RUNNING HEAD: Ideological News Online

Political Participation and Ideological News Online: Mobilization and Demobilization in

the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election Cycle

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Abstract

Observations of the contemporary news media landscape tend to settle at the nexus of increased ideological polarization and the blurring boundaries between mass and interpersonal communication. This study explores this nexus though a focus on the participatory outcomes associated with ideologically oriented online news use. We hypothesize that frequent exposure pro-attitudinal sites mobilizes citizens by combining homophilous interpersonal interaction and news use, but that exposure to counter-attitudinal sites can undermine this relationship by disrupting homophily and fostering intrapersonal ambivalence. Analyses of two independently collected and nationally representative surveys demonstrate that frequent use of ideological online news in general, and of ideologically consistent outlets in particular, are positively related to political participation. In some cases, exposure to ideologically discrepant online news undermines these beneficial effects. These findings support a long line of research in the area of "face-to-face" communication, but suggest that some new dynamics, unique to the online environment, may also be at work.

Key Words: elections, online news, blogs, political participation, crosscutting exposure, heterogeneity

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the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election Cycle

Over the course of the last two U.S. presidential elections, ideologically oriented online news outlets, especially political blogs, have attracted a great deal of popular and scholarly attention. Citizens' use of these polarized, personalized, and interactive forms of news media is often contrasted with their use of more traditional news forms grounded in unidirectional information flows and journalistic norms of objectivity. This article considers the implications of this changing media landscape for political participation in the U.S. Most empirical evidence suggests that use of ideological online outlets is politically mobilizing (e.g., Gil de Zuniga, Puig-I-Abril, & Rojas, 2009; Lawrence, Sides, & Farrell, 2010). We argue, however, that this outcome is contingent on a specific style of consumption—namely, highly disproportionate use of proattitudinal information relative to counter-attitudinal information—that is common among the U.S. population, but to which there are numerous exceptions (Westerwick & Kleinman, 2011; Carnahan, Lynch, & Garrett, 2011). Furthermore, we suggest that when individuals do consider counter-attitudinal outlets, the mobilizing effects of ideological news use are reduced.

One of the reasons that the potentially demobilizing consequences of ideological online news have not been explored more may be the anachronistic notion that mass communication and interpersonal communication are fundamentally separate processes (e.g., Sennett [1977] 1992). As Mutz and Martin (2001) note, "An obvious difference [between mass and interpersonal communication] is the extent to which they allow interactivity" (p. 98). Consequently, the exertion of cross-pressures has traditionally been the domain of people, not news organizations. Yet, one of the fundamental features of online news sites, and Internet technologies more generally, is that they blur the boundaries between mass communication and human interaction (e.g., Dahlgren, 2005), allowing for the possibility of traditionally

interpersonal processes manifesting in communicatively hybrid environments. Thus, we anticipate the patterns observed during interpersonal communication may increasingly be mirrored in the context of online media exposure.

This paper addresses this possibility through an examination of the role that ideologically oriented online news outlets, such as political blogs, played in fostering participation during the 2008 U.S. Presidential election season. We argue that although ideological online news use is positively related to political participation in the aggregate, heavy use of crosscutting sites can undermine this relationship by creating intrapersonal ambivalence, disrupting the creation of homophily and bonding social capital, and though perhaps to a lesser extent than face-to-face contexts, exerting interpersonal cross-pressures. We lay out the theoretical foundation of this argument before turning to our empirical tests, which utilize two independently collected and nationally representative datasets.

Ideological Online News Outlets

Americans are increasingly reliant on online news: the percentage of U.S. citizens who got news about the presidential election online rose from 18 percent in 2000 to 44 percent in 2008 (Smith & Rainie, 2008). Use of ideologically oriented online news outlets, such as blogs, is an important part of this trend (Davis, 2009), used by an estimated 14 percent of Americans during the 2008 election (Garrett & Danziger, 2011). These Internet-dependent sources present politically relevant news and commentary, embracing open partisanship and ideological opinion expression as legitimate elements of the journalistic endeavor. In many, if not most cases, they also allow for some form of interpersonal discussion between authors and consumers or consumers and other consumers. This definition most precisely reflects the content of political blogs, but may also extend to mainstream ideological outlets, such as *FoxNews.com*, which have increasingly taken on blog-like characteristics, including an expansive allowance for hyper-

partisan and personalized news commentary, viewer comments on news stories, and the easy

reposting of articles on social networking sites (by simply clicking on an icon). With our

terminology we mean to capture a wide range of sites that fit our definition—especially, but not

exclusively political blogs.

As recently as the 2004 Presidential election, many of the sites featured prominently in

the 2008 election were not yet in existence, including *The Huffington Post* and

FiveThirtyEight.com. The 2008 U.S. Presidential election was thus in many ways a testing

ground for the impact of ideological news sites as technologies that had more fully emerged as

institutions of the contemporary public sphere. Discussions of the impact of ideological news

outlets on electoral processes have tended to take on the binary of optimism and pessimism that

characterizes so much of Internet related prognoses. Whether one sees the contemporary news

landscape as a negative or positive development, hinges in part on whether one advocates for a

participatory or deliberative model of democracy.

Ideological Online News Exposure Promotes Political Participation

Individuals' use of partisan outlets tends to be governed by selective exposure processes,

which favor proattitudinal over counter-attitudinal information (see Stroud, 2008) and discussion

(Mutz, 2006). This is problematic from a deliberative perspective, which considers exposure to

diverse points of view essential toward fostering a "high scale of mental activity," "the mutual

uplifting of minds" (Mill, 1859) and an "enlarged mentality," or more sophisticated opinions

(Arendt, 1968). "True" public opinion is thought to reside not in the finite minds of individuals

but among heterogeneous networks of citizens engaging in an observable deliberative process—

the epistemic dimension of democracy (Habermas, 1989; 2006). Disproportionate exposure to

likeminded individuals and information that people are likely to encounter on ideologically

consistent news sites, does little to support deliberation or promote a public sphere (Schudson,

1997) and can contribute to political polarization (Stroud, 2010) and fragmentation (Sunstein, 2002).

More positively, though, disproportionate exposure to pro-attitudinal information can arouse enthusiasm for a cause or candidate, leading to increased political participation. The uniquely interpersonal or "interactive" characteristics of online news, especially blogs, have been praised for their ability to stimulate political engagement, particularly among young people who have grown tired of "institutionalism" and "mainstream news" (e.g., Wall, 2005).   Some have even suggested that blogging has the potential to reverse declining trends in political participation:

It gives us the ability to inject authenticity, (and its twin daughters of emotionality and bias) into what we cover. But at the same time, it brings politics back to a human level. This—more so, I think, than community organization, is the key to an invigoration of alienated people back into the political system. (Stoller, 2004 as cited in Lawson-Borders & Kirk, 2005, p. 553)

Whether online news use is reversing declines in political participation is far from clear, but theory and research does suggest that it is generally mobilizing. Blog use, for example, has been associated with increased political discussion, a sense of community and political action (Kerbel & Bloom, 2005; Meraz, 2007). More broadly, Gil de Zuniga and colleagues (2009) find a positive relationship between political blog use and numerous forms of political participation.

The positive relationship between online news use and political participation may, in part, be attributed to a more general relationship between news use, political discussion, and pro-civic behaviors and attitudes (e.g., Moy & Scheufele, 2000; Norris, 2000; Rojas et al., 2005; Shah et al., 2001). By connecting news and political discussion in time and space, online ideological news outlets create a particularly close relationship between discussion and news use not seen in

the traditional news media environment (Brundidge, 2010). Indeed, research on blogs tends to

emphasize their interpersonal features, likening them to community forums (Nardi et al., 2004)

and interactive spaces within political websites (Meraz, 2007). While information is typically

updated by the "blogger," suggesting a form of broadcasting and "self-expression" (Herring et

al., 2004; Trammell & Keshelashvili, 2005), it is also dramatically shaped by the people who

read and comment on it (Bausch et al., 2002).

 Further enhancing the participatory effects of the discussion and news combination may

be the homophily enhancing content of both the news and audience commentary. Because of

their obvious ideological orientation, online news sites allow for easy identification of

likeminded information and associates and thus for the creation of political homophily which

tends to stimulate increased political participation (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954). Homophily,

which is characterized by interaction with and exposure to likeminded others, is a generally

enjoyable experience (Huckfeldt, Johnson, & Sprague, 2002; Huckfeldt & Sprague, 1995) with a

number of participation-enhancing benefits. Social networks composed of like-minded others

can help people solidify their political perspectives and alert them to issues of common interest

(Hampton, 2003), reinforce their political self-concepts (Knobloch-Westerwick & Ming, 2011),

and create bonding social capital (Putnam, 2000), thus arousing enthusiasm and support for a

particular cause or candidate and stimulating political participation (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954).

Thus, just as encounters with likeminded discussion partners has a large and positive

contribution to political participation (Eveland & Hively, 2009), we anticipate that likeminded

ideologically oriented news sites should have a similar influence.

 In sum, by providing an environment that combines homophilous news use and political

discussion, ideological online news outlets should stimulate political participation. We further

suspect that the mobilizing influence should be particularly strong when it comes to online

political participation (when compared with offline), due to easier traversability between the two activities (Brundidge, 2010). When compared with the relatively effortful act of voting, for example, it is much easier to traverse from ideological online news use to signing an online petition. Thus, we hypothesize that:

> *H1.   Use of ideological online news outlets (either conservative or liberal) is positively*
>
> *related to (a) online and (b) offline political participation.*
>
> *H2.   The relationship between use of ideological online news outlets and political*
>
> *participation is stronger for online participation than offline participation.*

Crosscutting Ideological Online News Exposure Hinders Participation

Although individuals exhibit a preference for attitude reinforcement and homophilous interaction, ideological online news outlets do not promote *exclusive* exposure to likeminded perspectives and the avoidance of non-likeminded perspectives (Garrett et al., 2011). For example, studies examining the links included in blogrolls—the prominently featured lists of blogs recommended by a blogger—do disproportionately link to politically similar blogs (e.g., Adamic & Glance, 2005; Ackland, 2005), but a substantial proportion of links embedded in blog posts point to ideological divergent websites (Hargittai, Gallo, & Kane, 2008). Furthermore, Hargittai and her colleagues found that while the majority of these links are for straw-man arguments, there are at least some links that engage the "other side's" arguments in a substantive way. There is also evidence that online news use and political discussion may contribute more to heterogeneity than some have imagined based on people's tolerance for, if not attraction to, political difference (Garrett, 2009), and through inadvertent encounters with non-likeminded individuals and information (Brundidge, 2010). While it seems reasonable to conclude that people's exposure to political difference falls short of the goals of deliberative democracy, this does not mean that audiences of ideological online news outlets are entirely insulated in "echo

chambers" and "information cocoons" a la Sunstein (2001).

Despite the risks of news audience fragmentation and political polarization posed by using like-minded ideological news outlets, using ideologically discrepant sources poses a different normative threat. There is a substantial body of research in the area of interpersonal political communication suggesting that frequent exposure to political disagreement or "crosscutting" political perspectives, while beneficial to deliberative democracy, can actually be detrimental to a *participatory* model of democracy (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Mutz, 2002, 2006). *The People's Choice* study, for example, found that exposure to politically non-likeminded others decreased the likelihood that one would vote, leading Lazarsfeld and his colleagues to conclude: "Whatever the source of the conflicting pressures, whether from social status or class identification, from voting traditions or the attitudes of associates, the consistent result was to delay the voter's final decision" (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet 1944, p. 60).

Diana Mutz (2002a; 2002b; 2006), who has more recently taken up the reigns of crosscutting political exposure research, found that exposure to crosscutting political perspectives, defined as the discussion of politics with non-likeminded others is inversely related to political participation, including voting in Presidential and Congressional Elections, and positively related to delaying one's voting decision. She concludes: "the kind of environment widely assumed to encourage an open and tolerant society is not necessarily the same kind of environment that produces an enthusiastically participative one" (Mutz, 2002b, p. 851).

Mutz specifies two mechanisms whereby heterogeneous political discussion networks leads to political demobilization. The first is that regular exposure to political disagreement through interpersonal networks fosters intrapersonal ambivalence. Ambivalence may reduce political participation due in part to its connection to more cognitively complex assessments of political issues (e.g., Sniderman 1981). Cognitively complex views reflect awareness that

political issues are not black and white and the "other side" may possess some valid positions (Sniderman 1981). Complex assessments of issues, while promoting higher levels of tolerance, reduce ideological fervor and thus promote less political participation. This possibility is supported by research suggesting that political ambivalence leads to delayed formation of voting intentions, and instability in candidate evaluations (Lavine, 2001).

However, Mutz finds the inverse relationship between ambivalence and political participation to be weak and notes that it disappears entirely when controlling for the second psychological mechanism she specifies, interpersonal cross-pressures. In this case, the individual feels pulled in different directions, creating anxiety as it becomes impossible to agree with and therefore please all parts of one's network. As described by Green and colleagues (2000), "The decision maker is caught in the middle, pushed one way by part of the group, and pulled the other way by an opposing faction." (p. 4). In order to avoid a potential conflict, people embedded in crosscutting networks become politically neutral by devaluing politics altogether, which makes political participation much less likely.

While there has been extensive research and theory that supports the idea that interpersonal political disagreement often diminishes levels of participation, there has been little research on the extent to which mediated exposure to political difference (e.g., via blogs) can have similar consequences. While Mutz and Martin (2001) argue that mass mediated news sources are less likely to exert the normative social pressures associated with interpersonal discussion due to their "impersonal" nature, online news outlets combine often highly personalized news and interpersonal political discussion and commentary, suggesting interpersonal dynamics may be involved.

The two mechanisms proposed by Mutz (2006) in her description of the face-to-face environment, however, may operate somewhat differently in the online world. Ambivalence

remains a plausible mechanism: exposure to sharply conflicting views encourages cognitive complexity, which can produce ambivalence. Strong social cross-pressures, however, appear less likely. Although there is evidence that people visit non-likeminded online news sites, it seems unlikely that they do so with a mind toward fostering close interpersonal ties. People may feel pressure to please both their conservative parents and their liberal friends, but they seem less likely to feel pressure to please the relatively anonymous people they encounter in non-likeminded news outlets. While people are likely to experience homophily in pro-attitudinal news sites due the attraction they might feel for likeminded others, this does not mean that they experience an equivalent heterophily when in non-likeminded sites. Nevertheless, exposure to crosscutting online news sites may still dampen political participation by fostering ambivalence about political issues, and distracting people from the more intense homophily people might otherwise experience by visiting exclusively pro-attitudinal sites. This leads us to the following hypotheses:

> *H3.*   *Use of ideologically consistent online news outlets promotes (a) online participation and (b) offline political participation more than use of ideologically discrepant outlets.*

Method

The data for this study comes from two sources: a national random-digit-dial (RDD) telephone survey of individuals living in the continental United States, and a web-administered survey using a population-matched sample drawn from two large online panels. Using these two datasets provides a unique opportunity to replicate relevant analyses with slightly different populations, timeframes and operationalizations. A description of both datasets follows.

The telephone survey ($N = 600$) was conducted between November 6 and 20, 2008, the weeks immediately following the Presidential election, by Abt SRBI, Inc. The survey achieved a

response rate of 26.2%, calculated using AAPOR method two (RR2), and treating non-English speakers as ineligible (American Association for Public Opinion Research, 2008). A comparison of respondent demographics to census data (2006 American Community Survey) indicates that the sample is reasonably representative of the U.S. population, although there are a few differences. Whites are over represented (73.9% nationally versus 82.8% in this sample) as are older Americans (nationally 23.0% of the population are between the ages of 50 and 64 versus 34.7% in this sample), and respondents are better educated than the American population at large (nationally 74.1% hold a high school diploma versus 93.1% in this sample). In summary, the sample provides adequate representation of the national population. Although there are a few attributes on which the sample falls short, there is little reason to expect these attributes to influence the relationships between the variables examined here.

The second dataset was collected as part of the Cooperative Campaign Analysis Project (CCAP), which was administered by YouGov/Polimetrix. YouGov/Polimetrix constructed a sampling frame for CCAP from the 2007 American Community Survey (ACS) using data on age, race, gender, education, marital status, number of children under 18, family income, employment status, citizenship, state, and metropolitan area.[1] The target sample was then selected by stratifying on age, race, gender, education, and state (with battleground states double sampled) using simple random sampling within strata, excluding all non-registered persons.

Once the target was defined, respondents were recruited from the PollingPoint and MyPoints panels. This yielded a pool of completed interviews from which a final "matched

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[1] The frame was constructed using stratified sampling from the full 2007 ACS sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements (using the person weights on the public use file). Data on reported 2004 voter registration and turnout from the November 2004 Current Population Survey was matched to this frame using a weighted Euclidean distance metric. Data on religion, church attendance, born again or evangelical status, news interest, party identification and ideology was matched from the 2008 Pew Religious Life Survey.

sample" was drawn. To construct this sample, respondents in the pool were matched to individuals in the target frame using weighted Euclidean distances metric.[2] There were, on average, between two and three possible matches from the pool for each of the respondents in the target sample, but only the best one was used in the matched sample. For example, if a 40-year-old Republican woman with a college degree is drawn for the target sample, YouGov/Polimetrix used nearest-neighbor matching to select the one respondent in the pool who most resembled this woman.

The CCAP data collection effort included six waves, beginning in December 2007, but only fifth wave data, which were collected in October 2008 and included detailed questions about media use and online behavior, are used in this study. This subsample had a within-panel response rate of 78%, yielding a total of 1,101 respondents.

Predictors

Ideological online news outlets. Both surveys use a pair of items to assess how frequently respondents used ideologically oriented blogs and other ideologically oriented online sources of news about the Presidential candidates or the campaign, one for conservative sites and the other for liberal sites. The telephone survey framed the question in terms of websites of "a politically conservative (liberal) news organization or blog". Responses were on a five-point scale ranging from "never" to "every day or almost every day" (Conservative site use, $M = 1.24$, $SD = .78$; Liberal site use, $M = 1.15$, $SD = .63$). The CCAP survey asked respondents about the exposure to liberal or conservative *blogs* specifically, using a four-point scale anchored by

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[2] The variables in the distance function include metropolitan statistical area, age, race (white, black, Hispanic, other), years of education, interest in news, gender, five-point party identification, three-point ideology, and "don't know" response on ideology. For unordered variables, matrices of distances were used.

"never" and "regularly" (Conservative site use, M= 1.6, SD = .90; Liberal site use, M = 1.5, SD = .84).

Ideology. A single item 5-point scale ranging from very liberal to very conservative (RDD survey, M = 3.6, SD = 1.58; CCAP survey, M = 3.3, SD = 1.13).

Non-partisan online news sites (control). The telephone survey used a single reverse-coded five-point-scale item assessing the frequency with which respondents used websites associated with "a major national news organization". After recoding, one means "never" and five means "every day or almost every day" (M = 2.45, SD = 1.67). The CCAP survey averaged four items asking about use of national newspaper websites, local newspaper websites, online news magazines, and Internet news aggregators, each of which was measured using a four-point scale ranging from "never" to "regularly" (M = 2.3, SD = .83, *Cronbach's alpha* = .72).

Attention to campaign (control). The telephone survey used a single reverse-coded four-point scale to assess campaign attention. Respondents were asked to indicated how closely they followed news about the 2008 election, with responses anchored by "not at all closely" (1) and "very closely" (4) (M = 3.4, SD = .82). The CCAP survey used a single four-point scale (not reverse coded) to assess campaign attention. Respondents were asked how closely they paid attention to news stories about the candidates for the 2008 presidential election, with responses anchored by "not at all closely" to "very closely" (M = 1.6, SD = .84).

Criterion variables

Political Participation. There were two measures of political activity in the telephone survey. Online political activity was a summative measure based on one reverse-coded five-point-scale item (email a candidate/elected official; anchored by "never" and "every day or almost every day") and four reverse-coded four-point-scale items (signed an online petition, donated money online, volunteered to help a campaign online, and volunteered online for a

political demonstration; anchored by never" and more than "a couple times"). A zero score on

the index corresponds to no activity, and higher values reflect more activity (*M* = .78, *SD* = 1.73,

Cronbach alpha = .668). Note that although the alpha is low, we believe that it is appropriate to

use this as an *index* of activity, a composite measure that captures several related aspects of a

common domain of behavior. Offline political activity in the telephone survey was a count

based on seven dichotomous items measuring political activities in the prior 12 months: signed a

petition, given money to a political cause of candidate, volunteered, contacted a politician or

local government official, attended a political meeting, participated in a protest or strike, and

avoided purchasing a product for political or ethical reason (*M* = 1.61, *SD* = 1.61). The CCAP

survey's measure captured the frequency of offline political activity by averaging four seven-

point-scale items with responses ranging from "not at all" to "frequently": volunteer work,

contributed money to campaign, worked for a candidate, and attended political meeting (*M* = 1.8,

SD = 1.1, *Cronbach's alpha* = .78)

Results

Our data are consistent with the claim that use of ideological online news outlets,

especially liberal sites, is associated with higher levels of political participation. Results also

suggest that the effect on online participation is larger than on offline participation. We

demonstrate these relationships using multivariate regression, controlling for factors such as

campaign attention and education, which are known to vary with both key predictors and

outcomes. First consider the results based on the telephone survey data. The first model shown

in Table 1 reports the standardized coefficients of an OLS regression on the frequency of online

political activity. This model explains almost a third (30%) of the variance in participation, and

online news use in its various forms is among the strongest of predictors. Specifically, we see

that liberal and conservative media use are each significantly associated with political activity,

though the effect of liberal site use is significantly larger than that of conservative site use, $F(1,$ 493$)=10.94, p < .01.$ [3] Thus, hypothesis H1 is supported.

The effects of blog exposure on offline participation are mixed. The second model in the table is based on a Poisson regression predicting the count of offline political activities respondents participated in during the election cycle. The explanatory power is substantially lower than in the prior model, with a pseudo-R^2 of only 11%, suggesting that the factors included in the model contribute only modestly to our understanding of offline participation. Specifically, we see that liberal online news use is a significant predictor of the number of activities an individual engages in offline, but the coefficient on conservative site use is non-significant (though in the direction expected).[4] A test using the matched-sample data collected as part of CCAP yields comparable results: the third model shown in the table lists the OLS regression coefficients generated using these data. The predictive power of this model is again quite low, explaining only about 12% of the variance. As with the other model of offline activity, we find differences between liberal and conservative site use. We see that liberal source use has a positive and highly significant influence on the frequency of offline participation, but that the positive coefficient on conservative source use is only marginally significant. Thus, H1b receives mixed support and H2 is supported. Summarizing, we conclude that use of ideological online news is associated with higher participation levels, but these effects are most pronounced among online forms of participation and, at least in 2008, among users of liberal blogs and news sites. We consider possible causes for these results in the discussion.

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[3] We also note that although liberal and conservative media use are positively correlated, the correlation is not so high as to produce problems with collinearity ($r = .44, p < .001$).
[4] Note that the coefficients reported for this model are unstandardized.

Insert Table 1 About Here

We also find evidence that among liberal sites, but not conservative sites, ideologically consistent outlets are more effective at promoting online participation than ideologically discrepant outlets. However, support for a comparable effect regarding offline participation is again mixed. The evidence for this is presented in Table 2, which expands on the three regression models reported in Table 1 by adding interactions between respondents' ideology and the orientation of the ideological media they used.[5] First note that the interaction between conservatism and conservative site use is non-significant (and very close to zero) in all three models, suggesting that conservatives and liberals responded comparably to the content they encountered on these sites, contrary to our predictions.

Turning to liberal site use, we see strong evidence that the consequences for online participation vary by users' ideology: liberals are more strongly mobilized than conservatives by their use of these sites, as indicated by the negative and highly significant coefficient on the interaction term. Figure 1 presents the relationship visually, showing that the net effect of liberal site use on participation is positive for everyone except strong conservatives. Thus, H3a receives mixed support, holding for use of liberal, but not conservative, ideological outlets. The consequences for offline participation are even more ambiguous. The model predicting a count of offline activities by liberal site use yields a significant interaction, but the model predicting frequency of offline participation does not (though the coefficient is in the predicted direction). Thus, we conclude that hypothesis H3b is unsupported.

Insert Table 2 and Figure 1 About Here
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[5] These variables were centered prior to estimating the model.

Discussion

This study seeks to distinguish between the consequences of ideological online news use in general, and use of counter-attitudinal online outlets in particular on political participation. The results are slightly more complicated than anticipated, but there are several lessons. First, perhaps unsurprisingly, it is clear that consumption of ideological news online has a stronger influence on online political participation, such as signing an online petition or making an online donation, than on offline participation, including doing volunteer work or attending a political meeting. Second, there is evidence that ideological online news outlet use generally promotes political participation, but that exposure to crosscutting outlets significantly weakens this relationship.

An unexpected finding concerns the differences across consequences of liberal and conservative site use. Conservatives saw a smaller uptick in participation associated with their use of liberal sites than liberals. In contrast, conservatives and liberals benefited comparably from their use of conservative sites. One possible reason for this difference may lie in timing of our surveys. The 2008 election was unique in several ways. The Democratic ticket lead in the polls for most of the election cycle, and the candidate was unique: he had unusually strong support among young Americans and independents and he would come to be the first African-American president in U.S. history. In such an environment, conservatives may have been more easily dispirited by counter-attitudinal news outlet use and less reassured by pro-attitudinal outlet use as it became clear that Barack Obama would likely win the Presidency. It may also be that liberal and conservatives had different motivations for viewing counter-attitudinal outlets. Republicans were more likely than Democrats to consume counter-attitudinal content during the election cycle (Knoblock & Kleinman, 2011) and this tendency increased among Republicans as

Obama's perceived electoral chances rose (Carnahan, Lynch & Garrett, 2011). Thus, the conservatives who were most likely to look at liberal outlets were those who were least optimistic about their candidate's prospects, which likely also contributed to their lower levels of participation.

Another possibility is that exposure to political difference is somehow more demobilizing for conservatives than liberals. Research has shown that liberals tend to have greater cognitive flexibility, and integrative complexity than conservatives (e.g., Sidanius, 1985; Tetlock, 1983), which could possibly make them more comfortable with exposure to belief discrepant information. Content matter on online news sites may also be a contributing factor. Conservative media seem to be particularly polarizing (Jamieson & Cappella, 2010). Indeed, Sobieraj and Berry (2011) recently found that conservative media use significantly more "outrage" speech than liberal media. After being primed by conservative media to view liberals as "outrageous" extremists, conservatives may experience particularly intense cognitive dissonance when confronted with opposition to their point of view. Liberals, on the other hand, when confronted with polarizing content on conservative sites may be able to be more dismissive and thus remain resolute in their political positions. Whatever the causal mechanism, our findings suggest that individual differences and contextual factors may partially determine whether or not counter-attitudinal online news outlet use dampens political participation.

Importantly, our results are inconsistent with the research of Lawrence and colleagues, who found that readers of ideologically crosscutting blogs do not participate less than those who read only likeminded blogs (Lawrence et al., 2010). One possible reason for this apparent contradiction is that Lawrence et al. measured political blog use by having respondents list the names of the sites they visit without regard for frequency of use. It may be that crosscutting effects only emerge when accounting for frequency of use, as we did in the current study.

Another possibility is that the respondents in their study only considered themselves "users" of likeminded blogs and did not mention, or could not recall, the names of crosscutting blogs with which they had somewhat less common, potentially "inadvertent" interactions (Brundidge, 2010). Unlike Lawrence and colleagues, the current study also examined two different types of crosscutting online news outlet use and their impact on people of different ideological dispositions. Our findings suggest varying relationships to political participation depending on how heterogeneous exposure is conceptualized and the individual differences of the individuals examined, factors that were not considered by Lawrence et al. (2010). Nevertheless, inconsistencies between the two studies underscore the need for further research that might clarify the relationship between crosscutting online news use and political participation.

It should also be noted that our findings are complementary but somewhat different from the findings of Mutz (2002a; 2002b; 2006) and Eveland and Hively (2009), both of which examine "face-to-face" interpersonal political discussion. Unlike the face-to-face interpersonal context, we do not find that crosscutting political exposure is negatively related to political participation; instead, it *decreases* political participation relative to those who use exclusively likeminded sites. Our findings support our theoretical contention that the powerfully demobilizing effects of interpersonal cross-pressures may not be the most central mechanisms at work in the online environment. It seems more likely that the more subtle relationships seen in the current study stem from the dispiriting, though not entirely demobilizing, influence of intrapersonal ambivalence and the disruption of homophily. These results support the notion of a blurring between mass communications and interpersonal communication such that online patterns increasingly resemble, though may not entirely replicate face-to-face interpersonal dynamics.

Despite the importance of these results, this study does have some limitations. First, as with all cross-sectional survey data, causality is difficult to establish. It may not be the case that exposure to crosscutting online news outlets decreases political participation but rather that people who participate less in politics or who are already feeling unsure about their opinions seek out a diversity of online news outlets as an attempt to resolve their political confusion. We did control for a number of variables, such as the level of attention to the campaign, education, and political ideology, which makes this possibility less likely. Nevertheless, panel or experimental data would provide more definitive evidence of causality. We were also unable to examine mediating psychological mechanisms in our study. It is therefore not entirely clear *why* crosscutting online news outlets dampen political participation, only that they do. Though theory and previous research support our contention that people may their political participation due to homophily disruption, intrapersonal ambivalence, and (to a lesser extent) interpersonal cross-pressures created though crosscutting political discussion, it may be that the mechanism is somehow different. Future research should examine the mediating link between exposure to likeminded online news outlets and diverse online news outlets and political participation.

Limitations aside, this study productively extends and builds upon conclusions drawn from research on crosscutting interpersonal political discussion to the more communicatively hybrid online news environment. Here, we find an unfortunate tradeoff between participatory and deliberative models of democracy—one that extends beyond the "face-to-face" political discussion networks explored by Mutz (2002a; 2002b; 2006). Online selective exposure—which is often accompanied by political polarization, decreased political knowledge, and intolerance for divergent views—may in some cases foster increased political participation.

Thus, the extent to which exposure to political difference online is viewed as positive or negative, partially hinges on the model of citizenship to which one subscribes. A participatory

model views high levels of individual political participation and central (e.g., voting) (see

Putman, 2000), while a deliberative model considers exposure to diverse political discussion and

information as essential to achieving rational consensus, "true" public opinion, and *informed*

political participation (Arendt, 1968; Habermas, 1989; Mill, 1859/1998). The former model is

results oriented, whereas the latter is more focused on the process and quality of citizenship

without any guarantees of increased participation. Our results suggest a tension between these

two models, not easily resolved. This state of affairs may not be inevitable, but may rather be a

symptom of a political environment beset by hyper-partisanship, "horse-race" political news

coverage, ideological polarization, and incivility. Under such conditions, it can hardly be

surprising that those people who see matters in more complex ways and do not wholly identify

with one particular homophilous in-group, can come to see themselves on the outside of

Presidential electoral politics.

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Table 1. Regressing political activity on use of ideological online news outlets

	Political activity		
	Online frequency [a]	Offline count [b]	Offline frequency [a]
Attention to campaign	0.10*	0.28*** (0.06)	.08*
Female	0.07	0.12 (0.07)	0.08*
Age	0.05	0.00 (0.00)	-0.01
Education	0.10*	0.14*** (0.03)	0.08*
Income	0.00	0.02 (0.02)	0.03
Newspaper	0.02	0.05* (0.02)	0.12**
Television	0.00	-0.04 (0.05)	-0.04
Online news site, non-partisan	0.19***	0.07*** (0.02)	0.03
Ideological conservatism	-0.06	-0.03 (0.04)	-0.01
Conservative blogs & news sites	0.11*	0.09 (0.04)	0.07†
Liberal blogs & news sites	0.33***	0.12* (0.05)	0.18***
Observations	505	505	845
R^2 / Pseudo R^2	0.299	0.106	0.121

Notes. (a) Based on OLS regression, standardized beta coefficients, (b) based on Poisson regression, coefficients shown with standard errors in parenthesis.
† $p < .10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2. Regressing political activity on use of counter-attitudinal online news outlets

	Political activity		
	Online frequency [a]	Offline count [b]	Offline frequency [a]
Online news site, non-partisan	0.19***	0.07**	0.03
		(0.02)	
Ideological conservatism	-0.05	-0.01	-0.01
		(0.04)	
Conservative blogs & news sites	0.17**	0.12*	0.05
		(0.05)	
Conservative blogs & news sites X Conservatism	0.03	-0.01	0.05
		(0.04)	
Liberal blogs & news sites	0.21***	0.06	0.15**
		(0.06)	
Liberal blogs & news sites X Conservatism	-0.23***	-0.07*	-0.07
		(0.04)	
Observations	505	505	844
R^2 / Pseudo R^2	0.336	0.108	0.127

Notes. (a) Based on OLS regression, standardized beta coefficients, (b) based on Poisson regression, coefficients shown with standard errors in parenthesis.

Controls for attention to campaign, gender, age, education, income, and offline media use are omitted for clarity, but are of similar magnitude and significance as those reported in Table 1.

† $p < .10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure 1. Online political activity as predicted by use of ideological online news outlets