

## How Has the Internet Affected Political Participation

Internet and Society  
SOC 350  
Roderick Graham

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### The Internet Increases Political Participation

- ❑ People can be “citizen journalists” and produce their own news
- ❑ Through social networking sites, twitter, and texting, people can organize and spread their messages
  - ❑ Note: Remember the idea of networked collectivism

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Recent Political Movements Helped by Social Media



- ❑ The “Occupy Providence” movement no longer need to rely on mass media to cover their news
- ❑ They can use their cell phones and YouTube to produce their own news
- ❑ Let’s watch a few clips of citizen journalists

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### The Internet Increases Political Participation

- People are able to learn more about a political candidate
  - There is more information available
  - Getting this information is easier

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### For example: Who is Herman Cain?



- As an example, Googling republican political candidate "Herman Cain" gives you info from:
  - Businessweek
  - Huffinton Post
  - Wikipedia
  - HermanCain.Com
  - Washington Post

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Research from Pew Internet and American Life

#### Main sources of campaign news, 2002-2010

*Based on all adults*

	2002	2006	2010
Television	66%	59%	67%
Newspapers	33	34	27
Internet	7	15	24
Radio	13	17	14
Magazines	1	2	2

Source: The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 3-24, 2010 Post-Election Tracking Survey. n=2,257 national adults ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Note: totals may exceed 100% due to multiple responses.

<http://pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2011/Internet%20and%20Campaign%202010.pdf>

---

---

---

---

---

---

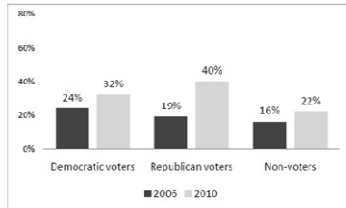
---

---

## Research from Pew Internet and American Life

### Growth in online video consumption by voters, 2006-2010

Based on 78 of internet users in each group who watch political videos online



Source: The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 3-14, 2010 Post-Election Tracking Survey. n=2,357 adult internet users ages 18 and older, including 755 cell phone interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. n=1,623 based on internet users.

<http://pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2011/Internet%20and%20Campaign%202010.pdf>

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Internet and Decreased Political Participation

- ❑ The vast amount of information online can disconnect people from the political process
- ❑ People are talking online...but no one is listening, or they are preaching to the choir

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Internet and Decreased Participation

*The Myth of Digital Democracy* (Hindman 2009):

- ❑ Despite the proliferation of blogs and websites, only a few ever get read by significant numbers of people
- ❑ Furthermore, while blogging is open to everyone, the most popular bloggers all fit the same demographic (educated, young, white, male)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Internet and Decreased Participation

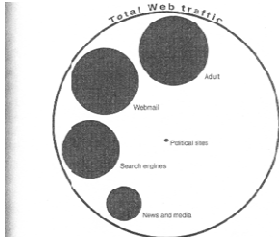


Figure 4.1  
This figure displays the relative traffic received by different categories of online content. While adult sites receive more than 10 percent of Web visits, political sites receive slightly more than one-tenth of a percent.

*The Myth of Digital Democracy (Hindman 2009)*

What this figure is showing is that while there is tremendous potential for political participation, most people use the Internet for other purposes

## The Internet and Decreased Participation

Table 3.4  
Concentration of Links to the Most Popular Sites

Sites	Links to top site (%)	Links to top 10 (%)	Links to top 50 (%)
Abortion (Yahoo!)	706	19.4	49.2
Abortion (Google)	1,015	31.1	70.6
Death penalty (Yahoo!)	729	13.9	63.5
Death penalty (Google)	761	14.4	53.5
Gun control (Yahoo!)	1,099	28.7	56.7
Gun control (Google)	630	39.2	76.8
President (Yahoo!)	1,163	51.0	83.2
President (Google)	1,070	21.9	65.3
U.S. Congress (Yahoo!)	528	25.9	74.3
U.S. Congress (Google)	1,390	22.0	51.4
General politics (Yahoo!)	1,027	6.5	36.4
General politics (Google)	3,243	13.6	47.0

This table demonstrates the remarkable concentration of links that the most popular sites enjoy in each of the categories explored. The first column lists the number of sites that contain at least one outgoing page that links to any of the sites in the relevant category. Columns two, three, and four show the percentage of links attributed to the top site, the top ten sites, and the top fifty sites in a given category.

*The Myth of Digital Democracy (Hindman 2009)*

- This table shows that most links refer to only the top sites for any given topic
- Most websites do not get linked to

## The Internet and Decreased Participation

- Some argue that the online environment does not produce dialogue conducive to democracy
  - Segmentation – different groups hear only one side of the story
    - (ex. Liberals only reading pro-abortion columns)
  - Polarization – people's opinions on fundamentally complex issues become rigid and extreme through
    - (ex. Liberals developing a sense that there are NO good pro-life arguments, and that under no circumstances should abortions be restricted)

## The Internet and Decreased Participation

The processes of segmentation and polarization create an environment that is not democratic, and instead produces groups who cannot communicate with each other



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Daily Me

- The “Daily Me”
  - From Cass Sunstein’s very influential book entitled *Republic.Com*
  - People can avoid new ideas and differing opinions
  - People become fragmented and more polarized on websites and discussion boards

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Filter Bubble

- The Internet is becoming personalized, such that different people see different news stories
  - Tech companies such as Google, Amazon, Netflix, etc. are creating personalized experiences for their customers
- This “filter bubble” prevents people from experiencing new and diverse news and ideas

---

---

---

---

---

---

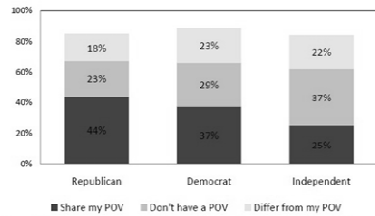
---

---

## Research from Pew Internet and American Life

### News with a "point of view" by partisan affiliation

% of online political users within each group who usually get political news from online sources that...



Source: The Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, November 3-24, 2010 Post-Election Tracking survey. 16,229 adult internet users ages 18 and older, including 100 cell phone interviews. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. n=1,007 based on online political users.

<http://pewinternet.org/~media/Files/Reports/2011/Internet%20and%20Campaign%202010.pdf>

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Summary

- The internet can increase political participation by making it easier for people to be citizen journalists, to organize protests, and to learn more about politicians or laws
- The internet can decrease political participation because the vast amount of information can lead to segmentation and polarization

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---