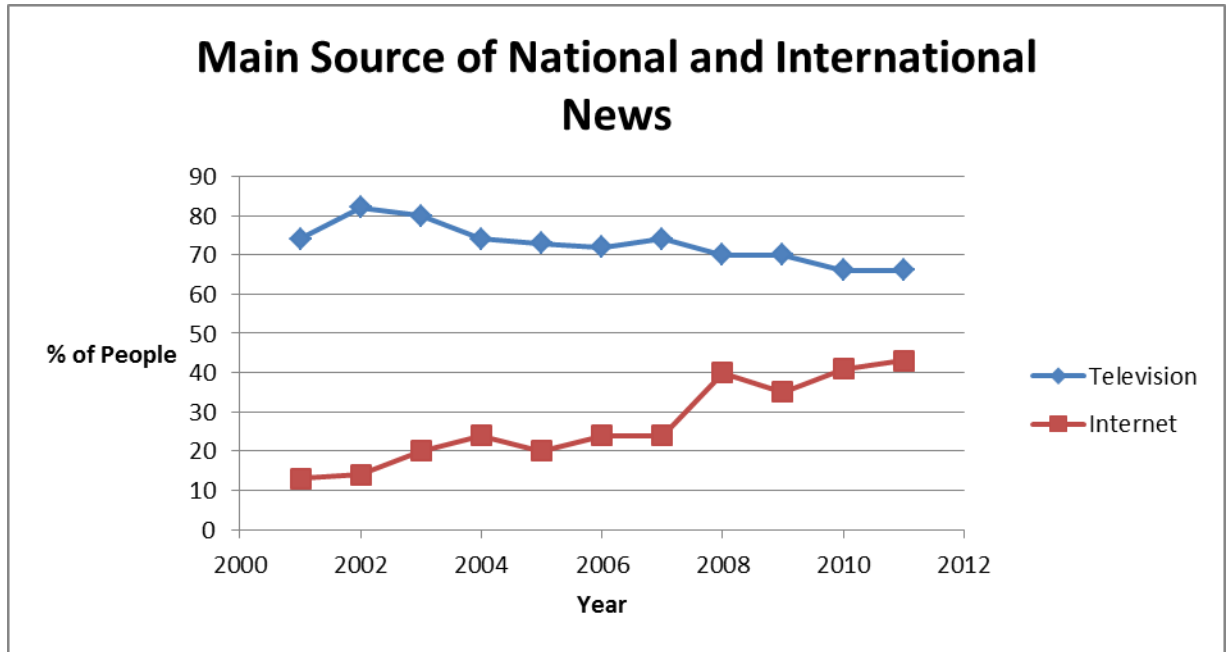
Conclusion

While Internet use has increased dramatically, the results from this chapter suggest that, over time, the predictors of Internet use in the United States are relatively stable. Indeed, gender, party identification, education, and age seem to be predictors of online news consumption in both 2008 and 2010. These findings serve to more clearly define what we mean when we talk about Internet users. Internet users tend to be male, identify with the Democratic Party, have higher levels of education, and are younger compared to non-Internet users. Given technological advances as well as the growing number of new online users it will be interesting to see whether or not these classifications are durable or whether they will change as well.

Additionally, this chapter evaluated the demographic characteristics of individuals most likely to post on online forums. Once again, the characteristics were very similar for respondents in 2008 and 2010. The findings would suggest that commenters are predominately male, unemployed, and unmarried. Perhaps these results indicate that those with less societal attachments are more likely to post their comments in these comment sections. It is conceivable that these findings are simply the result of these individuals having more time than other members of society to engage in these online discussions. However, it is also possible that social isolation breeds a negativity that expresses itself in the comments these individuals post on these online forums. Further study should be undertaken to evaluate the motivation for engaging in online debates through comment sections.

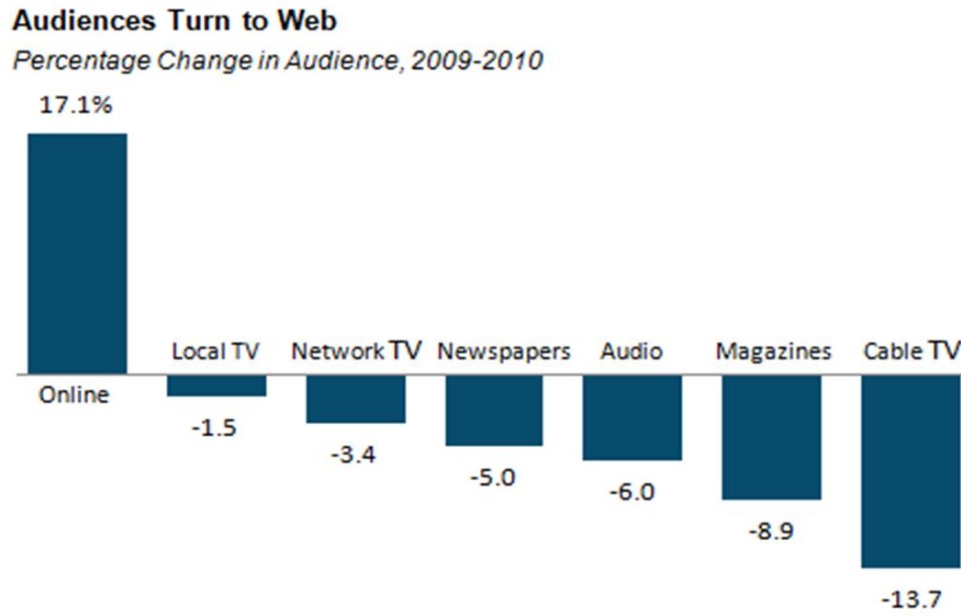
While this chapter spent time evaluating the likelihood of certain individuals to post in online comment sections, Chapter 4 will address whether reading said comment sections serves to alter attitudes toward political leaders, issues, or institutions. However, before turning to this analysis, Chapter 3 will evaluate whether or not Internet use more broadly is associated with more negativity toward government leaders as well as the federal government more generally.

Figure 2.1: The use online media as the primary source of news from 2001 to 2011



Source: Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism 2011

Figure 2.2: Increase in online news audience from 2009 through 2010



Source: Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism 2011, p. 7

Table 2.1: OLS regression predicting use of online news during the 2008 elections

The dependent variable for the first table is a 6-point variable measuring whether the respondent selected to use online news to read about the 2008 elections (ranging from 1 meaning “No, never” and 6 representing “Yes, more than once a day”).

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Age	-0.15** (0.04)
Married	-0.08 (0.00)
Parent	0.00 (0.11)
Employment	0.00 (0.14)
Student	0.28 (0.16)
Education	0.25** (0.03)
Race	-0.04 (0.14)
Republican	0.21 (0.12)
Democrat	0.40** (0.12)
Religious Attendance	-0.05 (0.03)
Income	0.15** (0.03)
Gender	0.35** (0.10)
Constant	0.90** (0.28)
Model Summary Statistics	
Number of obs	1260
Adjusted R-Squared	0.13

Source: Pew Internet and American Life Project 2008 Data
 *= p<0.05, ** =p<0.01. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 2.2: Logistic regression evaluating individuals opting to use online news more than any other news source during the 2008 elections

The dependent variable asks whether or not the respondent relied on the Internet for information regarding the 2008 campaign more than any other media source (the variable is binary and 1 represents “Internet” and 0 represents “Other”).

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Errors)
Age	-0.41** (0.07)
Married	0.02 (0.20)
Parent	0.01 (0.19)
Employment	0.18 (0.25)
Student	0.37 (0.24)
Education	0.23** (0.06)
Race	0.02 (0.23)
Republican	-0.33 (0.20)
Democrat	-0.18 (0.19)
Religious Attendance	-0.05 (0.05)
Income	0.13** (0.05)
Gender	0.43** (0.17)
Constant	-2.74** (0.47)
 Model Summary Statistics	
Number of obs	1640
Pseudo R-Squared	0.11
Log Likelihood	-538.45

Source: Pew Internet and American Life Project 2008 Data
 *= p<0.05, ** =p<0.01. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 2.3: Logistic regression evaluating whether or not the respondent gets news online in 2010

The dependent variable is whether or not the respondent gets news online (a binary variable where 1 represents “Yes” and 0 represents “No”).

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Errors)
Age	-0.02** (0.00)
Gender	0.29* (0.14)
Satisfied	-0.61** (0.16)
Married	0.06 (0.15)
Parent	-0.01 (0.17)
Employment	0.24 (0.17)
Republican	-0.14 (0.17)
Democrat	0.38* (0.18)
Education	0.36** (0.05)
Race	-0.03 (0.21)
Income	-0.00 (0.00)
Constant	0.72* (0.36)

Model Summary Statistics

Number of obs	1440
Pseudo R-Squared	0.07
Log Likelihood	-660.07

Source: Pew Internet and American Life Project 2010 Data
 *= p<0.05, ** =p<0.01. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 2.4: OLS regression evaluating which individuals are more likely to seek out news that agrees with their own perspective

The dependent variable asks the respondent whether or not they use sites that challenge their point of view and ranges from 1 (uses sites that share their point of view) to 3 (uses sites that challenge their point of view).

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Errors)
Age	-0.04 (0.03)
Married	0.08 (0.73)
Parent	0.02 (0.07)
Employment	0.10 (0.09)
Student	0.05 (0.10)
Education	-0.07** (0.02)
Race	0.05 (0.09)
Republican	-0.10 (0.08)
Democrat	-0.30** (0.07)
Religious Attendance	0.01 (0.02)
Income	0.01 (0.02)
Gender	-0.03 (0.10)
Constant	2.14** (0.18)
Model Summary Statistics	
Number of obs	755
Adjusted R-Squared	0.03

Source: Pew Internet and American Life Project 2008 Data
 *= p<0.05, ** =p<0.01. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 2.5: Logistic regression evaluating which individuals are most likely to post online comments in 2008

The dependent variable is a binary variable where 1 indicates that the respondent did comment on a website and 0 indicates that the respondent did not comment on any websites.

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Errors)
Age	-0.05 (0.08)
Gender	0.49* (0.21)
Married	-0.59* (0.25)
Parent	-0.15 (0.24)
Employment	-0.86** (0.28)
Republican	-0.12 (0.27)
Democrat	0.36 (0.25)
Education	0.09 (0.08)
Race	-0.12 (0.30)
Income	0.08 (0.06)
Constant	-2.16** (0.62)
 Model Summary Statistics	
Number of obs	965
Pseudo R-Squared	0.05
Log Likelihood	-340.69

Source: Pew Internet and American Life Project 2008 Data
 N = 965 * = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 2.6: Logistic regression evaluating which individuals are most likely to post online comments in 2010

The dependent variable is binary where 1 signifies that the respondent posted a comment on an online news article and 0 suggests that the respondent did not post a comment.

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Errors)
Age	-0.00 (0.00)
Gender	0.37** (0.13)
Satisfied	-0.15 (0.14)
Married	-0.29* (0.14)
Parent	0.24 (0.15)
Employment	-0.32* (0.16)
Republican	-0.24 (0.16)
Democrat	0.03 (0.16)
Education	0.04 (0.04)
Race	-0.16 (0.17)
Income	-0.00 (0.00)
Constant	0.77* (0.32)
Model Summary Statistics	
Number of obs	1441
Pseudo R-Squared	0.02
Log Likelihood	-786.80

Source: Pew Internet and American Life Project 2010 Data
 N = 1441 * = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Chapter 3: Why is everyone so angry? An examination of the political attitudes of online media consumers

In the spring of 2011 Jack Stuef of the satirical news site *Wonkette* wrote an article entitled “Greatest Living American: A Children’s Treasury of Trig Crap on His Birthday”. In this article Stuef mocked the disability of former Alaskan Governor Sarah Palin’s son Trig Palin, who was born with Down Syndrome. At the punch line of one of the article’s jokes Stuef called Trig “retarded.” After receiving criticism regarding the article the site eventually pulled the piece, but Stuef defended it as a response to the use of children as campaign props (Christopher 2011).

On the other side of the political aisle, a Republican Party official in the state of California in the spring of 2011 emailed a picture of President Obama’s face superimposed on the body of an ape. The party official claimed that this was not a racist email for it was meant to be satirical in nature (Madison 2011). These episodes are some of the many examples of the way that individuals on both ends of the political spectrum have started to use the Internet as a means of proliferating often negative, politically charged statements and images about their opponents. These examples represent anecdotal evidence that Buss and Buss (2006) were correct in their argument that the Internet serves to further exacerbate the negative elements of American political discourse.

This chapter will focus on whether or not those individuals that use the Internet to access political information think differently about politics than those who opt to use more conventional sources (television, newspaper, radio). The data used for this analysis comes from the 2004, 2008, and 2011 American National Election Studies surveys (“The ANES 2004 Time Series Study” 2004; “The ANES 2008 Time

Series Study " 2008; "ANES Evaluations of Government and Society Study (EGSS1)" 2011). By including several years as well as election cycles it will be possible to understand the way in which these trends change over time. However, it is important to note that the degree to which these relationships can be explained is limited by the fact that the analyses are reliant on survey data as opposed to experimental data. In other words, if there is a relationship between online news gathering and negative political attitudes it will be impossible to determine the direction of causality (whether online news causes increased negativity or whether negative individuals are attracted to online news sources more than their less negative counterparts). These findings are meant to be suggestive and to set the stage for the experimental design utilized as part of the fourth chapter.

The 2004 Presidential Election

As Howard Dean's presidential campaign emerged as a force to be reckoned with during the 2004 presidential election, the former Vermont governor began to struggle with his emergence as the early front-runner. In a telling conversation with his campaign manager, Joe Trippi, Dean stated "I never thought that it would go this far. I was going to raise my profile, raise healthcare as an issue, shake up the Democratic Party. Help change the country. But I never thought *this* would happen." Trippi, in his book *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: Democracy, the Internet, and the Overthrow of Everything*, calls the Dean campaign "a dot-com miracle," a movement toward the use of new media techniques and an acknowledgment of the growth of the Internet as a player in the political arena (Trippi 2004).

At this point, the scholarly literature regarding the role of the Internet typically downplays the importance of technological advances. Bruce Bimber and Richard Davis (2003) attempted to determine whether or not the Internet was becoming an important source of information for potential voters and whether or not the individuals who choose to use the Internet during the process of gathering political information were voting differently than the rest of the population. They utilized survey data from a random sample of individuals in San Diego, St. Louis, Charlotte, and New York who had viewed online information and concluded that “Online communication has not replaced candidates’ traditional activities of press relations, fundraising, speeches and rallies, and so forth. Specifically, candidates do not bypass the press in order to reach the voters.” Further, their conclusion suggested that the Internet would have very little importance in shaping political attitudes.

However, some argued that the Internet did indeed have the potential to shape American politics. Caroline Tolbert and Ramona McNeal (2003) argued that those using the Internet were significantly more likely to vote in presidential elections. Using National Election Studies data from the 2000 election the authors determined that, compared to those who did not use the Internet, Internet users were 12% more likely to vote. Additionally, those individuals that used the Internet to gather political information were 7.5% more likely to vote than those who did not.

When evaluating these foundational studies it is important to note that the shape and character of the Internet in American politics have changed dramatically in the last decade. Candidates rely on the Internet as a means of attracting volunteers, raising money, and transmitting their message. Additionally, the proliferation of

online political news sites, political blogs, and social networking sites have all changed the way that individuals acquire, and perhaps think about, developments in American politics. Consequently, as this chapter makes comparisons between trends in 2004 through 2011 it is important to keep in mind that changes in technology and behavior make said comparisons inexact.

This chapter will examine whether or not Internet users tend to have more negative attitudes toward political leaders and institutions. These findings suggest the need for further exploration of the role of the Internet in the formation of political attitudes in the proceeding chapters. In particular, this chapter will lead into the experimental design presented in the fourth chapter which addresses negativity in one subset of online activity.

For the 2004 analyses the dependent variables are feeling thermometers, measuring the respondent's opinion about a particular political leader or institution on a 100-point scale, where 100 is the most favorable rating. The primary independent variable in each of the regressions is a binary variable where 1 indicates that the respondent did see information about the presidential campaign online and 0 indicating that the respondent did not see information about the campaign online. Similarly, there is a binary variable measuring whether or not the respondent received information about the campaign on the radio, in magazines, or on television. The regressions also make use of a liberal/conservative scale (moving from "liberal" to "conservative"), a party identification scale (moving from "strong Democrat" to "strong Republican"), an income variable, a race variable (1 being "white" and 0 being "non-white"), a variable for the respondent's age, and a variable indicating the

gender of the respondent (1 being male and 0 being female). Additionally, there is a variable indicating how the respondent feels about the state of the economy relative to the prior year (ranging from “gotten better” to “gotten worse”).

The above variables are meant to control for some of the most important predictors of support for political candidates and leaders. For party identification, it is assumed that respondents of a particular party would be supportive of candidates and political leaders of that same party. Likewise for ideology it is assumed that those with a given ideological predisposition will support candidates and leaders with a similar ideological persuasion. Higher levels of income are typically associated with increased support of Republican candidates and leaders. In terms of race, those classified as non-white are typically more likely to support the Democratic Party than are those classified as white. Likewise with gender, it is expected that women will be more supportive of liberal or Democratic candidates than their male counterparts. Finally, including the variable measuring the respondent’s attitude toward the state of the economy helps to illuminate whether poor economic conditions lead to more negative views of those in power and vice versa.

[Insert Table 3.1]

As Table 3.1 shows there appears to be a relationship between Internet use and attitudes toward President Bush. More specifically, those who received political information from online news sources rated President Bush over 4 points lower, on average, on the feeling thermometer. This is in contrast to those who watched political television news who rated Bush over 4 points higher than non-television users on the same scale. Other significant indicators of attitudes toward Bush are the respondent’s income (surprisingly the higher the individual’s income the more likely

one is to rate Bush lower on the feeling thermometer), their party identification (unsurprisingly, the more Republican leaning the respondent claims to be the more likely he or she is to rate Bush higher on the scale), their ideological slant (the more conservative the individual, the more likely that he or she will rate Bush higher), and their economic views (if the respondents feel that the economy has gotten worse in the past year they rate Bush significantly lower than people that have more optimistic views of the economy).

[Insert Tables 3.2 and 3.3]

Using the Internet to find information about the 2004 campaign also seems to be correlated with lower levels of support for presidential candidate John Kerry, but the relationship is one that is not statistically significant. Perhaps this indicates that during this period much of the conventional wisdom concerning the Internet was correct and that the content online had a more liberal slant. Significant indicators for approval of Kerry include the respondent's party identification (with Democrats supporting Kerry more than Republicans), their race (with whites less likely to support Kerry than non-whites), and their views on the economy (those that felt the economy had gotten worse in the past year were more likely to support Kerry than those who felt that it had gotten better).

For the final 2004 regression, the use of the Internet to gather information about the campaign was not significantly related to attitudes toward the federal government more generally. Overall, the relationships examined from the 2004 dataset present a muddled picture concerning the role of the Internet in American politics.

However, it is important to evaluate some of these relationships in the 2008 election at a time when the Internet was more frequently used as a source of information.

The 2008 Presidential Election

During the 2008 election cycle, the Pew Center reports that 55% of Americans were involved in some form of online political activity (Smith 2009). The emergence of the Internet as a political tool was especially pronounced amongst younger Americans as 83% of young people (ages 18-24) had a social networking site and two-thirds of those individuals used those sites as a means of engaging in some form of political activity (Smith 2009). Clearly, there was an expansion of online political activity between 2004 and 2008 and this section will attempt to determine whether or not that expansion is also related to a change in the way that citizens evaluate politics and political leaders.

Dianna Mutz and Byron Reeves (2005) and Buss and Buss (2006) both speak to the power of the media to alter the trust that exists between political leaders and citizens. These findings are an attempt to examine whether online media had an impact on how individuals thought about the 2008 presidential election.

For the 2008 analyses the feeling thermometers for President Bush, Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama, and Republican presidential candidate John McCain serve as the primary dependent variables. The primary independent variable for each regression is Internet usage and this variable is coded as either 0 (indicating that the respondent did not use the Internet as a means of gathering information regarding the presidential campaign) or 1 (indicating that the respondent did use the Internet as a means of acquiring news about the 2008

elections). This coding is the same for all of the media variables including television news, print news, radio news, and magazine publications.

It is important to note that while the above media variables demonstrate whether or not the individual respondent has selected to use a particular media source as a means of gathering information regarding the 2008 presidential election, they do not provide a nuanced view of media usage in said election. In other words, the media variables do not measure the frequency with which each media source is used in comparison to other available sources of information. Additionally, the media variables do not indicate the specific newspapers, online sites, radio programs, etc. used by the respondents. However, the relationships presented in this chapter should serve as a preliminary examination of media use during the 2008 presidential election in spite of this important caveat.

In addition to the variables controlling for the use of other forms of media, the regressions also control for the respondent's party identification (based on a 7 point scale moving from "strong Democrat" to "strong Republican"), income (a 25 point scale moving from respondent's making less than \$2,999 per year to those respondent's earning more than \$150,000 per year), race (a binary variable where respondents are either classified as "white" or "non-white"), ideology (a 7 point scale moving from identifying as a "strong liberal" to a "strong conservative"), age, and their gender (1 for men and 0 for women). Additionally, a variable evaluating whether or not respondents feel the economy has gotten better or worse within the

past year (moving from “gotten better” to “gotten worse”) was added to the regression².

The data suggest that the Internet does indeed serve to substantively alter the way that individuals understand American politics as well as their political leaders. However, the nature of this relationship is more nuanced than the hypotheses, as well as past empirical research, would suggest.

[Insert Table 3.4 about here]

Table 3.4 suggests there is not a significant difference between Internet users and non-users with regard to attitudes toward President Bush during the 2008 election. This is in contrast to the relationship that existed during the 2004 election cycle during which Internet users were far more likely to disapprove of Bush. While the Internet variable is not significant, it still appears as if media choice had some influence on attitudes toward Bush. Specifically, those reading newspapers or magazines had rated Bush significantly lower on the feeling thermometer than those opting not to use those sources of information. Additionally, while not all of the variables were significant it is interesting to note that for all of the media variables, excluding the variable for radio use, the direction of the relationship was negative indicating that those who were paying attention to the media during that time period were more likely to disapprove of Bush. Perhaps this relationship exists due to the

² In addition to examining respondent attitudes toward the state of the economy, analyses were undertaken in order to determine the extent to which the economic collapse in September 2008 factored into respondent ratings for each of the dependent variables. A dummy variable for the interview date of the respondent was created (1 indicated that the interview date took place in October or November 2008 and 0 indicated that the interview date was in September 2008). Ultimately, there was no statistically significant difference between responses before or after the economic collapse with regard to any of the 2008 dependent variables.

extensive coverage of the economic crisis as the election approached and the corresponding blame that citizens placed on the Bush administration.

Additionally, when evaluating the Bush feeling thermometer, party identification was an important indicator of a respondent's rating (with those who more closely identify with the Republican Party are far more likely to approve of Bush while those who more closely identify with the Democratic Party far more likely to disapprove of Bush). Likewise, on the ideological scale those who are more conservative are likely to hold a more favorable opinion of Bush compared to those who are more liberal. Age is also a significant indicator of support for Bush, as older respondents are more likely to approve of Bush than their younger counterparts. Additionally, men are significantly more likely than women to have a positive attitude toward President Bush. Finally, economic concerns clearly factored into lower ratings for Bush as those feeling that the economy had gotten worse in 2008 compared to the year prior rated Bush approximately 7 points lower on the feeling thermometer than those who had more optimistic attitudes regarding the state of the economy.

[Insert Table 3.5 about here]

The results for the second 2008 regression suggest that an individual using the Internet as a source of political information is less likely to hold a favorable opinion of Obama than those who did not. More specifically, an individual using the Internet selected a rating approximately 3.9 points lower on the feeling thermometer for Obama than an individual that did not claim to use the Internet holding other factors constant. This seems to contradict conventional wisdom which is that Obama would likely garner substantial support from Internet users for a number of reasons ranging

from his record Internet fundraising efforts, his use of e-mail as a means of contacting supporters, as well as the more general assumption that Internet users tend to be both younger and more liberal than the rest of the population. These findings are uniquely intriguing in that the use of other forms of media, including television news programs and magazine publications, are associated with more positive attitudes toward President Obama. Indeed, radio news, which is largely perceived to be more conservative than other media, was the only other source of information with negative relationships toward President Obama.

There are several potential explanations for this interesting finding. First, it is possible that the negative Internet campaigns attempting to generate fear of an Obama presidency, in many cases labeling Obama as a Muslim, were at least marginally successful. These negative attacks would consequently demonstrate the inability for many in the public to distinguish between valid and invalid news sources when seeking information online. Perhaps these attacks were scrutinized in more detail through more conventional news sources (television, radio, newspapers, etc.) limiting their effectiveness when presented via these sources. However, the more likely explanation for the unexpected relationship is that those using the Internet are, in general, more critical of the government than those who do not rely on online news sites. In order to examine this possible explanation the following table evaluates the attitudes of Internet users toward the federal government.

[Insert Table 3.6 about here]

The results of Table 3.6 seem to indicate that those using the Internet as a means of gathering political information are indeed less likely to support the activities of the federal government. More specifically, Internet users rate their attitude toward

the federal government, on the feeling thermometer ranging from 1 to 100, over 4 points lower than non-users holding other factors constant. Additionally, Internet usage is uniquely correlated with attitudes toward the federal government in a way that watching television and reading magazines or newspapers are not. The only other significant media variable was radio usage, indicating that individuals using the radio to access information about the 2008 campaign rated the federal government 2.5 points lower on the feeling thermometer. However, the notion that the Internet creates more negative attitudes toward political leaders and institutions is undercut by the results from the regression examining attitudes toward Republican presidential candidate John McCain.

[Insert Table 3.7 about here]

Table 3.7 demonstrates that Internet users were significantly more likely than non-users to have a favorable opinion of McCain. More specifically, Internet users rated McCain over 2 points higher on the feeling thermometer than those choosing not to use the Internet. This again seems to contradict the conventional wisdom that Obama had cornered the market with regard to online support during the 2008 election. Johnson and Kaye (2010) suggest that blogs are seen as more credible by conservatives because they represent an alternative to the traditional media which, they feel, has a more liberal perspective. Perhaps these findings suggest that more conservatives are beginning to turn to blogs or similar online sources alternatives to traditional media, a development which could have led to increased support for McCain amongst those using the Internet to gather political information in the presidential election.

Additionally, it appears that respondents who were older, Republican-leaning, and conservative were all significantly more likely to approve of McCain than other respondents. While the results regarding the Internet are interesting, it is important to note that this measure of Internet use is rather broad and does not focus on online fundraising, volunteer mobilization, or social networking which were areas where Obama had expended a great deal of resources.

While the 2008 election had large turnout rates throughout the nation and an increased level of interest from the electorate, it remains to be seen whether these trends will continue. If, as posited above, the Internet serves as a source which fosters distrust or apathy toward the government will we see a corresponding decrease in civic engagement amongst the electorate? Or, will the low cost of, and high access to, the Internet afford individuals the ability to more directly engage in politics and thus improve the efficacy of American democracy? These questions hold important implications for American politics and warrant continued examination.

Additionally, it is important to note that these results only represent a snapshot of relationships that existed during the 2008 presidential election. The use of the Internet as both a social force and a campaign tool is continuing to expand throughout the nation and, as such, it is important to continue to study these relationships as new data become available. Indeed, the Internet seems to serve a far different role today than it did when evaluated in the context of the 2004 election.

2011 Trends

Between 2009 and 2010 there was a 17% increase in the number of individuals using online news sources ("The State of the News Media: An Annual

Report on American Journalism" 2011). This dramatic increase makes evaluating the Internet difficult in that the population of Internet users is constantly growing. Additionally, these changes make it even more imperative that research into online news consumption frequently occurs in order to accurately assess the ways in which individuals acquire political knowledge. Presumably, they will use this political knowledge when opting to support various political efforts or selecting which candidate will get their vote.

The preceding analyses from 2004 and 2008 suggest that there is at least reason to further explore the supposed negativity in online news and the potential that said negativity may have on public opinion in the United States. The July 2011 ANES dataset entitled "Evaluations of Government and Society Study" provides variables which allow for the further study of this trend.

Each of the following analyses makes use of variables for Internet, print, television, magazine, and radio news consumption (each variable uses a 6 point scale where 1 indicates the respondent uses the media source to get political information every day and 6 indicates that the respondent never gets information about politics from that particular source). Additional independent variables include the respondent's income (a 19 point variable ranging from making less than \$5,000 per year to making more than \$175,000 annually), party identification (a 7 point scale ranging from "strong Republican" to "strong Democrat"), race (a binary variable where 1 indicates "white" and 0 indicates "non-white"), age, their ideological disposition (a 7 point variable ranging from "extremely liberal" to "extremely conservative"), gender (a binary variable where 1 indicates male and 2 indicates

female), and views on the economy relative to the economic conditions of the previous year (a 5 point variable ranging from “much better” to “much worse”).

[Insert Table 3.8 about here]

The dependent variable for Table 3.8 is approval for Obama (a 7 point variable ranging from 1 or “approve extremely strongly” to 7 or “disapprove extremely strongly”). Unlike in 2004 and 2008, reading political news in 2011 is not related to approval of the president. In terms of media use, those who watch television news had more positive attitudes toward Obama and, as would be expected, those that listen to political radio programs have lower levels of approval toward Obama than those that do not listen to said programs. Perhaps there was a shift between 2008 and 2011 which led to a decreased level of negativity amongst online news consumers. However, before reaching that conclusion it is important to examine other indicators of negativity offered in the dataset.

[Insert Table 3.9 about here]

The dependent variable in Table 3.9 evaluates the level of trust that individuals have in the federal government (a 3 point variable ranging from 1 suggesting that the respondent trusts the government “just about always” to 3 suggesting the respondent trusts the government “only some of the time”). Again, there does not appear to be a relationship between any of the media variables and an increase or decrease in trust for the federal government. However, the dataset also includes measures for determining the respondent’s attitudes concerning the direction of the country as a whole.

[Insert Table 3.10 about here]

Respondents were asked to describe how angry they felt about the direction of the country (using a 5 point scale ranging from 1 suggesting the respondent is “extremely” angry to 5 suggesting the respondent is “not at all” angry). Table 3.10 demonstrates that those individuals using the Internet to gather political information were more likely to be angry about the direction of the country. The use of predicted probabilities is helpful in examining this relationship in more detail. For those that use the Internet to get political information every day the probability of holding extremely or very angry attitudes toward the direction of the country was 38% compared to 29% for those that never used the Internet to get political information. These results suggest that it is too soon to dismiss the notion that the Internet contains more negative content, or attracts more negative individuals, or perhaps both.

[Insert Table 3.11]

The results of Table 3.10 are confirmed in Table 3.11 where the dependent variable is one which identifies whether the respondent is, using the same scale as above, “outraged” at the direction of the country. Once again, the more an individual uses the Internet as a source of political information the more likely said individual is to feel outraged about the state of the country and its future. Using predicted probabilities, those using the Internet to get political information every day have a probability of indicating they are either extremely or very outraged about the direction of the country of 41%. Comparatively, those that never use the Internet to find information about politics have a probability of responding in a similar fashion of 29%. Interestingly, the results for the Internet and the radio are almost identical. These results suggest anger and discontent amongst those individuals using the

Internet or the radio that is decidedly different than the attitudes demonstrated by users of other media sources.

Conclusion

In 2004 and 2008 there are indications that Internet users exhibit more negative attitudes toward political leaders as well as, in some instances, institutions. Additionally, the 2011 analysis suggests that Internet news consumption is also related to more pessimistic attitudes toward the direction of the country. The durability of these trends in the face of a constantly changing online environment (the emergence of new social networking sites, new demographic groups taking advantage of online news sites, the increased use of smart phones, etc.) suggests that it is imperative to better understand the factors which lead to the identified negativity. Incivility has been shown in a variety of contexts to erode trust in political leaders as well as the political process more generally (Mutz and Byron 2005; Ansolabehere et al. 1994). Consequently, the study of online political news holds important implications for the interaction between American government and its citizens.

Anecdotally, the examples in the introduction of the Trig Palin blog posting and the Obama email serve to illuminate a larger and more concerning trend in American media consumption. The negativity evidenced within the community of online news consumers speaks to an erosion of political discourse more generally. The nature of this discourse will be more fully examined in the next chapter.

Table 3.1: OLS regression evaluating media use and attitudes toward President Bush during the 2004 presidential election

The dependent variable is a feeling thermometer, measuring the respondent's opinion regarding President Bush on a 100-point scale where 100 is the most favorable rating.

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Robust Standard Errors)
Internet News	-4.10* (1.86)
Print News	-1.80 (1.98)
TV News	4.49 (2.83)
Magazine News	0.20 (1.81)
Radio News	-0.66 (1.72)
Income	-0.31* (0.14)
Party Identification	8.57** (0.49)
Race	-5.41* (2.12)
Age	0.12* (0.06)
Liberal/Conservative	5.36** (1.14)
Gender	-1.07 (1.81)
Economic Views	-10.46** (1.24)
Constant	34.95** (5.84)
Model Summary Statistics	
Number of obs	912
Adjusted R-Squared	0.58

Source: 2004 American National Election Studies Dataset. Data weighted using the post-election post-stratified sample weight.

*= p<0.05, ** =p<0.01. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 3.2: OLS regression evaluating media use and attitudes toward Senator John Kerry during the 2004 presidential election

The dependent variable is a feeling thermometer, measuring the respondent's opinion regarding Senator John Kerry on a 100-point scale where 100 is the most favorable rating.

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Robust Standard Errors)
Internet News	-3.00 (1.65)
Print News	2.37 (1.72)
TV News	1.59 (2.52)
Magazine News	1.58 (1.58)
Radio News	-2.43 (1.49)
Income	0.14 (0.13)
Party Identification	-6.85** (0.51)
Race	-3.52* (1.71)
Age	0.02 (0.05)
Liberal/Conservative	-0.36 (0.92)
Gender	-1.92 (1.52)
Economic Views	5.40** (1.11)
Constant	68.91** (4.87)
Model Summary Statistics	
Number of obs	904
Adjusted R-Squared	0.47

Source: 2004 American National Election Studies Dataset. Data weighted using the post-election post-stratified sample weight.

p<0.05, ** =p<0.01. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 3.3: OLS regression evaluating media use and attitudes toward the federal government during the 2004 presidential election

The dependent variable is a feeling thermometer, measuring the respondent's opinion regarding the federal government on a 100-point scale where 100 is the most favorable rating.

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Robust Standard Errors)
Internet News	0.45 (0.80)
Print News	0.85 (0.79)
TV News	-0.78 (1.10)
Magazine News	-0.87 (0.82)
Radio News	0.97 (0.76)
Income	-0.02 (0.06)
Party Identification	-0.10 (0.23)
Race	-0.01 (0.88)
Age	0.03 (0.02)
Liberal/Conservative	0.72 (0.44)
Gender	-1.42 (0.77)
Economic Views	-0.05 (0.52)
Constant	15.97 (2.37)
 Model Summary Statistics	
Number of obs	913
Adjusted R-Squared	0.02

Source: 2004 American National Election Studies Dataset. Data weighted using the post-election post-stratified sample weight.

*= p<0.05, ** =p<0.01. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 3.4: OLS regression evaluating media use and attitudes toward President Bush during the 2008 presidential election

The dependent variable is a feeling thermometer, measuring the respondent's opinion regarding President Bush on a 100-point scale where 100 is the most favorable rating.

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Robust Standard Errors)
Internet News	-1.05 (1.49)
Print News	-2.73 (1.45)
TV News	-2.24 (2.61)
Magazine News	-2.60 (1.41)
Radio News	1.05 (1.38)
Income	0.03 (0.11)
Party Identification	6.27** (0.45)
Race	-0.05 (1.66)
Age	0.09* (0.04)
Liberal/Conservative	3.34** (0.61)
Gender	-5.76** (1.32)
Economic Views	-7.01** (1.75)
Constant	25.57** (6.16)
 Model Summary Statistics	
Number of obs	1467
Adjusted R-Squared	0.42

Source: 2008 American National Election Studies Dataset. Data weighted using the cross-section sample weight--post-election. * = p<0.05, ** = p<0.01. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 3.5: OLS regression evaluating media use and attitudes toward Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama during the 2008 presidential election

The dependent variable is a feeling thermometer, measuring the respondent's opinion regarding candidate Obama on a 100-point scale where 100 is the most favorable rating.

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Robust Standard Errors)
Internet News	-3.89** (1.48)
Print News	2.13 (1.54)
TV News	7.96** (2.42)
Magazine News	3.85** (1.44)
Radio News	-2.68* (1.39)
Income	-0.12 (0.12)
Party Identification	-5.73** (0.45)
Race	11.79** (1.51)
Age	-0.04 (0.04)
Liberal/Conservative	-4.43** (0.63)
Gender	-2.76* (1.40)
Economic Views	0.38 (2.00)
Constant	100.29 (6.56)
Model Summary Statistics	
Number of obs	1466
Adjusted R-Squared	0.47

Source: 2008 American National Election Studies Dataset. Data weighted using the cross-section sample weight--post-election.

*= p<0.05, ** =p<0.01. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 3.6: OLS regression evaluating media use and attitudes toward the federal government during the 2008 presidential election

The dependent variable is a feeling thermometer, measuring the respondent's opinion regarding the federal government on a 100-point scale where 100 is the most favorable rating.

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Robust Standard Errors)
Internet News	-4.59** (1.45)
Print News	0.64 (1.40)
TV News	-1.54 (2.16)
Magazine News	2.03 (1.39)
Radio News	-2.53* (1.29)
Income	-0.40** (0.11)
Party Identification	-0.26 (0.44)
Race	8.22** (1.59)
Age	-0.02 (0.05)
Liberal/Conservative	0.01 (0.63)
Gender	-5.32** (1.32)
Economic Views	-0.02 (1.74)
Constant	59.79** (6.09)
 Model Summary Statistics	
Number of obs	1454
Adjusted R-Squared	0.09

Source: 2008 American National Election Studies Dataset. Data weighted using the cross-section sample weight--post-election.

*= p<0.05, ** =p<0.01. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 3.7: OLS regression evaluating media use and attitudes toward Republican presidential candidate John McCain during the 2008 presidential election

The dependent variable is a feeling thermometer, measuring the respondent's opinion regarding candidate McCain on a 100-point scale where 100 is the most favorable rating.

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Robust Standard Errors)
Internet News	2.80* (1.34)
Print News	-1.18 (1.40)
TV News	1.20 (2.10)
Magazine News	-0.44 (1.37)
Radio News	0.09 (1.26)
Income	0.19 (0.11)
Party Identification	4.65** (0.41)
Race	-1.98 (1.60)
Age	0.13** (0.04)
Liberal/Conservative	1.41* (0.62)
Gender	-1.70 (1.30)
Economic Views	-0.91 (1.85)
Constant	25.07** (6.25)
Model Summary Statistics	
Number of obs	1462
Adjusted R-Squared	0.29

Source: 2008 American National Election Studies Dataset. Data weighted using the cross-section sample weight--post-election.

*= p<0.05, ** =p<0.01. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 3.8: OLS regression evaluating media use and attitudes toward President Obama in 2011

The dependent variable is a 7-point variable measuring attitudes toward President Obama ranging from “Approve Extremely Strongly” to “Disapprove Extremely Strongly”

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Robust Standard Errors)
Internet News	-0.02 (0.28)
Print News	0.02 (0.03)
TV News	0.07* (0.04)
Magazine News	-0.02 (0.04)
Radio News	-0.10** (0.03)
Income	0.01 (0.01)
Party Identification	-0.40** (0.03)
Race	0.63** (0.17)
Age	0.00 (0.00)
Liberal/Conservative	0.22** (0.05)
Gender	0.18 (0.10)
Economic Views	-0.67** (0.05)
Constant	2.30** (0.52)
Model Summary Statistics	
Number of obs	1132
Adjusted R-Squared	0.55

Source: 2011 American National Election Studies Dataset. Data weighted using the poststratification weight.*= p<0.05, ** =p<0.01. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 3.9: Ordered logistic regression evaluating media use and trust in the federal government in 2011

The dependent variable is a 3-point variable ranging from trusting the federal government “just about always” to “only some of the time.”

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Errors)
Internet News	-0.02 (0.47)
Print News	0.03 (0.05)
TV News	0.08 (0.06)
Magazine News	-0.03 (0.07)
Radio News	-0.03 (0.05)
Income	-0.00 (0.02)
Party Identification	-0.22** (0.05)
Race	0.77** (0.19)
Age	0.00 (0.01)
Liberal/Conservative	0.02 (0.01)
Gender	-0.02 (0.15)
Economic Views	0.59** (0.08)
 Model Summary Statistics	
Number of obs	1132
Pseudo R-Squared	0.13
Log likelihood	-603.91

Source: 2011 American National Election Studies Dataset. Data weighted using the poststratification weight.

*= p<0.05, ** =p<0.01. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 3.10: Ordered logistic regression evaluating media use and anger concerning the direction of the country in 2011

The dependent variable is a 5-point variable measuring the degree to which individuals feel angry about the direction of the country. The variable ranges from “extremely” to “not at all”

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Errors)
Internet News	0.08* (0.03)
Print News	-0.06 (0.04)
TV News	0.06 (0.04)
Magazine News	0.04 (0.05)
Radio News	0.06 (0.03)
Income	0.02 (0.01)
Party Identification	0.17** (0.04)
Race	-0.55** (0.16)
Age	-0.00 (0.00)
Liberal/Conservative	-0.07 (0.05)
Gender	-0.15 (0.11)
Economic Views	-0.49** (0.11)
 Model Summary Statistics	
Number of obs	1132
Pseudo R-Squared	0.07
Log likelihood	-1631.83

Source: 2011 American National Election Studies Dataset. Data weighted using the poststratification weight.

*= p<0.05, ** =p<0.01. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 3.11: Ordered logistic regression evaluating media use and outrage concerning the direction of the country in 2011

The dependent variable is a 5-point variable measuring the degree to which individuals feel outraged about the direction of the country. The variable ranges from “extremely” to “not at all”

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Errors)
Internet News	0.11** (0.03)
Print News	-0.03 (0.04)
TV News	0.05 (0.04)
Magazine News	0.02 (0.05)
Radio News	0.09** (0.03)
Income	0.02* (0.01)
Party Identification	0.17** (0.04)
Race	-0.40* (0.16)
Age	-0.00 (0.00)
Liberal/Conservative	-0.03 (0.05)
Gender	-0.19 (0.11)
Economic Views	-0.52** (0.06)
 Model Summary Statistics	
Number of obs	1132
Pseudo R-Squared	0.07
Log likelihood	-1679.65

Source: 2011 American National Election Studies Dataset. Data weighted using the poststratification weight.

*= p<0.05, ** =p<0.01. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Chapter 4: Who reads this stuff? An experimental approach to understanding the role of comment sections in online news consumption

The results in Chapter 3 suggest that media selection is related to an individual's perception of the federal government and political actors. However, the direction of this relationship is unclear. In other words, are negative individuals attracted to the Internet as a news source or does the content on the Internet breed negativity? This chapter uses an experimental design in order to illuminate more fully the direction of the relationship between Internet use and negativity. More specifically, the chapter will use an experimental design isolating the effect of one of the unique features of Internet news—comment sections.

Most online news sites or political blogs contain comment sections at the conclusion of articles or postings. These comment sections often contain some of the most inflammatory online statements as individuals criticize anything and everything, including each other. These comments are often posted anonymously, affording the individual the opportunity to post in such a way as to avoid any potential repercussions. Additionally, comment sections offer the ability for individuals to post instantaneously which consequently produces comments that are more raw and emotional than if individuals were required to spend more time pondering their reactions. Given the presumed negativity of comment sections, it is important to evaluate whether angry content helps to produce more negative attitudes for online news consumers.

McCluskey and Hmielowski (2011) confirmed these trends by comparing online comment sections to traditional letters to the editor. They found that the ability to post anonymously, the lack of editorial control over comments, and the fact that

younger individuals were more likely to use online media sources all contributed to a willingness in comment sections to challenge their community as well as the institutions within their community. Journalists have expressed mixed opinions concerning the role of comment sections. Specifically, journalists recognize the possibility that comment sections can serve as a tool of democracy, allowing for the free expression of ideas on a variety of issues. However, they are also concerned that these comments are “less thoughtful and more impulsive, shallow, and aggressive than earlier forms of audience participation” (Singer et al. 2011).

One of the unique features of Internet news, in comparison to news found through other sources, is the level of interactivity that it affords. Indeed, the very definition of news is changed as information is accessed through comment sections, social networking sites, blog postings, etc. These developments create a need for research to explore both the short-term and long-term implications of online news consumption. This chapter does so through an exploration of comment sections and whether or not these online forums serve to shape the way that online news consumers think about politics. In analyzing the role of comment sections the chapter will address the following hypotheses:

H1: Participants reading an article with a comment section at the conclusion will exhibit more negative attitudes toward the policies, the institutions, and the individuals in their respective article compared to those reading the same article without a comment section.

H2: Participants reading an article with a comment section at the conclusion will have more negative attitudes related to the performance of the media in reporting on politics.

H3: Participants reading an article with a comment section at the conclusion will have a difficult time differentiating between content in the article and content in the comment sections when questioned after reading said material.

These hypotheses will help to illuminate some of the ways in which the interactivity of the new media is or is not changing American political culture. The first hypothesis is an extension of the analysis found in the third chapter which suggests that individuals that use the Internet as a source of political information tend to have more negative attitudes toward American politics than those who use more conventional sources of information. In this instance, it is hypothesized the comment sections may, because of the hostility of information often associated with these features of online news, be related to the presence of this negativity. The second hypothesis is similar to the first and suggests that some of the negativity aimed at political leaders, institutions, and issues may also generate declining levels of trust in the ability of the media to fairly and accurately report political information as they are the conduits for the proliferation of this hostile political rhetoric. Finally, the third hypothesis is related to the literature concerning the ability of younger Americans to effectively assess the credibility of information which they are exposed to on the Internet. In this instance, it is hypothesized that because of the inability to determine “good” sources of information from those that are not as good they will have a difficult time at the conclusion of the study differentiating between information that they were exposed to in the comment section and information they acquired in the actual text of the article.

Experimental Design

A pre-test/post-test control group design was used for the purposes of this experiment (Campbell and Stanley 1963). Students from the University of Missouri-St. Louis were approached, in the fall and spring semesters in the 2010-2011

academic year, and asked to participate in a study evaluating the media habits of college students.

There were brief presentations in undergraduate as well as graduate courses asking students to participate, explaining any incentives provided for their participation, and explaining the importance of supporting university studies. After the brief presentation, a signup sheet was passed around the class asking students to provide their name as well as their e-mail address. Students in some of the courses were, with the consent of their respective professors, offered extra credit upon completion of the experiment. Additionally, during the spring semester students were offered a five dollar gift card for St. Louis area dining, shopping, and entertainment establishments at the conclusion of their participation in the study. In total, 130 students completed both the pre-test and the post-test components of the study throughout the academic year.

The sample is made up of college students and, as such, is not a representative sample of the population as a whole. However, younger individuals are more likely to take advantage of the Internet to gather online news (Chapter 2; Smith 2009; McCluskey and Hmielowski 2011). Consequently, the sample is appropriate for an examination of online news consumers.

After signing up to participate in the study students were emailed a pre-test questionnaire that gauged their level of political knowledge, their daily media habits, their party identification, and their attitudes toward various political figures, institutions, and groups. Additionally, they were asked to provide demographic information including race, gender, age, and income. After completing the

questionnaire they were directed to a webpage that contained dates, times, and locations available for the completion of the second portion of the study. Students were asked to select a time that best worked for their schedule and respond via email with their desired appointment time.

During the second meeting students were provided with a computer and were directed to a webpage containing a real news article. The students were randomly divided into two groups, (1) students that received an article related to local anti-smoking efforts and (2) another group of students who received an article related to the controversy surrounding the newly instituted Arizona immigration law. These groups were created to control for any variance between the way that individuals interact with local news and national news.

Within both groups the students were further randomly assigned into experimental and control groups. Students in the experimental group were given an article with a comment section that followed and students in the control group were given the same article without a comment section. Both articles contained links to external sites if the students were interested in exploring the issue in the article in more detail. The articles, links, and comments were all real. The only modifications were taking the articles from the original host site and placing them into websites that I had created as well as limiting the number of comments to 40 and the number of links to 8 (this was done to keep the material to a manageable length).

While reading the articles some students were monitored using LanSchool, a program that allows professors to track the computer usage of students. This technology was used to track how long students spent reading the article, to verify

whether they made use of the external links provided and, if so, how long they spent on the sites to which they were directed. This information is helpful in determining whether or not length of exposure to the online content changed the participant's thoughts about said content.

When the students finished reading the article, they were provided with a link to a set of post-test questions meant to gauge changes in their opinion as a result of the information in the article, the links, or the comment sections. After completing the experiment students were redirected to a webpage that summarized the purpose of the study and thanked them for their participation. The articles used for this study as well as the questionnaires are all provided in the appendix.³

Manipulation Checks

In order to evaluate the experimental design and ensure that the manipulation imposed on those participants in the treatment group was a success, a series of manipulation checks were performed.

[Insert Table 4.1 about here]

Table 4.1 demonstrates that individuals receiving the comment section as part of the treatment group acknowledged that their article did contain a comment section. More specifically, all of the students in the treatment condition were able to correctly

³ In addition to original questions, some of the questions for the study were replicated in all or in part from a variety of sources. The original questions can be found from through the following sources: Political Knowledge Update Survey Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2009), Young People and News: A Report from the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics, and Public Policy (2007), Mutz and Reeves (2005), the Pew Internet and American Life Project's January 2010 Online News dataset, Baumgartner and Morris (2006), and the 2008 National Election Studies Time Series dataset. Citations for specific questions can be found in the appendix containing the full text of each of the surveys used.

identify that their article did have a comment section at the conclusion of the article⁴. The results are not quite as good for those in the control group where fourteen individuals indicated that their article did have a comment section when, in fact, it did not. However, even within the control group 82% of the participants were able to correctly identify that the article did not have a comment section. In addition to exploring whether or not individuals recognized the presence of the manipulation, it is also important for the purposes of the experiment that many of those placed in the experimental group took advantage of the opportunity to read the comment sections at the conclusion of their article.

[Insert Table 4.2 about here]

As indicated by Table 4.2, 53 of the 64 recorded students in the treatment condition claimed to read at least one of the comments in the attached comment section. This suggests that comment sections, at least in this instance, are not simply disregarded by online news consumers. Specifically, 83% of the participants read at least one of the comments. In addition, it is also important to more fully evaluate the number of comments read by the participants.

[Insert Table 4.3 about here]

Table 4.3 shows that a large percentage, 40%, of those claiming to read comments read between 1 and 5 comments out of the 40 total comments at the conclusion of the article. This compares to about 6% of students claiming to read all 40 comments. The table demonstrates that while students did not read all or most of the comments a substantial portion did opt to read between 1 and 20 comments. In addition to examining the decision of participants to read the comments in this

⁴ One student did not have a response to this question.

instance, it is also essential to discover whether or not they take advantage of comment sections in their everyday life. Indeed, if individuals frequently use comment sections in their daily news habits it is possible that the impact of the experimental manipulation may be more limited.

[Insert Table 4.4 about here]

Table 4.4 demonstrates that those in the treatment group reading the comment section for the purposes of this experiment were also likely to read a comment section in their own daily news consumption. Indeed, there is a statistically significant relationship, for those within the treatment group, between reading comment sections often and reading comment sections attached to the provided articles during the experiment. Given that these participants make use of comment sections outside of the experimental design, and are exposed regularly to the content that characterizes these online forums, it is possible that some of the effects of the manipulation may not be as strong as anticipated. Strikingly, 34 of 36 individuals claiming to read comment sections “sometimes” or “often” elected to read the comment sections attached to the end of the article in this instance.

[Insert Table 4.5 about here]

The participant’s decision whether or not to read the comment section appears, as evidenced by Table 4.5, not to be based on preexisting attitudes regarding the merits of comment sections. In fact, the overwhelming majority opted to read the comment section holding relatively neutral attitudes with regard to the value of comment sections. More specifically, for those in the treatment group, 38% stated that comment sections rarely provide valuable information and 58% stated that

comment sections provide valuable information some of the time. This compares to less than 2% of respondents who claimed that comment sections provided valuable information most of the time. Despite an apparent ambivalence regarding the importance of comment sections the majority of participants still selected to spend additional time reading the comments at the conclusion of their respective article.

Additionally, there was limited data available for the amount of time that individuals took between accessing the article and accessing the post-test survey. It would be expected that those who read the comment section would have taken more time to reach the point of accessing the post-test survey when compared to their counterparts who did not read the comment section. The average time spent reading the article for those who were in the control group was approximately 5 minutes and 13 seconds compared to those in the treatment group who spent, on average, 6 minutes and 38 seconds reading the article. In other words, those in the experimental group spent, on average 1 minute and 30 seconds longer on the reading component of the experiment than did those who were part of the control group. This is a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups.

It is important to note that when looking at individuals in the treatment condition, it appears as if those who reported reading the comments spent the same amount of time on the reading task as those who selected not to read the comments. Additionally, it is important to note that this time variable includes all online activity (including reading the links, the article, and the comments) between when the page was opened through the time that they opened their email to retrieve the post-test questionnaire.

[Insert Table 4.6 about here]

I also examined whether there were any differences between the treatment and control groups on several pre-test survey items. Table 4.6 demonstrates that the randomization of the experiment was a success. This table is a compilation of regression analyses which examined the dependent variables using a primary independent variable that classified participants as being part of the control or the experimental group. The table includes the coefficient and the standard error for the treatment variables from each regression. Additionally, all of the analyses controlled for a series of attitudinal variables including the respondent's feelings regarding the overall fairness of media reporting (a 5 point variable asking if they agree that the media reports on political events fairly and ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"), whether politicians deserve respect (a 5 point variable asking them whether or not they agree with a statement indicating that politicians do not deserve much respect and ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). Additionally, the analyses controlled for the participant's level of political knowledge (a scale variable based on the participants response to a series of questions related to current political figures), their party affiliation (a 7 point variable moving from "strong Democrat" to "strong Republican"), their ideology (a 7 point variable moving from "extremely liberal" to "extremely conservative"), whether they like to deal with simple or complex problems (a binary variable where 1 indicates the respondent prefers "complex" problems and 0 suggesting that they prefer "simple" problems), and finally the degree to which they consider themselves to be an opinionated person

(a 5 point variable asking the participant whether they have more or less opinions than the average person ranging from “few opinions” to “more opinions”).

In almost all instances there was not a significant relationship between one’s assignment into either the control or the experimental group and one’s attitude toward political leaders, issues, and institutions when evaluated in the pre-test survey prior to the manipulation. Unfortunately, this is not the case for one of the relationships, attitudes toward President Obama. Those in the treatment group were already predisposed to having more positive attitudes toward Obama than those in the control group prior to the administration of the manipulation. In order to correct for this difference, the Obama feeling thermometer variable (the measure used to evaluate attitudes toward Obama) is used at times as a control variable when testing for the impact of the experimental manipulation.

In addition to examining differences in attitudinal factors between the control and the experimental group it is also necessary to determine whether demographic characteristics were significantly different when comparing the two groups.

[Insert Table 4.7 about here]

The demographic characteristics of the treatment group and the control group are largely similar, demonstrating once again that the attempted randomization of the study was successful. The largest differential in demographic categories was with regard to the percentage of male respondents. However, the difference between the control and the experimental groups with regard to each of the demographic characteristics presented fails to meet the standards for statistical significance.⁵

⁵ P-values were greater than 0.10

Results

Before analyzing whether comment sections played a role in shaping the political attitudes of the participating students, it is important to examine whether or not certain students were more inclined than others to read comment sections.

[Insert Table 4.8 about here]

Table 4.8 evaluates whether demographic characteristics were reliable indicators of an individual's likelihood to read comment sections if available. The age variable is marginally statistically significant given the relatively small sample size and it suggests that as age increases so does the likelihood of reading a comment section. Using predicted probabilities, there is a 36% increase in the likelihood of opting to read comment sections moving from the youngest participant (17 years of age) to the oldest (62 years of age). Additionally, the income of the participant was significant and suggests that as the level of income increases the likelihood of reading the comment sections decreases. Using predicted probabilities we can see that moving from those with the lowest level of income (those making less than \$2,999) to those with the highest level of income (\$110,000 to \$119,000) the likelihood of reading the comment section decreases by 32%.

[Insert Table 4.9 about here]

Table 4.9 examines whether attitudinal characteristics were related to whether or not the participants opted to read the comment section provided to them. Again, it appears as if attitudinal factors such as ideology, political knowledge, or respect for political figures had little to do with whether or not someone decided to read one or more of the comments at the conclusion of the article.

Ultimately, the purpose of the experiment was to discover whether or not the presence of online comment sections served to change the political opinions of those reading said comment sections.

[Insert Tables 4.10 and 4.11 about here]

Tables 4.10 and 4.11 indicate that placement into the control or the experimental group was not correlated to changing attitudes toward either the Arizona immigration law (for those in the national group) or anti-smoking policies (for those in the local group). In addition, the difference in means between those in the control group and those in the experimental group were examined with regard to a variety of different political attitudes measured in the post-test survey.

[Insert Table 4.12 about here]

Ultimately, it appears as if there is little difference between the political opinions of those provided with a comment section compared to their counterparts who did not receive a comment section. Comment sections did not produce significant differences between respondents with regard to their opinions on those that disagreed with their perspective on the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, Congress, or illegal immigrants.⁶

However, participants in the experimental section of the local issue group rated those with opposing perspectives to their own decidedly more negative than their counterparts in the control group. Specifically, members of the experimental group, on average, rated those with opposing perspectives to their own about 9 points lower on the feeling thermometer (0-100) compared to those in the control group.⁷

⁶ P-values were greater than 0.10

⁷ This result was significant at with a p-value below 0.05

However, these results did not hold true for the national issue group in which there was no statistically significant difference between the control and the experimental group in regard to evaluations of those holding contrary attitudes about the Arizona immigration law controversy. These results suggest that continued study of comment sections is warranted and that there is at least potential for online comments to influence political attitudes.

The results above while inconclusive suggest that, in most instances, comment sections have no statistical or substantive impact on the way that individuals understand political leaders, issues, and institutions. However, there are other tools available to assess the role that comments play in the acquisition of political information and opinion formation.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), created by Petty and Cacioppo, provides a theory about the way in which individuals process information (Milburn 1991). With ELM a careful and intentional form of information searching is defined as central route processing whereas a more random, less intentional approach is defined as peripheral route processing. Those using central route processing would, in the context of this experiment, utilize tools such as the additional links or comment sections. As noted above, the majority of those assigned a comment section read said comment section. If reading a comment section was indicative of a more developed information gathering approach then we would also expect that those that read the comment sections would also utilize other tools within the article such as the additional links. This possibility is analyzed in Table 4.13.

[Insert Table 4.13 about here]

Given that such a vast majority of the individuals exposed to the treatment condition opted to read the comment section provided, the number of observations for the group declining to read the comments is very low. Consequently, determining statistical significance is difficult for the above relationship. However, it is interesting to note that approximately 38% of those individuals reading a comment section also elected to take advantage of the additional links provided within the article. Overall, a higher share of respondents who read comments also clicked on links than respondents who read no comments.

[Insert Table 4.14 about here]

Further analysis examines whether online comment sections erode trust in government and the media. I first evaluate whether being in the treatment condition altered the respondent's trust in political leaders. The dependent variable asked the participants if they felt that most politicians could be trusted to do what is right (a five-point variable ranging from 1 indicating “Strongly Disagree” to 5 representing “Strongly Agree”). The primary independent variable is a binary variable measuring whether or not the individual was placed in the treatment condition. Clearly, being placed in the treatment condition did not alter the individual’s trust toward political leaders. A difference of means test also indicates that there are no significant differences between the control and the experimental group with regard to trusting political leaders. Additionally, there was no statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups with regard to post-test attitudes toward Democrats, Republicans, or Congress⁸. Ultimately, these findings indicate that the

⁸ A difference of means test was performed for each of the above variables and demonstrated that there was no statistically significant differences between the experimental or the control group.

first hypothesis is unsupported and there does not appear to be an increase in negativity toward political institutions as a result of exposure to online comment sections in this instance.

The results from the study indicate that, amongst the sample of individuals in this study, politicians are, more often than not, seen as trustworthy. More specifically, approximately 57% of individuals responded that they agree or strongly agree that politicians can be trusted to do what is right. Additionally, 52% of the participants stated that they disagree with the contention that politicians do not deserve much respect. However, there is one area where the participants seemed to feel that politicians were not effective. When asked to identify whether they felt that politicians did little to address the major problems of the day, approximately 63% of individuals agreed or strongly agreed that politicians were doing little to address said problems. Seemingly, individuals are not unhappy with the character of the individuals in office but rather in the lack of progress exhibited by government in the present day American politics.

In addition to evaluating attitudes toward political figures the data also allows for a study of how online media consumers judge the performance of the news media.

[Insert Table 4.15 about here]

While the first hypothesis is not supported in this study, the data still provide some indication that there ought to be concern regarding the content contained within online comment sections. The dependent variable in Table 4.15 asks the participants whether or not they thought the content within their article was “polite” or whether it

was “hostile” or “rude.”⁹ The treatment variable is marginally significant given the relatively small sample size and demonstrates that there is potentially a relationship between being exposed to comment sections and determining that the content of the article is more hostile or rude. The use of predicted probabilities is helpful in illuminating this relationship more fully. For those exposed to the treatment condition the probability of identifying the article as more negative in tone was 48% compared to only 28% for those who were not provided a comment section at the conclusion of their article. In other words, those who were exposed to comment sections at the conclusion of their article were 20 percentage points more likely to define the tone of their article as hostile or rude.

Ultimately, these results indicate that comment sections can influence the way that online news consumers understand the information which they are receiving and serves as a justification for continued research into the way in which these online forums could potentially shape political attitudes. This study demonstrates that online comment sections can fuel public perceptions of hostility in policy debates.

[Insert Table 4.16 about here]

Tables 4.16 and 4.17 demonstrate that being in the treatment group did not alter an individual’s evaluation of the media and its performance. The dependent variable for Table 4.13 measures whether or not individuals believe that the media can be trusted to report information fairly (a five-point variable ranging from 1 indicating “Strongly Disagree” to 5 representing “Strongly Agree”). In this instance,

⁹ The question in the national group asked participants to evaluate their content as being either “polite” or “hostile.” The question in the local group asked participants to evaluate their content as being either “polite” or “rude.” While acknowledging that these are different terms the dissertation evaluates them as being part of the same general concept and uses the terms interchangeably throughout.

it does not appear that being exposed to comment sections altered the evaluations that participants held with regard to whether or not they felt the media could be trusted to accurately report information.

[Insert Table 4.17 about here]

The dependent variable for Table 4.17 measures participant evaluations of media performance with regard to their covering of political news stories (a four-point variable ranging from 1 being “Poor” to 4 being “Excellent”). Again, exposure to the treatment condition did not appear to influence overall evaluations of the media and its ability to report fairly on political issues.

The results of the above analyses indicate that there is little support for the second hypothesis that exposure to comment sections, in this instance, will create a negative attitude toward the media and its role in reporting political information. However, it is important to note that this hypothesis only examines exposure to comment sections in this particular instance and does not predict the way in which long-term exposure to these online forums will shape attitudes toward government, the media, and political issues.

The media variables do, however, tell a compelling story with regard to the state of the relationship between American citizens and the media. Overwhelming individuals give the media, at best, underwhelming evaluations given the findings from this particular study. More specifically, approximately 75% of individuals feel that the media does either a fair or poor job covering political news stories with only 3% stating that the media does an excellent job reporting on said stories. However, the above analyses suggest that these judgments about the media are not significantly

related to the presence of online comment sections. Perhaps this suggests that online news consumers are able to avoid conflating the material on comment sections with that information presented through the journalistic news articles, and videos.

The final analyses performed in this chapter deal with the ability of readers of online comment sections to differentiate between information that they receive in comment sections and information that they read within the text of the actual article. The literature on credibility assessment and American youth is pessimistic concerning the degree to which younger individuals can navigate and understand the world of online information. Jacobson Harris (2008) argued that young people simply do not have the appropriate knowledge base to place the information that they are viewing online into context, suggesting that they may have difficulty recalling details about the content they were exposed to during the course of the experiment. Without the ability to evaluate the information itself, Harris argues, these young people simply make judgments based “heavily on design and presentation features rather than content” (Harris 2008, 161). The lack of attention to the specific content would also suggest that participants may have difficulty evaluating the origin of the material they were exposed to in the online news article.

In the post-test questionnaire participants were given a series of statements and asked to identify whether or not each statement was part of the article or part of the comment section. Each statement led to the creation of a binary variable with 1 indicating that the participant correctly identified the origin of the statement and 0 indicating the participant’s response was incorrect. These four separate variables were

combined into a composite score with respondents receiving a score of 1-4 based on the number of correct responses.

For each of the article groups (local and national) those in the experimental group answered a lower percentage of the questions correctly. However, these differences were not statistically significant. In the national issue group participants answered a vast majority of the questions correctly. Indeed, approximately 95% of respondents were able to identify the origin of at least 3 of the 4 statements and 71% of respondents were able to do so for all of the statements. In the local issue group, 94% were able to identify the origin of at least 3 of the 4 statements and 64% were able to do so for all of the statements. Given these findings, there appears to be little support for the third and final hypothesis. At least for the purpose of this experiment, the respondents seem to, in the short-term, have the ability to avoid conflating user-generated comments and the content of online news articles.

Conclusion

Comment sections have become a staple of online news websites and, as such, it is important to continue to evaluate the role that comment sections have on the nature of American political discourse as well as the development of public opinion. The results of this study suggest that, when offered, online news consumers overwhelmingly opt to read at least some of the comments provided to them. Additionally, it appears that these readers are able to identify that the nature of the policy debate in the article they are reading is, to some extent, more negative because of the presence of comment sections.

Likewise, for those in the local group, exposure to comment sections created increased negativity toward those who disagree with their perspective on anti-smoking policies. However, the results of this study suggest that this perceived negativity did not alter attitudes about political leaders, institutions, or issues and it does not undermine the overall credibility of the news media with regard to the reporting of political news stories.

However, I would caution against such a quick dismissal of this unique feature of online news. Perhaps the manipulation in this experiment did not produce alterations in attitudes because the majority of participants for this study were college students in a Political Science department and likely were frequently accessing online news articles and in constant exposure to comment sections, similar to those the participants in the treatment group saw during the course of this experiment. Indeed, approximately 79% of the participants in the study access online news at least several times a week and 53% do so every day.¹⁰ If comment sections are, in part, aiding the formulation of more negative political attitudes perhaps the damage has already been done and manipulations such as those that were part of this study cannot capture the magnitude of their impact.

Unfortunately, the limitations of this study do not allow an examination of that possibility. However, future studies should continue to isolate unique features of Internet news as a means of identifying why Internet-users seem to have decidedly different political attitudes, as evidenced in previous chapters, than do those who use more conventional news sources.

¹⁰ It is important to note that the percentage of Internet users in the study is relatively constant regardless of age. In fact, the percentage of respondents claiming to use the Internet several times a week or every day is greater for those over the age of 30 than for those under 30.

Table 4.1: Recognition of a Comment Section

R's Group	Comment Section?		Total
	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	
Control Group	35	14	49
Experimental Group	0	64	64
Total	35	78	113

Source: Experimental Data from University of Missouri-St. Louis 2010-2011

Table 4.2: Use of the Comment Sections

R's Group	Read Comments?		Total
	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	
Control Group	20	5	25
Experimental Group	11	53	64
Total	31	58	89

Source: Experimental Data from University of Missouri-St. Louis 2010-2011

Table 4.3: Number of Comments Read by Experimental Group

Comments Read	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative
No Comments	11	16.92%	16.92%
1 to 5 Comments	26	40.00%	56.92%
6 to 10 Comments	10	15.38%	72.31%
11 to 15 Comments	9	13.85%	86.15%
16 to 20 Comments	4	6.15%	92.31%
21 to 25 Comments	0	0%	92.31%
26 to 30 Comments	1	1.54%	93.85%
31 to 35 Comments	0	0%	93.85%
36 to 40 Comments	4	6.15%	100%
Total	65	100%	

Source: Experimental Data from University of Missouri-St. Louis 2010-2011. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 4.4: Use of Comment Sections Outside of Experiment

Read Comments Often?	Read Comments? (Experiment)		Total
	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	
Never	20% (2)	6% (3)	8.3% (5)
Hardly Ever	60% (6)	26% (13)	31.7% (19)
Sometimes	10% (1)	50% (25)	43.3% (26)
Often	10% (1)	18% (9)	16.7% (10)
Total	100% (10)	100% (50)	100% (60)

Pearson Chi-Squared(3): 8.40

Pr: 0.04

Kendall's Tau-b: 0.30

ASE: 0.12

Source: Experimental Data from University of Missouri-St. Louis 2010-2011. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 4.5: Do Comment Section Readers Find Value in Comment Sections?

Comment Sections Valuable?	Read Comments?		Total
	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	
Never	50% (1)	1.9% (1)	3.7% (2)
Rarely	0% (0)	38.5% (20)	37% (20)
Some of the time	50% (1)	57.7% (30)	57.4% (31)
Much of the time	0% (0)	1.9% (1)	1.9% (1)
Total	100% (2)	100% (52)	100% (54)

Pearson Chi-Squared(3): 12.85

Pr: 0.01

Gamma: 0.42

ASE: 0.57

Source: Experimental Data from University of Missouri-St. Louis 2010-2011. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 4.6: Pre-Test Randomization (Attitudinal Measures)

Dependent Variable	Treatment Coefficient	Treatment Standard Error
Anti-Smoking Efforts Opinion	-0.35	0.38
Arizona Immigration Law Opinion	-0.13	0.41
Illegal Immigrant Thermometer	7.82	7.83
Obama Thermometer	7.62	3.70*
Democratic Party Thermometer	1.07	0.73
Republican Party Thermometer	-3.29	3.37
Congress Thermometer	-1.26	3.97

* =p<0.10. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Source: Experimental Data from University of Missouri-St. Louis 2010-2011.

Table 4.7: Pre-Test Randomization (Demographic Measures)

Demographic Characteristics	Treatment Group	Control Group
Percentage Male	39.9%	42%
Percentage White	57.8%	58.8%
Mean Age	27.6	28.6
Mean Income Category	\$15,000-\$16,999	\$15,000-\$16,999

Source: Experimental Data from University of Missouri-St. Louis 2010-2011.

Table 4.8: Logistic Regression Evaluating Demographic Variables as Indicators of Choosing to Read the Comment Section

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Age	0.14 (0.09)
Sex	-0.58 (0.81)
Race	1.16 (0.83)
Income	-0.12 (0.07*)
Constant	-1.32 (2.06)
Number of Observations	60
Pseudo R-Squared	0.12
Log Likelihood	-23.78

* =p<0.10. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Source: Experimental Data from University of Missouri-St. Louis 2010-2011.

Table 4.9: Logistic Regression Evaluating Attitudinal Variables as Indicators of Choosing to Read the Comment Section

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Government Too Complicated?	0.13 (0.42)
Does the Media Report Fairly?	-0.13 (0.41)
Do Politicians Deserve Respect?	0.04 (0.43)
Political Knowledge Scale	1.85 (1.58)
Web News Consumer	-0.31 (0.41)
Liberal/Conservative	0.39 (0.36)
Party Identification	-0.14 (0.33)
Government Too Complex?	-1.76 (1.22)
Constant	-1.32 (2.06)
Number of Observations	62
Pseudo R-Squared	0.12
Log Likelihood	-23.78

Source: Experimental Data from University of Missouri-St. Louis 2010-2011.

Table 4.10: Attitudes Toward Arizona Immigration Law

AZ Law Opinion	Treatment Group?		Total
	No	Yes	
Agree Strongly	20% (5)	11.8% (4)	15.3% (9)
Somewhat Agree	28% (7)	41.2% (14)	35.6% (21)
Neither Agree or Disagree	8% (2)	5.9% (2)	6.8% (4)
Disagree Somewhat	16% (4)	17.7% (6)	17% (10)
Disagree Strongly	28% (7)	23.5% (8)	26.4% (15)
Total	100% (25)	100% (34)	100% (60)
Pearson Chi-Squared(4): 1.57		Pr: 0.81	
Kendall's Tau-b: -0.003		ASE: 0.12	

Source: Experimental Data from University of Missouri-St. Louis 2010-2011. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 4.11: Attitudes Toward Anti-Smoking Policies

AZ Law Opinion	Treatment Group?		Total
	No	Yes	
Agree Strongly	26.9% (7)	53.3% (16)	41.1% (23)
Somewhat Agree	30.8% (8)	13.3% (4)	21.4% (12)
Neither Agree or Disagree	3.9% (1)	10% (3)	7.1% (4)
Disagree Somewhat	30.8% (8)	13.3% (4)	21.4% (12)
Disagree Strongly	7.7% (2)	10% (3)	8.9% (5)
Total	100% (26)	100% (30)	100% (56)
Pearson Chi-Squared(4): 7.14		Pr: 0.13	
Kendall's Tau-b: -0.19		ASE: 0.12	

Source: Experimental Data from University of Missouri-St. Louis 2010-2011. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 4.12: Attitudes Toward Political Leaders and Institutions

Political Opinions	Control Group	Treatment Group
Democratic Party	55.3%	54.8%
Republican Party	36.3%	36.9%
Congress	44.2%	47.3%
Illegal Immigrants	45.3%	38.5%
Opposing Views (National Group)	37.3%	43.9%
Opposing Views (Local Group)*	51.8%	42.6%

Source: Experimental Data from University of Missouri-St. Louis 2010-2011. Figures not precise due to rounding.

* = $p < 0.05$

Table 4.13: Relationship Between Clicking on Links and Reading Comment Sections

Click on links?	Read Comments?		Total
	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	
No	83.3% (5)	62.3% (33)	64.4% (38)
Yes	16.7% (1)	37.7% (20)	35.6% (21)
Total	100% (6)	100% (53)	100% (59)

Pearson Chi-Squared(1): 1.04

Pr: 0.31

Kendall's Tau-b: 0.13

ASE: 0.11

Source: Experimental Data from University of Missouri-St. Louis 2010-2011. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 4.14: OLS Regression Evaluating the Treatment Condition and Feelings of Trust in Government

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Treatment	0.22 (0.18)
Obama Thermometer	-0.001 (0.003)
Constant	2.57 (0.22)
Number of Observations	108
Adjusted R-Squared	-0.004

Source: Experimental Data from University of Missouri-St. Louis 2010-2011. Figures not precise due to rounding.

Table 4.15: Logistic Regression Measuring Participant Evaluations of Hostility in News Articles Based on Exposure to a Comment Section

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Treatment	-0.83* (0.43)
Obama Thermometer	0.02* (0.01)
Constant	-0.11 (0.50)
Number of Observations	107
Pseudo R-Squared	0.05
Log Likelihood	-67.97

Source: Experimental Data from University of Missouri-St. Louis 2010-2011.

Table 4.16: OLS Regression Evaluating Reading Comment Sections and Corresponding Evaluations on the Fair Reporting of the Media

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Treatment	0.07 (0.19)
Obama Thermometer	0.01* (0.003)
Constant	1.93** (0.24)
Number of Observations	108
Adjusted R-Squared	0.03

* = $p < 0.10$ **= $p < 0.01$ Figures not precise due to rounding.

Source: Experimental Data from University of Missouri-St. Louis 2010-2011.

Table 4.17: OLS Regression Evaluating Reading Comment Sections and Corresponding Evaluations on the Fair Reporting of the Media

Independent Variables	Coefficient (Standard Error)
Treatment	0.13 (0.15)
Obama Thermometer	0.01* (0.002)
Constant	1.58** (0.19)
Number of Observations	108
Adjusted R-Squared	0.04

* = $p < 0.10$ **= $p < 0.01$ Figures not precise due to rounding.

Source: Experimental Data from University of Missouri-St. Louis 2010-2011.

Chapter 5: Where do we go from here? The future of online news consumption and media research

In 2011, in Erie County New York legislation was passed to prevent the practice known as “cyber-bullying.” This legislation was a response to the suicide of a local teenager who was a victim of this practice. Ed Rath III, a sponsor of the legislation, stated “It broke the hearts of the entire community when it happened and this local law will help ensure that that type of tragedy never happens again” (Holmes 2012). Additionally, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is warning individuals of another online danger. Specifically, the IRS wants to create awareness of the practice of phishing—or, using an email or a website to lure individuals into giving their personal information and, consequently, open the door for identity or financial theft (Simpson 2012). These are just a couple of the many ways in which we are still attempting to gauge the implications of this new online world which has, in many ways, become an integral part of American culture.

The emergence of online news is another area where the implications are unclear. Perhaps the Internet will serve as a boon for democracy as it operates as the largest marketplace of ideas that the world has ever seen. Or, perhaps the Internet will serve to increase divisiveness and hostility amongst groups and individuals and further erode political debates in our local, state, and national communities. This dissertation has certainly not resolved this discussion but, hopefully, it has presented some important findings and has demonstrated ways in which we can continue to analyze online political information.

Robert Entman (1989) posits that “the media make a significant contribution to what people think—to their political preferences and evaluations—precisely by

affecting what they think about.” What is it that the Internet causes individuals to think about? What implications does this have on public opinion and the way that citizens interact with their government as well as one another? This final chapter will serve to highlight some of the more important findings from the previous chapters that have addressed these questions and will make some concluding statements with an eye toward the future of online political news.

Chapter Summary

The second chapter provided an examination of some general trends in online news consumption. Overall, it is evident that an increasing number of individuals are opting to use the Internet over more conventional sources of information. Indeed, 44% of all adults and 60% of Internet users used the Internet to gather information about the 2008 presidential campaign. Likewise, there was a 17% increase in online news consumers in the one year period between 2009 and 2010 ("The State of the News Media: An Annual Report on American Journalism" 2011). These statistics demonstrate that the Internet is certainly an important force in American political culture. The information found on the Internet will, in many cases, be the information that helps individuals develop their political attitudes, that informs them of the policies advocated by candidates, and that alerts them to political scandals. Understanding the nature of that information as well as the means in which individuals interact with that content is essential to understand the future of American politics.

Additionally, the chapter examined possible indicators of online news consumption. Specifically, it appears as if being a male, leaning toward the

Democratic Party, having higher levels of education, and being younger indicates a propensity toward using the Internet as a source of political news. Interestingly, these results are fairly stable in both 2008 and 2010 according to the Pew Center data. These trends help to paint a more complete picture with regard to what is meant when we talk about online news users. Also, the fact that younger individuals are consistently more likely to use online news than their older counterparts serves as a justification for using an experimental design in the fourth chapter which focuses exclusively on students.

The chapter also analyzed the content preferences held by online news consumers. Overall, it appears as if most individuals prefer information which agrees with their own perspective. Specifically, 44% indicate that they prefer to use information which shares their own political views and 31% state that they prefer sites that do not hold a particular political perspective. Interestingly, the more educated the individual the more likely he or she is to seek sources which align with his or her political viewpoints. Perhaps this indicates that an increase in education also increases the confidence that an individual has in his or her opinions which encourages him or her to avoid differing perspectives. Or, perhaps it is simply a product of more educated individuals being sophisticated enough news consumers to identify the ideological biases held by various news agencies.

In addition to analyzing the content that is appealing to online news consumers, the chapter also examined the type of individuals most likely to take advantage of the opportunity to post on online comment sections. Ultimately, in 2008 only 11% of survey respondents claimed to post comments online. By 2010 the

number claiming to post comments online rose to 24%, a significant increase in such a short time span. However, even with the increase in online commenters, the demographic characteristics of those likely to post online were almost identical in 2008 and 2010. Specifically, unmarried, unemployed, men, are the most likely to post online comments. The supposed negativity of online comment sections may, in part, be born out of the social isolation experienced by some of the individuals most likely to post comments. However, more analysis would need to be done before speaking conclusively as to why individuals with these demographic characteristics are more likely than others to post online comments.

Whereas the second chapter presented general trends with regard to online news consumption, Chapter 3 attempted to determine whether or not online news consumers think differently about politics than those who use more conventional sources of information. Specifically, using NES data from 2004, 2008, and 2011, the chapter evaluated whether or not online news consumers have more negative attitudes toward political leaders and institutions than those that use traditional sources of information such as television, radio, newspapers, and magazines. It is assumed that the content of online news tends to be more negative than information presented through other forums (Buss and Buss 2006; Singer et al. 2011). Consequently, this chapter attempted to understand whether that negativity created corresponding negative attitudes amongst those who consume information from online sources.

In 2004, the Howard Dean campaign demonstrated the power of the Internet as a means of mobilizing money and sparking political support (Trippi 2004). While the Internet was still emerging as a force in American politics, there were still a

substantial number of individuals opting to use the Internet to find information about the 2004 campaign. Specifically, 47% of those in the NES study claimed that they saw information about the campaign online. Those using the Internet to find information about the campaign had lower opinions of President Bush. While the results for Kerry lacked significance, it appears as if Internet users had more negative attitudes toward political leaders in some instances and consequently it is important to analyze these relationships over time to see whether they are indicative of a trend and not simply a statement about the 2004 election.

For 2008, evidence from the Pew Center indicated that individuals, particularly younger individuals, were using the Internet to a far greater extent than they were in 2004. For example, 83% of young people had a social networking site and two-thirds of those individuals used those social networking sites as a way to engage in some form of political activity (Smith 2009). Unlike in 2008, Internet users did not have a more negative view of President Bush than those using other sources of information. However, these Internet users did hold more negative attitudes toward presidential candidate Barack Obama. Likewise, those using the Internet to gather political information had more negative views of the federal government more generally. However, views toward presidential candidate John McCain actually improved amongst Internet users. While it is impossible to confidently explain why this is the case, it is possible that McCain was successful in his attempt to paint himself as an outsider, or “maverick,” in the 2008 election and that, in so doing, he avoided the negativity of the Internet community.

Johnson and Kaye (2010) provide another explanation regarding the McCain outlier. They contend that blogs in particular are popular amongst conservatives seeking an alternative to the real or perceived liberal biases in more traditional media. Assuming that is the case, it would make sense the Barack Obama would not do as well amongst this subset of online news consumers as did McCain.

The results in 2004 as well as 2008 at least provide some evidence that, in certain cases, the use of online news appears to be correlated with more negative attitudes toward political leaders and institutions. The 2011 NES data release entitled “Evaluations of Government and Society Study” allows for the continued examination of these trends. Ultimately, Internet use was not correlated with more positive or negative attitudes toward President Obama. Additionally, Internet users were not decidedly different with regard to their evaluations of the trustworthiness of the federal government compared to those using more traditional sources of information. However, the data did provide some evidence that there was still a level of negativity amongst online news consumers that is not found in other media.

Specifically, those getting news online were both angrier and more outraged at the overall direction of the country than those not using online news. While not true in every instance, the results from 2004 through 2011 suggest that there are reasons to be concerned about the negativity evidenced within the community of online news consumers. Unfortunately, the nature of this type of survey data does not allow for a determination of the direction of these relationships. In other words, it is impossible to evaluate whether online news creates more negativity or whether more negative individuals are attracted to the Internet as an information source.

Fortunately, the use of experimental data can help to more fully illuminate the direction of the above relationship. Such an approach was used for the fourth chapter of the dissertation. In the fall and spring semesters of the 2010-2011 academic year at the University of Missouri-St. Louis students were asked to participate in an experiment evaluating the media habits of college students. After signing up for the study students were asked to complete an online survey. Following the completion of the survey students were asked to attend a session on campus where they would read an article and respond to another brief survey. Students randomly assigned to the control group were given an article (concerning either a local or national political issue) without a comment section at the conclusion of the article and those assigned to the experimental group were given one of the same articles with an attached comment section. The study was interested in identifying the role of comment sections in the formation of political attitudes. The three hypotheses examined were:

H1: Participants reading an article with a comment section at the conclusion will exhibit more negative attitudes toward the policies, the institutions, and the individuals in their respective article compared to those reading the same article without a comment section.

H2: Participants reading an article with a comment section at the conclusion will have more negative attitudes related to the performance of the media in reporting on politics.

H3: Participants reading an article with a comment section at the conclusion will have a difficult time differentiating between content in the article and content in the comment sections when questioned after reading said material.

With regard to the first hypothesis, those in the experimental group did not have decidedly different views regarding political leaders or issues than their counterparts in the control group. Consequently, it was necessary to reject the first hypothesis. However, those in the experimental group did report their article as being

more hostile or rude in nature than did the control group. Specifically, 48% of those in the experimental group described the nature of the policy debate in their article as being hostile or rude whereas only 28% of those in the control group, who were not exposed to a comment section, felt that the policy debate in their respective article was hostile or rude. While this trend did not appear to influence the way that the participants felt about the issues or political leaders discussed in the article it does provide justification for the continued study of comment sections. Perhaps this particular study did not capture the way that the hostility, perceived or real, within online comment sections alters political attitudes and there is a more appropriate study for the examination of this issue.

The need for this continued study is evident in the finding that those in the local issue group who were exposed to the online comment section had decidedly more negative views, relative to those in the control group, of individuals holding an opposing perspective to their own on the issue of anti-smoking policies in St. Louis. However, these same results did not hold true for the participants in the national issue group.

In addition to evaluating whether the comment sections changed attitudes toward political leaders, issues, and institutions the study also attempted to determine whether or not the presence of comment sections caused participants to adopt more negative views of the media and its effectiveness in reporting on political issues. The rationale for the second hypothesis was that exposure to negativity online would create a corresponding distrust toward those responsible for placing that negative information online. However, the results suggest that there is no difference between

the control and the experimental group with regard to attitudes toward the performance of the media in reporting political information.

One caveat is that this experiment represents a single exposure to one comment section and does not speak to the way in which continued exposure to comment sections over time will influence the way that one thinks about political leaders, issues, institutions, or the media. Continued research into the long-term implications of online news consumption could perhaps more fully illuminate the role, if one exists, between the use of online comment sections and the development of more hostile or negative attitudes toward American politics.

For the third and final hypothesis, there was an attempt to evaluate the ability of online news consumers to engage in effective credibility assessment. The credibility assessment literature, in most instances, suggests that younger individuals will have difficulty differentiating between good and bad sources of information online (Harris 2008; Flanigan and Metzger 2008; James and Davis 2011). Additionally, Wattenberg (2008) argues that younger individuals are less knowledgeable and engaged in politics than their older counterparts. In this case, students were asked to differentiate between information in the comment section and information in the text of the article. Students were asked to identify whether various statements originated from the article or the comment section. Of the four questions, 95% were able to correctly identify the origin of at least three of the four statements. When broken down by participant age, 96% of those under the age of 25 were able to answer at least three or four of the questions correctly. Clearly, these results suggest that the third hypothesis must be rejected.

While the hypotheses are not supported by the data, the results do suggest that online news as well as comment sections should continue to be studied with regard to how they are changing the landscape of American political communication.

Looking to the Future

When responding to the debate regarding the Arizona immigration law, one online commenter stated: “What a bunch of crap. Holder and Osama Obama must think that the average American is as stupid as they are. We need to get rid of these idiots.” Another commenter argued that “We need to take the 113 billion these illegals cost us and use it for bounties!!! We would create a lot of jobs and get rid of illegals at the SAME TIME!” Similarly, when responding to anti-smoking policies in St. Louis an online poster stated “Why are we continuing to waste money trying to educate these smokers? Let them die early if they want to. Use the money for something worthwhile!! This has been going on for decades now.” While these statements are not necessarily representative of all of the statements within the online comment sections in the articles presented to students, they are indicative of the pervasive vitriol that permeates so many of these user-generated postings.

McCluskey and Hmielowski (2011) confirm that online commenters have a greater propensity to challenge their community and the institutions in their community. To some extent, these findings may represent a positive trend as average citizens have a greater voice in the political process than ever before. However, the above comments, as well as other scholarly work, suggest that these comments are generally “less thoughtful and more impulsive, shallow, and aggressive than earlier forms of audience participation” (Singer et al. 2011). The findings of this paper

indicate that those exposed to comment sections are substantially more likely to identify the content of their article as being hostile or rude in nature when compared to those exposed to the same article without a comment section.

In addition, scholars such as Buss and Buss (2006) contend that, more generally, online news promotes sensationalism and that online discourse is often characterized by the spreading of outrageous and hostile information. Negativity in political discourse has been shown to have very real implications for American politics. Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994) demonstrate that negative advertising has the effect of depressing voter turnout and creating apathy amongst the public. Additionally, Mutz and Reeves (2005) posit that incivility in televised political discourse serves to attract audience interest but has the impact of lowering levels of trust that viewers have toward their political leaders. Hetherington (1996) also provides evidence that negative reporting can change the way that voter's think about candidates. In his article Hetherington argues that negative reporting on economic issues caused more negativity toward Bush in the 1992 election despite the fact that the economy was actually improving.

The findings presented in this dissertation suggest that online news consumption, in some instances, seems to be related to more negative attitudes toward political leaders and institutions. Additionally, user-generated content causes individuals to view online news as decidedly more negative. The findings of Berry and Sobieraj (2008) indicate that these trends are unlikely to end any time soon. They contend that the media feels that "highly polarized" and "provocative" material will attract the widest audience (Berry and Sobieraj 2008). Additionally, more and more

individuals are being exposed to this material. Indeed, moving from 2009 to 2010 there was a 17% increase in the number of online news consumers and a 13% increase the number of online commenters which demonstrates that online news is rapidly displacing more traditional forms of media ("The State of the News Media: An Annual Report on American Journalism" 2011).

Amidst these trends, it is important to begin preparing younger Americans to deal with the implications of this online environment. James, C., K. Davis, et al. (2011) have created the GoodPlay Project that provides suggestions for how to best prepare younger Americans to effectively navigate online situations. This form of research should become an even more prominent part of the literature. If we agree that part of an educator's responsibilities to prepare young individuals how to become productive citizens then it is imperative that we recognize that, to young people, citizenship is defined in large part by the activities which they engage in online.

The convergence of a sensationalist media and a growing number of individuals posting hostile comments provides potential for serious consequences with regard to the nature of American political discourse. Additionally, these trends ought to serve as an impetus for researchers to continue to study the implications of the emergence of the Internet as a source of political information.

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Pre-Test for the National Issue (Arizona Immigration Law) Group

QA1. People tend to get their news about government and public affairs from different sources. How often, if at all do you get your news from each of the following sources? From a daily newspaper. Do you read the news pages of a newspaper every day, several times a week, about once a week, less than once a week, hardly ever, or not at all? (*Young People and News* 2007)

- Every day
- Several Times a week
- About once a week
- Less than once a week
- Hardly ever
- Not at all

QA2. How often, if at all, do you get your news from national television, such as ABC, NBC, CNN, Fox News, or MSNBC? Do you watch national television news every day, several times a week, about once a week, less than once a week, hardly ever, or not at all? (*Young People and News* 2007)

- Every day
- Several times a week
- About once a week
- Hardly ever
- Not at all

QA3. How often, if at all, do you get your news from local television? Do you watch local television news every day, several times a week, about once a week, less than once a week, hardly ever, or not at all? (*Young People and News* 2007)

- Every day
- Several times a week
- About once a week
- Hardly ever
- Not at all

QA4. How often, if at all do you get your news from radio? Do you listen to radio news every day, several times a week, about once a week, less than once a week, hardly ever, not at all? (*Young People and News* 2007)

- Every day
- Several times a week
- About once a week
- Hardly ever
- Not at all

QA5. How often, if at all, do you get your news from the Internet? Do you obtain news from the Internet every day, several times a week, about once a week, hardly ever, or not at all? (*Young People and News* 2007)

- Every day
- Several times a week
- About once a week
- Hardly ever
- Not at all

On a typical day, do you get news from a website of a national or local paper? ("January 2010--Online News" 2010)

- Yes
- No

On a typical day, do you get news from a website of a TV news organization such as CNN, Fox, or CBS? ("January 2010--Online News" 2010)

- Yes
- No

On a typical day, do you get news from a website of a radio news organization such as NPR? ("January 2010--Online News" 2010)

- Yes
- No

On a typical day, do you get news from a portal website like GoogleNews, AOL, or Topix that gathers news from many different sources? ("January 2010--Online News" 2010)

- Yes
- No

On a typical day, do you get news from the website of an individual blogger? ("January 2010--Online News" 2010)

- Yes
- No

On a typical day, do you get news from a website that offers a mix of news and commentary, such as the Drudge Report or Huffington Post? ("January 2010--Online News" 2010)

- Yes
- No

On a typical day, do you get news from a news organization or an individual journalist that you follow on a social networking site like Facebook? ("January 2010--Online News" 2010)

- Yes
- No

On a typical day, do you get news from another individual or organization you are following on a social networking site like Facebook, including personal friends and family? ("January 2010--Online News" 2010)

- Yes
- No

How about opportunities to comment on stories? Is this important or not important in deciding where you get your news online? ("January 2010--Online News" 2010)

- Yes, important
- No, not important

How about links to related material? Is this important or not important in deciding where you get your news online? ("January 2010--Online News" 2010)

- Yes, important
- No, not important

How often do you click on links to related material that are in online news stories? Would you say you do this often, sometimes, hardly ever, or never? ("January 2010--Online News" 2010)

- Often
- Sometimes
- Hardly ever
- Never

When getting news through the Internet, is it usually because you seek out the news or is it usually because you just happen to come across it?

- Seek out the news
- Happen to come across the news
- Some of both/both about equally

When getting news through the Internet, do you usually check other sources of information in order to determine whether or not the information you read is accurate?

- Always check other sources
- Sometimes check other sources
- Rarely check other sources
- Never check other sources

QA6. Thinking about the different kinds of news available to you, what do you prefer? ("January 2010--Online News" 2010)

- Getting news from sources that SHARE your point of view
- Getting news from sources that DON'T HAVE a particular view
- Getting news from sources that DIFFER FROM your point of view

QB1. What is your current age?

QB2. Are you:

- Male
- Female

QB3. Are you:

- Asian
- Black/African American
- Hispanic/Latino
- White
- Other

QB4. Please indicate the number of the income group that includes the income that you had in 2009 before taxes. This figure should include salaries, wages, pensions, dividends, interest, and all other income. ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

- None or less than \$2,999
- \$3,000--\$4,999
- \$5,000--\$7,499
- \$7,500--\$9,999
- \$10,000--\$10,999
- \$11,000--\$12,499
- \$12,500--\$14,999
- \$15,000--\$16,999
- \$17,000-\$19,999
- \$20,000--\$21,999
- \$22,000--\$24,999
- \$25,000--\$29,999
- \$30,000--\$34,999
- \$35,000--\$39,999
- \$40,000--\$44,999
- \$45,000--\$49,999
- \$50,000--\$59,999

- \$60,000--\$74,999
- \$75,000--\$89,000
- \$90,000--\$99,999
- \$100,000--\$109,999
- \$110,000--\$119,999
- \$120,000--\$134,000
- \$135,000--\$149,000
- \$150,000 and over

QC1. Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale? ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

QC2. Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale? ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

- Strong Democrat
- Democrat
- Weak Democrat
- Independent
- Weak Republican
- Republican
- Strong Republican

QC3. Which political party is more conservative? ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

- Democratic Party
- Republican Party

QC4. Now we have a set of questions concerning various public figures. We want to see how much information about them gets out to the public from television, newspapers, the Internet, and the like. The first name is Nancy Pelosi. What job or title does she NOW hold? ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

Joe Biden. What job or political office does he NOW hold?

Gordon Brown. What job or political office does he NOW hold?

John Roberts. What job or political office does he NOW hold?

Hillary Clinton. What job or political office does she NOW hold?

QC5. Now we have a set of questions asking you about a range of issues about the current state of politics in the United States. As far as you know, which political party has a majority in the U.S. House of Representatives? ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

- Republicans
- Democrats
- Independents

As far as you know, which foreign country holds the most U.S. government debt? (*March 2009 Political Knowledge Update Survey Final Topline* 2009)

- Japan
- China
- Canada
- Saudi Arabia

QC6. Some people have opinions about almost everything; other people have opinions about just some things; and still other people have very few opinions. What about you? Would you say you have opinions about almost everything, many things, about some things, or about very few things? ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

- Almost everything
- Many things
- Some things
- Very few things

Compared to the average person do you have a lot fewer opinions about whether things are good or bad, somewhat fewer opinions, about the same number of opinions, or a lot more opinions. ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

- Fewer opinions
- Somewhat fewer opinions
- About the same number of opinions
- Somewhat more opinions
- More opinions

QC7. Some people like to have responsibility for handling situations that require a lot of thinking, and other people don't like that. What about you? Do you like it when you have responsibility for handling situations that require a lot of thinking, do you

like it somewhat , neither like it nor dislike it, dislike it somewhat, or dislike it a lot?
("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

- Like it a lot
- Like it somewhat
- Neither like nor dislike
- Dislike it somewhat
- Dislike it a lot

QC8. Some people prefer to solve simple problems instead of complex ones, whereas other people prefer to solve more complex problems. Which type of problem do you prefer to solve: simple or complex? ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

- Simple
- Complex

QC9. This question asks you to rate a person or a group of individuals using something we call a feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the person or group. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward the person or group. You would rate the person or group at the 50 degree mark if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the person or group. How would you rate President Obama? ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

How would you rate the current Congress?

How would you rate the Democratic Party?

How would you rate the Republican Party?

How would you rate illegal immigrants?

QC10. The following questions are related to an ongoing political conflict over Arizona's new immigration law. Are you familiar with or have you heard about this law?

- Yes
- No (Go to QC11)

Would you say that Arizona's new immigration law makes their immigration policies more restrictive, about the same, or less restrictive?

- More restrictive
- About the same
- Less restrictive

Do you agree strongly, somewhat agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with Arizona's new immigration law?

- Agree strongly
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree somewhat
- Disagree strongly

Using the feeling thermometer described in QC9, how would you rate those individuals that would disagree with your perspective on the Arizona immigration law?

QC11. Do you agree or disagree that the following statements describe your attitude toward conflict¹¹

I hate conflict. (Mutz and Byron 2005)

- Agree
- Disagree

I find conflict exciting. (Mutz and Byron 2005)

- Agree
- Disagree

Arguments don't bother me. (Mutz and Byron 2005)

- Agree
- Disagree

I feel upset after an argument. (Mutz and Byron 2005)

- Agree
- Disagree

I enjoy challenging the opinions of others. (Mutz and Byron 2005)

- Agree
- Disagree

¹¹ Mutz and Reeves (2005) use questions originally presented by Goldstein (1999).

Pre-Test for the Local Issue (Smoking in St. Louis) Group

QA1. People tend to get their news about government and public affairs from different sources. How often, if at all do you get your news from each of the following sources? From a daily newspaper. Do you read the news pages of a newspaper every day, several times a week, about once a week, less than once a week, hardly ever, or not at all? (*Young People and News* 2007)

- Every day
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- Hardly ever
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QA2. How often, if at all, do you get your news from national television, such as ABC, NBC, CNN, Fox News, or MSNBC? Do you watch national television news every day, several times a week, about once a week, less than once a week, hardly ever, or not at all? (*Young People and News* 2007)

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How about opportunities to comment on stories? Is this important or not important in deciding where you get your news online? ("January 2010--Online News" 2010)

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How about links to related material? Is this important or not important in deciding where you get your news online? ("January 2010--Online News" 2010)

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When getting news through the Internet, is it usually because you seek out the news or is it usually because you just happen to come across it?

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QB1. What is your current age?

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- \$120,000--\$134,000
- \$135,000--\$149,000
- \$150,000 and over

QC1. Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale? ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

- Extremely liberal
- Liberal
- Slightly liberal
- Moderate; middle of the road
- Slightly conservative
- Conservative
- Extremely conservative

QC2. Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale? ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

- Strong Democrat
- Democrat
- Weak Democrat
- Independent
- Weak Republican
- Republican
- Strong Republican

QC3. Which political party is more conservative? ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

- Democratic Party
- Republican Party

QC4. Now we have a set of questions concerning various public figures. We want to see how much information about them gets out to the public from television, newspapers, the Internet, and the like. The first name is Nancy Pelosi. What job or title does she NOW hold? ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

Joe Biden. What job or political office does he NOW hold?

Gordon Brown. What job or political office does he NOW hold?

John Roberts. What job or political office does he NOW hold?

Hillary Clinton. What job or political office does she NOW hold?

QC5. Now we have a set of questions asking you about a range of issues about the current state of politics in the United States. As far as you know, which political party has a majority in the U.S. House of Representatives? ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

- Republicans
- Democrats
- Independents

As far as you know, which foreign country holds the most U.S. government debt? (*March 2009 Political Knowledge Update Survey Final Topline* 2009)

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- China
- Canada
- Saudi Arabia

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- Many things
- Some things
- Very few things

Compared to the average person do you have a lot fewer opinions about whether things are good or bad, somewhat fewer opinions, about the same number of opinions, or a lot more opinions. ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

- Fewer opinions
- Somewhat fewer opinions
- About the same number of opinions
- Somewhat more opinions
- More opinions

QC7. Some people like to have responsibility for handling situations that require a lot of thinking, and other people don't like that. What about you? Do you like it when you have responsibility for handling situations that require a lot of thinking, do you

like it somewhat , neither like it nor dislike it, dislike it somewhat, or dislike it a lot?
("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

- Like it a lot
- Like it somewhat
- Neither like nor dislike
- Dislike it somewhat
- Dislike it a lot

QC8. Some people prefer to solve simple problems instead of complex ones, whereas other people prefer to solve more complex problems. Which type of problem do you prefer to solve: simple or complex? ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

- Simple
- Complex

QC9. This question asks you to rate a person or a group of individuals using something we call a feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the person or group. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward the person or group. You would rate the person or group at the 50 degree mark if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the person or group. How would you rate President Obama? ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

How would you rate the current Congress?

How would you rate the Democratic Party?

How would you rate the Republican Party?

How would you rate smokers?

QC10. The following questions are related to anti-smoking efforts being undertaken in the St. Louis area. Did you know that federal stimulus money was being given to the St. Louis area for a new anti-smoking effort?

- Yes
- No

Would you say that colleges and universities in the St. Louis area are becoming more or less restrictive in terms of allowing people to smoke on campus?

- More restrictive
- About the same
- Less restrictive

Do you agree strongly, somewhat agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with anti-smoking efforts including smoking bans on college campuses?

- Agree strongly
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree somewhat
- Disagree strongly

Using the feeling thermometer described in QC9, how would you rate those individuals that would disagree with your perspective on anti-smoking efforts including bans on smoking on college campuses?

QC11. Do you agree or disagree that the following statements describe your attitude toward conflict¹²

I hate conflict. (Mutz and Byron 2005)

- Agree
- Disagree

I find conflict exciting. (Mutz and Byron 2005)

- Agree
- Disagree

Arguments don't bother me. (Mutz and Byron 2005)

- Agree
- Disagree

I feel upset after an argument. (Mutz and Byron 2005)

- Agree
- Disagree

I enjoy challenging the opinions of others. (Mutz and Byron 2005)

- Agree
- Disagree

¹² Mutz and Reeves (2005) use questions originally presented by Goldstein (1999).

Post-Test for the National Issue (Arizona Immigration Law) Group

QA1. This question asks that you rate a person or a group of individuals using something we call a feeling thermometer. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward the person or group. You would rate the person or group at the 50 degree mark if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the person or group. How would you rate President Obama? ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

How would you rate the current Congress?

How would you rate the Democratic Party?

How would you rate the Republican Party?

How would you rate illegal immigrants?

Do you agree strongly, somewhat agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with Arizona's new immigration law?

- Agree strongly
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree somewhat
- Disagree strongly

Which official stated that Arizona had crossed a "constitutional line" according to the article which you just read?

- President Obama
- Janet Napolitano
- Jan Brewer
- Eric Holder

QB1. Did your article have a comment section located at the bottom?

- Yes
- No (Go to QC1)

QB2. Did you read any of the comments in the comment section located directly underneath the article?

- Yes
- No (Go to QC1)

About how many comments did you read?

- 1-5

- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- 31-35
- 36-40

Do you feel that comment sections within online news articles provides valuable information much of the time, some of the time, rarely, or never?

- Much of the time
- Some of the time
- Rarely
- Never

The following are a list of statements taken from either the article or the comment section. Please indicate whether the statement was taken from the article or the comment section? “Arizonans are understandably frustrated with illegal immigration, and the federal government has a responsibility to comprehensively address those concerns.” Did that statement come from:

- The article
- The comment section

“I wonder why the DOJ hasn’t sued all the sanctuary cities throughout the US. The constitution clearly states there will be no sanctuary cities yet the feds have ignored this for years and now picks and chooses which laws it wants to enforce.” Did that statement come from:

- The article
- The comment section

“I hope that congress will learn from this and listen to the voice of the people of this great country, and to all of those who came here legally and has now sworn allegiance to the United States of America.” Did that statement come from:

- The article
- The comment section

“As a direct result of failed and inconsistent federal enforcement, Arizona law is under attack from violent Mexican drug and immigrant smuggling cartels.” Did that statement come from:

- The article
- The comment section

QC1. Did you click on any links to other websites within the article that you read?

- Yes
- No (Go to QD1)

How many links did you click on?

- 1-2
- 3-4
- 5-6
- 7-8

Did you find that the information you found by clicking on the links was consistent with the information presented in the article?

- Yes
- No

Do you find links within online news articles to be helpful much of the time, some of the time, rarely, or never?

- Much of the time
- Some of the time
- Rarely
- Never

QD1. Which word better describes the nature of the policy debate in the material you just read?

- Polite
- Hostile

How would you describe those advocating in favor of the Arizona immigration law in the material you just read? Please respond using the 7 point scale moving from calm and friendly to agitated or hostile.

1. Calm/Friendly 2 3 4 5 6 7. Agitated/Hostile

How would you describe those advocating against the Arizona immigration law in the material you just read?

1. Calm/Friendly 2 3 4 5 6 7. Agitated/Hostile

QD2. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on: ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree

- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I trust the news media to cover political events fairly and accurately: (Baumgartner and Morris 2006)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Overall, how would you rate the performance of the media in covering politics? (Baumgartner and Morris 2006)

- Poor
- Only fair
- Good
- Excellent

QD3. Politicians generally have good intentions: (Mutz and Byron 2005)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Politicians in the U.S do not deserve much respect: (Mutz and Byron 2005)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Most politicians can be trusted to do what is right: (Mutz and Byron 2005)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Most politicians do a lot of talking but they do little to solve the really important issues facing the country: (Mutz and Byron 2005)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Post-Test for the Local Issue (Smoking in St. Louis) Group

QA1. This question asks that you rate a person or a group of individuals using something we call a feeling thermometer. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward the person or group. You would rate the person or group at the 50 degree mark if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the person or group. How would you rate President Obama? ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

How would you rate the current Congress?

How would you rate the Democratic Party?

How would you rate the Republican Party?

How would you rate illegal immigrants?

Do you agree strongly, somewhat agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with anti-smoking bans on college campuses?

- Agree strongly
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree or disagree
- Disagree somewhat
- Disagree strongly

Which county has recently received federal grants to begin a campaign against smoking according to the article?

- St. Clair County
- Monroe County
- St. Louis County
- Madison County

QB1. Did your article have a comment section located at the bottom?

- Yes
- No (Go to QD1)

QB2. Did you read any of the comments in the comment section located directly underneath the article?

- Yes
- No (Go to QD1)

About how many comments did you read?

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Do you feel that comment sections within online news articles provides valuable information much of the time, some of the time, rarely, or never?

- Much of the time
- Some of the time
- Rarely
- Never

The following are a list of statements taken from either the article or the comment section. Please indicate whether the statement was taken from the article or the comment section? “We want to show that tobacco use is not cool.” Did that statement come from:

- The article
- The comment section

“I don’t like public schools (controlling) behavior chosen by adults.” Did that statement come from:

- The article
- The comment section

“It’s more about stopping people from starting, assisting people who do, truly educating and offering help to stop if they already smoke. Sadly \$7.6 sounds like a lot, in the grand scheme of things it’s a drop in the bucket.” Did that statement come from:

- The article
- The comment section

“As long as we are paying for everyone’s health insurance now (which I oppose), spending a little money (comparatively) to get people to stop or never start smoking is a good investment. I rather not pay for either to be honest.” Did that statement come from:

- The article
- The comment section

QC1. Did you click on any links to other websites within the article that you read?

- Yes
- No (Go to QD1)

How many links did you click on?

- 1-2
- 3-4
- 5-6
- 7-8

Did you find that the information you found by clicking on the links was consistent with the information presented in the article?

- Yes
- No

Do you find links within online news articles to be helpful much of the time, some of the time, rarely, or never?

- Much of the time
- Some of the time
- Rarely
- Never

QD1. Which word better describes the nature of the policy debate in the material you just read?

- Polite
- Rude

How would you describe those advocating in favor of the new anti-smoking policies in the material you just read? Please respond using the 7 point scale moving from calm and friendly to agitated or hostile.

2. Calm/Friendly 2 3 4 5 6 7. Agitated/Hostile

How would you describe those advocating against the new anti-smoking policies discussed in the material you just read?

2. Calm/Friendly 2 3 4 5 6 7. Agitated/Hostile

QD2. Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on: ("The ANES 2008 Time Series Study " 2008)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree

- Strongly disagree

I trust the news media to cover political events fairly and accurately: (Baumgartner and Morris 2006)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Overall, how would you rate the performance of the media in covering politics? (Baumgartner and Morris 2006)

- Poor
- Only fair
- Good
- Excellent

QD3. Politicians generally have good intentions: (Mutz and Byron 2005)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Politicians in the U.S do not deserve much respect: (Mutz and Byron 2005)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Most politicians can be trusted to do what is right: (Mutz and Byron 2005)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Most politicians do a lot of talking but they do little to solve the really important issues facing the country: (Mutz and Byron 2005)

- Strongly agree

- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Sample Introduction to, and instructions for, the Experimental Manipulation

Media and Politics: Experiment Webpage

Hello,

First, I would like to take a moment to thank you for your participation in this project.

Today, I would like you to click on the first link and read the article provided for you. After you have finished reading the article please let me know so that I can provide you access to the post-test survey. In order to do so I will need to know the email address that you provided when signing up for the experiment.

Again, thank you for your participation and if you have any questions about the experiment process let me know.

Michael

Article: [Arizona Immigration Law](#)

Article for National Issue Group

Suit: Arizona immigration law crosses 'constitutional line'

By Andrew Seidman, McClatchy Newspapers Andrew Seidman, McClatchy Newspapers Tue Jul 6, 7:29 pm ET

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department Tuesday sued Arizona over its tough new immigration law, charging the state with crossing a "constitutional line" that would undermine the federal government's efforts to monitor illegal aliens.

In its lawsuit, filed in Phoenix , the Justice Department explained that the federal government has the strict and sole authority to create national immigration policy.

" Arizona's immigration policy . . . exceeds a state's role with respect to aliens, interferes with the federal government's balanced administration of the immigration laws, and critically undermines U.S. foreign policy objectives," the department said.

Arizona's law, which seeks "attrition through enforcement," establishes a mandatory system that requires law enforcement officers to verify any given person's legal status if the officer is suspicious of "unlawful presence."

The department asked for a preliminary injunction against the policy to prevent "irreparable harm" to the U.S. The law was signed by Republican Gov. Jan Brewer on April 23 and is slated to take effect on July 29 .

"As a direct result of failed and inconsistent federal enforcement, Arizona is under attack from violent Mexican drug and immigrant smuggling cartels," Brewer said in a statement. Now, Arizona is under attack in federal court from President Obama and his Department of Justice ."

Last week, in his first major speech on the issue, President Barack Obama urged Congress to make a comprehensive immigration overhaul a priority, citing Arizona's law. However, he offered no new specifics or a deadline for enacting a bill.

Arizona's law, the department wrote, would disrupt the national framework and potentially lead other states down a slippery slope of patchwork policies that would "cripple" federal policy.

The law is unconstitutional, the department wrote primarily because "it impermissibly attempts to set immigration policy at the state level and is therefore preempted."

Although the law rightfully seeks to deter "unlawful entry" of illegal aliens, the lawsuit asserts, it ignores all other aspects of federal policy.

The department noted that Arizona's law could potentially result in the "harassment and incarceration" of legal aliens and even U.S. citizens who are stopped by police officers and who lack immediate documentation as proof of legal presence.

The use of extensive resources to target all potential illegal aliens, instead of focusing attention on major threats, conflicts with U.S. policy, the department argued.

"Arizonans are understandably frustrated with illegal immigration, and the federal government has a responsibility to comprehensively address those concerns," said U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder in a press release. "But diverting federal resources away from dangerous aliens such as terrorism suspects and aliens with criminal records will impact the entire country's safety."

Janet Napolitano , the secretary of the Department of Homeland Security , said she vetoed similar pieces of legislation during her two terms as governor of Arizona . She echoed Holder's concerns and added that, if implemented, the Arizona law would undermine "the vital trust between local jurisdictions and the communities they serve."

ON THE WEB

[Department of Justice Complaint about Arizona](#)

[Department of Justice brief against Arizona](#)

MORE FROM MCCLATCHY

[Obama calls for immigration overhaul, but prospects bleak](#)

[Napolitano promises more security at Mexican border](#)

[Study: In long term, immigrants are good for U.S.](#)

[Sacramento joins cities weighing Arizona immigration boycott](#)

[Check out McClatchy's politics blog: Planet Washington](#)

Comment Section

1. 8 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 0 users disliked this comment

[Chas](#) Fri Jul 09, 2010 07:57 pm PDT [Report Abuse](#)

Every law enforcement officer in the United States has the power to detain any person he or she has interaction with pursuant to a suspected criminal act, (even a traffic violation) and ask them for identification. If the person refuses to identify themselves they can be held until identified by the officer or his or another law enforcement agency. Arizona and Missouri have only brought this fact to the surface and the illegals and the liberal bleeding hearts like the ACLU don't like it. The law is already on the books in every state. Eric Holder and Obama need to be impeached and stay out of state business

[Replies \(1\)](#)

2. 7 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 0 users disliked this comment

[**Babbler**](#) *Fri Jul 09, 2010 10:42 am PDT* [Report Abuse](#)

So if they are monitoring them, that means they know where and who they are. They just don't care about the law.

[Reply](#)

3. 13 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 1 users disliked this comment

[**BrianINtheNO**](#) *Thu Jul 08, 2010 07:37 am PDT* [Report Abuse](#)

I wonder why the DOJ hasn't sued all the sanctuary cities throughout the US. The constitution clearly states there will be no sanctuary cities yet the feds have ignored this for years and now picks and chooses which laws it wants to enforce.

[Reply](#)

4. 10 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 0 users disliked this comment

[**Stryder**](#) *Thu Jul 08, 2010 10:32 am PDT* [Report Abuse](#)

I hope that congress will learn from this and listen to the voice of the people of this great country, and to all of those who came here legally and has now sworn allegiance to the United States of America.

5. 0 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 0 users disliked this comment

[**Anonymous**](#)

What Constitution is he reading? Did I miss something or is there something in there about "State Sovereignty" and "States' Rights"?

[Reply](#)

6. 1 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 1 users disliked this comment

[MSwDem](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 06:45 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

You know, if we brought all our Troops home, we could line them along the Mexican border. I don't know what the spacing would. Maybe someone can help me with that. Doing this we could both protect our border (without raising Arizona) and stop violating other folk's border. Arizona safer, US safer, Troops safer, the rest of the world safer. WAR IS OVER! (if you let it) please.

[Reply](#)

7. 10 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 1 users disliked this comment

[Randy](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 08:04 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

Looks like Holder can only do one task at a time. Maybe he should step down if he can't deal with illegals and terrorists at the same time, it's called multi tasking. Mr. Obama do your job or it will be done for you !!

[Reply](#)

8. 9 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 2 users disliked this comment

[larry](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 07:10 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

i want to know why the justice dept hasent tried the black panthers hasent ben tried for the threats of [kill all whites, babies included. the dept is supost to investagate what ever. regardles of who trys to stop them including the president. they did with NIXON.

[Replies \(2\)](#)

9. 1 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 1 users disliked this comment

[MSwDem](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 06:45 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

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[Reply](#)

10. 11 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 3 users disliked this comment

[American](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 06:56 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

Obama and the Dems are interesting in protecting illegal alien than Americans. First they tried to protect terrorists at Guitmo and now illegal aliens. They are against the majority of Americans interests these days. This is the first time that sitting president suing his own people. Instead of offering solution, he is suing his own people. It is beyond laughable. I bet illegal aliens' are high five each other now.

Hmm... who are they working for?

[Replies \(2\)](#)

11. 6 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 1 users disliked this comment

[Robert](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 07:18 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

We need to take the 113 billion these illegals cost us and use it for bounties !!! We would create a lot of jobs and get rid of illegals at the SAME TIME !

[Reply](#)

12. 13 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 2 users disliked this comment

[Nothanks](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 07:20 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

crossing a "constitutional line" That's funny since the Feds DON'T UPHOLD the Constitution by NOT DOING THE JOB THEY ARE SUPPOSE TO DO. Really after this is over AZ and any other State in the United States should sue the Feds for NOT doing the job they were hired to do and people should be fired.

[Replies \(1\)](#)

13. 12 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 1 users disliked this comment

[Reader](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 07:33 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

We've granted amensty 7 times since 1986. If we grant amnesty now, we'll be granting it next year, the year after that, and the year after thant, until WE ARE MEXICO!!

SECURE THE BORDER FIRST!!!!

If they could build the Great Wall of China in the 5th century (5,000 miles long), we can secure our southern border in the 21st century (1,500 miles long)!!!!!! We have better technology and are fighting INDIVIDUALS, China was stopping ARMIES!

If Obama can't handle this, he needs to step down.

[Replies \(1\)](#)

14. 13 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 1 users disliked this comment

[BrianINtheNO](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 07:37 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

I wonder why the DOJ hasnt sued all the sanctuary cities throught out the US. The constitution clearly states there will be no sanctuary cities yet the feds have ignored this for years and now picks and chooses wich laws it wants to enforce.

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15. 11 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 1 users disliked this comment

[david](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 07:55 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

Holder and little o are the real racists in this country.

And while we are at it...how come states like calif. can sell pot...while it is a federal crime, yet Az can not protect thier citizens?

[Replies \(1\)](#)

16. 10 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 1 users disliked this comment

[**Just Shoot Me**](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 08:34 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

That the true Racist in this country are Obama and Holder!

They are intentionally driving a wedge between whites, blacks & browns.

[Replies \(1\)](#)

17. 7 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 2 users disliked this comment

[**newchum76**](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 08:50 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

The cynical posturing by the Feds, and the hypocritical rhetoric are enough to make a billygoat puke! I thought O was about 'change'! Nothing has changed, just the color of the bosses....

[Replies \(2\)](#)

18. 8 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 0 users disliked this comment

[**B B**](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 08:56 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

NOW they decide to follow the constitution!?! What a bunch of HYPOCRITES!!!

[Replies \(2\)](#)

19. 9 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 0 users disliked this comment

[**Old Timer**](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 09:20 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

What a bunch of crap. Holder and Osama Obama must think that the average American is as stupid as they are. We need to get rid of these idiots.

[Reply](#)

20. 0 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 0 users disliked this comment

[**its me**](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 09:34 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

people we need to find out where this hearing is going to be at and when it is , what judge is going to hear this case .we need to write thie judge and we need to protest this hearing.if this judge vote for the Fed,he needs to be kick out of office and if this

judge is a mexican judge we need to find out his back ground and see here he votes on cases.

[Reply](#)

21. 5 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 1 users disliked this comment

[Geoff A](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 05:19 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

Illegal immigrants cost our country approximately 100 billion dollars per year, this is subtracting the 14 or so million in taxes that we might collect. Protecting and enforcing our borders are one of the few powers granted the central government in the constitution and they are even inept at that! We had immigration reform and amnesty during the Reagan era and we see how well that worked! Enforce our current laws, expel those that don't belong here and punish those communities that harbor them, with the loss of federal money.

[Replies \(5\)](#)

22. 3 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 0 users disliked this comment

[Issy](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 05:53 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

How about suing the federal government for dereliction of duty by failing to enforce US Law, protect our borders from illegal entry - in fact, they are encouraging illegal entry. With so much hope and change we are now prosecuting entities that act right?

[Reply](#)

23. 4 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 0 users disliked this comment

[mitcha](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 05:54 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

The Obama administration only seems to want to uphold the constitution when it is politically convenient for them to do so. Why are they allowed to claim Arizona is violating the law when Obama and Holder refuse to uphold the nations laws. Has our president now been granted the powers of "pick and Chose" on which laws it is alright to violate?

[Reply](#)

24. 3 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 0 users disliked this comment

[ARMANDO L](#) *Thu Jul 08, 2010 06:02 am PDT* [Report Abuse](#)

Look at what these leftist are doing to America. VOTE EVERY SINGLE ONE OF THEM OUT IN NOVEMBER. WAKE UP AMERICA AND VOTE OUT ALL THE LEFTIST LIBERAL SOCIALIST MARXIST DEMOCRATS OUT.

[Reply](#)

25. 0 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 0 users disliked this comment

[LimRickNews](#) *Thu Jul 08, 2010 06:17 am PDT* [Report Abuse](#)

U.S. sues Arizona over immigration.
What laws apply to the states or the Nation?
The Feds says it's us,
So please stop the fuss,
Should this line end with intimidation, deportation or discrimination?

For more, google "LimRickNews".

[Reply](#)

26. 7 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 1 users disliked this comment

[keann](#) *Thu Jul 08, 2010 06:29 am PDT* [Report Abuse](#)

doj is so concerned about AZ law - Rhode Island has had one almost identical for years -- nobody is suing that state. Sanctuary cities have been violating/usurping federal law for yrs -doj isn't concerned about that violation why the double standard?

[Reply](#)

27. 4 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 0 users disliked this comment

[Hope](#) *Thu Jul 08, 2010 06:34 am PDT* [Report Abuse](#)

You can send a letter to your Reprs, Senators, and Obama opposing amnesty and it's easy to do at numbersusa.

[Reply](#)

28. 9 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 2 users disliked this comment

[Miki](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 06:39 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

NOW there is 46 Afghani's missing from Lackland AFB, the Black Panthers can terrioize voters, NASA is to turn to Muslims so we can bolster their self esteem and the US gov't allowing itself to be invaded by illegals.

Mmmm I wonder if the KKK or Islamic extremists were standing in front of voter registration center intimidating voters would they be arrested and prosecuted? Are we now allowing radical groups to do as they please or does the US gov't have some association with the Black Panthers?

I find that the US due to it immigration policy are inviting terrorists to come here and showing them how to get in (via the Mexican border). This is not about Mexicans although the members of the drug cartels that commit violent crimes are terrorrists. THIS IS ABOUT NATIONAL SECURITY. Imagine if the police and FBI while investigating the Time Square bomber's cohorts were not allow to ask for immigration status. Then the US wouldn't have deported 31 illegals that are terrorists. And we wonder why the US is at risk for terrorist activities. ITS SO EASY TO COME HERE ILLEGALLY!!

Where are the missing Afghani's missing from Lackland AFB?? Why is the media not covering and pushing this story out to the public??

And on top of all this the Times Square bomber was an American citizen by marrying a naturalized Arabic! My mother married a USAF soldier born in Brooklyn, NY who at that time fought in two wars (WWII and Korea). My Mom went to classes to learn English and history to become an American citizen. It took her years and the immigration officials did a full background check. She did not get a free pass even though her children were born US citizens. When she did get her citizenship my father was fighting his third war (Vietnam).

Obama and his gang are putting Amercia at risk. Is the Obama administration ANTI-AMERICAN??

NOW IS THE TIME THAT ALL AMERICAN CITIZENS STAND UP AND TAKE BACK THEIR COUNTRY!!

[Reply](#)

29. 16 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 3 users disliked this comment

[California Is Talking](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 06:41 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

The Obama administration sues their own for protecting their home and country. How stupid can that be.

[Reply](#)

30. 11 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 3 users disliked this comment

[American](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 06:56 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

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Hmm...who are they working for?

[Replies \(2\)](#)

31. 6 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 1 users disliked this comment

[Robert](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 07:18 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

We need to take the 113 billion these illegals cost us and use it for bounties !!! We would create a lot of jobs and get rid of illegals at the SAME TIME !

[Reply](#)

32. 12 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 1 users disliked this comment

[Reader](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 07:33 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

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[Replies \(1\)](#)

33. 11 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 1 users disliked this comment

[david](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 07:55 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

Holder and little o are the real racists in this country.

And while we are at it....how come states like calif. can sell pot...while it is a federal crime, yet Az can not protect thier citizens?

[Replies \(1\)](#)

34. 14 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 0 users disliked this comment

[AaronG](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 11:04 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

Illegal Aliens = Parasites

Illegal Aliens = Criminals

Illegal Aliens = Invaders

Legal Aliens = Productive Tax Paying Citizens

Legal Aliens = Law Abiding

Legal Aliens = Welcome

Illegals have no rights, no entitlement to anything, not welcome and will be dealt with....if the Feds won't do it, WE, the PEOPLE will do it...and it will be done peacefully or violently....but it WILL be dealt with. GO ARIZONA!

[Reply](#)

35. 11 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 1 users disliked this comment

[JD](#) Thu Jul 08, 2010 11:31 am PDT [Report Abuse](#)

Illegal immigrants should have the right to apply for citizenship as they always have and become productive tax paying citizens, Arizona and California have become safe havens for illegal criminals and need to be deported, the only problem with that is they just run back over and kill more americans, good hard working illegals and terrorize the streets and their drug cartel murder and kidnap more citizens than in afganistan.

[Replies \(1\)](#)

36. 7 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 0 users disliked this comment

[Patrick](#) *Thu Jul 08, 2010 11:50 am PDT* [Report Abuse](#)

arizona has bot violated the constitution and there for the law suits will fail. Hussein just wants their votes but the american people have spoken and in november when more states make the same law thing will finally start to get better

[Reply](#)

37. 19 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 0 users disliked this comment

[Michael](#) *Thu Jul 08, 2010 11:57 am PDT* [Report Abuse](#)

I HEAR RHODE ISLAND HAS A LAW JUST LIKE THE NEW ARIZONA ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION LAW! IT WAS CHALLENGED YEARS AGO WHEN NOBODY CARED AND IT HELD UP IN THE COURTS! OBAMA IS A JOKE ALONG WITH HOLDER, WHAT A BUNCH OF LOSERS!!!!

[Reply](#)

38. 11 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 0 users disliked this comment

[Hope](#) *Thu Jul 08, 2010 12:04 pm PDT* [Report Abuse](#)

With all the sympathy & support that this administration has for ILLEGALS, maybe Obama can invite them all to the White House for another one of his BEER SUMMITS.

[Reply](#)

39. 6 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 0 users disliked this comment

[sheltons](#) *Thu Jul 08, 2010 12:09 pm PDT* [Report Abuse](#)

actually the arizona law is what Texas does when someone is arrested and placed in jailes now. that is why ICE has personelvisiting the jails on regular basis. Because when a illegal alien has been repremandedthe law enforcement agency runs a check for any outstanding warrants etc. If they are illegal aliens then they get to be treated as a illegal alien and federal laws also have been broken. If our society doesn't obey the law then we are going to be accountable and punished when caught. Same with illegal aliens. No one will stop law abiding persons no matter what the race.That would keep lawerys buisy.

[Reply](#)

40. 8 users liked this comment [Please sign in to rate this comment up.](#) [Please sign in to rate this comment down.](#) 0 users disliked this comment

[CliffyW](#) *Thu Jul 08, 2010 12:41 pm PDT* [Report Abuse](#)

To see the FEDERAL ILLEGAL ALIEN LAWS
web search ILLEGAL ALIEN LAWS
a and READ for yourself how the feds are IGNORING the EXSISTING ILLEGAL
ALIEN LAWS

[Reply](#)

Article for Local Issue Group

St. Louis County has \$7.6 million to use against smoking

BY PHIL SUTIN psutin@post-dispatch.com 314-863-2812 and PAUL HAMPEL phampel@post-dispatch.com 314-727-6234 | Posted: Friday, July 9, 2010 12:10 am

CLAYTON • St. Louis County, flush with a \$7.6 million federal stimulus grant, is launching a major assault on smoking.

The drive promises to be the best-financed anti-smoking effort to date in the St. Louis area. The money, to be spent over two years, is about equal to what is now spent statewide from state and federal sources.

The first target will be schools, colleges and universities in the county, which officials aim to make smoke-free by February 2012.

Some of that work has already been accomplished.

All 24 school districts in St. Louis County ban smoking on their campuses, as do Catholic schools.

And some universities here also ban smoking campuswide, while others are moving in that direction.

Some, however, still allow smoking outside. And the county expects its message to affect students when they are not at school.

"We want to show that tobacco use is not cool," said Craig LeFebvre, a county health department spokesman. "The CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) ranks clean-air policies by different categories. We're shooting for the gold standard — an indoor and outdoor tobacco-free policy."

The county health department was named a recipient of the grant in March. In all, the Department of Health and Human Services handed out 44 grants totaling \$372.8 million.

The county's was the only grant made in Missouri. In Illinois, the only recipients were agencies in the Chicago area, which got \$27.5 million for obesity and anti-smoking programs.

THREE REGIONS TARGETED

Barry Freedman, project manager for the grant, said he expected to put emphasis on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd County Council districts. Those districts were identified in a 2007 survey as having the highest smoking rates. The 2nd District, in North County, had a smoking rate of 36.1 percent. The 3rd District, in West County, had a rate of 25.6 percent; and the 1st District, in north-central county, had a rate of 23.6 percent.

The project sets a goal of persuading the County Council by January 2012 to extend its smoking ban to all workplaces, restaurants and bars.

Its ban takes effect Jan. 2 but exempts existing "drinking establishments" whose income from food is 25 percent or less of gross income, and the gambling floors at casinos.

In addition, the project sets a goal of persuading at least two additional municipalities to adopt smoking bans more restrictive than the county's. Ballwin, Clayton and Kirkwood currently have such measures.

Here are some of the ways the grant has been allocated:

- \$2 million for a media campaign targeting smoking.
- \$1.5 million for outreach projects. That includes smaller projects in individual communities.
- \$1.3 million for salaries and benefits for nine new hires who will work through March 2012. Freedman will be paid about \$62,400 a year.
- \$1 million to the Center for Tobacco Policy Research of Washington University and the St. Louis University public health school to evaluate the project and identify best practices that other communities can use.
- \$500,000 to Tobacco Free St. Louis to help its advocacy efforts and to offset its loss of a state grant.
- \$500,000 to the county for administrative costs.

MIXED OPINIONS

While UMSL is heading toward a total ban on smoking by January 2012, sentiment there is mixed about restrictions.

Matthew Bakers, a psychology and political science major at UMSL, was interviewed during a smoke break on campus this week. Bakers, 34, of Ballwin, doesn't like the idea of going off campus to light up.

"I don't like public state schools (controlling) behavior that is chosen by adults," Bakers said. Kathy Kinney, a coordinator in UMSL's alumni relations office, has been a smoker since she was a teenager. Kinney, 54, of Granite City, said she doesn't mind that the campus is going smoke-free. "Maybe it will help me quit," she said. After a pause, she added: "I'm sure it will."

Troy Peters, 20, of Brentwood, thinks fellow students should have the right to smoke outside. Peters does not smoke.

He also thinks the government has better ways to spend its money, especially at a time when budgets are tight.

"I think this is definitely the wrong allocation of money in the wrong place," said Peters, who is studying Spanish and psychology. "There are all kinds of problems that need to be fixed more than this, and the U.S. is already in so much debt."

Sara Sonne Lenz of the Post-Dispatch contributed to this report.

ON THE WEB

[Smoke Free St. Louis](#)

[Jefferson County Smoking Ban Rallies](#)

MORE FROM THE POST-DISPATCH

[Brentwood Smoking Ban](#)

[Second Hand Smoke](#)

[Lake St. Louis Smoking Ban](#)

[Possible Impact of Kansas City Case on St. Louis](#)

[St. Louis Councilman Explains Opposition to Ban](#)

[Illinois Anti-Smokers Pushing for Tax](#)

Comments

1. [Johnd38](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 8:57 pm

Why are we continuing to waste money trying to educate these smokers? Let them die early if they want to. Use the money for something worthwhile!! This has been going on for decades now

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2. [ms. stl](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 5:25 pm

It's more about stopping people from starting, assisting people who do, truly educating and offering help to stop if they already smoke. Sadly, \$7.6 sounds like a lot, in the grand scheme of things it's a drop in the bucket.

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3. [RonaldJ](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 11:06 am

Government needs to stop spending our money on such campaigns. This type of propaganda should be left up to and funded by private groups. I'm so sick of our government spending our money on what they think is good for us.

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4. [mr.westcounty](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 11:59 am

As long as we are paying for everyone's health insurance now (which I oppose), spending a little money (comparatively) to get people to stop or never start smoking is a good investment. I rather not pay for either to be honest.

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5. [TakinOutTheTrash](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 11:15 am

It has been proven this crap doesn't work. 1 in 5 teenagers are smoking. What a waste of money!

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6. [cubs2009](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 12:19 pm

I also wonder how many much needed additional officers could be added to the St. Louis or North St. Louis force for 7.6 mil. Perhaps 6-12 for about 5-8 years (including new cars, benefits, etc)

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7. [A CENTRIST](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 11:09 am

Stop wasting taxpayer money. Enough is enough. Here is a better idea. First, tax the hell out of ciggies if you want people to really stop. Two, if you smoke, you will NOT BE ELIGIBLE for free socialize healthcare. Period. Then we won't have to pay for your killing yourself. Buy your own private insurance if you want to smoke. That should take care of everything, save the gov \$ and make the gov \$. Vote for me!

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8. [Raisin7755](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 11:06 am

This is the biggest waste of money that I have seen in a while. With all the problems going on. This is what they spend my tax dollars on? Idiots. Vote 'em all out in November.

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9. [RonaldJ](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 11:06 am

Government needs to stop spending our money on such campaigns. This type of propaganda should be left up to and funded by private groups. I'm so sick of our government spending our money on what they think is good for us.

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10. [the Bard](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 10:42 am

I will not just "get over" the misuse of taxpayer money. Attitudes like that have led us to our financial crisis we currently face. Take a pet project that you personally dislike, support the spending tax payer money on it and take the individual freedoms away from citizens is not a good model for a free society. Especially since these are "stimulus funds" that are supposed to help create jobs.

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11. [jimboray](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 10:25 am

More insanity from this incompetent ,clueless,fraud of a president and his communist cronies.

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12. [slw](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 10:20 am

7.6 million, over smoking...really....

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13. [ms. stl](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 9:49 am

When I was a child growing up in STL we had numerous programs in the public schools about the hazzards of smoking. Very few of my friends ever smoked. I got to college, very few of my friends smoked, I got to Chicago, only 1 of my friends

smoked (and was in the closet about it). Then, all of a sudden, I started to see younger people (my cousin-13 years younger than me smoking). It occurred to me, maybe, everyone thought we had the smoking thing covered, let's move on to more critical things.

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14. [Key West35](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 9:35 am

As a former smoker and taxpayer in St louis County I am upset with our government wasting money. No one is going to quit smoking unless they really want to. There is NOTHING that is going to convince someone to stop unless they have the will power and desire to stop.

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15. [307](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 8:48 am

7.6 million won't fix stupid. Stupid is wasting the 7.6 million. More Obama nonsense!

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16. [the Bard](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 8:32 am

they are cutting education and other programs left and right, but somehow 7.6 million is available to just throw away.

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17. [CandygramforMongo](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 8:03 am

I also love how they banned all flavored cigarettes except menthol. Hmmm, I wonder why...

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18. [mr.westcounty](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 7:39 am

This state has one of the highest percentages of smokers in the country and is almost dead last for taxation of cigarettes. We need to fix that. From an earlier stltoday article.

“Because money raised by the higher cigarette tax will go to fund health care for poor children, many smokers say they’re being victimized, forced to subsidize services to others. But the truth is that it’s the rest of us who subsidize them. We’ve been doing it for years.

Even with higher federal taxes, smokers don’t come close to covering the costs they

impose on society. Cigarettes would have to sell for \$10.28 a pack to recoup all that money.”

If you want to smoke, that is your prerogative. But I'm tired of paying for your habit. And now with universal healthcare coming our way, I will be paying for it more than ever.

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19. [harleyrider1978](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 7:39 am

Finally, the Obama administration has supported increased funding for tobacco control. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provides support to all states and 21 communities for tobacco-control programs, and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act includes public health funds and funds targeted for the prevention of disease that can be used for tobacco control (though these funds probably won't compensate for the loss of state funding). Furthermore, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius recently announced a comprehensive tobacco-control initiative. <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/full/NEJMp1003883>

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20. [harleyrider1978](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 7:38 am

Tobacco control is bankrupt nationwide as the states cut their funding. The states figured out 4 years ago tobacco control was costing them state tax dollars and harming the revenues of many businesses. The only thing left to keep tobacco control on life support was the federal government providing funding. Your right poster, it's borrowed money from the future in stimulus money.....no more fed dollars will be gotten when november elections switch congress back to republican control....smokefree bankrupt.

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21. [JJEugronus](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 7:14 am

How about just making tobacco ILLEGAL?

You did it with K2!! And there's a HECK of a lot more evidence that tobacco is harmful.

Oh, that's right! We LIKE drugs that enjoy major corporate sponsorship! (Or is that more like we like the MONEY?)

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22. [Innsbrook](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 7:09 am

Give me half....3.8 million....and I guarantee I will make a personal visit to every friggin student in the state and get in their face about the evils of smoking. This is nothing more than another example of the taxes you and I pay being flushed down the drain on projects that do not create jobs, and projects which have no basis for quantifying the results. Will there be anything left worth saving of this country come November 2011 when we can send this idiot back to street corner organizing?

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23. [Nick Kasoff](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 6:58 am

So they're borrowing \$7.6 million from my children, for what seems to be a political project (getting the county council to extend the ban) attacking a lawful consumer product.

24. [Redondo](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 7:53 pm

We have the lowest taxes in decades and the highest national debt ever. The GOBPs complain about the poor who pay no income tax yet they want to pay no income tax. Our country was founded on taxation with representation, which is what we still have. So quit your belly aching!

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25. [Bill Hannegan](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 5:52 pm

Mr. Sutin called me today and gave me the smoking rates for the other County districts:

District 4 11.6 percent

District 5 16.6 percent

District 6 16.0 percent

District 7 6.9 percent

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26. [lrgmuthbas](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 5:15 pm

You can keep on taxing the smoker and it won't help .They will keep buying the cheepest ciggerettes out there . Enough with the taxes people are staying home more instead of going out . So all this does is layoff more people look at the economy now.But since you feel so good about higher taxes lets go after a tax increase on alchol,gasoline,food so all the politations can get a nice pay increase.Also let's stop giving billions away to other countrys hand take care of the people here.

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27. [bobjmcavoy13](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 4:53 pm

ms. stl...Just a quick comment. Everyone knows smoking is a health hazard. Just tell me how \$7.6 million "awareness" campaign is going to add significantly to the knowledge of the people who choose to smoke. Just BAN SMOKING FROM EVERY SCHOOL CAMPUS, like the Catholic schools have done. They survived with very little (in fact no) turmoil. And it didn't cost a dime.

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28. [ms. stl](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 3:54 pm

Cont: How loud would the screams be if our government knew of a health hazard that they kept under wraps and did not make the public aware of? Can you imagine that? Then, it would be the place of the government to make us aware, then they would be doing a horrible injustice to use the tax payers. Again, which part are you missing? Cigarette smoking is a health hazard. This program is intended to save lives and yes money!

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29. [ms. stl](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 3:51 pm

For the record, I don't text and drive. I do however work, very hard, and have had and paid for health insurance for the last 25 years. I am a hard core advocate for the end of tobacco use in our country. Most specifically, cigarette smoking, for numerous reasons. I find it commical that everyone is ranting about the government interfering with human rights, the right to smoke here.

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30. [Redondo](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 3:41 pm

cubs2009:

Not going to a doctor for years is not a good thing. In fact it is that sort mentality that racks up medical costs. Early detection and prevention is the cost saving answer. When/if you do have problems they will probably be past a early detection stage and you will rack up some monumental cost far exceeding whatever you paid in.

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31. [Huck](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 1:25 pm

Another example of a government and administration in Washington and Jefferson City that has your best interests at heart----NOT! Take the money and utilize it to help

where it is needed, or put it towards reducing taxes that are gonna increase and kill us in December (Thanks Barack)---let the FBI and the CIA worry about smokers in St. Louis.

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32. [ms. stl](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 1:27 pm

Why is it so hard for people to understand? There are billions of dollars being spent by our government on people who have diseases that are caused by smoking. PERIOD!!!! It is called prevention. Pay now or pay later. Stop the problem, or at least decrease it and save not only the money in the long run, but, again, the pain for the families affected!

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33. [Bill Hannegan](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 1:16 pm

What are the numbers for the other districts?

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34. [Bill Hannegan](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 1:11 pm

According to the 2007 survey by the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, St. Louis County has a smoking rate of 18.6 percent, lower than the national average. How could the 3rd district have a smoking rate higher than that of St. Louis City (30%) or any Missouri county except Taney (40.1) and Ripley (37.1) counties?

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35. [Tony P.](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 10:44 am

Well Ms Stl - I'm not against stop smoking programs but we have much bigger problems. This is only going to employ nine people for two years. Furthermore it will be the government lobbying the government. A portion will be spent on smoking cessation drugs which simply don't work. This will have little to no effect. It is a complete waste of money. With that amount of money you could put hundreds of people back to work.

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36. [Tony P.](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 2:18 pm

I always loved the argument that smokers cost more. You would be right if non-smokers never got sick and never died. There have been several studies the cost of

smoking on society and they show smokers actually pay more than non-smokers. They pay more taxes and receive less (in part because life span is three years less). Smoking is not a healthy choice, but neither is drinking, eating fast food, using too much salt, eating cake.....in fact enjoying anything is bad for you!

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37. [cubs2009](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 2:45 pm

Tony P - exactly right! Ms. stl was probably texting in while driving too. Let's tax bungee jumpers, skydivers, twinkie eaters, aerosol can users, blah, blah Most of your money is going toward supporting the non-working, non-health care covered people in Missouri. I've worked since my teens and paid for health care for decades. I smoke and have not been to a doctor for years (probably to a fault). How many times have you used your health care plan, if you have one?

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38. [Tony P.](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 8:22 am

This is great - we are spending 7.6 Million for the government to lobby itself - simply brilliant.

[Report Abuse Admin](#)

39. [drumming umpire](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 4:09 pm

Too bad Cookie Thornton can't go to a counth council meeting.

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40. [Redondo](#) said on: July 9, 2010, 2:32 pm

Tony:

What studies?

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Debriefing Statement

Thank you for your participation in this project.

The primary goal of this research project was to determine whether or not Internet users think differently about American politics than those individuals that rely on more traditional media (television, radio, print). As part of that analysis, this experiment attempted to isolate one way that the Internet is unique and by exploring the use of comment sections.

This study modified some of the content of the online articles in order to more accurately study the role of the Internet as well as comment sections. For example, some participants were given an article with a comment section and others were given an article without a comment section. Additional changes to the articles were made including adding or removing external links, adding or removing certain comments, and modifying the layout of the articles. However, the articles that you read were real as were the comments. These modifications were necessary to avoid problems in our experimental design which could have potentially undermined our results.

Hopefully the findings of this study will serve to help us more fully understand the growing role of the Internet in American politics. If you are interested in the results of this study or have questions about any aspect of the study please contact Michael Arttime at mra8r3@umsl.edu.

We ask that you do not disclose the information presented on this form to anyone else while we are still actively experimenting. Disclosure of this information could jeopardize the future of this research. We appreciate your cooperation in this effort.

Thank you again for your participation and your assistance as we continue to try to better understanding politics in our modern society.