Learning to Do Democracy: Deliberative Capacity in Political Blogging Communities

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ABSTRACT

This thesis demonstrates that participants in Political Blogging Communities increase their deliberative capacity over time, potentially enabling them to participate in democratic societies. The study unifies perspectives on the meaning of blogs in American politics. It presents a unique theoretical framework that incorporates community and social learning literatures. The Internet is thought to potentially enable a revitalization of democracy because of its political and communicative properties. While studies have looked to deliberation in online forums, this study specifically targets Political Blogging Communities. Blogs have been targeted by a diverse range of scholars and methods that raise questions of their role in emphasizing the constitutional ideal of deliberation. Daily Kos and Red State are among the most popular political discussion sites, but are generally under-investigated in the literature. The theoretical framework and results presented here suggest that they are places where democratic capacity increases. A pilot study provided encouraging results. Because Political Blogging Communities talk about public issues, have several aspects of a supportive community, and feature contributions from ordinary people, they foster an adherence to deliberative norms. The sampling frame sought dedicated participants in an effort to approach the question of social learning over time. To address these questions, the deliberative content of 373 diaries from 20 authors at Daily Kos and Red State was hand coded. This Thesis makes two principal contributions: (1) it introduces a new measure that assesses deliberative quality is introduced, and (2) finds that the diversity of deliberative content in political blogs increases over time.

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Chapter One: Political Blogging Communities and their Democratic Promise

Over the last two decades, scholars and technologists have made considerable efforts to better understand the relationship between communication technology and democracy. The Internet is thought to potentially enable a revitalization of democracy because of its political and communicative properties. Blogs have been targeted by a diverse range of scholars and methods that raise questions of their role in emphasizing the constitutional ideal of deliberation. During the mid-2000s, weblogs or blogs—webpages that are easily and frequently updated to display new content in reverse chronological order (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt & Wright, 2004)—were thrust into the spotlight as they played a unique role in the national elections of 2004, 2006 and 2008 in the United States. Blogs were given special attention because they offered a higher level of interactivity than other media that serve to distribute political information. Blogs also enable people to publish their own ideas and perspectives with ability for them to reach a large audience.

While studies have looked to deliberation in online forums including blogs, this study specifically targets Political Blogging Communities because they talk about public issues, have several aspects of a supportive community, and feature contributions from ordinary people. Together, these characteristics, among others, foster an adherence to deliberative norms on the part of dedicated participants. The rest of this chapter introduces the framework of the thesis, the impetus for research, the propositions that will be considered, the sampling frame, the methods and measures, and the kinds of expected results.

The Impact of Blogs

Because of its communicative properties, the Internet has captured the interest of a wide-range of scholars from different disciplines who focus on the deliberative nature of democracy. On balance, it can be summarized that the Internet can enable deliberation in part because it can be designed to do so and because in theory everyone has an equal ability to access and utilize the technologies. Because blogs were one of the first social publishing platforms, they effectively marked the democratization of publishing. It became realistic for large numbers of people to create and contribute to political information. Although blogs are only one component of a much

larger technological movement that has made recording public and semi-public communications an omnipresent feature of very large segments of the population, their accessibility and the popular attention attached to them has made blogs the object of many investigative studies.

Whereas previous studies, for example, focused on the practices of political bloggers and readers (e.g. Adamic & Glance, 2005; Ackland, 2005; McKenna & Pole, 2008; Papacharissi, 2007; Lawrence, Sides & Farrell, 2010; Yano & Smith, 2010), the ability for blogs to affect political party platforms and elections (e.g. Armstrong & Zuniga, 2006; Bai, 2008; Cohen, 2008-2009; Karpf, 2010; Sides & Farrell, 2010; Wallsten, 2007), the potential for expanding the public sphere in modern democracies (e.g. Dahlberg, 2001a; Reese et al., 2007), and the ability for blogs to contribute to social or political revolutions (e.g. Kulikova & Perlmutter, 2007), yielding mostly qualitative observations as well as combinations of systematic qualitative and quantitative data on blogging practices, this study modifies previous content analysis-based approaches that sought to evaluate the content and quality of online publications in dialogue with each other (e.g. Papacharissi, 2007; Robertson, 2008; Stromer-Galley, 2007; Trammel et al., 2006). No other studies have attempted to systematically apply hand coding content-analysis to Political Blogging Communities with the aim of evaluating the amount and quality of deliberation over time, as this thesis does.

Research on blogs has tended to focus on the functions of blogs as alternatives to traditional media sources, as avenues for political commentary by everyday citizens, and, in accordance with notions about the public sphere, as meeting grounds for like-minded people to exert influence in particular campaigns and elections. Earlier in their brief histories, the Internet and activist blogs were the object of research on the use of the Internet for political mobilization, activism, and democratic revitalization (e.g. Meikle, 2002; Donk, Loader, Nixon, and Rucht eds, 2004; McCaughey & Ayers eds, 2003). The data and analysis presented in this paper focuses instead on the social function of community blogs as a space for learning deliberative democratic norms that aid in understanding and participating in modern political realities.

Other studies of the Internet explore the possibilities for it contributing to a revitalization of democracy in the U.S. and other industrialized democracies. The prevailing perspective is that access to more information and avenues of communication positively affects democratic practices (e.g. Kamarck & Nye, 2001; Shane, 2004; Coleman & Gotze, 1999). The rise of Internet-based commercial activity, as well as the continuing need for abstract skills in order to

publish online, dampened early expectations. However, the arrival of blogs and their seeming real-world impact reignited discussions over the democratic potential of the Internet.

The design and structure of an archetypical blog is at least somewhat conducive to deliberation; blogs contribute to the experience of people who utilize them in ways different from the commenting system on *The New York Times'* website, or the micro-blogging status-update system of Facebook. Indeed, blogs are still relatively easy to create and maintain; however, they require careful attention from their owners if they are to survive or remain relevant. In other words, people have to learn more about how the Internet works to effectively communicate in the blogosphere than they do when using other Internet-based publishing platforms. A part of what they learn is the focus of this study.

Political Blogging Communities like the archetypical Daily Kos and Red State have been conceived of and studied as deliberative spaces where publicly held issues and positions are discussed. Political blogs have been labeled as *deliberation enclaves* (Sunstein, 2007). As such, they are both beneficial (Karpowitz, 2009) and harmful to the type of republican democracy said to be at work in the United States. Evidence for these claims has centered on hyperlinking practices and the unwavering partisan preferences of readers (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Lawrence, Sides & Farrell, 2010). Deliberation takes place, often by accident (Papacharissi, 2010), and then only within the confines of a very particular subset of the citizenry as determined by the kinds of people who view and contribute to blogs (Zickuhr, 2010).[1]

Many studies of blogs are not helpful in understanding their political impact because a large portion of the content found on blogs is of low quality. If one were to select a blog at random, it is probable that the blog would be dormant, dead, rarely updated, or self-absorbed, rather than one that exhibits an adherence to social norms in a way comparable to more traditional, physical or even televisual forms of publishing or communication (Papacharissi, 2010). Some of the first systematic studies of blogs seemed to suggest, therefore, that not only

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[1] Besides the fact that Internet users in general are slightly different from the American population, especially regarding frequency and speed of access, there are distinct differences between those who blog and those who use the Internet for other activities. Although millenials (ages 18-33) are overrepresented as Internet users, very few choose to blog, reflecting a more general trend away from blogging in comparison to other activities across the entire Internet user population (Lenhart & Fox, 2006; Zickuhr, 2010), although 32% of users do read blogs on the Internet, and the number of people who work on their own blogs is increasing (Zickuhr, 2010). The blogs described in these studies, however, are not necessarily blogs about politics, and although a true picture of who blogs politically is difficult to ascertain, one can be confident in the peculiarity of political bloggers compared to the general population.

were blogs not even within the realm of constituting a virtual public sphere where deliberation could take place, but never would reach it (e.g. Witschge, 2004).

Nonetheless, national attention kept blogs in the spotlight for their potential and ability to affect the American political landscape. During the 2004, 2006, and 2008 national elections, many books and articles were written highlighting the impact of blogs and new media on campaigns, elections and the development of the contemporary Republican and Democratic party platforms (e.g. Bai, 2008; Davis, 2009; Wallace, 2008; Keren, 2006; Barlow, 2007; Perlmutter, 2008; Armstrong & Moulitsas, 2006; Kline, 2005; Hewitt, 2005; Gillmor, 2006; Trippi, 2004). During this period, political science and the political communication literatures saw blogs as alternative sources for political information. The popularizing of blogs was also read as another step in an increasing trend of compartmentalization or alienation from community—community being a foundation of republican democracy—as well as a retreat from the public sphere and traditional civic duties.[2] Accordingly, Sunstein (2000, 2009), among others (e.g. Adamic & glance, 2005; Farrell, 2010), demonstrates that bloggers and their readers tend to become more and more polarized in their political beliefs over time. The more time they spend reading and writing on blogs, they are increasingly convinced that their own opinions on issues are correct while those positions become more and more extreme.

The findings presented in this study were gathered with a concerted effort to avoid some of these powerful critiques of the effects of blogs on democracy in favor of a more unified conception of the meaning of blogs in American politics. However, I should note that, although gathered for a different purpose, the data gathered here generally tends to reinforce the notion that blogs increase polarization and discourage the voicing of widely divergent opinions on any given issue. But this study raises a few caveats to these realities.

Political Blogging Communities: Toward a New Research Agenda

A Political Blogging Community is a different animal from just any political blog found on the Internet. Here, a blogger is presented with the opportunity to have his or her work read by a large audience of readers with similar interests. Blog authors encounter seasoned, new, and even famous community members. Together, these participants help to build, maintain and sustain

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[2] Critiques of this sort were offered with the support of Putnam's *Bowling Alone* thesis.

virtual communities that discuss politics (Rheingold, 1993). Adding the community dimension to the deliberative structure of blogs allows for the proposition that *the more time one spends in a Political Blogging Community, the better he or she deliberates*. This thesis is therefore interested in what bloggers do over a period of time, and investigates the relationship between time and deliberative quality. Authors that publish items regularly for years—effectively demonstrating their dedication to the community—tend to be more conscious of the community norms that support forms of deliberation, as well as those that lead authors to shy away from presenting 'the other side' of an issue in a reasonable light—a practice that does not win over many of the self-selected readers. While much progress has been made, the literature continues to lack a clear, comprehensive notion of what blogs are and what they mean to American democracy. This study contributes to the clarification of the deliberative, communal aspects of the political blog.

Incorporating the literature surrounding *community* gives this study a distinct advantage over previous studies, although it does open a whole other set of problems, particularly regarding issues of conceptual traveling. A community necessarily implies that some characteristics are held in common by all its members. In communities formed around interest in politics, common characteristics often include age, occupation, technical skills, and partisanship. This like-mindedness initially helps to facilitate deliberation. People learn to positively exert control over their own identities by sharing their stories, their opinions. This way, a narrative community develops over time that supports the reinforcement of norms (Papacharissi, 2010:148; Borkman, 1999).

To study the communal aspects of blogs, research should turn to community-oriented blogs. There, amateur contributors are shown that they too can reach a large audience. Therefore, they are more likely to follow explicit and implicit community guidelines and norms, especially those that reward authors with greater attention measured by accumulating feedback from other readers. In addition to norms, bloggers at sites like Daily Kos and Red State learn to articulate political arguments, deepening their political knowledge (Cappella, Price & Nir, 2002). Together, Political Blogging Communities are the most promising place where people might learn how to deliberate. Even so, focused systematic exploration of the content and structure of Political Blogging Communities, especially Daily Kos and Red State, is rare. This is surprising, too, because Daily Kos and Red State are often portrayed as significant voices in American

politics, especially when the perspectives at the extremes of the political spectrum are needed for study.

Anyone who has experienced reading or commenting on blogs generally understands that the potential for substantive deliberation exists, even if some posts are lazy, some comments are inane, or few perspectives are covered. However, it also becomes clear that people try to write carefully so as to gain and maintain the attention and readership of the community, even though their abilities to do so vary widely. These unexpected pleasantries stand in stark contrast to many single user blogs where people with too much time on their hands write stream-of-consciousness entries, or 'rants', for a limited audience. These blogs and other online postings tend to take a turn for the worse in terms of quality (e.g. Graham, 2008).

Finally, this study is partly inspired by the theory that particular technologies have characteristics that have knowable political consequences (Winner, 1977). In other words, the fact that blogging happens *on the Internet* matters. For example, the content on Political Blogging Communities is centralized, but its users are decentralized; anyone can publish from anywhere. According to this theory, the democratizing effects of the blogging practice extend into the lives of people more than superficially. People learn something fundamentally democratic there, and then come to expect similar experiences throughout the rest of their lives. Blogging has the potential to empower individuals universally. An equally powerful counterexample is the traditional process of publishing a book. Instead of learning that everyone has a right to be widely read, people learn that since only elites can afford or have access to publishing firms, they are the only ones with valuable things to say on public issues. Blogging, and the social technologies of the Internet more generally, have shattered these stereotypes.

Questions and Propositions

In sum, this thesis posits that blogs are a potentially deliberative medium situated on the potentially democratically revitalizing technology of the Internet. In community, even a partisan one, the democratic and deliberative aspects of these technologies are enhanced. Therefore, as people participate in Political Blogging Communities, they develop their capacity to deliberate based upon the incentives the community offers, such as feedback from other users (Noveck,

2009), to do so. In particular, texts written by the same author over time will exhibit higher adherence to the ideal norms of deliberation.

The first question this study considers is whether there is a relationship between participation in Political Blogging Communities and the capacity to deliberate. This question necessarily introduces the relevance of the time spent on and the density of participation. Do online publications in Political Blogging Communities more closely adhere to proper norms of deliberation over time? If so, it is important to consider the extent and speed to which it occurs. Additionally, the content of the many texts found on the websites have an effect on the degree to which deliberative norms are held and enforced. This study addresses this question, simply assessing the differences between the most influential politically left and right Political Blogging Communities. Finally, the density of an author's participation in the Political Blogging Community—i.e. an increase the frequency of posts as well as the average number of words found in each—will logically correlate with an increase in a particular diary's deliberative score. In short, diaries will either be more deliberative, less deliberative, or remain about the same over two years than if there were no sustained pattern of authorial participation. The authors of those texts that exhibit higher quality deliberation are likely more positive contributing members of the community than those that do not adhere to deliberative norms and will earn feedback that encourages them to continue producing high quality content. These incentives may also serve to encourage political participation.

Contributions and Significance

The findings presented here aim to expand political science's understanding of political blogs, contributing to the advancement of a more general conception of the meaning of online political communication in the American political context. The findings suggest that to revitalize American democracy and restore the constitutional deliberative ideal (Sunstein, 2007), more people, especially those with right-leaning political views,[3] should be encouraged to engage in political writing in Political Blogging Communities or other similar forums. Though Political Blogging Communities do not meet the ideal conditions to foster deliberation, the discussions of

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[3] The results of this study tend to show that conservative bloggers tend to increase the deliberative quality of their posts at a higher rate than liberal bloggers, although liberal blogs are generally of higher quality.

public issues found there do influence political processes. This thesis posits that their greatest impact is indirect. If participating in a kind of deliberation found on Political Blogging Communities fundamentally alters an individual's deliberative capacity, it is also plausible that these better deliberators will be better citizens.

This study answers Stromer-Galley's (2011) call for investigations into the effects of online discussion on participants in both the short and long term. The information gathered speaks to the significance of online discussion in the ebb and flow of democracy. Finally, although not directly addressed in the paper, the findings may be of interest for the designers of Internet technologies and protocols that govern the flow of digital information. The implications of their design choices of blogging or other social platforms are illustrative. After all, without the technology, the participants studied here would not have this particular experience. Designers might look to develop systems that can better meet the needs and desires of its citizens as they face future, looming public problems, as well as systems that can increase agency and human happiness.

Future research might focus on other aspects of the Political Blogging Community experience left unconsidered by this study. For example, one might examine the differences between similar deliberative content found in a newspaper—i.e. letters to the editor—and that found online. It might also consider how the interface, the design of the software that supports blogs, affects deliberation. Third, the culture of the Political Blogging Community should be studied since anecdotal evidence gathered here suggests that certain buzzwords, turns of phrase, and topics affect the particular experiences of participants, especially in terms of community feedback. Another consideration would be to study how the general political context of any particular timeframe might affect deliberation online. After all, there are important political moments that spark meaningful political discussion. For example, an eye test of the gathered data shows that, contrary to conventional wisdom, deliberative quality decreases around important national elections.

To gain a better understanding of the forces at work in the political blogosphere, more studies should emulate this thesis's strategy and focus on the effects that participation has on the individual. This study shows that such a reconstituted research agenda can yield answers to interesting yet overlooked questions.

Chapter Two: Connecting Deliberation, Deliberative Democracy, Political Science, and Political Communication

Before defining the relevant concepts and how they are used in this study, the general link between the practices of deliberation, deliberative democracy, blogs and what political science and political communication say about each ought to be established. This section attempts to situate the study within existing literatures that inspire and advance the underlying theory guiding the research. While a diverse group of scholars have approached the meaning of the Internet and the communicative technologies it supports to democracy, a much smaller group of scholars have considered the particular ideas surrounding deliberation online. These ideas are connected to broader discussions within political science and grassroots democracy literatures on the meaning of blogs to contemporary politics.

Deliberation is an important part of the political process in liberal democracies and smaller democratically organized social forms. It is a process that involves dialogue, and is therefore inherently communicative. One of the barriers to large scale deliberation has been that it is physically impossible to gather and consider all of the people affected by a particular problem and to properly understand their positions. As with the historical arrival and proliferation of radio and television, the Internet is seen as a technology able to enhance democracy by improving the quality of citizen and public decisions. Further, the unique nature of the Internet and the many-to-many communicative technologies it supports makes larger scale deliberative democracy possible. It allows ordinary people to be heard. However, their views are heard mostly by other ordinary people, rather than political elites, and as such, to the extent that deliberation occurs, it takes place largely on the periphery of public policymaking and power politics.

One of the most unique and important things about the Internet is that it enables people to deliberate with each other. Within their online discussions about various public problems, political scandals, and other various aspects of the realm of politics, they are exposed to disagreement and learn to express their opinions more clearly (Gutman & Thompson, 1996). In particular online communities, such as Political Blogging Communities, deliberation is enhanced due to a common understanding about or a perspective on the nature of the public problems

being discussed. Therefore, because the community is built on a deliberative framework, supported by the members, norms, and rules of a virtual community, the more time one spends in a deliberative community like a Political Blogging Community, the better he or she will become at deliberating. In other words, one's capacity to deliberate is enhanced rather than diminished.

Deliberation and Participatory / Representative Democracy

Many theorists contend that in a democracy, all aspects of governance should be subject to deliberation. It is claimed that deliberation among people of differing opinions and perspectives on public issues, where possible, can lead to better, more justifiable decisions, and more satisfied citizens. Further, theorists like Gutman and Thompson believe that deliberation can and should take place, even when participants, due to a lack of available information, have to resort to moral argumentation. This thesis takes the position that deliberation in governance is a useful tool in empowering citizens and increasing democratic capacity.

Deliberation is a mode of political or democratic communication. It can therefore also be used as a form of rule whereby all public decisions are justified to all those who are affected by such decisions (Gutman & Thompson, 1996; Noveck, 2009; Fishkin, 2005). Normally, Habermasian traits are attributed to deliberation, which is then thought of as the reasoned exchange of ideas individuals representative of the general public that improves political culture and a democracy (Noveck, 2009). Habermas promotes participatory democracy through human reason as a way to make modern society more egalitarian and more just. Being free to speak in the 'public sphere' is therefore imperative to maintaining and expanding a legitimate democracy. The public sphere must strive towards meeting an 'ideal speech situation' in which rational-critical argumentation is the basic criterion by which public contributions are judged, discussion is limited to the domain of common concern, and discussion is open to all members of the public (Habermas, 1989a:36). The closer a society or group can get to the 'ideal speech situation', the better off all would be.

In the U.S., deliberation has been heralded as a constitutional ideal exemplified the U.S. Senate. A deliberative conception of democracy enables a distinct kind of freedom and promotes a distinct kind of democracy (Sunstein, 2007). The framers of the American constitution designed the political system to foster forms of deliberation so that it might help contain

fragmentation—a condition believed destructive to democratic order. The system has evolved so as to protect and subsidize free speech that exposes citizens to disparate viewpoints and incline them to moderate their own opinions (Sunstein, 2007:Chapter 2; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996:Chapter 1).

Although the U.S. Senate's norms of deliberation have yet to devolve to other levels of American governance, due to the power of communicative technologies, the deliberative constitutional ideal could now move to conceivably all levels of governance, including to the level of the citizen. This requires a space where citizens can come together to reach collective decisions about public issues (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). A deliberative space must meet several preconditions. The processes of politics should adhere to the three principles of reciprocity, publicity, and accountability, while the principles of basic liberty, basic opportunity, and fair opportunity should govern the content of politics (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996:Chapter 1).

However, people inevitably live in an environment of incomplete understanding and often resort to moral disagreement in their argumentation (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). For example, instead of expressing support for legalizing marijuana by citing medical studies or the projections made by economists on the benefits to the general welfare that lifting the ban might have, one might resort to a moral claim, that 'it's my body and my lifestyle and therefore no one has a right to tell me what to do.' While this does not adhere to the Habermasian criterion of rational argumentation, moral disagreement, properly expressed, can be channeled into a deliberative activity.

Deliberation, as a process and an outcome, can help overcome the barriers that moral disagreement and incomplete information place on the reasoned opinion expression of deliberation. As a moral response to moral conflict, it also creates the possibility for citizens to make decisions related to scarcity more legitimate, encourage them to adopt a broader perspective on public policy than they might otherwise take, help them confront incompatible moral values and clarify what is morally at stake, as well as increasing the chances that justifiable and provisional public policies will be arrived at (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996:Chapter 1). Moral arguments can often be characterized as more expressive than they are rational, and as such, as commonly found in the texts at Political Blogging Communities.

Together, a case can be made that in order to maintain and promote a more just society, a democracy ought to promote its deliberative characteristics. Identifying and discussing common problems, and deliberating over solutions and their just implementation are a significant purpose and promise of democracy. Advocates claim that each inroad that deliberation makes into existing democratic practices and institutions improves the living experience for all people while improving governance. While the concept of deliberation provides a useful framework for assessing the democratic performance of spaces of political discussion, including those online (Freelon, 2010), the actual phenomena is rarely, if ever, observed as naturally occurring. And even though the most optimistic accounts claim that large numbers of people are capable to deliberate if presented with an opportunity to do so, it is still an ideal type.

Communicative Deliberation and the Internet

Although Habermas conveys a desire for a reinvigorated public sphere, his ideal types have been usefully operationalized in ways that support optimistic and pessimistic readings of the deliberation in modern society. Because deliberation is communicative, new ways of communicating modify the equation that defines what deliberation is and whether it is taking place. In response to the arrival of the Internet as an increasingly ubiquitous communicative technology, Habermas's basic criteria have been revisited.

Within the ideal public sphere, the exchange and critique of reasoned moral-practical validity claims occurs in which critiques are presented reciprocally of positions provided with reasons (Dahlberg, 2001a: 623). Participants critically examine their own culture and the implicit assumptions about the way the world works, as well as evaluating the larger context in which the deliberation is taking place (Dahlberg, 2001a: 623). They also must make an honest effort to take on the role of the other in order to better understand the other's perspective on an issue by carefully listening and should strive to share all relevant information, including facts, desires, and self-interests, about the issue (Dahlberg, 2001a:623). People who are affected by the problem or issue or the solutions offered should be able to question any assertion and every effort should be made to see that everyone is included and that the discourse be equalized among perspectives and participants. Finally, deliberation is not truly deliberation if it is dictated by capital or more official governing powers (Dahlberg, 2001a:623).

How well does the Internet adhere to or enable the above tenets of the public sphere? Certainly, the Internet is more communicative than its predecessor and co-habitant, television. For years, scholars felt that television, especially in the form of public broadcasting, had the potential to enhance American democracy (e.g. McConnell, 1952; Groombridge, 1972). The reason for this optimism was that it had the potential to provide for a common experience and common information to citizens who would then have the ability to make well-informed decisions on public matters on their own.[4] However, it has been largely affirmed that television did not fulfill this promise, and by many accounts its proliferation contributed to a decline in the quality of American democracy due to capital's control over content and inherent limits to the technology (Borstin, 1974 & 1992; Dahlgren, 1995; Kellner, 1990; Hart, 1999). Television was thought of as a technology exhibiting inherently democratic characteristics that were later conceived of by theorists as anti-democratic ones. This observation is not lost on contemporary investigations in the politics of the Internet.

Science & Technology Studies scholars have proffered that the Internet has its own politics (e.g. Graham, 2008; Chadwick & Howard, 2009; O'Reilly, 2005) and is grounded in social contexts (Chadwick & Howard, 2009:429). The technologies of the Internet, rather than objectively existing unchanged, are increasingly politicized by politicians, activist groups, and politically or technologically savvy people (Chadwick & Howard, 2009:5-9). However, the technologies continue to enable the creation of individualized political meanings insofar as they further imaginative capacities. These ideas are reinforced by the longstanding discussions of whether or not technologies are political in their conception, design, or purpose, and whether they promote particular kinds of political relationships (Winner, 1980:122). It has often been said that the choices made over the design of a space can decisively influence the ways in which people act within it; this is just as true for the design of state capital cities as well as for online forums (Coleman & Gotze, 2001; Sack, 2005; Suler, 2004; Wright & Street, 2007). The argument that the Internet's conception, design, and purpose are compatible with a deliberative politics is therefore compelling. There are several design features of online forums that can be decisively associated with the enhancement of deliberation (Wright & Street, 2007).

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[4] The trend of investigations into the deliberative nature of the Internet has spawned a renewed interest in television as a deliberative medium that deepens democracy (Cottle & Rai, 2006).

Because of the diversity of the scholarship surrounding the Internet, it is helpful to categorize the various discourses of the Internet. Each perspective serves a purpose in explaining how the Internet is linked with deliberation and democracy. From a *deliberative rhetorical* perspective (Dahlberg, 2001b; Freelon, 2010), since the Internet is conducive to deliberation even if the conditions for a true deliberative space is often far from being met (Witschge, 2004; 2003), participants in Political Blogging Communities and other political discussion forums can come together around common or public problems in free and open dialogue to share opinions and positions. Participants can then modify their positions as better arguments rise to the top. Individual opinions are transformed and become more public-oriented, and, in turn, so do the individuals themselves. This perspective is especially illuminating considering the rhetorics and practices of participants in a Political Blogging Community. For example, blog platforms that allow members to vote for the best diaries enable this kind of deliberation in which potentially personal opinions, once voiced, can become the concern of the larger community. The community then has an ability to transform it into a public issue, spawning comments, revisions, and new opinions. From a *communitarian* perspective, the Internet supports platforms that have the ability to strengthen a community and expand or establish others (Dahlberg, 2001b; Freelon, 2010). Bloggers, for example, often make considerable efforts to create or further collective identity by referring to the group of readers and bloggers as a whole. This is done by calling out specific members of the community as admirable or unfavorable examples of proper members or important political figures that seem to portray the community's identity well externally.

The experience of people using the Internet and related technologies is an important reason the Internet is seen as pro-democratic. On the Internet, people tend to encounter a more democratic society when they use the Internet than when they socialize in their local environments due to the diversity of the participants and the content, even if it is not always evenly accessible by choice or by design (Papacharissi, 2009). In fact, the use of computers and mobile devices with access to the Internet has become the most important way to be effective politically, and the experience of doing so presents an opportunity for a personal change in political outlook (Kahn & Kellner, 2007). Political discussions and rational dialogue online is connected to the human ability to create meaning in everyday life and aid in the identification of the anti-democratic and anti-deliberative tendencies in modern in society (Franklin, 2007; Barney, 2007). People tend to enjoy participating in online discussion (Stromer-Galley,

2011:181), and being that it is often easier and socially safer to do so promotes the notion that the Internet provides a space for ordinary people to speak and sometimes act politically when they would not otherwise do so.

The weight of these arguments and gathered evidence has aided proponents of the Internet who claim it as a pro-democratic technology. The Internet, due to its flexibility and generalized diffusion, appears to support the aims of a reconstituted political sphere. The technologies allow for reciprocity, for thoughtful responses, for easy reference to common informational materials, and for the inclusion of large numbers of voices. Like the call for more deliberation as an avenue towards a reinvigoration of American democracy, the calls for the proliferation of Internet technologies is justifiable even in the face of the perceived failure of television. In conclusion, the two literatures meet at the point where there is a need for more deliberation in modern society, and that the Internet itself is deliberative, offering a solution to modern democracy's problems.

Democratizing Publishing

The Internet and its applicability to the existing decentralized infrastructure of personal computers have made it possible for large numbers of people to voluntarily access information in a fundamentally different manner than was possible in the early TV era. Not only can the traditional gatekeepers of information—those with the means and expertise to filter, publish, and disseminate to large audiences—be bypassed to access information, but ordinary people are able to contribute on their own. While the chances of becoming famous or having an impact as large as a celebrity or politician are still quite remote, an important unique contribution of blogs is that ordinary people are paying attention to the ordinary people who write blogs, although retrospective adulation for well-written by overlooked work is fleeting, as blogs, especially those about politics, do not exhibit the same characteristics of permanence associated with books or scholarly journals.

While the technical knowhow to create a website from scratch is still rather rare, blogging platforms make it cheap and easy to create entire websites with frequently updated content that also allows for simple interaction between authors and readers. More recently, social networking services such as Facebook™ or Google Buzz™ have made it even easier for people

to share what's on their mind and what they are reading. Twitter™ , a micro-blogging platform, has extended a remarkable ability for people to share their ideas—productive, creative, or inane—to especially large audiences.[5]

In any case, blogs have captured the attention of the popular and political press, political elites, policymakers, and scholars. As said above, much of it has focused on the extent to which the people publishing on and reading blogs are actually 'ordinary' people, and whether or not they are hearing the opposing viewpoints said to be necessary for making better decisions. Blogs are undoubtedly a source of political information for many people, including some who may have not sought it out as it existed in other media forms. The most popular blogs portray themselves as not only places to find political opinions, but also a source for general political information, especially that of partisan nature or that which is largely ignored in the national press (e.g. RedState.com, 2011). Covering topics that are not frequently discussed nationally is one way example of how blogs act as alternative media. To the extent that blogs are written and read by ordinary people, they can help everyday citizens to have a voice in the process of political messaging and framing (e.g. Armstrong, Rosenberg & Zuniga, 2006; Zuniga, 2008). Blogs are also seen as aiding social and insurgent movements (Bob, 2005; Fuchs, 2008; Fung, 2002; Kulikova & Perlmutter, 2007) as well as electoral ones. One can credit Daily Kos in part for the success of many progressive politicians in the 2006 and 2008 national wave elections. Likewise, Red State played a significant role in articulating supportable positions and goals of the Tea Party movement in 2009-2011, in turn transforming it from an 'astroturf' to grassroots campaign and aiding in the election of more conservative candidates, even though the site is much less movement-oriented than its liberal counterparts (Scholozman, Verba & Brady, 2010).

Blogs aid ordinary people to participate politically by providing a place where their voices can be heard and a safe place to gather and organize. This perspective has not been without criticism. The most common is that the divisions between the liberal and conservative blogospheres, while helpful in elections and in getting particular policies enacted or rejected, is generally damaging to American democracy. These normative claims are also substantiated by evidence. The linking practices of bloggers have come under much scrutiny (e.g. Sunstein, 2000; Adamic & Glance, 2005; Lawrence, Sides, Farrell, 2010), and for the most part, liberal sites link

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[5] All of these services have been said to play major roles in the revolutions and protest movements in the North of Africa and the Middle East during the Spring of 2011. They are also a natural outgrowth of the success of blogging, but are outside the scope of this study.

to other liberal sites, conservative sites to other conservative sites, and rarely do the two ever meet unless it is to attack the other's positions.

The most relevant aspect of this line of inquiry to the present study is that the linking practices on blogs seem to demonstrate that blogs to not attempt to adhere to the constitutional ideal of deliberation in the American political system. For a system that values free expression to function properly, people ought to be exposed to information they would not choose ordinarily choose. More generally, citizens should have at least some significant common experiences (Sunstein, 2007). The comprehensive and compartmentalized nature of biased political information available on the Internet means that common experiences are unlikely to form. In the blogosphere, exposure to different perspectives is rare and group polarization is a real risk. Groups of people engaged in discussion with one another at a place like Daily Kos or Red State end up thinking the same way they did before, except to an even more extreme degree (Sunstein, 2007:Chapter 3). In other words, liberal bloggers find themselves dueling to see who is the most liberal.[6] In this process, it is often assumed that most information is held in common. For example, on Red State, a common statement says "everyone knows the stimulus has failed," but references to the source of these claims, or reasons for why the stimulus failed, or to why people even think the stimulus failed, are largely absent, even if the person making the statement itself knows the reasons. This way, information relevant to the discussion of U.S. public policy, specifically economic policy, is left unshared, impeding productive deliberation.

Comparatively, Red State diaries contain fewer links to other materials than those found on Daily Kos, as demonstrated by the data gathered for this study. The average Daily Kos diary authored by dedicated community members contains 5.64 links, while the average Red State diary authored by dedicated community members contains 1.95. As shown in figure 1-1, which contains information gathered for this thesis, there is a significant correlation between an increase or decrease in the amount of links per post and the particular political blogging community.

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[6] One of the diaries considered in this study, authored by *LaFeminista* at Daily Kos, is a distinct counterexample to this perspective. Barack Obama is perceived as decidedly moderate by the liberal blogosphere as his policies have generated many complaints from the liberal blogosphere. However, there has been a significant trend in which bloggers are competing, on the left end of the political spectrum at least, to be the most serious and realistic. *LaFeminista* has been accused of being an "extreme lefty purist," and her diary was written in response to such accusations, claiming that standing behind progressive principles and ideals is the most productive use of expressive political forums like Daily Kos.

Figure 2-1

Linking Practices at Daily Kos and Red State
Correlations

		Political Blogging Community	*The Number of Links to other sources in the diary*
Political Blogging Community	Pearson Correlation	1	.247**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	373	373
The Number of Links to other sources in the diary	Pearson Correlation	.247**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	373	373

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Sunstein (2007) has contended, however, that even though links are present in blogs, they often are used to illustrate how "dangerous, or how contemptible, competing views really are" (Sunstein, 2007:Chapter 3).

Blogs, then, rather than being places for general deliberation that ought to be found in the public sphere, are deliberative enclaves where like-minded people speak mostly to one another (Sunstein, 2007:Chapter 3). While people learn a great deal by reading blogs, they have a difficult time distinguishing truth from exaggeration, creating an atmosphere of misunderstanding. In this conception, bloggers learn is how to construct an echo chamber that serves various political or self-interested ends (Sunstein, 2007: Chapter 6). False information is easily spread and difficult to prevent in deliberative enclaves, or, in this case, the left or right blogosphere (Sunstein, 2007:Chapter 3). For the average individual, spending too much time in deliberative enclaves is likely to do more harm than good. According to the popular imagination of a democratic society, citizens that are not exposing themselves to new information and opinions are doing themselves and larger society a disservice.

The conservative and progressive blogospheres do have a number of differences regarding these concerns raised in the above discussion. Whereas both conservative and liberal blogs mostly link to other web sites that share their own political perspective, conservatives tend to link only to a limited number of sites, the overwhelming majority of which are like-minded, whereas liberals are more inclusive of other sources that contain opposing viewpoints (Adamic

& Glance, 2005). Not only are linking practices suspect, but political blogs also tend to feature the kinds of content that is oriented to the opinions and perspectives of the audience (Lawrence, Sides & Farrell, 2010). Audiences tend to self-select, turning to sources that conform to preexisting political beliefs, exacerbating the partisan political divide (Stroud, 2007). If ideal deliberation does occur, it is almost always by accident (Lev-On & Manin, 2009; Papacharissi, 2010). Additionally, because the most widely-read bloggers tend to enjoy privileged socioeconomic standing and amateur bloggers are largely ignored, blogs are said to be generally not helping democracy to flourish (Hindman, 2009).

Within an enclave, people can develop their political knowledge, efficacy, and trust (Karpowitz, 2009). However, deliberative enclaves can also promote the development of positions and opinions that would have been silenced in a more general debate held in the public sphere. This certainly seems like a possibility considering the amount of time spent by bloggers discussing the shortcomings of the beltway-centered debates as reported in the so-called mainstream media. There is also compelling evidence that enclave deliberation can be very helpful to disempowered citizens in civic forums. It can also allow for more diverse viewpoints to emerge so long as it is included within the general community framework.

As such, the emergence of accessible deliberative enclaves can be seen as an early if precarious step in a much longer-sighted agenda of political reform. Even if the deliberation is constrained to the particularities of their own partisan preferences, people learn how to deliberate in in these enclaves. So long as the negative effects can be mitigated, later people can move their conversations to more institutionalized deliberative forums, and will then be better equipped as citizens.

Better institutionalizing deliberation has been frequently called for (e.g. Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Sunstein, 2007). Further, if online deliberations can be hosted by government institutions, then citizens are directly inserted into the policymaking process, representing a net increase in democracy (Stromer-Galley, 2011:182). In short, the many criticisms of the anti-democratic and anti-deliberative nature of the blogosphere have been met with several retorts. What is discussed in political blogs is often of public import, but has been undercovered by national media. Authors are exposed to high levels of disagreement, and in addition to being suitable venues for the expression of frustration, political blogs often confront public problems and consider solutions even if the decisions reached there are not conclusive.

Those considered to be the very best bloggers tend to address a wide range of issues, providing credit where it is due, citing other members of the community, and interact with other authors. Moving forward, it will become clear that it is often the case that the best members of the community are also the most deliberative. If an author wants to remain relevant in the community discussions, he or she must strive to adhere to deliberative norms, even unconsciously. An author is more likely to be dedicatedly involved in the Political Blogging Community if deliberative norms are adhered to. Readers and other authors will then feel more comfortable engaging with the author and with the topic. Authors who display a willingness to engage readers across many aspects of deliberation, such as focusing on political problems, talking about the blog or discussion itself, and addressing issues or opinions raised by other members of the community therefore exemplify the deliberative rhetorical perspective of the Internet (Dahlberg, 2001b; Freelon, 2010). Subsequently, authors such as Daily Kos's LaFeminista who seek to develop a deeper sense of community while still focusing on American politics and policy, exemplify the communitarian perspective of the Internet (Dahlberg, 2001b; Freelon, 2010).

Although the echo-chamber effect has been well-documented objectively as seen above, authors and other participants in Political Blogging Communities are faced with political disagreement quite regularly. As such, authors take a big personal risk in publishing their perspectives to the community, even if they choose to remain anonymous. Indeed, online forums create the potential for people to be exposed to political disagreement, but disagreement is less common in spaces explicitly dedicated to political discussion than in spaces not intended for such discussion (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009). In other words, more productive political discussions are likely to occur on a forum dedicated to *Anime* stories and art than one on Democratic primary elections. This observation is echoed in this study. Even though blogs generate plenty of disagreement, explicit expressions of disagreement occur in only half of the diaries (mean = 0.54 expressions of disagreement per diary), and the authors of the sampled diaries are some of the best that Daily Kos and Red State have to offer considering their long term involvement in their respective communities.

There are many perspectives on the meaning of blogs in politics. They have been popularly described as assisting in the democratization of publishing because of their accessibility and ease of use. As such, they have been well-utilized in various political

campaigns over the last decade. Political blogs are instrumental in bringing together like-minded supporters to discuss public issues and participate politically. This ability also carries a risk of the creation of deliberative enclaves that are unproductive in a democracy. Indeed, the linking practices of blogs are evidence for their contributing to an increased partisan divide in the United States.

Putting the Community in Political Blogging

Being a part of a community is an important part of surviving everyday life. Communities support reasonable social interaction and societies. The more participatory the community, the better it becomes. In the United States especially, community, communication, and democracy are often said to be inseparable (e.g. Dewey, 1927). In the same way that the television and the Internet were and to some extent continue to be seen as instruments of democratic renewal, so has community building. In short, democracy in American governance can be strengthened by deepening it at the community level.

If one agrees that American politics is broken to the point where problems cannot be solved nor policies enacted justifiably, as many of the theorists and scholars incorporated into the literature that is the basis of this paper's conceptual framework, not to mention the Political Blogging Community participants themselves, do, then searching for ways to revive American democracy is an important task. As such, strengthening local, national, regional, and global communities is seen as one promising yet difficult to implement solution. American politics has its foundations in the values and institutions that sustain community (Warren, 2001:x). However, the U.S. tends to lack the kinds of organizations that promote and sustain the active democratic participation of its citizens (Warren, 2001:4). A truly democratic society would find democratic organizations everywhere (Pateman, 1970).

In the English-language Internet, perhaps the two most visible Political Blogging Communities are the liberal Daily Kos and the conservative Red State. Although they take opposing political perspectives and views on policy, they are ultimately comparable because the sites themselves are designed very similar ways, have similar types of people who participate there, and enjoy a similar amount of renown in their respective blogospheres. As such, their

examples will be raised throughout this thesis, and were the sites selected from which the diaries were sampled for content analysis.

Returning to the theories of community and democracy, although Political Blogging Communities of Daily Kos and Red State are ultimately controlled by the owners of the servers and domain names, the content is not tightly or authoritatively controlled. People are largely responsible for their own participation. The meritocratic structure of the commenting and recommendation system is certainly democratically controlled by the participants themselves. People are relatively free to voice their opinions with the hope that others within the community will take their words seriously, perhaps more seriously than they would be taken in more general, larger, even physical, settings. In the larger picture, however, the actual effects of their discussions on public policy are nearly impossible to systematically trace.

Community is also constituted by a sense of social unity. Citizens in community exercise agency and are committed to sustaining daily face-to-face communities locally; this effort translates into the making of broader imagined communities (Green, 1999:viii; Anderson, 1991). Ideally, a democratic community will be diverse in order to create the environment for rational progress. Participants in deeply democratic communities value this diversity, mutually support each other, and in turn create shared memories and hopes that sustain long-term commitments and help make meaning out of a common struggle (Green, 1999). Within the ideological and technological constraints, Political Blogging Communities support the notion of citizen agency and the ability to connect a community across large geographic areas because the community members are distributed. By sharing stories and presenting their own perspectives on political issues and reading those of others, participants in Political Blogging Communities certainly make sense out of a shared struggle to make the U.S. a better place.

Communities aid in facilitating deliberation and can be the place where deliberative democracy is a form of rule. To the extent that communities are deliberative, participating in one helps in the development of deliberative capacity. Communities offer a comforting place to deliberate. Participants in a community are more likely to deliberate because they feel a connection to one another. The issues discussed are also more likely to be important to each participant because they affect the entire physical or emotional wellbeing of the community. The normative ideal of democracy claims that these discussions are worthwhile, even necessary. Citizens will be more satisfied with outcomes of public decisions, more satisfied with and

investing in the functioning of the communities they are a part of than if the discussions did not take place or political decisions were made hierarchically. Similarly, participants in Political Blogging Communities are much more satisfied with their community than outside observers, and will fight to preserve the most-valued aspects of the site when they feel newer members, non-members, or the larger political context is threatening the fabric of the community. These feelings are expressed in not-infrequent diaries about the community's purpose.[7]

Because the Internet remains mostly freely accessible, it is a highly unique medium. Its open nature and its expansiveness constitute a situation in which people can do seemingly incompatible things: speak publicly to potentially many persons, *and* speak publicly to such a restricted audience that it feels more like a private activity (Papacharissi, 2010). Political Blogging Communities are accessible by anyone with a web browser, and participation is voluntary and based in a notion of fairness (Borkman, 1999:17). Participants in self-help/mutual aid groups that are the subject of Borkman's studies, as well as those that are a part of Political Blogging Communities, share a common purpose and often many common characteristics—such as the ability to articulate their opinions or use blogging software—that aid in meeting shared goals (Borkman, 1999:45).

Further, in such groups, "people can explore their humanness, develop intimacy with experiential peers … develop organizational skills to participate in civil society, participate in an identity oriented (new) social movement, and contribute to their community's store of social capital" (92). Within Political Blogging Communities, people are free to organize in this way without community, but a community encourages personal and group capacity. While deliberation is not a common feature of physical space realities, the deliberative and democratic experiences of people in Political Blogging Communities better equip them for democratic political life while also infusing an expectation that the physical world's political realities contain more democratic aspects.

The smaller, like-minded community, characterized above as a deliberative enclave, is unique among other forms of social organization because it allows people to express themselves comfortably. Political Blogging Communities are such a place where participants can grow and learn from each other. As long as one is comfortable with comparing alcoholics or stutterers to liberal Democrats or conservative Republicans, Political Blogging Communities share many

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[7] A diary that contains feelings of this type is featured in Chapter 5.

features of self-help/mutual aid groups. Self-help/mutual aid groups gather people with the same predicament together to share personal stories of their efforts to resolve their problem (Borkman, 1999:2). Self-help/mutual aid groups are also distinguished by their radical organizational and governing structure. They are organizations that function as participant-controlled learning forums situated in the commons and are catalysts for social change through experiential learning (Borkman, 1999:4). The most well-known example of a self-help/mutual aid group is Alcoholics Anonymous. Viewing Political Blogging Communities as a form of self-help/mutual aid group provides a valuable insight into why people who start blogging at these sites continue to be there years later. It also enables an optimistic reading of why authors become better bloggers generally, and better deliberators specifically. It adds another piece to existing structural (i.e. the internet just magically makes this happen) and self-interested (authors want to become famous or are selfishly seeking a specific political end and hope to leverage the community to advance their cause) explanations. As people share their stories by using the technologies supported by the Internet deployed in Political Blogging Communities, they attempt to fit their own life's experience and political perspectives with the larger narrative context of the entire web site.

Self-help/mutual aid groups and Political Blogging Communities are formed primarily as a result of spontaneous, informal grassroots efforts.[8] They are also often formed in response to perceived stereotypes projected by the "mainstream" society onto the participants. For example, Daily Kos was formed by Markos Moulitsas in May, 2002 quite spontaneously in response to his perception that the country was heading in an uncomfortably conservative direction. Much of the front page content found on Daily Kos over the years has focused on controlling the identity of liberal Democrats in U.S. politics. Besides the front page contributors, other Daily Kos participants spend a good deal of time lamenting the misportrayal of liberal Democrats and their policy agendas by the media and conservative politicians. The expression of these frustrations, as well as the way in which the Internet can distribute communities geographically, has led many liberals who live in conservative regions to come out of hiding and get involved in the progressive movement participating both online and gaining confidence to take action in their own geographically local communities. The same can also be said of Red State, although their numbers are smaller.

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[8] Other popular political blogs are not necessarily such due to grassroots efforts. For example, one of the most popular political blogs, ThinkProgress, was formed by liberal political action committee, Center for American Progress. It is also not a Political Blogging Community, however.

While former President Bill Clinton is certainly respected by members of the community, he is thought to be responsible for the perception that the Democratic party has become more mainstream, focused on securing social liberties instead of economic ones without upsetting the more conservative, beltway-oriented establishment members who believe that this is the only politically viable strategy. In fact, according to the site's FAQ page, Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman and former Arkansas Senator Blanche Lincoln are held out as examples of what the community is fighting against.[9] Liberal Democrats want more progressive candidates and more a more progressive policy agenda.

The personal stories, myths and community-wide legends are highly significant aspects of the community, although relatively few posts are dedicated to their retelling. The successes of older members are not lost on new members. This is a form of experiential knowledge that is highly valued in self-help/mutual aid groups and Political Blogging Communities. Experiential knowledge here includes knowledge about how the Political Blogging Community and/or the American political system works. It is both personal and collective, and is the main source of authority within the group (Borkman, 1999:15). Political Blogging Communities are potentially more effective in retaining and communicating experiential knowledge because all forms of communication are recorded, and remain reasonably findable. The repository of knowledge creates the possibility for a reflective process that is necessary to "convert raw experience into meaningful knowledge" (Borkman, 1999:16). Blogging in community is a process where people react to each other, read about other's experiences, and learn how to present their own stories.

This process is also a kind of individual journey. Often, participants express very personal feelings of helplessness in the face of oppressive scenarios. There seems to be little chance of escaping their predicament (Borkman, 1999: 32). One of the leading explanations as to why people turn to political blogs is that they perceive traditional political participation or discussion to be impossible. Once in the community for a formative time, as participants address their common problem through the experiences of others, they lose the sense of powerlessness and develop a sense of self-determination (Borkman, 1999:32). To get to that position of empowerment, participants must fully understand the group's liberating perspective (Borkman, 1999:42). From there, they positively confront the common problem of the American political system, public policy, and identity. Once a participant in a Political Blogging Community can

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[9] Available at http://www.dkosopedia.com/wiki/DailyKos_FAQ

get to this point in their journey, they begin to learn that adhering to the deliberative norms of the medium and the community is the surest solution both to being well-understood and respected within that community and in the regional and national political environment.

In a community supported by self-help/mutual aid and Political Blogging Communities, the strengths of particular persons are recognized (Borkman, 1999: 50). In their diaries, authors will often remark that they were inspired by the work of others. Other participants express their appreciation for the unique or especially valuable perspective of an author by recommending their diaries and comments. Moreover, informality in community communication is a sign of a truly associational life where relationships are authentic (Borkman, 1999:50), even if participants can choose to hide their real-world identities. Stories of gatherings, parties, campaign events, protests, tragedies, etc., that appear in diaries and comments is integral to the life of a community, and participants who choose to share such stories online tend to be more well-respected as well.

For example, participants of Political Blogging Communities will sometimes take the time to write a dairy describing their personal life. Often, these stories are tangential to the site's purpose of remaking American politics. They describe health problems, deaths in the family, issues with employment, and lifetime milestones. For example, *goatchowder* described being really afraid because he was running out of money after being unemployed for several years; this story was met with 36 very supportive comments from other participants.[10] *Digitalmuse* penned no less than three diaries about her son who died of cancer when he was in college.[11] Many diaries during the summer months at Daily Kos and in the winter months at Red State, are dedicated to the annual real world gatherings of many of the participants at Netroots Nation (formerly Yearly Kos) and the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), respectively.[12] These activities show that participants are willing to share their personal lives with each other, in addition to their opinions, both online and in more traditional settings.

Often bloggers simply want to express themselves because they feel stifled in their everyday lives (e.g. Nardi et al, 2004; Papacharissi, 2010). Communicating through stories, self-

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[10] Available at http://www.dailykos.com/story/2010/08/12/892632/--Fear. Accessed 24 June 2011
[11] Diaries available at: http://dailykos.com/story/2008/03/13/475514/-Dear-Dante,-Glad-Youre-Not-Here; http://www.dailykos.com/story/2008/04/05/490905/-Why-I-Support-ObamaA-Mothers-Story; http://www.dailykos.com/story/2008/06/02/527740/-The-Grieving-RoomOne-is-the-Loneliest-Number-Remembering-My-Only-Son,-Dante
[12] 2011 marked the second annual gathering of Right Online, a conference that parallels Netroots Nation. Both were held in Minneapolis at the same hotel on June 16-19 (http://www.netrootsnation.org; http://www.rightonline.com).

help/mutual aid groups and Political Blogging Communities transform identity and recreate an alternative social world (Borkman, 1999: 20). The potentially negative effects of this have already been documented—the danger of deliberative enclaves becoming echo-chambers of partisan hardening and misinformation. However, the theoretical framework of community provides an explanatory perspective as to why this may not be happening or why the consequences of such are not so dire.

The Social Functions of Self-Help/Mutual Aid Groups and Political Blogging Communities

Other functions of self-help/mutual aid groups and Political Blogging Communities help to explain their effectiveness and attractiveness. In their estimation, the groups regularly communicate the newest and most relevant information from professionals to those who need it most. It could be as simple as the latest political news, an effective campaign strategy, a convincing argumentative style, or the latest exit poll data. Political Blogging Communities also do well in assessing the worth of other, often unhelpful knowledge that remains within the network (Borkman, 1999:71). Participants spend considerable amounts of time reconsidering long held tenets in American politics. For example, the existence of blogs challenges the notion that 'all politics is local'. Participants also tend to be convinced that 'hugging the middle' of the political spectrum is not always the best path to an electoral or legislative victory. Blogs are sometimes effective at accomplishing their goals, both limited and expansive in scope, and these deliberative functions speak to this success.

The social, and in the case of Political Blogging Communities, physical technologies are a major reason for the effectiveness of these groups. These technologies serve a dual purpose: they are part of the process of intervening to stop unfair political practice and they are also a vehicle for actually solving the problem (Borkman, 1999:115). Experiential learning becomes a more generalized mode of inquiry and an inherently collaborative problem solving technique (Borkman, 1999:146-148). In this way too, deliberation, especially as a learning process, is a catch-all solution; it intervenes, it clarifies reality, and it offers a path for finding workable and justifiable solutions.

The form of social interaction—listening and expressing—transforms individual perspectives. Seasoned members of the group or Political Blogging Community will often try to

coax a participant into a reformed pattern of thought (Borkman, 1999:142). This mentorship is often very productive for participants as they try to make sense of their frustrations with American politics but can also lead to the creation of the deliberative enclaves. The capacity-building process will not work properly if a participant does not engage emotionally or mentally (Borkman, 1999:143). The deliberative qualities of Political Blogging Communities force participants to engage intellectually, but where knowledge is lacking, authors tend to resort to emotional responses as well. It is for this reason that lurkers, those who may or may not be registered users but do not have a record of commenting on or posting diaries, are not considered participants within the Political Blogging Community, even though they read content, and thus help fund the maintenance of the site through advertising revenues.

The individual author in a Political Blogging Community can go through three stages of development, suggesting that over time there will be progressive changes in the nature of their participation. They begin as *victims* who do not know how to make sense of their experience with American politics and public policy. Victims are mostly expressive, venting their frustrations and blaming others. Once they learn that they are not alone, that others have similar opinions or have had similar personal experiences and remain within the community, they can be characterized as a *survivor* (Borkman, 1999). Survivors enter the community and stay there. All of the authors considered in this study have made it to at least the survivor stage, as they have a record of sustained blogging for more than a year.

At the third, mature stage, an author can either be a *thrivor* or *dogmatic* (Borkman, 1999). A very small number of people ever reach this stage. A thrivor is a participant that thrives as a liberal Democrat or a conservative Republican. They are leaders within the community and often have also evolved into leaders outside the community as well. They recognize needs within the community and probe for solutions agreeable to everyone. These leaders help others articulate opinions and suggest paths for action on problems. Most of these needs are policy-oriented or are directed at political reform. Others, however, are geared towards aiding individuals whose problems were face by others in the community before, such as dealing with friends with different political persuasions.

A dogmatic participant, on the other hand, has been an active member within the community for years, but has not embraced the positive narrative, or the liberating perspective, of the identity of the community (Borkman, 1999). They articulate opinions well, have helped

out others in the past, but often complain that their life has not changed, and therefore, the community has not lived up to its promise. This is a very large risk for bloggers due to the ever-nagging questions surrounding the transferability of cyber political participation to the real world. Participants who become semi-famous beyond the community are the most at risk, and due to their fame, have a high chance of negatively affecting many members of the community. For example, David Sirota was an early member of Daily Kos, and became well-respected progressive journalist, publishing a number of books. He also regularly published at Daily Kos. But he quickly became jaded during the first few months of the Obama Administration, and it showed in his diaries. The reaction to these increasingly burned-out diaries was highly negative, and he subsequently quit Daily Kos in a now famous diary where he criticized the entire community for the opinions, and essentially claimed that the entire blogging idea was pointless (unfortunately, this post has since been deleted by him). He eventually returned in 2009, but could still be characterized as a prime example of a dogmatic participant. The authors considered more closely in this study are all positions at different moments in their development though categorical characterization is difficult.[13]

It should be noted that while professional knowledge is widely shared and often well-respected within the communities, professionals themselves do not have any greater or lesser authority in the makeup of the group. In fact, when professionals create and manage groups, they are strikingly different from the self-created and participant controlled groups in their functioning and meaningful outcomes (Borkman, 1999:85). Professionally managed political blogs, such as those hosted by Democrats.com or GOP.org, while attracting a great deal of readers, are not as popular, as respected, or as widely cited as the self-created blogs at Daily Kos and Red State. They do not as well-facilitate a fraction of the interaction that takes place on Daily Kos or Red State, and it is certainly not because they lack name recognition or expertise; the content is much more tightly controlled, and meaningful contributions come from only a small number of authors.

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[13] Due to the sampling frame employed in this thesis, some sampled authors have been members of the community for much longer than others, and may be facing the end of their developmental curve. This limitation of the study will be discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

For example, *Vorkosigan*, an author at Daily Kos, is a professor of politics in Taiwan with an expertise in Southeast Asia.[14] He writes about the topic frequently. But he is not afforded a position of authority based on that status. Instead, he is well-respected by the community because his insights are very valuable, and he has since made a niche for himself teaching others while occasionally expressing his frustrations with contemporary U.S. domestic politics and foreign policy.

Indeed, self-help/mutual aid groups and Political Blogging Communities provide paths to leadership roles for ordinary participants (Borkman, 1999:122). Some diarists have been made front-page diarists by virtue of their ability to write and engage with other participants, as well as the record of approval from community members measured by recommendations and, in the case of Daily Kos, *impact*.[15] These authors are then compensated monetarily for their efforts. The author of the High Impact Diaries series on Daily Kos, *jotter*, is a volunteer. The group of participants and authors who publish the series of "Diary Rescue" diaries are also volunteers. The diary rescuers direct attention to high-quality diaries that for some reason, often accidental, did not warrant proper attention. Both of these are examples of how participants can make the most out of creative leadership opportunities.

Transformational Blogging in Community

The above discussion may seem to make too much out of blogging. One might claim that all blogging is selfish and superficial at worst, politically ineffectual at best. On the other hand, the applicability of theories about community, democratically organized groups, and the impact they have on individuals through social learning are striking. This speaks to the transformative power of Internet communications and their political ramifications. The transformational process for Political Blogging Community participants is very significant. By expressing themselves politically, and learning from their peers, they actually change their outlook on political life from one of inefficacy to one of efficacy. The theories discussed above here are useful because they

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[14] This fact was gleaned through the careful reading of the diaries sampled for this study. *Vorkosigan* spent most of his time at Daily Kos writing about his weekend biking trips.

[15] Each day, at least until this thesis was submitted, one author, *jotter*, makes of measure of the day's diaries, ranking them based on the number of views, recommendations, comments, and connections to other diaries (see, "High Impact Diaries, April 17, 2011", http://www.dailykos.com/story/2011/04/18/968008/-High-Impact-Diaries:-April-17,-2011). An author known as Angry Mouse was promoted to front page status in 2010 because of the impact of her diaries within in the community.

help explain why people might actually change while blogging. It explains why people continue to participate in the community when they could publish a few diaries, post a few comments anonymously, and then run away. The theory also helps clear the air of the seemingly magical properties of blogs described by the conventional wisdom, popular social science journalism (e.g. Bai, 2007; Trippi, 2004), and by the bloggers themselves (e.g. Armstrong & Zuniga, 2006). If blogging is an activity that can profoundly affect the outlook of a person, shifting even a very small percentage of the citizenry can have a profound impact, especially considering the multiplicative effects of political mobilization. This way, we can better explain why blogs are said to have had a major impact on the presidential primary campaign of Howard Dean in 2004, the wave elections of 2006 and 2010, and the successful nomination and election of Barack Obama to the American presidency in 2008.

The entire theoretical framework is important to consider because it offers an optimistic reading of the reasons for which people improve their blogging skills and become better at presenting their ideas in a deliberative fashion. It adds a normative explanatory dimension to existing, well-articulated structural explanations (e.g. the Internet is made for deliberation), as well as those simply positing that the more one writes, the better he or she becomes at doing it. There is a wide breadth of evidence and suppositions that Political Blogging Communities can fit conceptually into the community framework. One can see it in early predictions for what the future of the Internet might offer (Rheingold, 1993) and in the diaries and comments from today's authors. Just as new members are well-received in mutual aid/self-help groups, members of Political Blogging Communities welcome new work from newer authors. They are welcomed to the community because the act of creating an account is akin to professing the same political and deliberative values as the established community. Those who publish earn the respect of existing community members, evidenced by recommendations, comments, and subscriptions, by increasing the deliberative content they publish. These features reinforce a sense of belonging (Noveck, 2009:71). Veteran members can get away with having an off-day regarding community norms. But once they reach the status of a *thrivor,* as defined by Borkman (1999), they tend to become even more expressive and more inclined to experiment: this is where the real progress is made within the community, where the community as a whole can advance.

The meaning of blogs in American politics and democracy more generally has been interpreted in many different ways, from forums for mobilization, to spaces that exacerbate

polarization and decrease cooperation, to forums for democratic deliberation. This study is an attempt to draw on all three perspectives, while adding the additional component of community, to provide an account of blogs in American politics that both pessimists and optimists ought to be able to relate to. While blogs are often of low argumentative let alone deliberative quality, are full of vitriol for the opposing political or partisan positions, are often abandoned, and often lack consistent reference to facts, figures, or literatures, dedicated participants—those who are more invested in the outcomes of the dialogues as well as the policymaking process—do learn from each other in profound way. They learn how to publish online, express themselves politically, discuss their opinions, and consider the opinions of others, even if they purposefully or inadvertently create echo chambers (e.g. Sunstein, 2007). This thesis posits a theory of why and how they learn, and then tests whether deliberation is one thing that is learned.

The differences between the left and right wing blogs are significant and they emerge in this study as well. Not only are the linking practices different, but so are certain aspects of the deliberative and argumentative content and quality. However, the meritocratic and democratic natures of Daily Kos and Red State mitigate some of these differences, make the two comparable, and can therefore be considered together. By carefully adhering to official community guidelines and implicit social norms, participants earn recommendations from fellow members and generate discussion. This is a very significant, self-affirming reward for their dedication (Noveck, 2009).

The system of commenting and recommending itself is made for facilitating basic forms of deliberation. The Political Blogging Community space has been constructed in a way that facilitates certain intentional and unintentional political ends. Daily Kos and Red State were certainly intentionally constructed to advance the particular political agendas of the site creators and people with similar views. Unintentionally, the two websites generate discussions that build communicative forms of democratic capacity among their participants. And while diametrically opposing views regarding American politics and public policy are not seriously considered other than through the construction of straw men, there is certainly still space for disagreement so long as it conforms to the community standards. Certainly, Political Blogging Communities allow for the simple expression of unpopular opinions even if they are immediately denounced.

Whether or not participants in Political Blogging Communities are committed to creating echo chambers as opposed to deliberative spaces is not the focus of this study. This paper takes

the perspective that there are deliberative elements within an echo chamber as well, especially one that is constrained by the structural bias of the Internet. Content analysis projects tend to claim that there is potentially deliberation on political blogs. Analyses on the linking and readership practices mostly conclude that the benefits of such political discussions are marginal at best, and an effacement of basic democratic ideals at worst. The evidence presented here again conforms to both of these expectations. The content analysis employed here shows that deliberative norms are often practiced in the publishing of diaries—sometimes sparking fascinating discussion unfortunately not considered here. Some authors are better than others at substantiating their opinions with references, and in keeping with Lawrence, Sides and Farrell's study (2010), most of the links and quotations are to and from like-minded sources, with liberals a bit more willing to link to conservative sources. Instead of hoping for blogs to show signs of enabling a revitalization of democracy, blogs ought to be appreciated for "their potential for debasing the stability of political environments" (Papacharissi, 2010:149).

By addressing what happens to a particular author's and the general authors' average texts over time, we can get a better sense of the dynamic forces driving the political blogosphere, and better speculate whether blogs increase democratic capacity and enhance democracy or exacerbate unhelpful partisan divides that lead to political gridlock. These are the kinds of questions about the democratic potential of blogs that people who use blogs, the larger public, practitioners, and researchers are anxious to know more about.

Chapter Three: Contextualizing and Operationalizing Deliberation in Political Blogging Communities

Having presented the relevance of the thesis, the impetus for its undertaking, and its guiding theoretical framework above, this chapter defines more carefully the relevant concepts and terminology that are used throughout the thesis. Even though blogs, social networks, forums, and Twitter™ have become ubiquitous for much of the world, the terminology used to describe various aspects of the Internet remains unique and is sometimes ambiguous. And while the social and political phenomena scrutinized in this study are quite commonly defined, when they move online, they are called by different names, and take on slightly different meanings. It is therefore important to define some important terms so that it can be made clear what data were gathered, and how they were analyzed. The conceptual definitions provide a foundation for the development of the study's methodology.

Blogs on Bloggers' Terms

The research for this thesis was conducted at level(s) of analysis in relation to the physical (or digital) text. Importantly, *diaries* (defined below) are subject to analysis in whole and in part. Considering the role of individual persons occurs only retrospectively. In other words, the thesis refrains from concluding that persons are or are not changing because it is concerned only with texts. As such, the operationalization of the concepts presented here is directed towards making sense of a textual analysis of hand coded blog posts in relation to human interaction. Texts are defined as strings of characters organized into words and sentences, but also links, images, videos, and other content that can be incorporated into the blog post or diary based upon the parameters of the software and the Internet medium. The data readily available for this study suggest going to the textual level of analysis. Information about the bloggers themselves would greatly enhance the findings, but these additional steps are beyond the scope of this study.

The first group of terms describes the blogs themselves. A *blog* is fundamentally a piece of software that enables relatively easy regular updating of the content found on a web page. The low cost of the software as well as lesser amounts of time and knowledge necessary to add

content to a webpage is part of the reason that blogs are said to have democratized publishing. A blog is usually owned and operated by a particular person, group or organization, and the owners produce content for a potentially interactive audience. Rather than being thought of a simply a piece of software, a blog is more commonly considered a record of content the software helps display. The record of content generally appears in reverse chronological order and is divided into smaller bits called posts or entries (Herring, Kouper, Scheidt & Wright, 2004). At Daily Kos and Red State, these smaller pieces are called *diaries*. The diary is one of the objects studied here. It is a single record of content written by a specific, particular, distinguishable author and exhibits a clearly demarcated beginning and end, although it can be updated, revised, or deleted at any time. It usually appears in line with other content produced by the same author. An *author* is the person chiefly responsible for the content contributed in his or her name. The term is used exclusively in the context of this study to denote ownership. In Political Blogging Communities, authors are usually referred to as diarists or contributors.

A *Political Blogging Community* is a space where like-minded people gather to produce, consume, and exchange political information. For Political Blogging Communities to function well, they have to be relatively famous so that they can attract a large number of willing and regular *participants*. In the midst of this fame, there is a dedication to keeping to the tenet of relative equal opportunity. All participants in the community have the opportunity to have their work widely-read, although in this case many come to enjoy a small following based upon a reputation or the topics they choose to write about. The community participants support the blog software collectively by collecting fees from advertisers (although the actual owners use the money the way they see fit), and by tolerating advertisements on each page. There is no charge to use the site or to be a participant.

The website, taking on aspects of a real community, is also sometimes deliberative. Participants deliberate the political topics of the day, especially nationally salient issues since the community is a kind of distributed network. However, people of widely divergent ideological or partisan perspectives do not reside within the community. Opposing views are instead presented as so many straw men or by links to content instead of by the people who hold such views. The term Political Blogging Community is meant to distinguish this kind of website from other political blogs that exist in isolation or at different networked domain names, even if the content, topics covered and even authors are generally similar. A very important distinction is the ability

to post diaries rather than just comments; this ability does much more to equalize the gap between established owners of blogs and other interested persons.

There are a few different types of members of Political Blogging Communities. A *participant* is one who is part of the Political Blogging Community and contributes either as an *author* or *commenter*. People who are registered users but only read the content are not considered participants. This term is another that is used exclusively in this study but not in the Political Blogging Communities themselves or in other studies. Participants are labeled as such instead of as *members* because many people can be spoken of as 'members' without ever having participated.

One type of participant is a *diarist*.[16] A diarist is one who is a registered member of the Political Blogging Community and has posted at least one diary publicly. Many people can be diarists and authors, but an author is only referred to as such when it is his or her work in question. Another kind of participant, a *commenter*, is one who is a registered member of the Political Blogging Community that has contributed content to the site in the form of a 'comment.' The comment is construed as feedback on the author's position but is also a form of discussion occurring with other participants. Registering oneself on the website is a prerequisite for participating in this way. This is a term used in this study and also within Political Blogging Communities themselves and is distinct from another frequently invoked term, *lurker*.

A *lurker* is someone who may or may not be a registered member of the Political Blogging Community, or any online forum, but reads a great deal of content (Nonnecke & Preece, 2000). Instead of producing his or her own content or contributing to the work of others, he or she only consumes the content, and in this way gains a working knowledge of the way the website works and also community norms. A lurker is akin to the new member of a support group that has yet to say anything publicly to the other members about their personal troubles. Most people begin their journey as lurkers, and the presence of lurkers is always in the mind of authors and commenters.

An integral feature of blogging is the hyperlink, or *link*. A link is a clickable connection to other content on the Internet. Links are used to source content or direct readers to additional information if they are inclined to learn more. Usually, links on blogs refer to news stories or

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[16] The term is used and defined by the political blogging communities that allow users to post their own content, but is also widely used in online spaces where people use blogs as personal journals, such as Xanga™.

content from other blogs, and, increasingly, multimedia from places like YouTube™ . The frequency of links in diaries is thus an important indicator of adherence to deliberative norms.

Deliberation and Deliberative Democracy in Political Blogging Communities

Besides the various features of blogs and the people who are responsible for their content, a second important set of concepts surrounds deliberation. To reiterate, deliberation is often conceived of as a model of political or democratic communication. It is grounded in the Habermasian conception of the public sphere, of which there are three principle characteristics (1989:36): the use of rational-critical argument as the basic criterion for the judging of public contributions, limiting discussion to the domain of public concern, and opening discussion to all members of the public. All of the elements of ideal deliberation are of great importance to the concept of deliberative democracy, a form of rule in which deliberation by citizens on public issues drives governance in a particular jurisdiction.

Because of the rigorous requirements of these characteristics, deliberation is rarely, if ever, observed naturally occurring. However, the content of ideal or near-ideal deliberation is helpful in assessing the democratic performance of political discussion spaces, including those that are at home online (Freelon, 2010). The norms that guide deliberation, or *deliberative norms*, are some combination of argument quality, equality, reciprocity, and diversity (Schneider, 1997; Freelon, 2010).

This study further delineates the deliberative norms as defined by Stromer-Galley (2007) whose codebook was adapted for gathering and interpreting the data. Although only used in limited settings, it has served as an example to several scholars interested in the quality of deliberation, especially when it occurs online. Although many scholars have sought to operationalize Habermas' ideas about public deliberation, this particular codebook has been held out as the most comprehensive because it incorporated important yet overlooked as aspects of Habermasian concepts (Freelon, 2010). The scheme has been praised as groundbreaking by communications scholars for highlighting the importance of intragroup interaction (Wilson, 2009; Carcasson, Black & Sink, 2010). It has also contributed to the ongoing polishing of the 'Conversational Argument Scheme,' a standardized set of criteria for analyzing political argumentation (Meyers & Brashers, 2010). It has been applied to offline settings as well because

it is has been adept at focusing more closely on content of argumentation rather than procedures (Lord & Tamvaki, 2011). Its flexibility has also been illustrated in application to archived experimental data gathered online (Freelon et al., 2008). The results of studies employing the scheme have provoked thoughts on the design of online deliberative spaces (Davies & Chandler, 2011). Finally, it is most often cited as a particularly illuminating and reliable way to discover deliberative quality (Manosevitch & Walker, 2009; Gordon & Manosevitch, 2010), and has thus been held up as an example for the development of other coding schemes interested in quality, if not deliberation (Bonito & Sanders, 2010). In short, the method of content analysis proposed by Stromer-Galley (2007) is compelling because it has worked well in several different settings, yielding reliable results, and has also been held up as an example of innovation in research design. It has been widely read and closely examined by scholars interested in topics similar to those explored in this thesis, and it is promising that further work using the codebook and adaptations of it will add to a growing body of knowledge that focuses on the quality of online deliberation.

The codebook focuses on the three basic criteria defined by Habermas which are expanded into five different, more easily measured ones. The first is *reasoned opinion expression* (Stromer-Galley, 2007). Clear expression of an opinion is an important component of deliberation. Speakers or writers need to make rational arguments. Such an argument must be grounded empirically and opinions should be supported by evidence. In Political Blogging Communities, for there to be high quality of deliberation, authors need to reference other sources whenever possible to justify their opinions and claims. The incentives to express a rational opinion are also reinforced in the blog setting. A diary will either express an opinion or argument or it will not. So-called junk diaries, diaries without any purpose, are quickly dismissed by the Daily Kos and Red State communities using feedback tools. A diary that contains a number of opinions without reference to other sources negatively affects an author's reputation. The sites are designed in a way so as to make those kinds of diaries disappear from a more substantive discussion. Therefore, participants have an incentive to craft well-articulated diaries. The continued presence of reasoned opinion expression in the discussion signals a capacity to deliberate.

Citing an external source, or *sourcing,* signals to other participants a willingness to engage other rationally constructed opinions (Stromer-Galley, 2007:4). Here, the kind of source

that is cited is illuminating. If the participant uses personal narratives or opinions as sources, it is considered of lower deliberative quality. External sources, especially those commonly known or easily accessible, help create and sustain a sense of community and common understanding. This way, disagreement can be more easily understood. In the context of Political Blogging Communities, external sourcing mostly consists of linking to other Internet content. While an experienced participant learns that citing sources helps secure readership and renown, sourcing may also be a sign of an increased awareness of politics and the diversity of voices and opinions in a democracy. Sourcing signals a realization that more voices have a legitimate say on the issues at hand. This attitude in turn reinforces the general norm of deliberative equality.

If there is disagreement on substantive issues expressed through reasoned expression, this is a major sign that deliberation is taking place. One plausible line of reasoning pursued by Stromer-Galley (2007) is that if people are disagreeing, it means they are willing to listen to each other and rearticulate their own positions. Disagreement arises when there is a problem that needs resolving and the proposed solutions are in conflict. Participants are then in dialogue with each other over implementing the best solution. Contested views lead participants to strengthen their arguments with better argumentation (Stromer-Galley, 2007:5). In the context of Political Blogging Community diaries, disagreement can be seen in the calling out of other participants' positions within a larger argument, the specific addressing of a particular diary to another participant, the discussion found in the comments, and the accepted protocol of updating diaries when new relevant information is made known to the author. Responding with an update on a particular diary means that a participant has at least considered other positions generated in response to the initial publication.

The propensity of participants to seriously consider each other's opinions is made possible by adhering to the deliberative ideal of *equality*. Equality is usually thought of as a prerequisite to deliberation. In this context, it means that everyone has the chance to participate meaningfully. Every effort should be made to include those who are directly affected by the problem or solution that is the topic at hand. No one should dominate the discussion or attempt to silence others. This way, more relevant information might enter the discussion and enhance deliberative outcomes (Stromer-Galley, 2007:6).

In the context of Political Blogging Communities, the author should allow reasonable discussion to take place. He or she should also refrain from phrasing a diary or any argument

within it in such a way so as to purposefully exclude a particular kind of community member from the discussion. For example, from the evidence gathered anecdotally in this study, pro-Israeli participants of Daily Kos and Red State tend to write highly inflammatory comments about those sympathetic to the plight of the Palestinians. This practice excludes potentially knowledgeable participants and impedes deliberation. As shown in numerous other studies, there is little room for partisan disagreement. Practically, this means that conservatives are not granted equality on Daily Kos and liberals are not granted equality on Red State. As conservative author *ctron* of Daily Kos writes "I do not write here much. I feel, sometimes, as if I am in enemy territory here."[17]

However, this thesis and the coding scheme used for analysis of the gathered data takes the perspective that it is the very act of rhetorical exclusion that helps draw out productive disagreement. Because all those involved in the conversation share a foundational belief about an issue larger than the one at hand, disagreement becomes more acceptable and other positions are taken more seriously. Arguing among friends produces very different outcomes than arguments among enemies, and one could speculate that they are more intellectually beneficial so long as other deliberative ideals are closely adhered to as well.

Deliberation demands discipline. Much rests upon whether participants stay on *topic*. Deliberation implies a deep consideration of an issue using all available information (Stromer-Galley, 2007:7). If the conversation is off-topic or out of its native context, it is difficult for new participants to identify what the participants are deliberating about. The principal topic of Daily Kos and Red State is generally the improvement of U.S. governance and civil society performance. So long as content is about American politics, it is considered on topic. The subtopics that fall into this category are seemingly limitless, but if an author spends a large amount of time discussing off-topic items, then he or she is likely to garner negative feedback. Political Blogging Communities are structured in such a way as to reinforce the value of staying on topic.

Someone who takes deliberation seriously is more likely to remain engaged with his or her audience or fellow participants. Just as authors engage the topic they also engage each other. *Engagement* is probably the most important aspect of deliberation, especially when considering the phenomenon in Political Blogging Communities. On the Internet, it is very easy to post

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[17] Diary available at http://www.dailykos.com/story/2008/11/05/655262/-Its-a-new-dawn-

something somewhere and disappear. The norms of communities mitigate these propensities, however. Essentially, deliberative and community norms encourage people to take turns speaking (Stromer-Galley, 2007:8). Diaries should reflect an interest in what others have said about a particular issue. They should present the opinion of the author, but also probe for the opinions of others in a way that makes the original author's position amenable. Because of the importance of this norm, and also its unfortunate rarity, this study focused only on authors that have a record of sustained participation.

The above six categories, reasoned opinion expression, sourcing, disagreement, equality, topic and engagement, each play a significant role in the analysis of the data. The more an author includes all of these aspects into their diaries, the better he or she adheres to the deliberative norms of the community. Clearly defining what blogs are, what aspects of them are of significance to the theoretical framework and the question of change in deliberative quality over time, and who the people are that contribute content to these blogs aids in the construction of a methodology that will yield meaningful results.

Chapter Four: Defining and Measuring Deliberation in Political Blogging Communities

This study is unique in that it attempts to unify theories of democratic deliberation in the public sphere with theories about communities and blogs; at the same time, it connects these in a new way to the data gathering methods. Measuring deliberation is problematic because it is difficult to determine when it is happening, let alone what is going on within it. Therefore, it is necessary to first encounter the texts at the most basic of levels to establish whether there is more or less deliberation that is of greater or lesser quality. A measure for deliberation designed by Stromer-Galley (2007) that has yielded useful results and proven reliable represents a formidable attempt to take this approach.

While the previous chapter defined key terminology, this chapter details how they are applicable to the data gathering and analysis methods. It provides justification for the coding scheme, details coding procedures, introduces the kinds of data that were gathered for the thesis and prepares the foundation for the expected results. The hand coding scheme, while relatively straightforward, comes with its own set of theoretical baggage that ought to be parsed before proceeding to the data gathering methods and results sections of the thesis.

The coding scheme developed by Stromer-Galley (2007) that was adapted for this thesis is premised on the distinction between dialogue and deliberation. Deliberation in a group entails the addressing of a shared problem, exploring it, and arriving at an agreed upon solution collectively. The thesis takes the position that all participants in the deliberation address the problem of American politics. Specific and frequent grievances include: America is not what it should be and this is the fault of poor governance, the political system is not democratic enough, American politics is not sufficiently liberal or conservative, and the Democratic and Republican parties are not sufficiently liberal or conservative, respectively.

Because the codebook was developed to cope with and categorize different parts of a verbal discussion, it is challenging to apply the various measures to the ideal of deliberation that is bound up in the research question. However, the coding scheme fundamentally measures *thoughts,* although they are spoken of here as *arguments*. A single argument is the principal level of analysis. It therefore asks *how many* thoughts or arguments occurred in the deliberation. The codebook categorizes the arguments according to the basic elements of deliberation. It asks how

many elements of deliberation are found in each text, or group of multiple arguments. An argument itself is defined as "an utterance that expresses an idea on a topic" (Stromer-Galley, 2007:3). Discussion is therefore a very important part of the coding scheme. Within the text, there are arguments about the problem, arguments about the process, arguments about the deliberation, and off-topic but communally important social discussion. A full description of the adapted coding scheme that very closely resembles its original formulation can be found in Appendix C.

Coding Rationale

The goal of the coding process is to make diaries at Daily Kos and Red State, or anywhere else, written by different authors comparable to each other in order to assess change over time. The hand coding procedures measure the raw amount of deliberation in each post. Once the all the arguments are considered in each post, all the content is standardized and is therefore comparable. It makes an analysis of the posts individually and in aggregate possible. Assessing change over time is also then made possible.

The resulting data reflects an attempt to make sense of the deliberative content absent or present in the content of Political Blogging Communties quantitatively. Categorizing the various kinds of arguments relevant to the ideal concept of deliberation essentially assesses the performance of the author. It therefore makes comparing authorial performance possible, and, more distantly, it advances upon an analysis of the development of individual capacities.

The coding scheme is useful not only for assessing deliberation's content; it also addresses many of the aspects of the literature on community found in this study's theoretical framework that inspired the entire project. It measures the degree to which participants speak directly to each other, speak about the Political Blogging Community, and in turn, articulate a liberating narrative that aids in an individual's development of deliberative capacity.

Coding Plan

What an author publishes online is very complex, but it reflects a more sustained attempt to communicate complete thoughts than would take place in everyday conversation. Although

different amounts of text appear in each diary, within that space, there is much that can happen. Accurately categorizing what is happening within the text is imperative. The full guidelines, summarized here, for coding developed, adapted, and used for this study can be found in appendices C, D and E.

The first step is to identify what the diary refers to. A diary starts a new topic, responds to a topic, or continues the author's line of reasoning begun in a previous diary. Starting a new topic can include discussing a new position, policy, or program. A diary that is written in response to a chronologically prior text or is written about the Political Blogging Community's strategic goals is considered a diary that responds to a topic. Because of the retrospective and decontextualized nature of the way in which the data by necessity had to be gathered, it is difficult to know if the diary is responding to a topic raised by the Political Blogging Community's paid front page contributors unless there is specific reference to this being the case. Therefore, most diaries are categorized as raising new topics. Finally, a diary that elaborates on the author's ideas from one of his or her previous diaries is considered a continuation of self. These diaries are often presented in a series format with similar diary titles. Getting an overall sense of what the diary is about helps to speed up the categorization of the arguments contained within that seem ambiguous at first glance.

To better grasp the coding of each argument, the texts are broken down into aspects—text about the problem, text about text, text about the deliberative process, or text that is off-topic. Briefly, *problemtext* or problem arguments are text about the common problem of American politics, which can take many forms on many different topics (discussed below).

Metatext or, meta arguments, are text about the text. Metatext arguments focus on clarifying the meaning of the text at hand. Oftentimesm authors are explicit about their arguments being of this type, and even 'tag' it as such. Beyond this, metatext takes the form of critically assessing the text at hand and the other texts of the deliberation found in Political Blogging Communities. The metatext designation also includes text about the direction or ideological/partisan slant of the general conversation taking place in the community.

Authors, in their mentioning of the names of other authors, help to create a sense of community within a community. Social arguments, or *socialtext,* are text that contains arguments intended to strengthen the bonds between participants. Although uncommon, the presence of social arguments is integral to the power of community to explain changes in the adherence to

deliberative norms. One could say that the more social arguments in a diary, the more participants are treating blogging like a conversation among longtime friends. Most social arguments encountered in this study are off-topic. Some of it takes the shape of sharing personal stories that serves as a basis for other diaries that may or may not be also off-topic.

Processtext, or process arguments, are texts containing arguments about the process or practice of publishing diaries or comments. This often takes the form of complaints that a various technical aspect of the site does not work. Authors may also ask for help with embedding a link, image or video into the diary. More importantly, however, process arguments can also be arguments that critically or reflexively examine the deliberation itself in relation to the technology that enables it.

Coding and Categorizing Arguments in Political Blogging Communities

Arguments are the principal unit of analysis for which the deliberation in the Political Blogging Community is coded. All kinds of phrases are coded as arguments, from opinions and facts to jokes and references to other texts. While it is easy to determine where one argument begins and ends when an author is referring to another text due to the inclusion of links, it is more difficult to know when authors are presenting different opinion-based arguments. One strategy is to look for orienting text. When authors themselves express that they are offering a new argument, one can be fairly certain a new argument is to follow. Because the deliberation is written out asynchronously in Political Blogging Communities, and sometimes edited by the authors, essentially every phrase, sentence, or part of a sentence is a new argument, whereas in face-to-face deliberation, some talk is empty.

What distinguishes arguments about the problem from general arguments? For an argument to be considered as an argument about the problem, it must be on topic, meaning that it must relate in some way to the general problem of American politics. Arguments about the problem take the form of *opinion, agreement*, or *disagreement*. An opinion is an expression of the author's belief about the way the world works. Statements that appear as general facts are also called opinions, and the coding includes an indication as to whether such an opinion is sourced. Opinions are generally signaled by judgments made on the part of a person, policy, event, general social problem, crisis, election, etc. A topical argument is coded as agreement if it

shows support for some chronologically prior text not authored by the author in question. A general observation established in this thesis is that authors do not generally make an effort to look for texts by other authors that share their opinion, preferring to agree or disagree with proposed policies rather than with each other. Just as rare is disagreement. A topical argument coded as disagreement when it shows an opposition to something in a prior text not authored by the author in question. When a great deal of disagreement is expressed, it is usually serving to answer criticism.

Statements of opinion, agreement, and disagreement can be formulated as *facts* or *questions*. A *fact* is a statement that a particular reality has existed, does exist, or will exist. As noted above, a fact often appears on its own without a statement of opinion attached to it. Facts are likely to be closely related to arguments regarding the state of the American political system, the items found in national news media or the front page of the community's website, and they sometimes include links or references to other sources. *Questions* can take many forms due to their general nature and usage in the English language. Generally, a question is a topical opinion argument directed at another author or commenter in order to gain more information or another opinion. This is an example of a genuine question. More often, questions take other forms. An *assertion* question is a statement that happens to have a question mark at the end. A *directive* question is a question formulated as a statement to extract further information from other participants in the future.

The most common form of question in Political Blogging Communities (75.3% of all questions found in the sampled diaries), a *rhetorical* question is asked in order to put forward an opinion or argument instead of probing for more information from others. These are questions that other participants either cannot answer or are not supposed to answer. Answers are usually given immediately by the author of such a question. Sometimes, the rhetorical formulation is lost in translation to the digital format, and participants may unwittingly offer answers because they see them as genuine questions. For coding purposes, it is important to detect sarcasm and to have a working knowledge of the common practices and culture of the community in consideration.

Meta arguments, or statements about the text that are not considered topical arguments, rather than advancing an argument or opinion, attempt to observe what has happened in the deliberation and why it is happening. Mostly, meta arguments focus on what is taking place in the immediate text at hand. Meta arguments can be categorized as *consensus, conflict, clarify*

own, or *clarify other*. *Consensus* meta arguments contain an author's sense about the overall consensus of the group of participants. *Conflict* meta arguments highlight disagreement among the Political Blogging Community members. Arguments that attempt to clarify an author's opinion or presentation of facts is coded as *clarify own*. It clarifies meaning, and occurs after an opinion has been provided. It likely appears because other participants have misunderstood them, or are anticipated to do so. Often, the presence of a clarification argument is noted by a hyperlink to another source. Arguments that clarify another author or participant's argument containing facts or opinion are categorized as *clarify other*. It is meant to clarify the meaning of what another participant has said because someone else has either misunderstood it or further misunderstanding is anticipated.

Process arguments are text about the process of deliberation as such, especially in relation to its technology-supported aspects. They also are about the general direction of the deliberation as expressed in relation to limitations or benefits of the technology that supports it, and are categorized in five ways. Process arguments that contain a question or statement about problems with the blogging software (WordPress for Red State, DK3 for Daily Kos) are categorized as *technical problems*. Arguments that contain statements about how the blogging software works well to facilitate deliberation on the American political system are labeled *technical benefits*. Any argument that contains a statement or question about the purpose of the Political Blogging Community or about the roles of the participants is categorized as *deliberation process*. These statements are meant to extract more information about the community or to share it with others, and thus aid in creating a common, positive identity.

Fourth, arguments that convey frustration over what people are supposed to be doing in the Political Blogging Community, and by extension, their roles in the physical world, are called *deliberation problems*. These arguments pose existential questions. They may also express confusion over the purpose of authors producing texts in the community. Arguments such as these include suggestions that the other participants have moved into areas that are off-topic or are at least unhelpful in their texts. These kinds of arguments, especially when they dominate the content of a diary, tend to generate attention within the community and are thought to be quite common by outside observers; the results of this study suggest that existential questions are quite rare. Finally, arguments that contain statements about the author's belief that the discussion of a particular aspect of American politics has been developmentally helpful for him or her, the

group, the state, or the entire country are categorized as *deliberation positive*. Statements such as these are also surprisingly rare unless they are prompted by other participants.

Finally, *social arguments* are texts that are considered off-topic but help facilitate deliberation by humanizing the Political Blogging Community's deliberative space. They take the form of *salutations* (greetings, welcomes, goodbyes, etc), *apologies, praise,* or *chit-chat* (off-topic jokes, puns, how the day went, etc). In particular, for a social argument to be considered *praise,* it must be directed at the particular participants or the Political Blogging Community in general and not towards practitioners or policymakers outside the community.

Topics of Political Blogging Communities

Returning to on-topic, *problem arguments* or 'topical arguments,' the topics for discussion in Political Blogging Communities have been of particular interest to observers and creators of blogs. While the meaning of the particular topics are not the principal focus of this study, it may be useful for the literature to be aware of what seasoned members of Political Blogging Communities are actually talking about. It is also important to know whether blogs are fulfilling their supposed critical role and are advocating political change or mostly supporting the current policies or actions of governments, media outlets, and policymakers.

There are several areas that blogs are said to be most effective. First, blogs attract more interest during campaigns and elections because they often contain unique perspectives on the races and the candidates. Blogs have traditionally been outlets of for information regarding political campaigns and elections, and are especially helpful in providing information about those that fly below the national political radar.[18] Particular bloggers take in interest in candidates or policy campaigns that are particularly progressive or conservative, or in races that seem to have special meaning beyond the local context. For example, Markos Moulitsas, the founder and namesake of Daily Kos, has said that one of the major goals of Daily Kos is to help more progressive Democrats get into office across the entire country and at all levels.[19] Therefore, any argument that contains text about past, future, and ongoing campaigns and

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[18] Blogs came into their own during the 2004 Democratic Presidential Primary as they provided information opinions about the candidates and campaign activities in ways very different from so-called traditional or mainstream media.

[19] Available at <http://dailykos.com/dkosopedia/wiki/FAQ>.

elections, including campaigns or movements for a particular set of policies such as gay rights or environmental protection, are categorized as *campaigns and elections*.

Second, bloggers claim that they can be effective at changing and articulating party platforms. Political Blogging Communities have the some of the most active and vocal political participants, and therefore, what they say should matter to the heads of the major political parties. This includes opinions on which policies should be supported and the positions to be taken. Blogs provide a space to persuade party officials and politicians that they should take a particular stance. Bloggers contend that if a politician wants to be considered a proper progressive, they ought to follow the guidelines of Daily Kos, and conversely, if a politician wants to be considered a proper conservative, following the direction of the Red State community can lend credibility. Therefore, arguments that focus on the Democratic or Republican party platforms are categorized as *party platform*.

Third, political blogs are used to mobilize support for or against current or proposed public policies and provide a critical perspective. While many blog posts are inspired by political news, a similar number take on policies being currently considered or those that should be considered in the future. For example, throughout 2009, blogs all over the political spectrum addressed the Affordable Care Act, making public and foreign policy the most often discussed topic among the sampled authors. Arguments that contain statements about the current or proposed public policies are categorized as *policy*.

Fourth, blogs are thought to be useful in that they provide a space far enough removed from everyday politicking for critically examining the political system as a whole by bloggers and new media gurus (e.g. Armstrong & Moulitsas, 2004; Perlmutter, 2008; Kline, 2007). Blogs are imagined as geographically removed from insider or "beltway" politics, and thus can be spaces for political innovation. Indeed, many bloggers turn to blogs because they are frustrated with their limited political influence. This is especially true for those who are geographically located in areas where they do not share beliefs or values with many of their neighbors.[20] Sometimes a blog's most important function is to provide a critical perspective on political information, even if its presentation is not always constructive. Arguments that contain statements about the performance and justice of the U.S. political system and American governance are categorized as *critique*.

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[20] This was personally the case for the researcher as well, although I am only an intensely interested *lurker*.

Fifth, blogs are perceived as being an effective way of holding politicians accountable beyond their election, for example, by activist groups that lose steam in between elections (e.g. Armstrong & Moulitsas, 2004; Perlmutter, 2008; Kline, 2007; Trippi, 2004). Blogs are useful in providing ongoing coverage of politicians. The most covered politicians are those who it is perceived were aided in some way by the Political Blogging Community. These strategies are based upon the assumption that the performance of particular politicians is integral to the functioning of the political system, and offers a more direct path for reform. Arguments that contain statements about particular politicians or evaluate their performance are categorized as *politicians*.

Finally, blogs are used to identify and address the shortcomings of other media sources, especially on the work of the major media outlets such as CNN, CBS, or the AP. Indeed, many blogs focus wholly on this topic, such as Media Matters (mediamatters.org) and Big Journalism (bigjournalism.com). Some bloggers focus their work almost entirely on what they perceive to be unfair or unhelpful coverage of American politics in the media. Blogs are therefore seen as a space in which more traditional or large-audience media outlets can be held accountable with a complimentary goal of challenging them to produce content that is considered to be of higher quality. Some bloggers, especially some of the most successful ones, are either former professional journalists or were trained as such.[21] Others consider themselves as amateur reporters fully capable of producing high quality political news and information that can serve as a viable alternative to the much derided "mainstream media."

Blogs criticize the unfair portrayal of politicians or public policies. For example, conservatives at Red State often complain about coverage of the Tea Party movement, but they are especially critical of coverage of the former Republican vice presidential candidate and former governor of Alaska, Sarah Palin. Liberals at Daily Kos, with the help of Media Matters for America (mediamatters.org) have complained throughout the time of Barack Obama's presidency that conservatives have enjoyed a disproportionate amount of coverage on supposedly nationally important TV shows such as NBC's *Meet the Press*. These universal critiques of the media are based upon a general assumption that the performance of an independent media is integral to the proper functioning of the American political system.

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[21] Markos Moulitsas and Joshua Micah Marshall, the founders of Daily Kos and Talking Points Memo, respectively, are relevant examples.

Arguments that contain statements about the proper or unfair portrayal of politicians or positions in major news outlets are categorized as *media*.

These six categories were chosen because they are held to be the most frequently discussed topics on political blogs, and are also thought to be the areas in which political blogs have and can make an appreciable difference. However, there are other topics in American politics that are written about in Political Blogging Communities. Any text that contains an argument that does not pertain to one of the five areas of critique of the American political system, but mostly does pertain to the overall topic of U.S. politics is coded as *other*. This includes authors vaguely mentioning one of the six specified areas. For example, many sampled diaries focus on the general economy of the U.S. during the ongoing effects of the 2008 financial crisis. The content is often politically oriented and thus on-topic even if it does not touch on a particular policy or specific politicians.

Sourcing: Elaborating on an Argument

When an author makes a *problem argument*, they sometimes include other useful information, such as a link to a news story, a personal story that explains an opinion or perspective, or a reference to someone else because it was their idea first. Authors may also do the same thing when they make a meta argument. This is called *elaboration*. A statement of elaboration is not a new argument, but instead bolsters one. It provides further justification, a clarifying definition, a reason for holding a particular opinion, an example, a personal story, a fact or statistic, an hypothetical example, a solution to a problem, further elaboration as to why a problem is a problem, a comparison to another phenomenon, a consequence of the problem or a proposed solution, a signal that something actually exists or does not exist, or any further elaboration that attempts to restate what is meant or justification for why a particular position has been taken.

These scenarios can be divided into four categories: *personal experience, mass media, alternative media,* or *other participants*. A *personal experience* is elaboration that includes an experience such as a fictional or mythical story, a firsthand account, or an account from close friends or family. A *mass media* elaboration includes explicit references and/or links to the mass media, especially those that are found on the Internet. An *alternative media* elaboration includes specific references and usually links to alternative media found on the Internet such as blogs or

forums. An elaboration coded as *other participants* includes a reference to an argument provided by other participants within the Political Blogging Community. It must be an explicit reference to an actual participant, and there is generally a link included to the other participant's work. This kind of argument clearly uses another participant's argument or evidence as a justification for a taken position. In Political Blogging Communities, normally the *blockquote* technique enabled by the blogging software so as to clearly delineate the source of the idea is used to denote such an activity. Referencing others in this way, as well as expecting it from others, is a social norm that encourages rather than stifles participation.[22]

Elaboration is a significant part of an author's articulation of his position on an issue. An elaboration is an attempt to lend credibility to his or her argument in an effort to persuade others. In Political Blogging Communities, personal stories are treated with great respect, although from anecdotal evidence, it seems that other participants would prefer an effort be made to provide links to other sources, even if they and their readers remain in the same partisan media circle (Lawrence, Sides, & Farrell, 2010; Adamic & Glance, 2005). Elaboration is also a significant component of ideal deliberation, and as such is part of the deliberative norm of *sourcing*.

Capturing information about the nature of the arguments, as well as the overall nature of the diaries in sum, is helpful in the endeavor to capture a more comprehensive view of what happens in the blogosphere. Knowing more about what is on blogs, in this case, their deliberative content, and also preliminarily considering how the content changes over time, helps to build a more compelling case on the meaning of blogs to American politics and to the individuals who spend significant portions of their lives reading and contributing to them.

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[22] The blockquote technique encourages a culture of accreditation. Using it signals to readers and other participants that it is acceptable and relatively easy to reference other people's work. It also shows a potential author that others might do the same with their work. Referencing another participant's work is a sign of adherence to deliberative norms, and encourages continued deliberation.

Chapter Five: Site Selection, Methods, and Measures

The previous chapters laid the theoretical framework that shaped the direction of the research and presented the conceptual definitions that made analysis possible. Carefully laying these arguments aided in the development of the rationale for site selection, the methods for gathering data, and the measures by which the data were analyzed. This chapter details the sites that were selected, specifically Daily Kos and Red State, how the authors and their diaries were selected and gathered, and how their content was analyzed.

This study presents a unique perspective on the meaning of blogs and offers evidence for its usefulness. The theoretical framework emphasizes the role of community in enhancing deliberation online. Controlling for the effects of as many intervening variables as possible was given a very high priority. It was therefore necessary that the authors being studied were a part of a community, or at least the closest approximation to one there can be online. It posits that the oft-studied practice of political blogging changes in community, and therefore, the book is not closed on the impact of blogging on democracy.

Why political blogging communities?

In asking whether deliberative tendencies, particularly deliberative quality, of given authors, specifically their texts, change over time, it was important to select sites where deliberation is very likely to take place. The community aspects of Political Blogging Communities increase the chances that deliberation regularly takes place because participants are more likely to be familiar with each other and therefore have expectations for the kind of responses an authored text will generate. A Political Blogging Community is the closest online approximation of other communities where deliberation is common, such as neighborhood associations, self-governing organizations, and even the U.S. Senate. Social norms and social expectations are part of the culture of a community. The setting of a participatory political blog contains its own distinct culture (King, 2001). Several factors contribute to the culture of a Political Blogging Community. Individuals who begin their blogging experience out of a desire to express themselves learn how to navigate the community successfully and have the opportunity to

eventually become experts of their domain. The learning process itself is part of the community's culture, which in turn impacts the development of deliberative capacity. Participants in Political Blogging Communities, regardless of their political perspective, are members of a more general culture comprised of politically frustrated, politically aware and technologically comfortable bloggers—a group that can be favorably compared to the types of people who seek to join mutual-aid/self help groups (Borkman, 1999).

The technology that supports Political Blogging Communities is also partially responsible for the consolidation and unification of an online culture. Although not all political blogging communities use the same software and participants do not interact using the same interface, the end result is basically the same: people write blogs, recommend diaries written by their peers, look for inspiration from their peers and front page writers, comment on each other's diaries and comments, and have the chance for their diary to be listed as a recommended diary, lending their opinion increased prominence. The software used for publishing on blogs (WordPress and DK3) remained the same during the time period that the authors and diaries are sampled from, 2009-2010, meaning that the experience of blogging remained constant. Abrupt shifts in the way in which new material is posted only discourage authors from continuing to post their material, and would thus skew any sample hoping for continuity of participation.

In particular, diaries are recommended because they are well written, because other participants agree with the opinions offered, or disagree and want to draw the attention of other participants. This feature is a key aspect of idea that Political Blogging Communities are a platform for political discussion and deliberation. While a select number of contributing editors have their stories published on the front page of the site in traditional blog format and many participants comment on them, participants are given the ability to publish their own diaries and recommend the works of others, creating a democratic feedback loop that also reinforces the idea of the community (Noveck, 2009). It also functions to keep writers engaged with their readers. The diaries that eventually appear in the more prominent and slightly more permanent "Recommended" list are chosen by participants before they disappear from the "Recent" diaries list that lists all the diaries published by the community participants in reverse chronological order. How long a diary stays on the recommended list depends on how many participants recommend it, meaning that it could be there for as long as a week or for only a few minutes. More recent recommendations keep a diary more prominent within the community. As per the

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website guidelines, users are encouraged to recommend writing or reporting that is exceptional or poignant.

Whereas other sources of political information that allow feedback in the form of comments like CNN.com or ThinkProgress.com employ other forms of media like photos and videos frequently, the Political Blogging Community's focus on text as the main form of content makes the sites more comparable to each other, and also makes the diaries and arguments comparable across communities.

All of this serves to democratize the ability for participants to have their opinions read and seriously considered by others. These features also allow them to express their agreement or disagreement with others' positions. All participants are enabled by the technology to make these decisions with equal voting power. Aspects of Political Blogging Communities therefore encourage continued participation and adherence to deliberative norms which increase readership, fairness, and argumentative quality.

Sampling Frame: Daily Kos and Red State

Open Political Blogging Communities are very rare. There are various blog-based websites that have a community of bloggers, such as Think Progress (thinkprogress.org) and Hot Air (hotair.com), but they are not open to regular contributions from others. There are many smaller Political Blogging Communities that are open to contributions from anyone but they are usually locally, regionally, or single policy area-oriented and thus have a smaller number of contributors. The only other Political Blogging Community of notable size and longevity is MyDD (mydd.com); this site posed problems for inclusion because many members quit during the 2008 Democratic Presidential primary campaigns over arguments regarding the merits of Barack Obama versus Hillary Clinton, complicating the sampling procedure since so many accounts remain inactive.

Therefore, due to the shortcomings of other potential sites and to the goals of the research, Daily Kos (dailykos.com) and Red State (RedState.com) were selected as the Political Blogging Communities from which the authors and diaries were sampled from because a random sample of all blogging communities was substantially difficult. Daily Kos and Red State have been targeted by other studies in the past, often by random sampling (e.g. Adamic & Glance,

2005; Yano & Smith, 2010; McKenna & Pole, 2008; Reese, et al, 2007; Ackland, 2005). While Red State and Daily Kos have been the object of study in other realms, they have infrequently been the subject of content analyses (Stromer-Galley, 2011). Because the theoretical framework does not confront the differences in the normative political weight in content between the left and right blogospheres, but does note that linking and readership practices are different between liberal and conservative blogs, including both conservative and liberal websites as sites for the sampling of authors and diaries is a prudent choice. In other words, if the practice of blogging in community is what is important to the development of deliberative capacity, then the same improvement should be seen regardless of the political content. Moreover, students of politics have ample reasons to be skeptical of the claim that ideological perspective would not affect results. Therefore, selecting the two websites to be the sources for the diaries helps test this theory and provide a comparative dimension.

The Attraction of Daily Kos and Red State

Daily Kos and Red State are popular for many reasons and are attractive destinations for bloggers. They are the most popular political blogs that allow anyone to publish their own political writing and offer the prospect of engaging with so-called A-list bloggers.[23] As such, the sites also enjoy large number of visitors as well as members—a readymade audience. The sites thus offer a major incentive for participants to publish their thoughts because they have the potential to be read by a very large audience. This audience often includes semi-famous members of the community. Prominent contributors, participants who have garnered a large following by virtue of their high quality work, have the chance to gain credibility beyond the community within the political class. Markos Moulitsas has been a contributor on MSNBC and written a column for *The Hill* .[24] Erick Erickson, the most prominent contributor and editor at Red State, was hired as a political contributor to CNN in March of 2010.[25] Chris Bowers, the

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[23] According to Wikio, a website that ranks political blogs based on incoming and outgoing links, ranks Daily Kos seventh, and RedState fifteenth (http://www.wikio.com/blogs/top/politics, accessed 24 April 2011). Technorati ranks Daily Kos eighth and RedState ninth (http://technorati.com/blogs/directory/politics/, accessed 24 April 2011). In both cases, the blogs that outrank RedState and Daily Kos do not allow for open participation.
[24] (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Markos_Moulitsas). Accessed 22 April 2011.
[25] (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erick_Erickson). Accessed 22 April 2011.

founder of Open-Left, a now defunct Political Blogging Community, was hired as a campaign strategist for Joe Sestak's 2010 senatorial bid.

Along with the elements of design that engender a sense of belonging and can sustain community (Noveck, 2009), people are more likely to return to Daily Kos and Red State because the sites are so regularly updated with new content from the front page writers and other participants alike.[26] The sites are active in covering current political events, presenting a two-fold advantage. Not only does this encourage frequent visits, but participants are discussing current politics and policy instead of longstanding moral disagreements such as the right to have an abortion. They also learn political information which increases their capacity to deliberate. The continued prominence of the site is a major incentive for members to remain active. Relevant political news, renown, and the chance for fame bring new visitors, the majority of whom remain unregistered lurkers are all attractions, but the community keeps participants around. Once a participant steps forward and decides to author a diary, they tend to become essentially lifetime members of the community.

It is difficult to ascertain the motivations behind someone's participation in a political blogging unless they say so in their published content. A participant's self-interested motivations are a competing explanation for why people would improve their writing or are sustained participants in the community for long periods of time. In the Political Blogging Communities of Red State or Daily Kos, one can be relatively certain that the non-front page contributors are expressing themselves voluntarily. The participants, not the front page contributors or administrators who benefit financially from the success of the website, are largely removed from commercial influence in their own content, although they are certainly free to post for non-altruistic reasons. Focusing on the Political Blogging Communities of Daily Kos and Red State represents an attempt to mitigate the influence of financially interested participants in the sample and the study. Looking at political blogs in general, as other studies have done, will also include many bloggers who blog for a living, or are employed by companies, newspapers, or political action committees, and thus have a different set of incentives from the rank and file amateurs who want to express opinions or mobilize support for various policies or campaigns. This has an impact on questions surrounding the impact of community on blogging.

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[26] For example, studies of websites have shown that regularly updating content found on websites promotes social interaction among users (Girgensohn & Lee, 2002).

From here the chapter justifies the sampling frame, presenting qualitative evidence that supports the notion that they are examples of relatively democratically organized supportive communities that address public issues. It is important to consider the history of the Political Blogging Communities even as their existence in real time has been relatively brief. As noted above, while it is difficult to understand the motivations of the participants, the motivations of the founders of the websites are more knowable. It is also true that communities develop over time, and briefly visiting and comparing the histories of the websites is important to identifying the degree to which one would expect participants to adhere to or respect deliberative norms.

There is a risk involved with presenting the communities this way. It is potentially problematic to describe sites in the same way that those who contribute to them do. The more popular descriptions of the meaning of blogs tend to present straightforward histories of the websites, focusing on successes and failures in American politics. While these retellings may not be wholly accurate or provide a critical assessment, the generally accepted histories of websites persist in the communities as legends, and serve as an influence and inspiration to the participants. Referring to the highs and lows of the community helps ground it. Sometimes the stories help participants feel better about what they are doing, that their discussions of political issues have some real significance because the words of others have affected American politics before.

There is much more information available about how the community participants themselves feel about Daily Kos than there is for Red State because of the vast quantities of reference texts available in the Dkosopedia (http://dkosopedia.com). It is therefore easier to be confident of the meaning of Daily Kos's history to the participants. But because of the clear similarities between the two sites, one can also be confident in the presentation of Red State as a space for political expression, discussion, and political mobilization.

Daily Kos: The Heart of the Progressive Blogosphere

Daily Kos (dailykos.com) was founded by Markos Moulitsas as a reform-minded Democratic Party blog in 2002. It formally became an open group blog in 2007 with new software and a new structure which was replaced in February of 2011. There are more than 900,000 registered users

and 1.2 million unique visitors each month.[27] Daily Kos is portrayed as the first blog seen to exert an above-average influence in American politics. Even though blogs existed in many forms before 2002, they rarely focused so clearly on politics, especially vehemently oppositional politics.

As stated above, Daily Kos is the most well-known political blog on the Internet for many reasons. Just to gain a little perspective, a search for "Daily Kos" on Google Books returns 428 results.[28] MyDD (mydd.com), another very similar progressive community blog that was portrayed as having a very significant role during the Howard Dean presidential campaign, returns 103. Most of these publications focus on the impact of blogs on political campaigns and on media's reporting of political news. A general search for mentions of "Daily Kos" in Lexis Nexis returned 796 hits (13 Feb 2011). A search for "mydd" returns only 104 (13 Feb 2011).[29] It is safe to say that much has been written about Daily Kos, and is so sufficiently well known that mostly anyone who feels they want to be part of such a community knows where they would go.

Theorists and scholars alike have remarked that the demographics of people who visit, read, and contribute to blogs do not very closely resemble the demographics of the U.S. population, and therefore struggle to reflect a representatively democratic arena. At Daily Kos, this fact is lamented. In a diary published on March 7, 2011 titled "Daily Kos Demographics: Still White. Over 50. Well off. Male," *soothsayer99* notes:[30]

> According to data collected by **Quantcast**, the Daily Kos audience was overwhemlingly white (93%), well-educated (80% college grads and more) and affluent (37% make >$100k) and disproportionately older (53% >50) and male (64%) when compared the demographics of Internet Users.

> So what has changed in terms of race class gender and representation at the new "improved" DK4??

> Well, Nothing.

> Despite much gnashing of teeth in 2200+ comments last time around, this data is oh yes indeed consistent with other indicators that demonstrate that Daily Kos demographics are also out of sych with on-line activist demographics; other sources include **polls**, **surveys**,

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[27] http://www.dkosopedia.com/wiki/DailyKos_FAQ

[28] According to: http://www.google.com/search?tbo=p&tbm=bks&q="daily+kos". Accessed 5 May 2011.

[29] This is only a demonstration and not meant as an exhaustive list nor a sufficient systematic representation of the renown of all political blogging communities.

[30] (http://www.dailykos.com/story/2011/03/07/953417/-Daily-Kos-Demographics:-Still-White-Over-50-Well-Off-Male). Accessed 24 June 2011.

and **critiques of the older white maleness of Netroots Nation.**
(http://www.dailykos.com/story/2011/03/07/953417/-Daily-Kos-Demographics:-Still-White-Over-50-Well-Off-Male).

[…]

The Daily Kos audience demographic is not the past of the Democratic Party. It is not the present of the Democratic Party and it is certainly **not the future** of the Democratic Party.

Daily Kos is NOT the base.

Daily Kos is NOT the progressive vanguard of the left wing.

Daily Kos is White. Over 50. Well-off. Male.

It is time and long past time for other voices -- Black Brown Young Female - to be afforded more credence in evaluating policies and current political trends, to be better represented, and yes to be *actually heard* here.

The data used in the diary were gathered from Quantcast, a web analytics service that collects information about who visits websites in order to help companies make better decisions about advertising and content.[31] Other imperfect community surveys tend to confirm these trends.[32] This increases the chances that the sampled authors are from a very different category than the

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[31] "About" (http://www.quantcast.com/about/overview/). Accessed 5 May 2011.
[32] "What is Your Education-Highest Grade/Degree Completed (Demographic Tues)."
(http://www.dailykos.com/story/2007/02/13/301389/-What-is-Your-Education-Highest-Grade-Degree-Completed-(Demographic-Tues).
"Demographic Tuesdays: What is your Partisan/Party Self Identification."
(http://www.dailykos.com/story/2007/04/03/318964/-Demographic-Tuesdays:-What-is-your-Partisan-Party-Self-Identification).
"What's Your Ideological Self Identity-Updated-(Demographic Tuesdays)."
(http://www.dailykos.com/story/2007/04/17/324120/-Whats-Your-Ideological-Self-Identity-Updated-(Demographic-Tuesdays).
"How Old Are You? Community Poll (Demographic Tuesdays) Update 3."
(http://www.dailykos.com/story/2008/02/26/464263/-How-Old-Are-You-Community-Poll-(Demographic-Tuesdays)-Update-3).
"What is your Sex/Gender Community Poll (Demographic Tuesdays)."
(http://www.dailykos.com/story/2008/03/04/468301/-What-is-your-Sex-Gender-Community-Poll-(Demographic-Tuesdays).
"What is Your Race/Ethnicity – Community Poll – Demographic Tuesdays."
(http://www.dailykos.com/story/2008/03/11/473982/-What-is-Your-Race-EthnicityCommunity-PollDemographic-Tuesdays).
"In What State/Region Do You Live? Community Poll Demographic Tuesdays updated."
(http://www.dailykos.com/story/2008/04/01/477082/-In-What-State-Region-Do-You-Live-Community-Poll-Demographic-Tuesdays-updated).
"What's Your Household Income? Demographic Tuesday Community Poll (updated)."
(http://www.dailykos.com/story/2008/04/15/495769/-Whats-Your-Household-Income-Demographic-Tuesday-Community-Poll-(updated)).

average American. However, the peculiarity of the demographic of Daily Kos participants, as discussed in Chapter 2, may contribute to a scenario where people may feel more comfortable to express themselves, as if they were speaking among friends.

Although the site's mission changed as the community evolved, the community's external goal is set on electing "more and better Democrats, not necessarily in that order."[33] Internally, a set of "Community Guidelines" help establish the goals for the working of the site and the respective roles that should be played by participants. They teach people what to expect and explain to them the behavior of other participants, or why their posting privileges might be revoked. They also provide basic direction as to what constitutes a proper diary. A few are especially noteworthy. For example, the guidelines suggest that diaries should be divided into introductions and bodies, should be substantive (quantitatively, more than three paragraphs), involve more effort than simply 'copying and pasting' articles, and provide links to source materials whenever possible.

Written positively, "diaries that showcase original research or analysis, call for political action, or news and analysis that is not widely discussed are encouraged."[34] In other words, this is the kind of material participants expect to read and contribute to the Political Blogging Community. Moreover, "authors are encouraged to back up all assertions with facts (preferably with links) whenever possible, using highly reputable sources."[35] If there is no source to support the position, participants are asked to reconsider whether or not they should write the diary. As far as other activities, participants are asked to read an entire diary before recommending it to the community.

To accomplish the officially noted goals, the discussion often veers into other realms not especially focused on electing more democrats. The community evidently thinks that it that it is useful to report on, discuss, and evaluate the political issues of the day so as to identify problems in American politics and to determine the best policies and candidates to support. Because Daily Kos has had some very real successes on that front, the discussions are seen as useful because they teach participants how to articulate their positions, and these participants then have the capacity to become influential in their own localities. The unofficial community building activities seen on Daily Kos, such as the "Pooties and Woozles" diaries or the "Grieving Room"

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[33] (http://www.dkosopedia.com/wiki/DailyKos_FAQ). Accessed 24 June 2011.
[34] (http://www.dkosopedia.com/wiki/DailyKos_FAQ). Accessed 24 June 2011.
[35] (http://www.dkosopedia.com/wiki/DailyKos_FAQ). Accessed 24 June 2011.

series are efforts that anchor the community in something other than electoral politics and keep participants engaged in innovative discussions that are productive during other times than campaign seasons.

Seasoned members are adept at describing the meaning of the site. A recent diary by *rlharry* titled "Congratulations, Daily Kos" is an illustrative example:[36]

> Here's a bit of good news amid all the bad. Daily Kos was voted top progressive blog by this year's AlterNet polling.
>
> For all its warts, flame wars, bugs, pie fights, and raucous discourse, DailyKos wins top progressive blog on the tubes. Congratulations, Markos, front pagers, diarists, tech nerds, lurkers, commenters, and everyone who makes this crazy place so interesting and so much fun.
>
> I'm a relatively old timer who spends a little too much time here, mostly just reading, but also contributing a few comments here and there. I try to stay out of the fights, but I do appreciate the passion (when it stays civil.)
>
> I miss some of the wonderful members of this community who have passed away, but have left their indelible spirit in these electronic corridors. (exmearden, RIP)
>
> I love the pootie, woozle, and pet diaries that bring a bit of joy to counteract all the serious stuff.
>
> The level of knowledge about politics and policy; and a huge range of topics from environment to economics is unsurpassed on Daily Kos when compared to other blogs.
>
> What other political blog can say they have a Cheers and Jeers?
>
> We may get crazy from time to time, but there is one thing DailyKos has more than any other blog: A heart!
>
> So, keep up the great work, everyone. And again congratulations!

These kinds of diaries demonstrate that people are concerned with the health of the community and the way it is projected to outside observers. This author demonstrated this by congratulating the community for winning the top spot in a recent ranking by *Alternet* and appreciating its peculiarities—the pootie and woozle diaries and Cheers and Jeers. *Rlharry* has seen the community at its best and worst but has remained a dedicated participant throughout. The

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[36] (http://www.dailykos.com/story/2011/04/22/969310/-Congratulations,-Daily-Kos!). Accessed 5 May 2011.

experiences of the participants and their tellings of them are often more emblematic of the goals and purposes of the site than those codified in the "Community Guidelines" visited above.

The Structure of Daily Kos

It is relatively easy for anyone to become a member or participant of the Daily Kos community. All that is needed is a valid email address. As such, there are few safeguards to prevent systematic exploitation of this open access to a large audience. The Daily Kos platform (DK3) is also relatively easy to use compared to earlier blogging software, but is more complicated than the WordPress software used on Red State. Still, it is easy to post text and links and does take an amateur working knowledge of basic html to make diaries look more attractive or to make arguments using more diverse means. There are few objective impediments that systematically exclude people from participating, however.

Even in its openness, certain practices are forbidden. Authors are asked to refrain from publishing diaries containing "wild speculation" without proof. This has included the contentious policy of banning participants, deleting diaries and removing comments that contain conspiracy theories. For example, the site administrators and editors have been very strong in handling conspiracy theories about the 9/11 attacks perpetrated by Al-Qaeda.[37] Hateful or defamatory diaries are prohibited, especially in regards to other participants.

However, there are other more subjective barriers to open participation that partially explain the skewed demographic of who uses Daily Kos. Daily Kos is a site for liberal Democrats and those further to the left. According to the FAQ, not all Democrats fit in; Joe Lieberman and Blanche Lincoln, Democratic U.S. Senators from Connecticut and Arkansas, respectively, are held up as specific examples of those that do not deserve much respect from the community. If the perceived non-liberal politics of Lieberman and Lincoln—both Democrats, do not fit in, it goes a long way towards explaining why anti-liberal or conservative content is generally not tolerated. For example, *Ctron*, a sampled author and a right-of-center Daily Kos author, published a diary that contained a few conservative perspectives. One of the commenters responded:[38]

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[37] (http://www.dkosopedia.com/wiki/DailyKos_FAQ). Accessed 4 May 2011.
[38] (http://www.dailykos.com/story/2009/01/22/687424/-Editorial:-President-Obama,-You-Must-Order-an-Investigation,-NOW!#comments). Accessed 4 May 2011.

And, you're here at DKos because.... (**6+ / 0-**)

?

by **CanyonWren** on **Wed Jan 21, 2009 at 09:30:28 PM PST**

Because I am American... (**2+ / 0-**)

and I'd like to see some damned justice, is that a fucking problem sir?

by **Ctron** on **Wed Jan 21, 2009 at 09:34:09 PM PST**

This is a Democratic site, to elect Democrats (**5+ / 0-**)

Since you say you are "not a Democrat", and then alternatingly a "Reagan Democrat," then a Libertarian/peleo-Conservative, it seems odd to me that you would find it compelling to post here on Daily Kos...especially since you obviously disagree so strongly with what Democrats stand for.

Just odd, is all...you are technically a troll, but whatever.

by **CanyonWren** on **Wed Jan 21, 2009 at 09:50:18 PM PST**

It's fascinating that you fancy yourself (**1+ / 0-**)

a good writer. You are not!

by **kktlaw** on **Wed Jan 21, 2009 at 10:14:08 PM PST**

Keeping the community purely liberal, free from conservative opinion is done rapidly by the participants themselves, rather than by some administrative force from above. This reinforces the notion that the community is at least self-policing. But it also shows how it is a deliberative enclave that would rather isolate itself from widely divergent perspectives from its own. The advantage here, though, as illustrated by the preceding example, is that the conservative argument is preserved at the site for all to see, whereas if this were to occur face-to-face, the *Ctron* would have spoken his piece, then been kicked out of the room, and his words quickly forgotten. Red State has a similar self-enforcement process.

Finally, authors as well as administrators have the ability to delete their own work, although unless the diary blatantly infringes upon copyright, the only time that diaries are deleted is if the author chooses to. Authors are encouraged to delete their diary if theirs is not the first one to cover breaking news. But they are discouraged from deleting diaries because the

discussion in the comments section has moved in a direction unfavorable to the author's original position.[39]

It is clear that Daily Kos caters to liberal Democrats, and focuses on electing liberal democrats. Even though creating an account is relatively easy, the site still mostly excludes the participation and contribution of people who have conservative opinions. Although posts can be deleted by moderators or participants, it does not generally occur. User accounts are also not easily deleted, and all content, once published on the website, is publicly accessible and searchable.

Red State.com: a "right of center" blog

Red State was founded by Ben Domenech, Mike Krempasky, and Josh Trevino in 2004 as a "right of center" blog mirroring Daily Kos. Red State administrators claim the site receives 364,000 unique visitors each month,[40] although Quantcast.com estimates a much larger number.[41] Quantcast also estimates a very similar demographical picture of the visitors of Red State to that of Daily Kos. According to the "About" page, Red State has a dedicated community numbering in the tens of thousands, including the conservative political class that calls Washington, DC home. The mission of Red State is to get more and better conservatives elected, and works hard to cover the merits of candidates in primary elections. In short, "At Red State, [the participants] are conservatives in primaries and Republican in general elections and we aim to win."[42]

Red State purports to be the most prominently referenced conservative alternative media source by major media outlets. A search for "Red State" on Google Books returns 159 results,[43] while a search for "'Free Republic' freerepublic.com," a cousin of a Political Blogging Community although it is hosted on a forum rather than blog software, returns 178 results. A

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[39] (http://www.dkosopedia.com/wiki/DailyKos_FAQ). Accessed 6 May 2011.
[40] (http://www.RedState.com/about/). Accessed November 2010.
[41] (http://www.quantcast.com/Red State.com). Accessed 5 May 2011.
[42] (http://www.RedState.com/about/). Accessed 25 April 2011.
[43] According to: (http://www.google.com/search?tbo=p&tbm=bks&q="Red State"). Accessed 5 May 2011.

simple search in the Lexis Nexis news database for "'Red State' redstate.com" returned only 16 results.[44]

Since the site was archived for this study, the guidelines and "About" pages have been altered to display much less information. The older pages did outline a set of community guidelines akin to the one found at Daily Kos. Although it does not outline what would be considered acceptable or outstanding diaries, it includes rules against any profanity, personal attacks, and any other disruptive behavior. Accordingly, Red State administrators reserve the right to ban users who they feel are disruptive to the functioning of the community.

The Structure of Red State

Red State, as it exists today and during the period from which the authors and diaries were sampled, is built on WordPress, an open source blogging platform built by a globally distributed community of developers.[45] Using the WordPress software is very easy, involving less effort than that involved in the posting of content at Daily Kos. Anyone can register as a participant so long as they have a valid email address.

Systematically, the site works to exclude what is perceived as liberal content, or at the very least, content that is considered offensive to conservative sensibilities. Red State is a community for conservative Republicans who profess conservative values and principles. In an interview on *The Colbert Report*, Eric Erickson, the aforementioned editor of Red State, claimed that for content to be featured on the front page, it had to be, for example, pro-free market and pro-life. Like Daily Kos with Democrats, the community sees itself as standing in opposition to so-called establishment Republicans that are not conservative enough. The front-page contributors have tried to shun the concept of the Tea Party for fear of it being coopted by the establishment, although the positions developed in the community have been well incorporated into Tea Party rhetoric. Red State would prefer to limit splintering, especially the kind that compromises conservative values first, and loses elections, second.[46]

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[44] Searching for Red State in popular news media is made difficult because the term "Red State" has been popularized as denoting Republican leaning U.S. states.
[45] (http://wordpress.org/about/). Accessed 13 July 2011.
[46] (http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/258313/january-04-2010/erick-erickson). Accessed 22 April 2011.

Unlike Daily Kos, religion plays a very large role in the day-to-day content of Red State. This may pose a barrier to participation for some people, especially those of truly libertarian persuasion. The community's general religious sentiments also direct the conversation towards values and moral principles rather than current politics. Authors use the space to articulate why they think the country as a whole, as well as particular politicians, is moving in the wrong direction. The common reasons are the failure of the media, the lack of self-reliant Christian principles, moral vapidity in American cultural productions, and a lack of adherence to the U.S. constitution. These last few observations are akin to the community building aspects of Daily Kos where moral values serve as a foundation for further reasoned opinion expression.

Red State is clearly a site for conservative Republicans, and its focus, too, is to support and elect what the community considers better Republicans. Creating an account is relatively easy, but the does tend to exclude liberal opinions, although such content is not systematically censored. And although posts can be deleted by moderators or participants, it is very rare, though user accounts are much more easily deleted than at Daily Kos. Once the content is published, it is publicly available to all.

Taken together, Red State and Daily Kos are remarkably similar though their politics are different. Both communities claim an identity that is oppositional to contemporary American politics and the way in which the political system works. They do not feel their views, or group's views, are adequately represented. Both recognize a democratic deficit.

Both communities have official goals of helping get more and better Democrats and Republicans elected so they might enact more liberal or conservative public policy. However, the participants do not focus wholly on these goals. They instead find it valuable to create a community atmosphere, discuss current politics, and vent frustration. Although the diaries at Red State generate significantly less discussion,[47] authors and participants respond to and are inspired by each other. Deliberative norms are reinforced by the structure as well as the participants.

Structurally, Red State is more likely to remove or censor content. This difference might be attributed to the fact that the guidelines for posting new contributions are much less explicitly articulated than those at Daily Kos (the lack of explanation may also contribute to the lesser amount of active authors). Daily Kos has a much larger number of participants and lurkers, and

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[47] According to the data gathered for this study, the average RedState diary receives 9.9 comments, while Daily Kos diaries receive an average of 67.9

therefore, there are many more diaries and comments produced each day. Daily Kos has also enjoyed more renown, although this pattern has shown signs of changing as conservatives became the oppositional party in Washington from 2006 to 2011.

Data Collection

Conducting an analysis of the content of blogs poses many challenges. The first is that while webpages do mostly remain archived, it is nearly impossible to reconstruct the exact appearance of the site when a particular diary or comment was authored. The study was conducted with this limitation. Another challenge is posed by the dynamic nature of the blog content. Because authors and administrators reserve the right to delete content, it is difficult to have a unified set of data that can be sampled from at one time. The fact that content can disappear without warning means that simply visiting the web pages directly is not favorable to systematic research. Making a complete copy of a domain (e.g. all of the content found at addresses beginning with http://dailykos.com/...) also exposes the researcher to content that would have otherwise remained hidden, such as archived pages that are no longer linked to current parts of the site. Copying an entire domain freezes the content that existed at a particular moment in time and thus makes it a bit more manageable. Doing so for this study was made especially necessary because Daily Kos changed platforms while the coding was underway.

There are many ways to make an exact copy of an entire domain. The most widely used software to do so is also the most comprehensive and reliable. HT Track is an open source, royalty free software program that is used for archiving the World Wide Web. It is the standard web archival software program and is categorized as a desktop crawler. HT Track creates a working, viewable mirror of the online site on a local storage device. It structures the archived data in the same way that it appears when remotely accessed via web browser, although it is stored in another file format. It leaves the raw html code untouched so that it can be probed by researchers as well

Researchers, scholars and government agencies have used HT Track in their endeavors (Marill et al, 2004). In particular, it has been a valuable tool for historians concerned with archiving often ephemeral human experience on the Internet. The National Archives used HT Track to harvest official websites related to George Bush's presidency (Glenn, 2007). The Web-

At-Risk project, a group of programmers, developers, and curators funded by the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program, has used HT Track to capture clusters of websites that arise during important events, such as the impact and aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf Coast of the U.S. (Glenn, 2007). The National Library of Australia has dedicated itself to preserving all of the web content within the .au domain. Over the many-year project, they have recently switched to HT Track because of its ability to handle the increasingly utilized programming language of *jscript* (Koerbin, 2004).

HT Track is more user-friendly than other web archiving software, but it struggles to handle newer forms of dynamic content, such as Flash (Glenn, 2007). It is also not well-suited to crawling a large number of websites at the same time (Marill et al., 2004). This shortcoming was not a major impediment for this study because it focuses on content, mostly text, from single domains. Because it simply makes a copy of the website, there are few opportunities for errors to be made, unless the administrators of the website being copied want for there to be errors, having implemented some barriers to systematic copying of content.

Sampling from Within

To find blogs or bloggers, other studies have turned to blog directories such as Technorati™ , eTalkingHead™ , BlogCatalog™ , Blogarama™ , and the now defunct blo.gs (Adamic & Glance, 2005; Herring et al, 2007). These particular studies combined directories and sampled from there, according to the category of blog that was to be the object of study. The need for exclusions was therefore mitigated because the blog directories were mostly trustworthy sources of the information (Adamic & Glance, 2005). However, the data collected by these services is not publicly available, making it impossible for researchers to account for any biases (Wallsten, 2007:4). Digging deeper and trying to categorize blogs by popularity or topic become even more complicated and taxing on the researcher (Wallsten, 2007:5). The major shortcoming of these methods is that there is no way to compile a complete list of blogs from which to sample, and even then, determining which ones are about politics is another subjective problem.

In this study, the archiving of the entire domain made it possible to create an entire list of all the registered users at each site from which to sample authors randomly. Every time a person registered a new account, a webpage was created—a kind of author homepage showcasing recent

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work by the participant. Those author homepages that did not have any original content were excluded by size (less than 8KB). From there an entire list of potential authors from both Red State and Daily Kos was compiled. There were nearly 6 times as many authors that could have been sampled from Daily Kos than there were at Red State, the effects of which were mitigated once exclusions were made because there were many more authors at Daily Kos who posted one or two diaries only, while those who choose to participate as authors at Red State tend to contribute much more content.

Moreover, one can be generally certain that unless an account was created at Daily Kos or Red State for some unspecified reason, all participants-turned-authors will be talking about politics. Exclusions did not need to be made on this basis. However, in the sampling process, many authors were excluded. Exclusions are common in research about political blogs. Wallsten (2007) excluded blogs based on the theory to be tested using criteria that included the time period the blogs were active and the amount of activity (6). Herring et al. (2007) excluded non-English blogs, photo and video blogs, and community center blogs, among others (5).

Because the goal of the sampling was to reach authors of blogs who were dedicated participants, reregistered users were excluded if there was no record of them ever posting anything, if there were less than 12 diaries posted within a roughly three-year timeframe between 2008-2011, if the time between the first and last diaries within the time frame was less than one and one-half years. The time span stipulation reflects an attempt to find authors who had made an effort at sustained participation in the community. The theoretical framework reserves that this is fundamentally different from a highly concentrated, prolific period of publishing diaries over a 6 month or shorter period. These kinds of authors might surface during elections, and they may even be volunteers or paid campaign workers. Moreover, over a longer period of time, an author will have been more socialized to the community norms, and hence, have a better opportunity to have his or her texts improve their adherence to deliberative norms, displaying a growth in deliberative capacity. This claim is supported by studies of sustained participation in mutually supportive communities (Borkman, 1999).

The period from 2008-2011 was an interesting time in American politics. The election of Barack Obama was a momentous occasion, and with it, the Democratic Party was in charge of not only the White House but also both houses of Congress. This meant that liberal Democrats hoped to enact as much of its policy platform as possible. Conservative Republicans, as the

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opposition in congress, consolidated a strategy of "No" quite quickly. The content at Daily Kos and Red State reflected these realities. People went to Daily Kos to talk policy rather than electoral strategy, while people turned to Red State to vent their frustration and to plan for the 2010 mid-term elections. Importantly, both sides of the spectrum went from out of power to in power at some point during the time from which the diaries were sampled.

Finally, authors were excluded if they happened to be front page contributors because they are likely to have a different set of incentives than the average participant. No authors were excluded based on the content of their diaries, but the process was not without difficulties. 525 authors who had a record of ever posting anything were sampled and their homepages visited using the locally stored archive, gathering 52 eligible authors from Red State and Daily Kos. Of this generated list, the first 20 were selected for study. This was a surprising finding it itself, and confirmed the rarity of this kind of social/political activity. In the end, the sample included 14 from Daily Kos and 6 from Red State, which roughly parallels the total number of authors at Daily Kos versus Red State. Please see Appendix A, figure 5-2, for a full listing of the sampled authors.

Authors were not contacted for purposes of verification, although from reading their diaries, it was quite easy to deduce an author's gender, race, occupation, number of children, marital status, sexual orientation, and geographic location. Had any of the authors appeared financially interested in their blogging, as opposed to being simply interested in the deliberation, they would have been excluded as well. Conducting interviews with the 20 authors to better understand their motivations and perceptions of the community and their feelings on deliberation would make for a solid follow-up study. Instead, this study relies on more removed analysis.

Specifically, some of the sampled authors were extremely prolific from January 1, 2009 to January 1, 2011. *LaFeminista* published over 250. Others barely made the minimum, such as *digitalmuse* and *ctron*. In order to make the study more manageable, instead of reading all of *LaFeminista's* diaries, the first 7, the last 7, and a randomly sampled middle 7 were analyzed. The rationale behind this kind of segmented longitudinal analysis is that the question being investigated was to account for change over time. Even for especially prolific authors, sampling the first 7 chronological diaries provides a significant amount of information in order to be confident in the content of chronologically early blogging to be compared to the final 7 diaries chronologically within the time period. This sampling of diaries from authors occurred six times.

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Before analysis, various objective aspects of the diaries were recorded—the date, the diary number, the number of words, and the number of comments.

Pilot Study Insights

A pilot study conducted in January, 2011 used the data gathered by the HT Track method and sampled a single author using the above stated criteria as well. The goal was to follow the procedures suggested by Stromer-Galley's (2007) codebook to see if the resulting data would provide insights into both the research question. As such, it increased confidence in the coding scheme, yielded results suggesting the validity of the thesis's propositions, and provided an impetus for the creation and introduction of the deliberative score, a measure of deliberative quality, to the data set.

To sample *coltergeist,* an author at Daily Kos that roughly matched the sampling frame, 20 authors had to first be excluded. This made it clear that having a comprehensive list of every author would be necessary to find a reasonable amount of authors so as to be able to draw some conclusions regarding the research question.

The fifteen sampled diaries show a commitment to talking about the political issues of the day, focusing equally on public and foreign policy and the media's coverage of politics. *Coltergeist* stayed on topic, but expressed relatively few arguments. The diaries were often short, heartfelt, and not well planned. However, his thoughts are representative of people who thrive the most being in community. The best authors, who are equipped from day one with the capacity to deliberate, even if they improve, are also people who can participate politically offline. It is clear that for participants like *coltergeist*, *aironlater*, and *Ctron*, the Political Blogging Community is a major source of personal security and growth as they express themselves politically.

The resulting data set showed that diaries contain a large amount of deliberative content. This finding, while significant, was the only answer the codebook was prepared to give. It does not tell us much about the adherence to deliberative norms. In the course of study, the full results of which can be found in appendix B, it was immediately clear that because the codebook was not designed to approach questions about change over time, a new approach would have to be taken to attach substantive meaning to the data. Not only would the first several diaries need to

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be compared to their chronologically later counterparts, but all of the diaries would be subjected to a measure of deliberative quality based on the ideal deliberative pillars.

The Deliberative Score: A New Tool for Assessing Quality

The straightforward analysis of raw data in the pilot study (see Appendix B) only meant the deciding of whether there was a linear increase in the amount of deliberative content. However, increasing the amount of arguments is not the same as increasing deliberative capacity. One is comparatively better at deliberating or more reasons than just speaking more. The process of gathering and briefly analyzing the data provided by *coltergeist* in the pilot study, discussed above, led directly to the development of the original concept of the deliberative score which seeks to categorize the arguments contained within each diary according to the five pillars of Habermasian deliberation—reasoned opinion expression, disagreement, sourcing, topic and engagement (Stromer-Galley, 2007). The deliberative score is an attempt to gain a deeper, more comprehensive view of the content of the diaries. The more pillars of deliberation present in a diary, the higher quality the deliberation within the diary (Witschge, 2003). The score, introduced in this thesis for the first time, represents an attempt to unify content analysis of deliberation to representations of deliberative quality.

After all, a diary that contains 55 well-articulated opinions contributes a great deal to the deliberation, but without referencing other content or factual sources, without addressing a topic well, or without writing engagingly so as to draw people into the conversation, it does not support the deliberative norms very well, and therefore does not satisfactorily reflect the deliberative capacity of the author. Someone committed to advancing the discussion while articulating themselves well will tend to produce content that contains some form of reasoned opinion expression, sourcing, disagreement, topic, and engagement, simply because these techniques keep a discussion going. The more of these that are incorporated, the more positive or engaging the response will be,[48] in turn encouraging deliberative practices in the future. This way, the problem of simple tallies of arguments is partially avoided, and the more relational

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[48] Future studies could assess this kind of performance by measuring comments, subscriptions, recommendations, or favorites, but would be better served by gathering this information in real time rather than retrospectively.

aspects of the theoretical framework, research questions, and propositions can be answered more fully.

The deliberative score represents an attempt to control for the correlation between the number of words and raw increases in the number of arguments which would of course increase the amount of deliberative content without meaning that one's deliberative capacity was enhanced. The score can range from 0-5, so long as there are *any* arguments that fit into each of the five categories. A second adjusted deliberative score ranges from 0-5, so long as there are more than 5 arguments that fit into any one category. 5 or more arguments in a category achieves 1 point towards the deliberative score. The five new pillar variables were recoded from existing variables for purposes of analysis.[49]

In the pilot study, the first 3, 5, and 7 diaries were compared to the final 3, 5, and 7 diaries using by comparing the means of the deliberative scores. The p-values for the 3- and 7- diary test were not statistically significant (p=.057, .356), but the 5-diary t-test was (p=.034). Within each of the five categories, there were no statistically significant results. The comparison of means test was chosen in favor of more linear correlation measures because diaries do not appear each day, week, or month on a uniform basis across the community; because some authors post a diary every day it was impossible to hand code each one. Additionally, every author has an off-day and produces low quality content that may be considered like an outlier.

The sites of Daily Kos and Red State were selected because they are regularly referenced in popular and scholarly literature, provide an opportunity for comparison, are fertile grounds for the kinds of political discussion necessary for deliberation, and contain vast amounts of data that is easily sampled. The pilot study that closely analyzed the publications of *coltergeist* from Daily Kos strengthened the methods and measures, especially in the creation of the deliberative score. From here, the paper proceeds to explain how the data, once gathered, was analyzed. The findings are also presented.

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[49] For a full listing of all the variables, please see Appendix D. For a detailed explanation of the deliberative score, please see Appendix E.

Chapter Six: Analyzing Deliberative Content and Change in Political Blogging Communities

The data gathering procedures consolidated a data set sufficient to approach the research question pursued in this thesis. The sampled diaries of sampled authors were subjected to the coding scheme described in Chapter 2, and in Appendix C. This chapter discusses the findings of this thesis and their implications. Once gathered, the data were analyzed on a per-author basis and in aggregate. Arguments were analyzed on a per-diary basis, a per-author basis, as well as all together. In sum, most of the tests did not yield statistical significance. No particular author shows major improvement on his or her own. SPSS and Microsoft Excel were used to organize the variables, data, results, and to create the scores, all of which served to generate the general findings of the study. Before this information is presented, it is important to not lose sight of the experiences of participants in communities. These individuals spend quite a bit of their lives online and are thus deeply affected. These qualitative anecdotes from the sampled diaries and authors contextualize why content might change over time, especially in terms of quality and diversity.

Blogging in Community

For some participants, the learning process of political blogging in community takes on an especially personal dimension. For these authors, blogging is more than just expressive, or deliberative, it is cathartic. In the Fall of 2008, discussions of the soon-to-be-elected Barack Obama struck a note with Daily Kos user *goatchowder*. *Goatchowder* was going through a divorce at the time[50], and Obama's performance in the most recent presidential debate reminded him how much he had learned from the senator.[51]

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[50] According to the diary, he was going through a divorce. However, without a follow-up survey, a step which was outside the bounds of this thesis, one cannot be completely certain that this is true. This thesis takes the position that notions of community that support deliberative qualities are reinforced even if personas are inauthentic, although the external benefits of blogging in community would be dampened by such behavior. It should be noted, also, that other participants tend to attribute personas as mostly authentic, but as in any social setting, people also recognize propensities for exaggerated storytelling, the evidence for which would be found in comments—also outside the bounds of this study.

[51] (http://www.dailykos.com/story/2008/09/29/615056/-How-Obama-helped-my-divorce). Accessed 15 January 2011.

He is a walking, talking example of how non-violent conflict resolution should be done. I didn't realize that until I unconsciously started emulating him. Applying these principles for the first time this afternoon, has already helped me in my personal life.

I got a rather threatening and bellicose letter today from my ex, which may have added a new sticking point in what were otherwise cut-and-dried and settled points of our divorce.

Rather than respond with more bellicosity and escalate the situation, I just held my ground, made my point, took no jabs or swipes, and that was it. I didn't even respond to the substance of the attack, which was in many way tangential to the point we were arguing about anyway, and thus provided a graceful "face-saving" way out if needed.

I'm prepared for whatever might happen. It might be a proposal or solution I can live with. Or the whole deal might fall apart and we have to start it over. Whatever it is, I faced it calmly, confidently, and (I hope) graciously, and that makes me feel much better about myself and how I treat other with whom I strongly disagree on important matters.

So Obama's example helped me become a better person, and quite possible a more effective one too.

This post received several comments of personal support, and affirmation that other participants, too, have learned something from Obama. Their perceptions of Mr. Obama cannot be separated from their participation in the Political Blogging Community. Barack Obama is seen here as a cool-headed, responsible deliberator, much in the way that Daily Kos participants would like to be seen.

A poignant example of how important process arguments are to the learning of deliberation in community is provided by a post made by *amymiller* at Red State.com. After a few comments made by Jeb Bush regarding how the Republican party ought to reevaluate their old ideas and put forward new ones, *amymiller*, agreeing, takes it a bit further, arguing that articulating conservative ideas is a very fundamental way to convince others to take up conservative positions.[52]

To be "nostalgic about the past" is not the same as forgetting the past and disregarding history. Jeb Bush may be less than a bastion of Conservative might, but that does not render his point moot. He is right. We do need to have thoughtful discussions, an especially now, listen and learn about people not in our happy little tent. I haven't been playing politics as long as some of you have, but I just escaped from liberal/squish hell, and if I learned anything, it's that getting inside the head of the left depends upon lending

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[52] (http://www.redstate.com/amymiller/2009/05/05/try-it-youll-like-it-a-response/). Accessed 15 January 2011.

an ear to what they're thinking. That **doesn't** means agreeing, or being receptive, or trashing the Reagan doctrine, but it does mean taking time out to consider how they're thinking and why they're thinking it. We need to keep Reagan in mind as we look forward, and formulate modern policy based on his core principles.

[…]

Realize that it's okay to sit down with a liberal and has something out respectfully; if you're talking to a person worth debating, the fact that you are interested in what they have to say will absolutely drive them wild. The way I see it, if someone—even someone whose beliefs are polar opposites of mine—is legitimately mad, or scared, or frustrated about what's going on in this country, I want to hear about it. Hate the war in Iraq? Let's hear about it! Feel like abortion should come down to a woman's right to choose? Lay it on me! Think I'm a fascist loon who hates black people and women? Whatever, just be creative in your insults, if you please.

My point it, if you don't listen to the people you represent, how can you possible know what's important to them? I have had respectful, insightful political debate with whites, blacks, immigrants, expats, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, anarchists, socialists, communists, Zionists, and one very friendly fascist, and the reason that those debates were respectful and productive was because I listend to what those people were telling me, instead of just passively hearing them. The key to winning the war is responding, instead of just sticking to *just* talking points, or *just* history, or *just* how the Left needs a reality check. It's productive, I promise.

And I'll just add, I never conceded one conservative point in four years, and I heard an awful lot of "Oh..I understand you now. I never thought about it that way before!"

Music to my ears!

This is an impassioned plea for a more inclusive discussion (although in the end she says she never has changed nor will change her position, even as she clearly thinks it is proper to disagree and change positions within the conservative enclave). This is a function of the equality pillar of deliberation that values the opinions, positions, and perspectives of all those affected by public problems or their solutions. Posts like this demonstrate what participants have learned, and what they teach each other in Political Blogging Communities.

Some authors blog about a few topics only. But they still tend to engage in larger discussions about the place of the community in the larger political context from time to time. In a post on 5 November, 2010 titled "How'd That Disunity Thing Work Out for You?", *dengre,*

who is notable in the community for his work on the scandal surrounding the former D.C. lobbyist Jack Abramoff, wrote about the virtues of unity and disagreement.[53]

> I remember a time when I posted a Diary everyday on this site and some of them made a difference in helping to defeat this or that Republican weasel with deep ties to the Abramoff scandal. That was back in 2005-2006 and the goal of Progressives and Democrats of all stripes was to defeat Bush and the GOP. We were united. And we won.
>
> In 2007 and 2008 our unity began to fray in the intensity of the Primary battles as we advocated for favorite candidates and issues. Still, once the General Election season began we unified and won again.
>
> Since then, unity on our side has been downgraded. For some it is still the most important thing, for others it has been downgraded to only occasionally important and for others it has become a 'dirty' word: the shameful utterance one hears from Obots and corporate sell-outs.
>
> […]
>
> If we do not relearn how to unify we will continue to be disappointed by outcomes and all of the issues on a progressive agenda—or even a traditional Democratic agenda—will continue to suffer defeats.
>
> And we have two basic choices on what we can do next:
>
>> Choice One: Unity First
>> We can relearn how to push unity to the front and temper the desire by our many factions for their most important issue to trump unity (and anything else).
>>
>> Or
>>
>> Choice Two: Unity Later
>> We can continue to have the battle over what issue in the progressive agenda should be first in line and what tactics and strategies should be used to pass legislation and or win the day for that issue.
>
> The sad truth is that most of the Diaries and fights that have devolved into pissing matches have been fights between folks advocating for Choice One or Choice Two as the best way forward. The recent meta Diaries that I play off of by Cenk Uyger and deaniac83 are about this fight between Unity Later (Cenk's position) and Unity First (deaniac83 position).

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[53] (http://dengre.dailykos.com/story/2010/11/05/917643/-Howd-That-Disunity-Thing-Work-Out-for-You?via=blog_528086). Accessed 15 January 2011.

The trouble with Choice Two and Unity Later is that it invites an endless number of other battles once you embrace that path. Now you have to fight with everybody else on that path about which issue should be first and which strategy is best and which tactics will work to get that goal done. These regular fights about the endless possible choices down of the Unity Later path seem to be the source of most Diaries and comments these days.

From where I sit, Choice Two is a fool's errand. One can not delay unity and then think that your divided coalition will be successful. I admit that I have lost patience for those who advocate for the tangled thickets of that swamp over unity. I am especially intolerant of those voices who actively promote disunity as a progressive 'virtue'.

I think that rediscovering Unity is the most important thing that we can do now. I think we should unite—as we did in 2005-2006—and that stopping the Republicans and their agenda should be enough of a reason for all of us to do that.

[…]

Years ago I believed Howard Dean when he said "You have the power". He was right and he still is. Each of us does have power and the responsibility to use it. Each of us is responsible for how united or disunited our coalition is and by extension how successful it is. And when our unity breaks down it is the responsibility of all of us, from President Obama on down, to accept that each of us had a hand in that, repair the breach and work to get things back on track. Disunity in the face of an organized, well-funded, unified opposition is not a winning idea. Unity Later does not work.

Diaries like these are some of the best the Political Blogging Communities have to offer. *Dengre* combines meta arguments with more general topical arguments regarding political strategy and the political system. While retelling electoral success stories that have taken on near mythical proportions—a very common thing to do before reflexive or critical analysis—he seems to be probing for the place and meaning of Daily Kos. In referencing the arguments of others, he grounds what is a rather sweeping indictment of liberal Democrats to blogging community. In this way, the narrative that Daily Kos has an impact on American politics is renewed and utilized in a way so as to lend the arguments presented in the diary more credibility. The diary represents an attempt to ensure that the deliberation has an impact. It also shows the impact that the deliberation has had on *dengre*, because he is convinced that the people, especially those in the community, have the power to make a difference and change minds. Finally, it is the kind of diary that would not have been written in his early days as a participant.

Deliberative Content of Sustained Participants in Political Blogging Communities

The profiles of Daily Kos and Red State presented here aid in imagining the kinds of people whose work is the object of this study. The literature on blogs, deliberative democracy, and community, as well as the conventional wisdom found in more popular media are trying to tell us something about what is happening in Political Blogging Communities. Taking a wide view, the data gathered for this thesis both complicates and confirms what we think we already know about blogs. It shows what Political Blogging Communities are all about even before assessing the impact of change. The first set of results, seen in figure 5-1, contextualizes and categorizes the shear amount of content found in Political Blogging Communities.

Figure 6-1

Results of and Types of Arguments in Diaries
All authors, Daily Kos and Red State

# of diaries	Words	Comments	Total Arguments	Arguments about the problem (problem arguments)	Arguments about the Arguments (meta arguments)	Arguments about the deliberative process (process arguments)	Social arguments
373	265,931	17,438	15,603	11,389	863	137	79
				73.0%	5.5%	0.8%	0.6%

Other aggregate results
Topical arguments with elaboration: 1,203 (10.6%)
Topical arguments with disagreement: 107 (0.9%)

Total Arguments	Arguments about Campaigns and Elections	Arguments about Party Platforms	Arguments about Public or Foreign Policy	Arguments about the way American politics work	Arguments about politicians or policymakers	Arguments about the media's coverage of politics	Other topical arguments
15,603	401	330	2,539	995	2,187	577	4,224
% of total	2.5%	2.1%	16.3%	6.4%	14.0%	3.7%	27.1%

Of the 15,603 total arguments, 3,135 were off topic.

A large amount of discussion was generated by the arguments, with each one producing a little more than one comment at a 1 to 1.12 ratio. Authors were able to express a distinct

argument with an average of about 17 words. The 373 hand coded diaries contained 15,603 arguments. Of those, 11,389 (73.0%) were about the problem. 863 (5.5%) were meta arguments, 137 (0.8%) were arguments about the deliberative process, and only 79 (0.6%) were social arguments. This leaves only 3,135 (20.1%) arguments that were off-topic.

This thesis shows that Political Blogging Communities generally stay on topic. Participants do indeed discuss American politics. To be a sustained author, one has to continue to write about politics, and they become adept at talking about new topics and providing new perspectives on the issues of the day. In particular, authors talk about public and foreign policy the most, dedicating 16.3% of their arguments to the topic. Arguments about politicians and other policymakers constitute the second most frequently discussed topic, at 14% of the time. Arguments about campaigns and elections (2.5%), party platforms (2.1%), the political system (6.4%), and the media (3.7%) were discussed at a significantly lower rate. The largest proportion of arguments about the problem focused on topics other than the six identified strengths of Political Blogging Communities, and these usually were concerned with social or moral issues or on the economy. The focus on American public and foreign policy is of particular interest. It means that Political Blogging Communities do focus on common problems and their solutions— a prerequisite for deliberative democracy. It also means that Political Blogging Communities do more than comment on horse-race political campaigns or complain about the media.

Authors focus so much on their topics that they also refrain from including meta arguments, social arguments, and process arguments. It seems it is better, a community norm even, to only express opinions on a topic as clearly as possible. The tendency to emphasize the deliberative pillar of reasoned opinion expression also includes an aversion to sourcing many of the arguments. Authors cite their arguments about the problem only 10.6 percent of the time. The average diary contains only 3.2 explicit references to other sources, including personal stories of the author. In Political Blogging Communities, authors stay on topic, discussing politics, especially public policy, in their diaries, include at least a few sources for their ideas in each diary, and in turn generate a considerable amount of discussion.

Differences among Authors and their Deliberative Tendencies

Digging a bit deeper, there are particular differences between authors. Some stand out as very gifted contributors, others struggle to produce large amounts of high quality content. However, all meet the sample criteria, demonstrating a long-term commitment to the community. The summary results here are presented in the order the authors were sampled and their diaries coded. Please refer to figure 6-2 in Appendix A for full results.

The number of words in the average diary of each author ranged from 2,311 expressed by *dengre* of Daily Kos, to a low of 236 from *bk* of Red State, about a third the length of the average Op-Ed in a major newspaper. The number of attached comments ranged from 178 comments per diary (*dengre* of Daily Kos) to less than 2 (*fmeekins* and *daconia* of Red State). While *dengre* also expressed 124 arguments per diary, *bk* only produced a little over 12. For *dengre*, there were 102 arguments about the problem—American politics—in each diary, while for *braindead* of Daily Kos, there were under 10 arguments about the problem in each. Concerning meta arguments, arguments about the deliberative process, and social arguments, *dengre* (8), *LaFeminista* (1.6), and *fistjab* and *dengre* (0.9) had the most arguments of each, respectively, per diary. There were many authors who expressed no meta arguments, social arguments, or arguments about the deliberative process.

These results suggest a standard correlation between writing a great deal of words, generating a lot of discussion, and articulating a lot of arguments about American politics. Contrary to images of blogs being dominated by the brief or superficial, in Political Blogging Communities, sustained members generate more discussion the more they stay on topic, and the more they write. Participants, then, tend to have a longer attention span, and in fact favor commenting on longer, thoughtful pieces than brief, inflammatory ones.

Is there a noticeable difference between the larger and liberal Daily Kos and the smaller and conservative Red State? Figure 6-3 shows that there are differences between the communities in terms of the kinds of arguments that appear at each and what form they take. This table highlights important differences between the liberal and conservative blogospheres: liberals include more words and socially oriented statements in their diaries but make fewer political arguments than their conservative counterparts. One could speculate that community

norms of liberal Political Blogging Communities encourage a more diverse conversation that reaches beyond a little further beyond the isolated expression of political opinions.

Figure 6-3

<u>Political Blogging Communities in Comparison</u>
Arguments in all sampled diaries

Site	*Number of diaries*	*Words*	*Comments*	*Total Arguments*	*Arguments about the problem (problem arguments)*	*Arguments about the Arguments (meta arguments)*	*Arguments about the deliberative process (process arguments)*	*Social arguments*
Daily Kos	237	185,326	16,086	9,659	6,955	721	126	67
Mean		782	67.9	40.8	29.3	3	0.5	0.3
Red State	136	80,505	1,352	5,944	4,434	142	11	12
Mean		591.9	9.9	43.7	32.6	1.04	0.08	0.09

Shaded cells indicate the higher mean value.

Daily Kos authors tend to write more in each diary than Red State authors, also generating a vastly larger number of comments. Red State authors are less wordy, however, needing just 13.5 words to express an argument, and 18.1 to articulate an argument about American politics. For Daily Kos authors, 72 percent of their arguments are about American politics, while those at Red State articulate arguments about American politics 74 percent of the time. However, the typical Daily Kos diary has a higher chance of containing meta arguments, arguments about the deliberative process, and social arguments.

This thesis demonstrates authors who are sustained participants in Political Blogging Communities stay on topic; they write about American politics. While Red State authors are a little more succinct in expressing distinct arguments, the linear patterns of words, comments, arguments, arguments about the problem, and the rest, holds across both communities. It is difficult to explain why Daily Kos diaries receive so many more comments than those found at Red State. While there is evidence to support that Daily Kos diaries receive more comments because they have more words than Red State diaries, this proposition does not hold due to the fact that Red State diaries express more arguments with fewer words. What we can say, however,

is that there is little basic evidence that Daily Kos and Red State produce completely different kinds of content and / or reproduce different kinds of communities. In short, there are more similarities than differences, and the most pronounced differences in the volume of content between Daily Kos and Red State are not likely what produces differences in deliberative quality.

Together, categorizing the coded arguments according to the ideal deliberative pillars yields a lopsided set of results in the sense that the vast majority of arguments represent an attempt to express an opinion on a particular political topic. Substantively, the results shown in Figure 6-4 show that sustained authors in Political Blogging Communities tend to use the diary feature of blogs as a space for the articulation of political arguments rather than a space for engaging other participants or sharing information gathered from other sources. Still, the average deliberative scores show that most posts contain some arguments from each of the deliberative criteria.

Figure 6-4

Deliberation in the Diaries
All authors

Number of diaries	Reasoned Opinion Expression	Sourcing	Disagreement	Topic	Engagement	Score1*	Score2**
373	13,084	3,101	150	11,213	1,186		
Mean number of arguments	29.8	8.31	0.4	30.1	3.2	3.5	2.2

* Deliberative score that counts each time any arguments are grouped as any deliberative pillar.
** Deliberative score that counts each time 5 or more arguments are grouped as any deliberative pillar.
--
Counts are established on a per argument basis. Overlapping occurs across the *Topic* and *Reasoned Opinion Expression* deliberative pillars.

The counts of arguments included in the deliberative pillars across the entire sample set conform to the patterns identified earlier. Authors express their opinions on American politics. They do not explicitly disagree with other participants very often, and refrain from engaging other participants directly in their diaries. Because of the small amount of disagreement—an important pillar of ideal deliberation—in Political Blogging Communities, the basic and more rigorous

deliberative scores rarely reach the highest possible value, 5. Earning a point on disagreement and engagement is rare, yet dramatically improve the deliberative quality of the diary. Disagreement generates more discussion, or at the very least a response from other participants referred to, and engagement is a sign that the author cares what the other participants have to say on the particular issue.

Again, there are particular differences between authors, and between sites. These results are presented in the order that the authors were sampled. Please refer to the expanded Figure 6-5 in Appendix A for a full set of results. The number of arguments categorized under the deliberative pillar of *reasoned opinion expression* ranged from a high of 103.1 expressed by Daily Kos's *dengre* to a low of 9.1 per diary expressed by *braindead* of Daily Kos. The number of arguments that explicitly referenced other material or participants ranged from 28.5 per diary (*dengre*) to less than 1.5 per dairy (*fmeekins* of Red State). While *dengre* also disagreed 1.6 times per diary, *braindead*, *amymiller*, *albanius*, and *Ctron* never explicitly disagreed with other participants. For the deliberative pillar of *Topic*, the highest per-diary average is again attributed to *dengre* (197.9), and the lowest is attributed to *braindead* (18.4). Finally, the author that expressed the highest number of engaging arguments per diary was *Vorkosigan* of Daily Kos (8.94), and the author that expressed the least was *bk* of Red State (0.33).

The deliberative scores represent an attempt to account for all of the deliberative pillars together. According to the first, less rigorous score (Score1), *aironlater's* diaries show the he or she has the highest capacity to deliberate in the sample, on a per-diary basis, with an average score of 4.28, with 0 being the lowest deliberative quality, 5 the highest. The author whose diaries are of the lowest deliberative quality, thus demonstrating a much lesser capacity to deliberate, is *Vorkosigan* with an average score of 2.69. This is somewhat surprising, because although *Vorkosigan* was often off-topic, he is also a professor of International Relations in Taiwan. According to the second, more rigorous deliberative score (Score2), *dengre's* diaries show that he has the highest capacity to deliberate, on a per-diary basis, with an average score of 3.57 (scores can range from 0 to 5). The author whose diaries are of the lowest deliberative quality according to this measure is *Ctron* of Daily Kos with an average score of 1.

The differences between the diaries published at Daily Kos and those published at Red State are more pronounced when the ideal deliberative pillars are considered. Figure 6-6 highlights some of these differences. Together the table suggests that bloggers in conservative

Political Blogging Communities make a concerted effort to express political opinions and do so at a much higher rate than their liberal counterparts. On the other hand, bloggers in liberal Political Blogging Communities are much more likely to include references to other materials, express disagreement, and mention each other than their conservative counterparts. This in turn accounts for the difference in the average deliberative quality across communities as measured by the deliberative scores (Score1 and Score2). By this measure, Daily Kos diaries are of higher quality than those found on Red State, meaning that overall, authors at Daily Kos make for potentially better deliberative citizens.

Figure 6-6

<u>Deliberation in Comparison</u>
All Diaries and the arguments contained therein, Daily Kos and Red State

Site	# of diaries	Reasoned Opinion Expression	Sourcing	Disagreement	Topic	Engagement	Score1*	Score2**
Daily Kos	237	6,753	2,319	127	6,739	995		
Mean per diary		28.5	9.78	0.54	28.4	4.2	3.68	2.3
Red State	136	6,331	782	23	4,474	191		
Mean per diary		46.6	5.75	0.17	32.9	1.4	3.22	2.08

* Deliberative score that counts each time any arguments are categorized as any particular deliberative pillar.
** Deliberative score that counts each time 5 or more arguments are categorized as any particular deliberative pillar.
--
Counts are established on a per argument basis. Overlapping occurs across the *Topic* and *Reasoned Opinion Expression* deliberative pillars.
Shaded cells indicate the higher mean value.

In comparison, the average Red State diary contains more arguments (46.6) that are categorized as the ideal deliberative pillar of reasoned opinion expression than the average Daily Kos diary (28.5), which in turn drives up the number of topical arguments (32.9 for Red State against 28.4 for Daily Kos). However, even considering this discrepancy, diaries published at Daily Kos tend to contain more arguments that are explicitly sourced (9.78), express disagreement (0.54), and engage other authors (4.2). Although it is impossible to deduce from the summary chart, the more rigorous deliberative score (Score2) is statistically significantly

higher ($p < 0.05$) for those diaries that were published on Daily Kos than for those published on Red State. There are fewer cases for Red State, but the average deliberative score on Red State is 2.13, whereas the average diary published on Daily Kos earns a 2.4. The less rigorous deliberative score (Score1) also shows an increase from Red State to Daily Kos, 3.22 to 3.68.

Figure 6-7 further illustrates the difference in deliberative quality between Daily Kos and Red State in terms of the deliberative scores of the respective diaries. The table and chart rely on the more rigorous deliberative score (Score2) that consistently produces more meaningful results.[54] They together demonstrate that there are more diaries of higher deliberative quality at Daily Kos than there are at Red State. In fact no diaries sampled from Red State achieve a high score of 5. This is a finding suggested by the previous table, Figure 6-6. Although the data claims a distinct difference between the two communities, to the average blogger, these charts should suggest that making an effort to adhere to deliberative norms, especially sourcing, engagement, and disagreement, also encourages more comments from other participants, which again raises the overall level of deliberative quality in the entire diary page. That the liberal Daily Kos would contain higher quality diaries than those at Red State is consistent with other expectations found in various literatures and polls, suggesting liberals are more willing to include other perspectives, to compromise to achieve more acceptable solutions, and are thus more amenable to change—a true mark of someone who takes the merits and activities of deliberation and deliberative democracy seriously.[55] These results are a reflection of these more general tendencies imposed on the Political Blogging Community.

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[54] Deliberative score that counts each time 5 or more arguments are categorized as any particular deliberative pillar.
[55] This is of course not to say that all conservatives who blog in Political Blogging Communities suffer from a deficiency to deliberate or participate in a deliberative democracy. Rather, from the content published by the sampled authors from Red State, we simply see a much lower level of commitment to deliberative norms.

Figure 6-7

Deliberative Score2 (rigorous)
Crosstabulation

Count

		Site (# of diaries)		*Total*
		Daily Kos	Red State	
Score 2	0	23	11	34
	1	20	9	29
	2	74	74	148
	3	82	35	117
	4	35	7	42
	5	3	0	3
Total		237	136	373

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	23.316[a]	5	.000
Likelihood Ratio	24.874	5	.000
N of Valid Cases	373		

a. 2 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5.
The minimum expected count is 1.09.
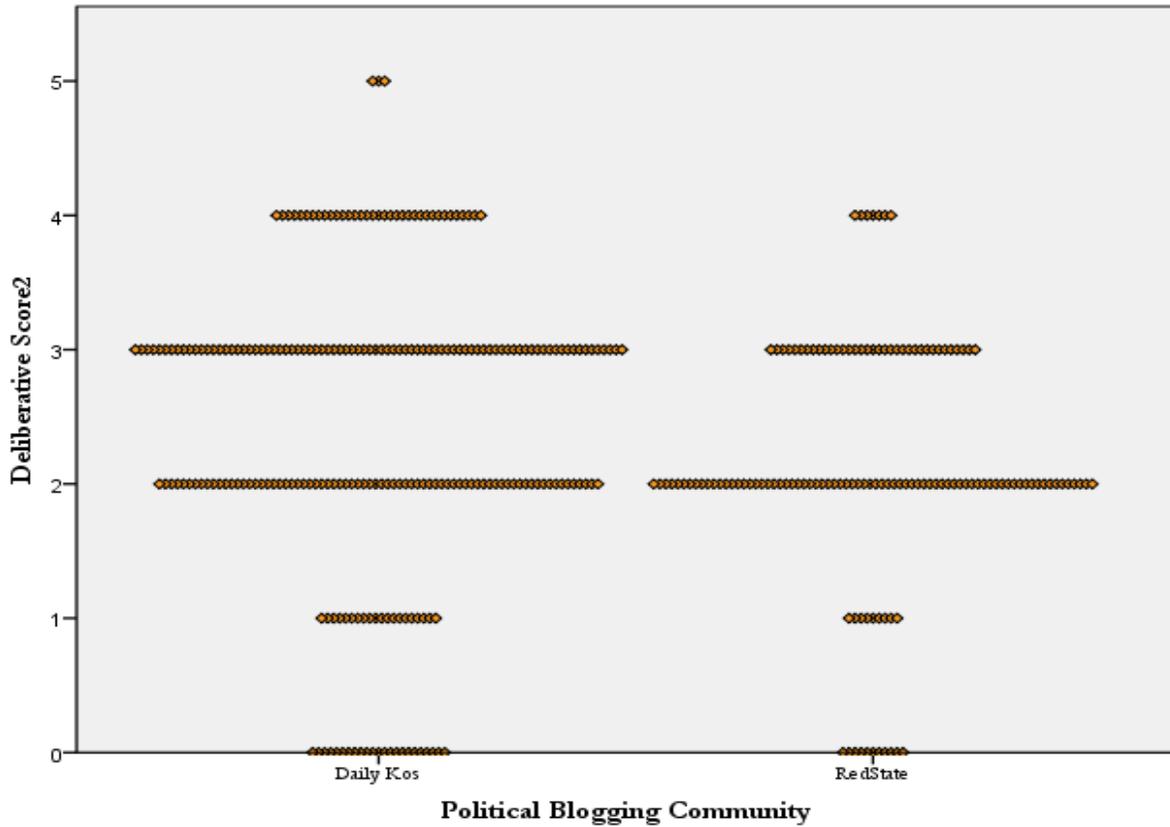
Each mark represents a single diary.

As the diaries move from Red State to Daily Kos, there is also a significant move higher up the deliberative score scale. These results mean that, according to the concept of the deliberative score and the codebook used to measure deliberation, the diaries published by sustained participants in the Political Blogging Community of Daily Kos are of higher deliberative quality. Here, one might speculate that the political perspective of the community may also be an important factor. The questions of change over time *independent of political content* will be considered next.

From the summary results presented above, the chances of *dengre* being an unusually capable deliberative participant in Political Blogging Communities seem very likely. However, Figure 6-8 illustrates that the correlation between words, arguments, and reasoned opinion expression does not necessarily also improve the deliberative quality of the diary, as measured by the deliberative score. Some authors, such as *aironlater*, and *UTvoter*, express a disproportionately smaller amount of arguments compared to their respective deliberative score. Other authors, such as *amymiller* and *vorkosigan*, pair deliberative scores in very much the same way as *dengre*. While *dengre* is an outstanding member of the Daily Kos Political Blogging Community, his diaries should not be considered abnormal. From a careful reading of his diaries, however, they are extremely well written and researched, and his post about the direction of the community detailed in the previous section of this chapter itself was poignant, and generated a large amount of productive discussion.

Because many of these results are based on aggregate analysis, they do not approach any of the questions regarding personal change over time, nor social learning, but they do provide a snapshot of what sustained participants in Political Blogging Communities are writing about and their deliberative practices. Authors do a fine job articulating their opinions, to varying abilities, do their part to clarify their own and other's materials, and make an effort at providing sources that support their own opinions, all the while contributing to the meaning of the community to its participants. The overall picture provides a kind of baseline by which progress on the part of individual authors and the entire communities can be compared to. This thesis has thus far presented a distinctive picture of what the Political Blogging Communities are. The next set of results addresses how they change.

Figure 6-8

<u>Increasing Arguments Does Not Necessarily Increase Deliberative Quality</u>
Average diary, displayed by author
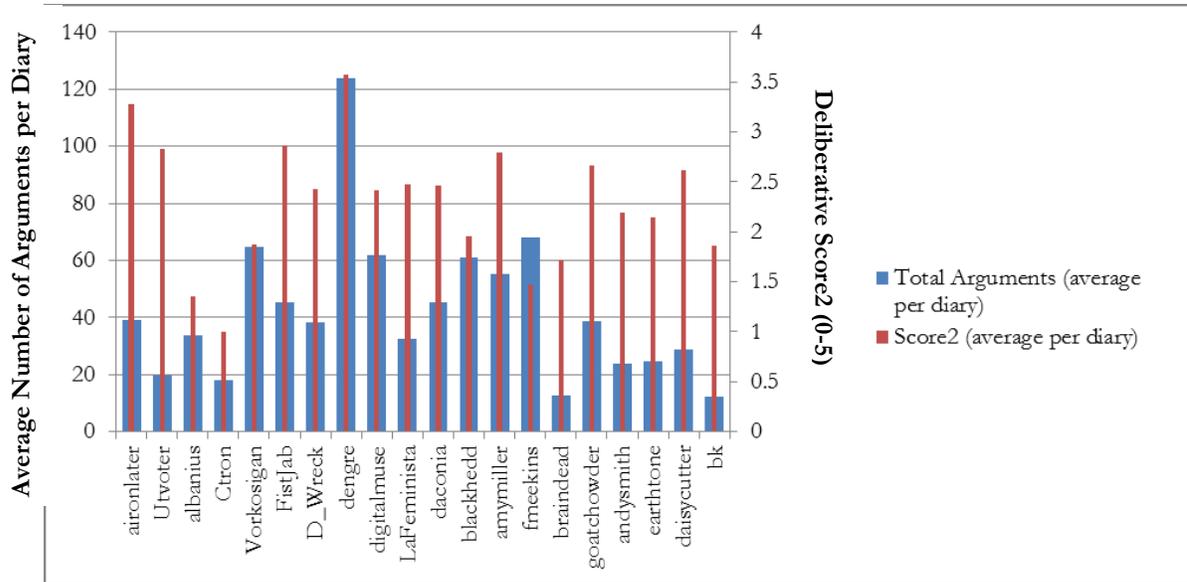
Bivariate and other correlations

Many variables have clear relationships to each other that complicate meaningful analysis, such as the sets of variables that assess social arguments and the various topics in politics that are the focus of Political Blogging Communities. However, there are other variables that have meaningful relationships. As we saw above, the number of arguments and comments increase with the number of words, and deliberative quality of the average diary increases if it was published on Daily Kos rather than Red State. This means that participants would rather engage in meaningful, well thought-out discussions than brief, ad-hoc ones.

Correlations help to decide if and how some factors are related to others. This evidence is not necessarily related to the question of change over time, but does provide insight into the deliberative aspects of Political Blogging Communities. The correlations suggest how the deliberative pillars might be related to each other beyond just looking at the increase or decrease in one pillar only. The evidence presented in this section may also prove useful for future studies since in paints a clearer picture of the deliberative qualities of Political Blogging Communities.

Figure 6-9 shows relationships between basic objective data and arguments in diaries. There are relationships between these variables that illuminate previous observations regarding the number of words contained in a diary and the number and nature of arguments that emerge from those words. These relationships are acknowledged here because they fundamentally affect all of the other variables used in the study. Moreover, as there are more words, more total arguments, and more arguments about American politics in a diary, a blog author will find that it will also earn more comments from readers. Substantively, people would rather comment on a longer more complex piece of writing than a short or simple one.

Figure 6-9

Aggregate Basic Correlations
All sampled diaries from all sampled authors

		Number of Words	Number of Comments	Date	Number of Discrete Arguments in the diary	Number of Arguments that contain text about problem
Number of Words	Pearson Correlation	1	.165**	-.019	.876**	.665**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.712	.000	.000
	N	373	373	373	373	373
Number of Comments	Pearson Correlation	.165**	1	.090	.143**	.141**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001		.082	.006	.006
	N	373	373	373	373	373
Date of publication	Pearson Correlation	-.019	.090	1	.029	.062
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.712	.082		.579	.232
	N	373	373	373	373	373
Number of Discrete Arguments in the diary	Pearson Correlation	.876**	.143**	.029	1	.739**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.006	.579		.000
	N	373	373	373	373	373
Number of Arguments that contain text about problem	Pearson Correlation	.665**	.141**	.062	.739**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.006	.232	.000	
	N	373	373	373	373	373

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As the number of words increases, the total number of arguments—including the number of arguments about American politics, meta arguments, social arguments, and arguments about the deliberative process, and the number of comments generated by the diary significantly

increase. Including more meta, social, and process-oriented arguments will also generate more comments.

Another interesting finding, as the diaries move further along chronologically, the number of words decrease, as do the total number of arguments, the number of arguments about the problem, and the number of comments. Figures 6-10 and 6-11 illustrate two of these findings.

Figure 6-10

The Number of Words in the Average Diary Decreases over Time

$y = -0.0481x + 2639.5$
$R^2 = 0.0004$

Figure 6-11

The Number of Comments Increases Over Time
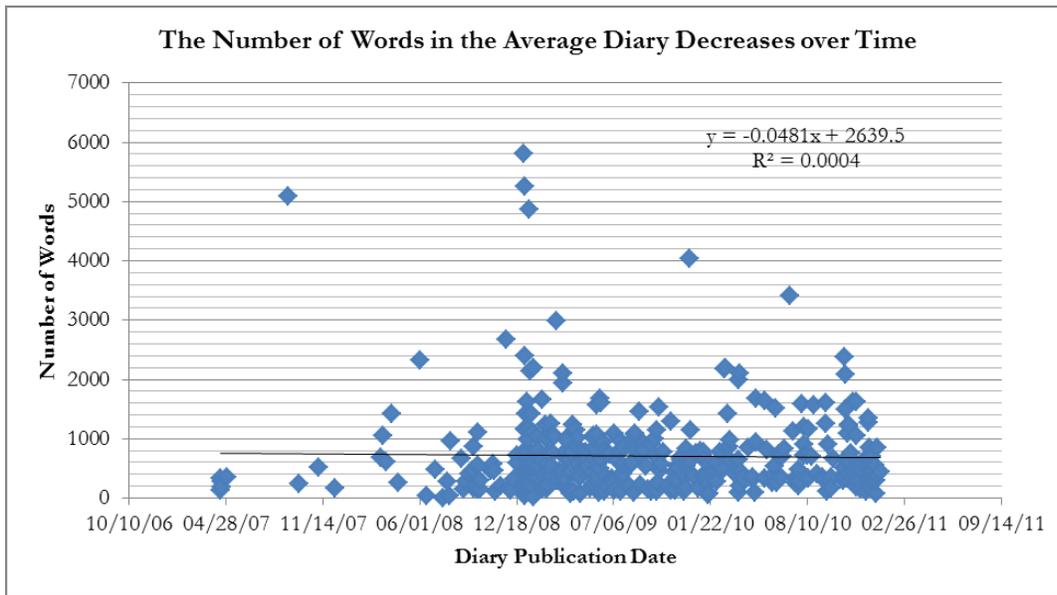
$y = 0.0294x - 1129.4$
$R^2 = 0.0081$
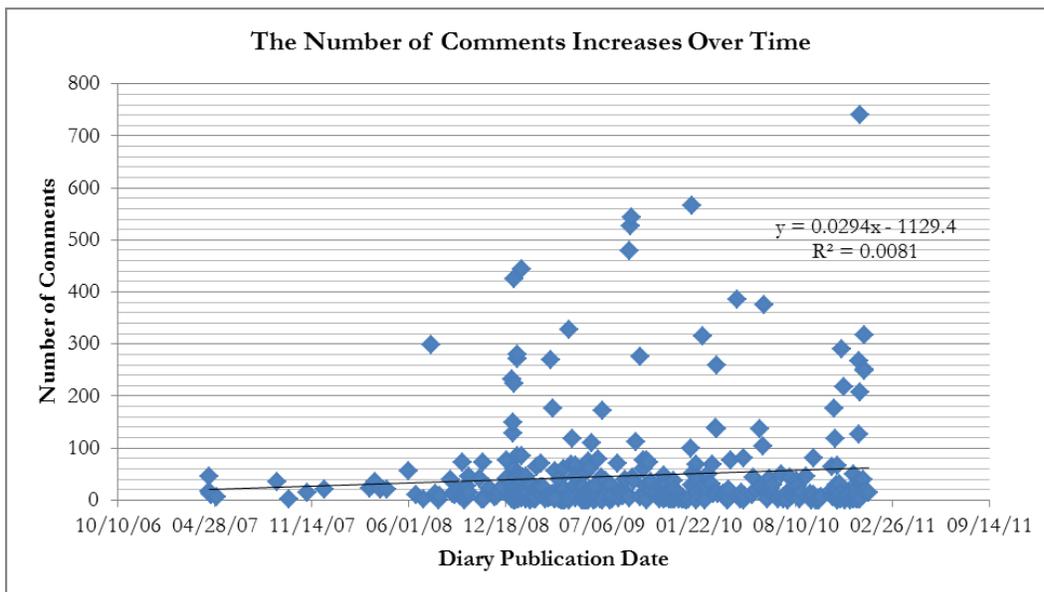
The increase in the number of comments could partly be due to an increase in deliberative quality, which in turn enhances an author's reputation within the community and garners more followers, although an increasing number of readers and participants is a viable competing explanation, the data about which there was no access to.[56]

More relevant to this thesis' theoretical framework, an increase in the number of comments was also related to the deliberative quality of the diary. This an especially encouraging finding, one that validates the methods of analysis, because, based on theories about deliberation, one would expect that a talented or dedicated deliberator would tend to engage well with other participants. This thesis demonstrates that this is the case. The more deliberative pillars a diary adheres to, the more comments it will receive from other participants. Figure 6-12 details the results.

Figure 6-12

Correlation between deliberative score2* and the number of comments in the average diary

		Deliberative score that counts each time 5 or more arguments are categorized as any deliberative pillar (range: 0-5)	*Number of Comments*
Deliberative score that counts each time 5 or more arguments are grouped as any deliberative pillar	Pearson Correlation	1	.163**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
	N	373	373
Number of Comments	Pearson Correlation	.163**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	373	373

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Deliberative score that counts each time 5 or more arguments are categorized as any particular deliberative pillar.

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[56] Another perspective is worthy of consideration. Because of the influence and popularity of Facebook™ and Twitter™, it is likely that bloggers and blog readers in general have become more accustomed to shorter and more spontaneous postings of materials online. In fact, more and more bloggers use Twitter™, and many report that doing so detracts from the time they spend blogging (technorati.com/blogging/article/day-5-twitter-global-impact-and/). Moving forward, blogging practices have been impacted by smartphones. In a 2010 poll conducted by Technorati, around 70 percent of bloggers contend that smartphones have caused them to publish shorter posts (technorati.com/blogging/article/what-topics-and-trends-day-2/page-3/). The effects of smartphone usage on this study's findings, however, can be questioned considering neither Daily Kos nor Red State employed software during the time period from which diaries were sampled that made mobile posting easy.

All of these results together suggest that, rather than expressing more arguments, sustained members tend to write less, but generate more comments, which is an indication of an increase in deliberative quality. In the case of Political Blogging Communities, to the extent that authors see an increase in their deliberative capacity, less is more.

Next, at the risk of noting that everything is related to everything else, the different deliberative pillars are also related to each other. Chart 6-13 illustrates how the deliberative pillars, which are variables that can be considered on their own, interact with each other. It is important to include this information considering the findings visited above that emphasize the role of *reasoned opinion expression* in driving many other variables derived from the coding scheme.

Figure 6-13

<u>Significant Findings – Deliberative Pillars (components of ideal deliberation)</u>
Pearson Correlation at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

- Reasoned Opinion Expression and Sourcing
- Reasoned Opinion Expression and Disagreement
- Reasoned Opinion Expression and Topic
- Reasoned Opinion Expression and Engagement
- Sourcing and Disagreement
- Sourcing and Topic
- Sourcing and Engagement
- Disagreement and Topic
- Disagreement and Engagement
- Topic and Engagement

The ideal deliberative pillars are positively related to each other, even though the variables they are comprised of rarely overlap. As a diary contains more arguments categorized under the pillar of reasoned opinion expression, the diary is also significantly more likely to contain more sourcing, more disagreement, more engagement, more arguments that focus on the topic, and raise both deliberative scores.

In short, adhering more closely to the deliberative ideal of reasoned opinion expression improves the overall deliberative quality of the diary. The more sourcing a diary contains, the more expressions of disagreement, arguments about American politics, and arguments that seek to engage with other participants it contains. If an author is sourcing something, then he or she is

also more likely to ask other participants what they think, disagree with them, and stay on topic. A diary that contains more disagreement will also contain more arguments about American politics, and naturally, more engagement with other participants.

A diary that contains more arguments categorized under the deliberative pillar of topic also contains more engaging arguments. This is of some significance because it means that when authors talks about politics, they engage with other participants more. For deliberation, let alone deliberative democracy, to work in practice, people need to talk to each other about public issues and common problems and take the others' positions seriously. Here is a sign that deliberative norms take hold in Political Blogging Communities, especially among sustained, dedicated members of the community.

In sum, so long as authors are actually learning how to express themselves—represented by the deliberative pillar of reasoned opinion expression—they also perform other deliberative tasks, marked by the other four ideal deliberative pillars, as well; this reinforces a kind of learning process in which authors increase their deliberative capacity, even if deliberation *per se* is not always what is taking place in Political Blogging Communities.

Learning to Deliberate Over Time

As far as the question of change over time is considered, the more rigorous deliberative score (Score2) is positively and significantly related to the date of publication, which also addresses the question of change over time. This is shown in figure 6-14. It has important implications for the study itself and the questions considered here, as well as for bloggers themselves. The authors of diaries in political blogging communities together increase their deliberative capacity over time. The improvement observed here also means that the community supports adherence to deliberative norms, and encourages authors to write quality posts. While using the date variable yields a statistically significant correlation, the chronological sequential variable (number [sequential]) that denotes the diary number is not significantly related to any of the deliberative pillars, or deliberative scores. Therefore, the null hypothesis that claims any change over time in deliberative quality is explained by random variation cannot be safely rejected. However, this may be due to a mismatch among the number of diaries sampled among sampled authors.

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Figure 6-14
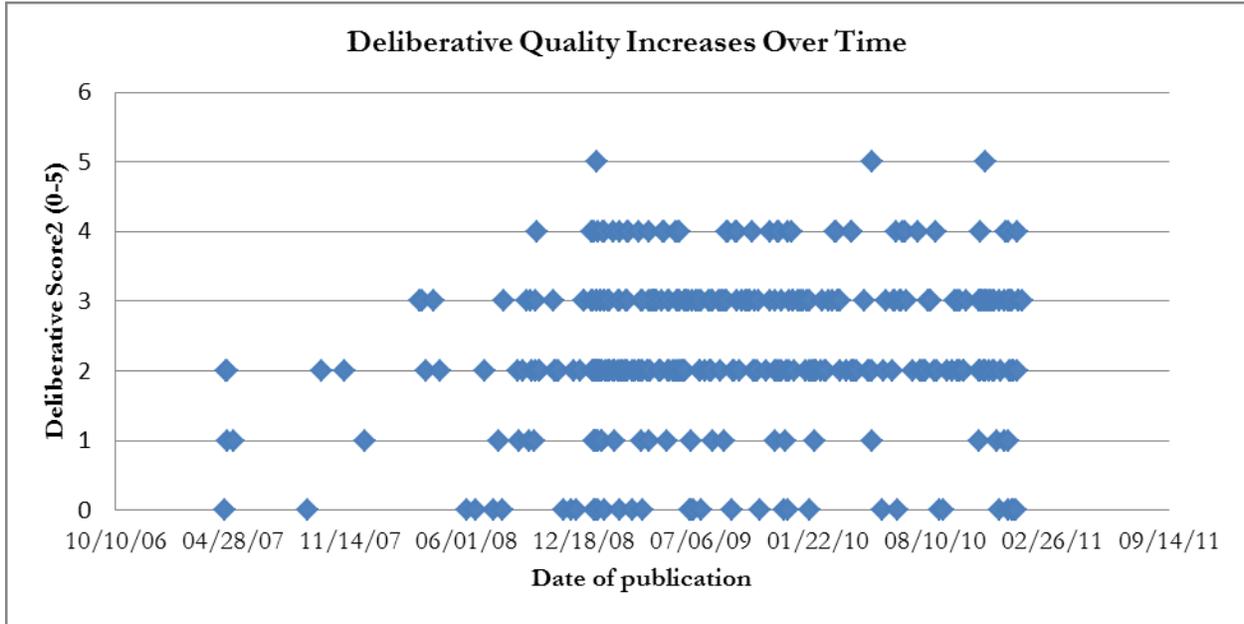
Each mark represents a single sampled diary.
--
Deliberative score that counts each time 5 or more arguments are categorized as any particular deliberative pillar.

These two final findings are certainly interesting, and considering the theoretical framework and propositions tested here, the more tests that are performed on the data, the more a pattern emerges.

Addressing Systematic Change

The final set of findings is the result of a same variable comparison of all the sampled diaries of all the authors. The results are significant at the 0.1 level, which is not an ideal threshold, and as such, confidence in the findings is somewhat diminished. But considering the pattern of findings and commonalities within them, the results provide a tentative foundation from which further studies may build and draw more robust conclusions. Analyzing the sampled diaries published on Daily Kos separately from those published on Red State, and vice versa, consistently yielded no significant findings, and therefore comparative generalizations are not possible.

Figure 6-15

<u>Aggregate comparison of the first sampled diary to the last sampled diary (0)</u>
Compare means test; significant findings*; test conducted with 20 diaries against 20 diaries.

Variable	*Value*	*Direction*
Social Arguments	p = 0.0828	Decrease
Topical opinion arguments formulated as general questions	p = 0.0563	Decrease
Other topical arguments advocating change	p = 0.0947	Decrease
Instances of any sourcing in the entire diary	p = 0.0828	Decrease
Topical arguments sourced in reference to other participants	p = 0.0497	Decrease**
Sourcing Score (deliberative pillar)	p = 0.0875	Decrease

* Differences between diaries across all other variables are explained by random variance.
** Change is significant at the 0.05 level.

Figure 6-15 shows that, according to the chronologically earlier set of diaries, those being the first sampled from the sampled authors, there are mostly decreases in the *amount* of deliberative content, including the deliberative pillar of sourcing, which is a mark of quality, when compared to the last diaries sampled chronologically. The final sampled diaries, approximately two years after the first sampled diaries, contain fewer social arguments, instances of sourcing in general as well as in reference to other participants, and other arguments about American politics advocating change. Substantively, these findings have more meaning in light of the findings that will be presented later. But one thing to note is that here, sourcing is seen as decreasing over time, but later, when more sampled diaries are included in the comparison, an increase in sourcing is observed. What is important to note is whether these patterns continue as more diaries are included in the before and after sample, paying close attention to like-variables. Figure 5-16 adds 4 more diaries for comparison.

When comparing the first and last three sampled diaries from all of the sampled authors, only four variables showed any potentially significant differences. Arguments that were identified as being about party platforms increased, including those advocating change, as did meta arguments that cited other participants. These diaries also showed an increase in the deliberative pillar of disagreement, which is a measure of quality. Substantively, authors are more likely to reference and disagree with each other; this represents an effort to address one another more often. It demonstrates an increasing comfort with the community, and knowledge of who to disagree with and how to do it.

Figure 6-16

Aggregate comparison of the first three sampled diaries to the last three sampled diaries (1)
Compare means test; significant findings*; test conducted with 60 diaries against 60 diaries.

Variable	Value	Direction
Arguments about party platforms	p = 0.0124	Increase
Arguments about party platforms advocating change	p = 0.0095	Increase**
Meta arguments sourced in reference to other participants	p = 0.0701	Increase
Disagreement Score (deliberative pillar)	p = 0.0933	Increase

* Differences between diaries across all other variables are explained by random variance.
** Change is significant at the 0.05 level.

However, the whole of the other variables showed no significant differences.

Figure 6-17 increases the number of sampled diaries that are the object of comparison to 100 diaries against 100 diaries.

Figure 6-17

Aggregate comparison of the first five sampled diaries to the last five sampled diaries (2)
Compare means test; significant findings*; test conducted with 100 diaries against 100 diaries.

Variable	Value	Direction
Number of words	p = 0.0471	Decrease**
Total number of arguments	p = 0.0686	Decrease
Arguments about the deliberative process	p = 0.0938	Increase
Topical opinion arguments	p = 0.0901	Decrease
Topical opinion arguments formulated as factual statements	p = 0.0845	Decrease
Meta arguments expressing conflict	p = 0.0737	Increase
Meta arguments that attempt to clarify other participants' prior arguments	p = 0.0607	Increase
Social arguments expressing praise towards other participants	p = 0.0189	Increase**
Any instances of arguments about the deliberative process in the entire diary	p = 0.0060	Increase***
Arguments about the deliberative process that are positive in nature towards the technology that supports it	p = 0.0819	Increase
Meta arguments sourced in reference to other participants	p = 0.0372	Increase**
Reasoned Opinion Expression Score (deliberative pillar)	p = 0.0931	Decrease
Topic (deliberative pillar)	p = 0.0981	Decrease

* Differences between diaries across all other variables are explained by random variance.
** Change is significant at the 0.05 level.
*** Change is significant at the 0.01 level.

In comparing the first three sampled diaries from each other to the last five, there are many more variables that show signs of potentially being significant. For the most part, there are increases in a diversity of variables, but decreases in some key areas that were noted in the earlier sections. For example, there is a noticeable decrease in the amount of words, which in turn contributes to a decrease in the number of arguments, and arguments about American politics, including the subcategories of topical opinion arguments, and topical opinion arguments formulated as factual statements. This also contributes to the decrease in the deliberative pillar of reasoned opinion expression, which in turn indicates a decrease in a component of deliberative quality.

Therefore, this thesis concludes that over time, sustained participants in Political Blogging Communities tend to decrease the total number of arguments they articulate, especially those about American politics. Because the dates of the diaries are all different, there are few external political events that could explain such a decline.

However, this decrease in topical arguments is partly compensated for by increases in other types of arguments, showing progress during their learning experience. There is an increase in arguments about the process of deliberation on the website including a positive response to the technology, an increase in meta arguments expressing conflict, those attempting to clarify the arguments of other participants as well as those that reference other participants, and in social arguments that seek to praise other participants for their work. This means that as sustained participants experience the community, they are more likely to write about the community itself. This is reflected by the increase in arguments about the deliberative process. They reference each other in social situations and meta situations. To do this, authors have to be paying attention to the writing of other participants, which is akin to listening in a face-to-face situation. The community of other participants supports these transformations, and in turn, authors who show a dedication to the community (the sampled authors) learn how to better deliberate, even if the increases are not comprehensively significant.

Finally, figure 6-18 shows the results of the highest number of diaries that could be compared to each other—the first seven sampled diaries per author against the final seven sampled diaries per author. This table provides the thesis's best look at blogs. It represents the most meaningful set of data that address the original relational research questions regarding change in deliberative capacity over time.

Figure 6-18

Aggregate comparison of the first seven sampled diaries to the last seven sampled diaries (3)

Compare means test; significant findings*; test conducted with 140 diaries against 140 diaries.

Variable	*Value*	*Direction*
Number of words	p = 0.0534	Decrease
Arguments about the deliberative process	p = 0.0587	Increase
Meta arguments that attempt to clarify other participants' prior arguments	p = 0.0406	Increase**
Social arguments expressing praise towards other participants	p = 0.0575	Increase
Any instance of any arguments about the deliberative process in the entire diary	p = 0.0025	Increase***
Arguments about the deliberative process that focus on technical problems	p = 0.0833	Increase
Arguments about the deliberative process that are positive in nature towards the technology that supports it	p = 0.0418	Increase**
Arguments about the deliberative process that focus on the benefits provided by the technology that supports it	p = 0.0833	Increase
Arguments about particular politicians or policymakers	p = 0.0672	Decrease
Other topical arguments expressing support for the status quo	p = 0.0763	Increase
Meta arguments sourced in reference to other participants	p = 0.0256	Increase**
Deliberative Score 2**** (minimum five instances)	p = 0.0478	Increase**

* Differences between diaries across all other variables are explained by random variance.
** Change is significant at the 0.05 level.
*** Change is significant at the 0.01 level.
**** Deliberative score that counts each time 5 or more arguments are categorized as any particular deliberative pillar.

Briefly, the decrease in the number of words emerges, but not arguments. There is an increase in a more diverse range of variables, including social arguments, meta arguments, and arguments about the deliberative process. More references are made to other participants, and the community itself is referred to more often, as shown by the variables related to the deliberative process.

These across the board increases contribute to the increase in the more rigorous deliberative score (Score2). It is fitting that the final finding is also the most important one. It relates directly to the propositions that underpinned this thesis. Substantively, the deliberative quality of the sampled diaries has increased over time. Therefore, it is possible to shed doubt upon the null hypothesis. Sustained participants in Political Blogging Communities learn how to deliberative by discussing politics and other topics together. It is the diversity, rather than the

raw amount, of deliberative content that increases over time. Political Blogging Communities are thus a supportive space of learning deliberative norms and developing deliberative capacity.

Overall, this thesis suggests that over time, diaries, their authors, and their Political Blogging Communities are more concise in their articulation of arguments about political problems. At the same time, they become more interactive towards the community, demonstrating self-awareness and reinforcing a liberating identity as liberal Democrats or conservative Republicans. The many findings presented all lend credibility to the final finding about change in deliberative quality over time. Although authors began their writing thinking that participation in political blogging was mostly expressing political arguments. As time goes on, authors increase the range of the deliberative content they include in their diaries, in turn increasing their deliberative capacity.

And even though authors expend less effort articulating arguments about American politics, they still express a fair number of them. While keeping in mind the general blogging trends discussed earlier, publishing fewer words on the websites is akin to speaking less in a face-to-face deliberative forum. Refraining from dominating the discussion is a sign of respect for the deliberative ideal of equality that is left unconsidered by the study's coding procedures. The act of allowing other to people speak increases the chances that an author's original positions on a particular public issue will be modified to accommodate the views of others. Therefore, an increase in overall deliberative quality, and a decrease in the number of words appearing in the diaries, speaks to an increasing adherence to all of the pillars of ideal deliberation, including equality.

Political Blogging in Community: Learning to Deliberate

The story of the average, dedicated blogger in a Political Blogging Community is one of risk, expression, imitation, reflexivity, and flourishing, of transforming from a victim to a survivor to a thrivor (Borkman, 1999). It is a big risk to write the first post. Ideas are put on display to the community, and potentially, to the entire world. But the author posted his writing there for a reason, and fundamentally, it is out of a desire to express oneself (Nardi et al. 2004; Papacharissi, 2010), especially in a way not traditionally possible. During the first experiences with the Political Blogging Community, the author is focused on expressing as many thoughts and

positions about American politics as possible. In spending more and more time crafting diaries, authors find themselves writing reading more and more of the content posted by other participants, including seasoned members and the front-page authors who serve as *de facto* opinion leaders for the community. The reading process, as well as the feedback from other participants made possible by the commenting features of blogs, in turn helps the author imitate other seemingly more successful participants.

The imitation phase soon gives way to an awareness of one's meaningful place in the blogging community. The author thinks about the purpose of the community, and begins to change the content he or she publishes. Instead of being simply a forum for political expression, perhaps blogs are spaces for the working out of disputes about common problems. Maybe it is the maintenance of the community itself that is most important. This reflection causes the author to spend less time talking, and more time listening. If an author remains a dedicated participant for a substantial amount of time, he or she flourishes. A sign that an author is flourishing reflected in an increase in the number of comments, subscriptions, recommendations per diary, as well as his or her taking on voluntary leadership roles.

The theoretical framework presented and tested provides an optimistic reading of the reasons why people would improve their deliberative blogging skills. The framework posits that people who want to participate politically would rather do so democratically. When expressing political arguments, they would rather do so in a forum where they feel comfortable and do not have to apologize for their perspectives.

The evidence presented here shows that Political Blogging Communities can fit quite well within existing framework surrounding community. Participants who become authors are welcomed into the Political Blogging Community in a similar fashion to those who join self-help/mutual aid groups, earning comments, recommendations, and subscriptions. This provides an incentive for authors to increase the participatory deliberative content found in their diaries. Authors who are the most comfortable with their position within the community are likely to experiment more, and propel the community forward in considering public issues.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This thesis contributes to a more general understanding of the meaning of blogs in American politics. Specifically, it demonstrates that deliberative quality increases over time, meaning that people who participate in Political Blogging Communities potentially increase their deliberative capacity which will aid in their political participation in modern democracies, especially those adopting institutions of deliberative democracy. However, as detailed throughout, this study is wrought with several limitations that could be well-exploited in future research.

From a careful reading of the diaries and from anecdotal evidence gathered about the authors, it is clear that although the time span from which the diaries are drawn is the same for each author, each author is at a different point in their life's journey and their involvement in the community. This is a built-in shortcoming to this kind of objective longitudinal analysis. Should this study be repeated or expanded, it ought to take place in real time and include interviews rather than only retrospectively investigating the blogging phenomenon to gain an understanding of how other unconsidered yet seemingly important factors, especially according the theoretical framework insofar as it relies on the concept of community, might affect the content the author's produce. Additionally, the lack of disagreement measured in Political Blogging Communities—disagreement being such an important part of the Dahlberg (2001a) & Habermas (1989) and Gutmann & Thompson (1996) deliberative criteria—suggests that either the content of Political Blogging Communities is lacking this factor in diary production (even though conventional wisdom suggests otherwise), or the coding scheme does not properly account for its presence.

In future research, observations on interaction among members in the comments section attached to each diary could be better tested with systematic qualitative evidence, rather than the incidental, anecdotal, and objective data gathered for this study. Additionally, knowing whether participants are reading the site carefully even when they are not posting diaries is problematic unless they say so in their posts. It would be valuable to conduct interviews of the community participants to know the tendencies of community involvement even when they are not leaving a record of their participation.

Even though this study does not present evidence to substantiate all of the community and social learning theories applicable to Political Blogging Communities, these theories together provide compelling reasons for why progress is made in actuality and why it can be seen

in the measures employed. People who want to participate prefer doing so in non-hierarchical settings. They prefer expressing themselves over not expressing themselves, especially being able to do so without having to apologize for their personal political and normative values.

Finally, the transformative nature of the theoretical framework contributes to an understanding of why people move from participating online to participating offline through electoral campaigns, protests, and community organizing. They are more motivated, have learned that they too can have an impact, and have the support of the community behind them.

Many scholars and practitioners are interested in the relationship between participation in online political forums and traditional forms of political participation. In other words, to what extent does participation online transfer into participation offline? How does what is learned by a person in their experience online translate in a physical setting? More illumination is needed on this causal chain. Although the researcher began this project hoping to get better answers to these kinds of questions, the thesis cannot directly address them. However, the evidence presented here should advance research studying personal transformation through online deliberation. Specifically, this Thesis' findings related to over time changes in political capacity imply individual development and growth.

Future research would be wise to investigate the how the Political Blogging Communities of Daily Kos and Red State could be considered political movements in and of themselves and how the deliberative norms there imparted affect the political mobilization and participation of their members. If people are more willing to deliberate online, are they more likely to deliberate offline or demand more participatory deliberative institutions? A study that encompasses an assessment of the motivations and changing perceptions of participants in Political Blogging Communities or other online forums would get closer to an answer.

Another way forward would be to assess differences in the learning processes between the settings of online communities and face-to-face gatherings. From the qualitative evidence gathered and presented in this thesis, one can see that talking about politics in community is a very emotionally charged process—a consideration that should be taken seriously in future research.

These normative observations could be better investigated using more direct approaches. However, the data and methods of analysis used in this thesis were sufficient to approach the questions proposed by the theoretical framework and objectively presents evidence that they

have some merit. Together, the theories, methods, measures, and conclusions are sufficiently unique. As such, the findings, even with their limitations, are relevant to political science, political communication, and democratic literatures.

Implications

Deliberation is an important part of the U.S.'s commitment to democracy (e.g. Sunstein, 2007; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). Deliberation among citizens and their representatives helps people confront public problems and find and participate in justifiable solutions. In a time when observers are concerned that democracy is waning, identifying new ways in which people learn democratic practices takes on a greater significance. Although Political Blogging Communities are far from perfect spaces for deliberation, and their discussions and decisions on public issues are far from being implemented, they do exert influence on the political process, even if it is indirect. Fundamentally, participating in a kind of deliberation increases their deliberative capacity, and with it comes an expectation of deliberative equality in all kinds of social situations. It is plausible that skilled deliberators make for better democrats, especially in a deliberative democracy or an alike organizational situation.

Deliberation requires communication and the Internet is a readily accessible communicative technology. The advent of blogs made effective communication across the Internet and large geographic areas relatively easy for large numbers of people. Mostly, people who choose to publish their thoughts online are heard by other ordinary people who have similar opinions and social standing. Therefore, it happens that one of the most important things about blogging is that it allows ordinary people to deliberate with each other. In publishing in Political Blogging Communities, they are exposed to disagreement while they approach public problems. The community reinforces a notion of deliberative norms by incentivizing their adherence. The more time one spends in a deliberative community, the better he or she will become at deliberating.

An increase in deliberative capacity leads to an increase in the desire for more deliberative institutions throughout society. These desires are expressed in Political Blogging Communities though such statements as "the media and the White House are telling us one thing, but what we're not hearing about is…why won't they talk about it? Isn't that what America is all

about?" Not only do people exposed to less-than-ideal forms of deliberation want more deliberative components in the policymaking process, but they generally want more avenues to express themselves politically—a form of the liberal individualist perspective articulated by Dahlberg (2001b), and a component of the principle of basic liberty defined by Gutmann & Thompson (1996). Bloggers claim a right to know what is actually happening in political processes.

The questions this thesis addresses have been rarely asked or investigated, especially using the measurement tools employed in this study. The results are not wholly surprising, and yet there is evidence that the amount of deliberative content decreases over time, while its quality increases. Further investigations may yield more support for the hypothesis that by participating in Political Blogging Communities, one can increase his or her deliberative capacity.

This study attempted to unify the various perspectives on the meaning of blogs in American politics, adding to them the theoretical framework of community and social learning. Doing so provided a way forward for a study that is useful to both the pessimist and optimist camps. And although most blogs are of low quality, dedicated members of Political Blogging Communities tend to produce higher quality work, and do learn from each other in profound ways. They learn how to communicate politically, even echo chambers may be created.

The community spaces are constructed in ways that intentionally and unintentionally create certain political outcomes. Daily Kos and Red State generate political dialogue that facilitates the development of deliberative capacity among participants. By considering what happens to the average dedicated participants publications over time, one can have a better understanding of the dynamic forces driving the political blogosphere. These are the types of questions whose answers would be useful in scholarship and in practice.

Summary and Final Conclusions

In investigating whether deliberative quality changes over time in Political Blogging Communities, this thesis united several perspectives on the meaning of blogs in American politics to create a theoretical framework that focused on the experience of the individual. It conceived blogs as spaces for social learning where the norms and requirements of deliberative democracy are taught and reinforced in community.

Whereas previous studies focused on the practices of political bloggers and readers (e.g. Adamic & Glance, 2005; Ackland, 2005; McKenna & Pole, 2008; Papacharissi, 2007; Lawrence, Sides & Farrell, 2010; Yano & Smith, 2010), the ability for blogs to affect political party platforms and elections (e.g. Armstrong & Zuniga, 2006; Bai, 2008; Cohen, 2008-2009; Karpf, 2010; Sides & Farrell, 2010; Wallsten, 2007), the potential for expanding the public sphere in modern democracies (e.g. Dahlberg, 2001a; Reese et al., 2007), and the ability for blogs to contribute to social or political revolutions (e.g. Kulikova & Perlmutter, 2007), this study modified previous content analysis-based approaches that sought to evaluate the content and quality of online publications in dialogue with each other (e.g. Papacharissi, 2007; Robertson, 2008; Stromer-Galley, 2007; Trammel et al., 2006). This thesis contributed to the clarification of the deliberative, communal aspects of the political blog and suggests that research ought to turn to community-oriented blogs as sites for more investigation.

Regarding the theoretical framework, this thesis first focused on the longstanding perspective that the Internet provides an opportunity to revitalize democracy. Because of its communicative and distributed power properties, the Internet piqued the interest of democrats who feel that open, public, ideal deliberation should be part of the policymaking process in modern democracies. The Internet potentially enables such space where all relevant voices and information can be heard, especially by ordinary people. One of the most important aspects of blogging is that it allows ordinary people to deliberate with each other.

This thesis also seriously considered pessimistic readings on the effects of the Internet and blogs on the constitutional deliberative ideal of American democracy. Bloggers and their readers tend to become more and more polarized in their political beliefs over time (Sunstein, 2000, 2009; Adamic & glance, 2005; Farrell, 2010). Political blogs have thus been labeled as *deliberation enclaves* (Sunstein, 2007). As such, they are both beneficial (Karpowitz, 2009) and harmful to democracy.

Understanding the democratic promise and limitation of blogs, the thesis emphasized the positive influence a community can exert on the political blogging experience. People are more comfortable in enclaves to confront disagreement, and are more likely to speak. Adding the community dimension to the deliberative structure of blogs allowed for the formulation of the proposition that *the more time one spends in a Political Blogging Community, the better he or she deliberates*. Therefore, as people participate in Political Blogging Communities, they

develop their capacity to deliberate. In particular, texts written by the same author over time will exhibit higher adherence to the ideal norms of deliberation.

In light of these propositions, the first question this study considered was the relationship between participation in Political Blogging Communities and the capacity to deliberate. The study investigated the relationship between time and deliberative quality, concluding that, even if all relevant information or participants are not available, members of a Political Blogging Community can learn deliberative norms. It is argued that the structure of blogs as well as the culture of the particular community exert a profound influence on those who choose to blog there, especially on those who demonstrate a sustained commitment to the community.

Daily Kos (dailykos.com) and Red State (redstate.com) were chosen as the sites from which to sample authors and their diaries. As representatives of renown from both ends of the ideological spectrum, they each have similar design, structure, and content, but most importantly, they exhibit several characteristics found in supportive communities that foster and adherence to deliberative norms, especially regarding their feedback features. Qualitative evidence from the sampled diaries was presented to support these claims. Political Blogging Communities are fundamentally different from just any political blog. Together, participants at Daily Kos and Red State confront public issues within the general realm of American politics, searching for and positing solutions. The sites are also under-investigated in the literature, especially as targets of such a particular theoretical framework, research questions, and hypotheses.

Before proceeding to the data analysis and substantive findings sections, the thesis carefully defined each concept, such as *blogs, diaries, authors,* and the elements of deliberation that drove the research and found their way into the discussion of the results.

The relational propositions regarding sustained authorial participation in Political Blogging Communities over time and deliberative quality were investigated by the sampling and hand coding of 373 diaries from 14 authors at Daily Kos and 6 from Red State. Using the web archival software, HT Track, a comprehensive list of all the registered users as of February 2011 at both sites was compiled from which authors who exhibited a sustained record of posting original diaries (> 12) during a time period from roughly 2008-2011, an interesting time in American politics, were sampled.

The diaries were subjected to a hand coding scheme closely adapted from Stromer-Galley (2007), created a data set that measured the raw amount of deliberative content in each diary.

Fundamentally, it categorized the nature of any particular *argument*, which is defined as "an utterance that expresses an idea on a topic" (Stromer-Galley, 2007:3). The coding made comparison of all diaries and arguments possible.

To add a component of quality, this thesis introduced a new measure, the deliberative score, which accounts for the diversity of deliberative content found in a particular diary and can range from 0-5. This range was defined by the ideal deliberative pillars as defined by Habermas (1989), Dahlberg (2001a), and Stromer-Galley (2007). The more an author includes all of these aspects into their diaries, the better he or she adheres to the deliberative norms of the community. Confidence in the data gathering and analysis procedures, as well as the hypothesis that deliberative quality would increase over time, was bolstered by a pilot study of one set of diaries from one author.

The data generated by the coding scheme showed that authors tend to stay on topic, spending most of their time discussing politics, especially public and foreign policy. They rarely interact with each other or provide links that bolster their opinions or statements of fact. The number of words per post decreases over time in accordance with observations made in other studies about the change in universal blogging tendencies.

After presenting data and findings suggested by the coding scheme, the theoretical framework and other studies, this thesis then assessed the effect of sustained participation in Political Blogging Communities on the adherence of deliberative norms. There are more diaries of higher quality at Daily Kos than at Red State, according to the measure of the deliberative score. The more rigorous measure of deliberative quality (deliberative score2) shows a statistically significant increase in correlation with publication date. It also yields significant result ($p < 0.05$) when sampled authors first seven sampled diaries are compared in aggregate against their final seven diaries.

All of these results suggest that dedicated bloggers in a community can become better deliberators, and hence, better citizens in modern democracies adopting deliberative institutions and other forms of communicative participation. One could conclude that in order to revitalize American democracy and restore the constitutional deliberative ideal (Sunstein, 2007), more people should be encouraged to engage in political writing in Political Blogging Communities or other similar forums.

To gain a better understanding of the forces at work in the political blogosphere, more studies should emulate this thesis's strategy and focus on the effects that participation has on the individual. This study shows that such a reconstituted research agenda can yield answers to interesting yet overlooked questions. By addressing what happens to a particular author's and the general authors' average texts over time, we can get a better sense of the dynamic forces driving the political blogosphere, and better speculate whether blogs increase democratic capacity and enhance democracy or exacerbate unhelpful partisan divides that lead to political gridlock. While the findings stand on their own, this thesis provides a basis for future research into blogging, as well as other social media platforms, for those interested in how concepts associated with community affect democratic capacity and personal growth.

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Appendix A:
Supplemental Data

Sampled Authors

Author username	Political Blogging Community	Time span of diaries sampled	Number of diaries coded
Aironlater	Daily Kos	2009-2010	18
Utvoter	Daily Kos	2008-2010	12
Albanius	Daily Kos	2005-2011	14
Ctron	Daily Kos	2008-2009	14
Vorkosigan	Daily Kos	2009-2010	16
Fistjab	Daily Kos	2009-2010	15
d-wreck	Daily Kos	2009-2010	37
Dengre	Daily Kos	2009-2010	14
Digitalmuse	Daily Kos	2007-2011	12
lafeminista*	Daily Kos	2009-2010	21
Daconia	Red State	2009-2010	26
blackhedd*	Red State	2009-2010	22
amymiller*	Red State	2009-2010	20
fmeekins*	Red State	2009-2010	21
Braindead	Daily Kos	2005-2010	14
Goatchowder	Daily Kos	2005-2009	15
Andysmith	Red State	2009-2010	26
Earthtone	Daily Kos	2008-2010	14
daisy-cutter*	Daily Kos	2009-2010	21
bk*	Red State	2009-2010	21
just-call-me-jay	Daily Kos	2009-2010	
Bigappleinfidel	Red State	2009-2010	
jerry39	Red State	2009-2010	
Nightsweat	Daily Kos	2007-2010	
Ncjim	Daily Kos	2007-2010	
mosquito-pilot	Daily Kos	2005-2011	
Johnnyrook	Daily Kos	2008-2009	
mojave-mike	Daily Kos	2009-2010	
Jeffdii	Daily Kos	2007-2009	
Rstreu	Red State	2009-2010	
Medeiros	Daily Kos	2009-2010	
Scottforamerica	Daily Kos	2008-2010	
Tomsank	Daily Kos	2008-2010	
Jeepdad	Daily Kos	2008-2009	
tokm908	Red State	2009-2010	
Izoneguy	Red State	2009-2010	
Etcartman	Red State	2009-2010	
rturner229	Daily Kos	2009-2010	

Elronaldo	Red State	2009-2010	
Smokeymonkey	Daily Kos	2008-2009	
iced327	Daily Kos	2009-2010	
zsmvf6	Red State	2008-2010	
moose67	Daily Kos	2007-2010	
tigre-caps	Daily Kos	2008-2009	
jeff_emanuel	Red State	2009-2010	
Hollywood	Daily Kos	2007-2009	
rian-fike	Daily Kos	2009-2010	
Ausonius	Red State	2009-2010	
Astronaut	Daily Kos	2008-2010	
michael-morrill	Daily Kos	2009-2010	
Hawesdawg	Daily Kos	2008-2011	

* The first and last seven diaries from the time span were coded, as was a random sampling of seven other diaries written by the author. This was done because the authors published at a high rate.

Figure 6-2

All Sampled Diaries
Arguments, grouped by sampled author

Author	F	Words	Comments	Total Arguments	Arguments about the problem (problem arguments)	Arguments about the Arguments (meta arguments)	Arguments about the deliberative process (process arguments)	Social arguments
Aironlater	18	16,772	612	703	522	93	4	4
Daily Kos	M	931.8	34	39.1	29	5.2	0.2	0.2
	SD	511.5	28.3	19.4	17.4	4.5	0.9	0.5
UTvoter	12	5,261	719	238	167	39	6	5
Daily Kos	M	438.4	60.0	19.8	13.9	3.3	0.5	0.4
	SD	165.0	88.5	5.5	6.6	2.1	1.2	0.7
Albanius	14	9,568	282	474	173	9	1	1
Daily Kos	M	683.4	20.1	33.9	12.4	0.6	0.07	0.07
	SD	1,278.5	16.3	74.8	12.5	1.2	0.3	0.3
Ctron	14	6,691	606	252	162	71	5	3
Daily Kos	M	477.9	43.3	18	11.6	5.1	0.4	0.2
	SD	722.8	85.9	26.7	20.4	10.2	0.6	0.4
Vorkosigan	16	16,749	594	1,037	469	28	10	2
Daily Kos	M	1,046.8	37.1	64.8	29.3	1.8	0.6	0.1
	SD	561.6	28.8	32.7	31.1	1.7	1.9	0.5
Fistjab	175	12,024	2,395	681	595	43	4	13
Daily Kos	M	801.6	160.0	45.4	40.0	2.9	0.3	0.9
	SD	632.8	184.0	36.3	29.0	3.2	0.7	0.9

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D-Wreck	37	27,911	2706	1,411	1,190	69	28	6
Daily Kos	M	753.4	73.1	38.1	32.2	1.9	0.8	0.2
	SD	347.9	127.7	19.2	20.6	2.2	4.4	0.4
Dengre	14	32,360	2,492	1,736	1,434	109	18	13
Daily Kos	M	2,311.4	178	124	102.4	7.8	1.3	0.9
	SD	1,752.3	141.8	79.8	82.3	5.9	4.0	0.5
Digitalmuse	12	10,944	705	743	361	31	7	2
Daily Kos	M	912	59	62.0	30.1	2.6	0.6	0.2
	SD	574.8	101.9	44.9	26.7	4.5	2.0	0.6
LaFeminista	21	10,083	2,829	684	535	53	33	10
Daily Kos	M	480.1	135	32.6	25.5	2.5	1.6	0.5
	SD	296.2	170.0	23.8	23.9	3.2	5.3	1.0
Daconia	26	14,289	58	1,179	982	33	11	2
Red State	M	549.6	2	45.3	37.8	1.3	0.4	0.08
	SD	373.8	4.2	28.9	28.3	1.9	1.5	0.4
Blackhedd	22	16,740	573	1,346	1,231	16	0	1
Red State	M	761.0	26	61.2	56.0	0.7	0	0.05
	SD	470.3	18.8	36.9	41.4	1.0	0	0.2
Amymiller	20	15,685	503	1,106	782	60	0	8
Red State	M	784.2	25	55.3	39.1	3	0	0.4
	SD	386.1	27.3	26.6	23.3	2.9	0	0.8
Fmeekins	21	20,149	34	1,432	618	11	0	0
Red State	M	959.5	2	68.1	29.4	0.5	0	0
	SD	913.7	2.2	61.8	33.7	1.2	0	0
Braindead	14	4898	327	175	134	9	1	4
Daily Kos	M	349.9	23	12.5	9.6	0.6	0.07	0.3
	SD	136.8	33.9	7.4	7.5	0.7	0.3	0.6
Goatchowder	15	7,105	320	580	418	99	6	0
Daily Kos	M	473.7	21	38.7	27.9	6.6	0.4	0
	SD	413.3	28.0	33.4	26.9	9.4	1.1	0
Andysmith	26	8,695	120	621	576	15	0	1
Red State	M	334.4	5	23.9	22.2	0.6	0	0.03
	SD	145.7	5.0	11.3	12.2	0.7	0	0.2
Earthtone	14	8,413	381	344	240	25	3	4
Daily Kos	M	601.0	27	24.6	17.1	1.8	0.2	0.3
	SD	470.9	22.0	20.6	14.9	1.8	0.4	0.6
Daisycutter	21	16,547	1,118	601	555	43	0	0
Daily Kos	M	788.0	53	28.6	26.4	2.0	0	0
	SD	819.2	88.6	50.0	47.1	3.1	0	0
Bk	21	4,947	64	260	245	7	0	0
Red State	M	235.6	3	12.4	11.7	0.3	0	0
	SD	217.4	4.9	10.9	10.9	0.8	0	0

Total	Sum	265,831	17,438	15,603	11,389	863	137	79
Total	M		872	780	569	43	7	4
Total	SD		930.9	459.1	380.9	31.5	9.4	4.1

Figure 6-5

Deliberation in the Diaries
All authors

Author	#	Reasoned Opinion Expression	Sourcing	Disagreement	Topic	Engagement	Score1*	Score2**
Aironlater	18	501	225	19	909	162	77	59
Daily Kos	M	27.8	12.5	1.06	50.5	9	4.28	3.28
	SD	16.6	9.64	2.15	30.8	10.1	0.57	1.02
UTvoter	12	155	82	2	316	47	49	34
Daily Kos	M	12.9	6.83	0.17	26.3	3.92	4.08	2.83
	SD	7.53	1.99	0.39	13.6	2.15	0.51	0.71
Albanius	14	147	37	0	332	10	44	19
Daily Kos	M	10.5	2.64	0	23.7	0.71	3.14	1.36
	SD	12.5	1.86	0	24.7	1.20	1.03	0.84
Ctron	14	159	68	0	314	61	38	14
Daily Kos	M	11.4	4.86	0	22.4	4.36	2.71	1
	SD	20.1	13.3	0	41.1	10.1	1.68	1.36
Vorkosigan	16	355	106	15	925	143	43	30
Daily Kos	M	22.2	6.63	0.94	57.8	8.94	2.69	1.88
	SD	24.9	8.75	2.57	61.4	23.0	2.06	1.54
FistJab	175	604	149	6	1235	74	61	43
Daily Kos	M	40.3	9.93	0.4	82.3	4.93	4.07	2.87
	SD	30.1	8.39	0.83	58.6	5.04	0.59	0.83
D_Wreck	37	1175	279	3	2358	83	136	90
Daily Kos	M	31.8	7.54	0.08	63.7	2.24	3.68	2.43
	SD	20.9	5.63	0.28	40.0	2.14	0.82	0.80
Dengre	14	1444	399	23	2771	108	58	50
Daily Kos	M	103.1	28.5	1.64	197.9	7.71	4.14	3.57
	SD	82.0	21.6	4.83	154.7	6.12	0.53	0.76
Digitalmuse	12	361	326	2	698	33	42	29
Daily Kos	M	30.1	27.2	0.17	58.2	2.75	3.5	2.42
	SD	26.7	43.5	0.75	48.7	5.08	1.17	1.31
LaFeminista	21	524	182	10	1054	74	77	52
Daily Kos	M	25.0	8.67	0.48	50.2	3.52	3.67	2.47
	SD	23.6	11.6	1.97	42.4	3.49	0.86	1.03

Daconia	26	2948	206	1	1954	40	83	64
Red State	*M*	37.8	7.92	0.04	75.15	1.54	3.19	2.46
	SD	28.3	7.47	0.20	56.7	2.23	1.17	0.95
Blackhedd	22	1161	60	11	2511	30	63	43
Red State	*M*	52.8	2.73	0.5	114.1	1.36	2.86	1.95
	SD	38.7	7.10	1.63	78.6	1.68	1.08	0.79
Amymiller	20	788	304	0	1632	71	77	56
Red State	*M*	39.4	15.2	0	81.6	3.55	3.85	2.8
	SD	23.5	9.92	0	51.3	2.96	0.37	0.77
Fmeekins	21	622	31	1	1248	14	57	31
Red State	*M*	29.6	1.48	0.05	59.4	0.67	2.71	1.48
	SD	33.1	1.89	0.22	65.6	1.15	1.31	0.81
Braindead	14	128	56	0	258	14	51	24
Daily Kos	*M*	9.14	4	0	18.4	1	3.64	1.71
	SD	7.27	3.37	0	14.7	0.96	0.50	0.91
goatchowder	15	406	122	8	846	115	60	40
Daily Kos	*M*	27.1	8.13	0.53	56.4	7.67	4	2.67
	SD	26.2	11.6	1.36	56.1	8.50	0.65	1.23
Andysmith	26	572	114	2	1149	29	92	57
Red State	*M*	22	4.38	0.08	44.2	1.12	3.54	2.19
	SD	12.2	2.61	0.39	24.0	2.12	0.58	0.85
Earthtone	14	241	94	2	459	35	54	30
Daily Kos	*M*	17.2	6.71	0.14	32.8	2.5	3.86	2.14
	SD	14.9	7.48	0.36	28.3	1.91	0.53	0.95
Daisycutter	21	553	194	37	1121	36	81	55
Daily Kos	*M*	26.3	9.24	1.76	53.4	1.71	3.86	2.62
	SD	47.1	9.69	7.85	94.9	1.31	0.48	0.74
Bk	21	240	67	8	490	7	66	39
Red State	*M*	11.4	3.19	0.38	23.3	0.33	3.14	1.86
	SD	11.1	2.73	1.53	21.9	0.80	0.91	0.79

* Deliberative score that counts each time any arguments are grouped as any deliberative pillar.

** Deliberative score that counts each time 5 or more arguments are grouped as any deliberative pillar.

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Counts are established on a per argument basis. Overlapping occurs across the *Topic* and *Reasoned Opinion Expression* deliberative pillars.

Appendix B:
Pilot Study: Daily Kos's *coltergeist*

A pilot study was conducted to assess the feasibility of the hand coding methods and measures and the potential validity of the theoretical framework and the propositions it suggests. *Coltergeist*, an author sampled from the main data set regarding Daily Kos, was very concise, only articulating 284 arguments in 15 diaries. 273 (96.1%) of the arguments were about the problem. Only 3 were meta arguments, none were process arguments, and only 8 were social arguments. 258 arguments were expressed as opinions (per diary: N=15, M=17.2, SD=14.9). In terms of the Habermasian deliberative criteria, *coltergeist* certainly concentrated his efforts on expressing reasoned opinions.

However, only 44 arguments contained any elaboration; of those, 22 referenced personal stories, 13 cited mass media, and 9 used alternative media to bolster their credibility. None referred explicitly to what other participants had argued previously—a sign that building community was not very important to *coltergeist*. Another pillar of deliberation is disagreement. However, disagreement with other perspectives occurred in only 7 arguments (2.5%; per diary: N=15, M=.467, SD=1.81). This preliminary finding pointed to a trend that instead of deliberating with each other through their diaries, authors keep shouting their opinion into the space, with vague reference to things others have said in or out of the community. But this result mirrors previous results of analysis of discussions that saw only 5.6% of the arguments expressing disagreement (Stromer-Galley, 2007). Moreover, only 17 arguments were articulated as questions, all meant to state an opinion rather than express agreement or disagreement. The 3 meta arguments conformed to previous use of the codebook in which only a small amount of the arguments could be categorized as meta arguments (Stromer-Galley, 2007).

12 of *coltergeist's* 15 diaries brought up new topics in American politics. An overwhelming majority of the arguments were about one of the six general topics known to be the focus of much production in the political blogosphere. Four arguments focused on the Republican or Democratic party platforms, 48 or 22.9% were about a particular policy (per diary: M=3.132, SD=4.81), 29 or 10.2% were critiques of the way politics work in the U.S. (per diary: M=1.93, SD=2.31), 20 or 7.0% were about particular politicians (per diary: M=1.33 SD=1.80), 55 or 19.4% were about the media (per diary: M=3.67 SD=5.45), and 6 or 2.1% were on other on-topic topics (per diary: M=.4 SD=1.06). Surprisingly, there was no mention of campaigns or elections in *coltergeist's* diaries.

Figure 4-2

<u>Coltergeist</u>
Daily Kos
Pilot Study

#	Date	Total Arguments	Topical Arguments	Topical Opinion Arguments	Topical Arguments with Elaboration	Public or Foreign Policy Arguments	Arguments about the media's coverage of politics
1	01/02/09	12	12	12	0	4	0
2	01/03/09	15	15	9	5	1	7
3	02/24/09	9	9	5	3	2	0
4	03/11/09	27	27	27	2	13	19
5	04/07/09	20	20	20	0	0	8
6	04/09/09	9	9	8	1	1	0
7	04/14/09	7	6	6	2	0	0
8	05/08/09	8	8	8	0	0	0
9	05/26/09	4	4	4	0	0	0
10	06/04/09	11	11	11	8	0	9
11	06/16/09	5	5	5	0	0	2
12	08/13/09	16	16	16	12	6	0
13	08/20/09	36	36	35	1	14	0
14	08/21/09	42	38	38	7	0	3
15	08/27/09	63	57	54	3	7	7
	Sum	284	273	258	44	48	55
	M	18.93	18.2	17.2	2.93	3.2	3.67
	SD	16.57	15.11	14.90	3.59	4.77	5.45

<u>Other aggregate results</u>
Meta arguments: 3
Process arguments: 0
Social arguments: 8
Arguments about political party platforms: 4
Arguments about the way American politics work: 29
Arguments about particular politicians: 20
Other topical arguments: 6

Appendix C:

Guide to coding the sampled diaries

Stromer-Galley's (2007) codebook is premised on the distinction between dialogue and deliberation. Deliberation, in its more theoretical, Habermasian sense, entails the addressing of a shared problem and proposing and arriving at agreed solution.

1. Common problem – The American political system
    a. America isn't what it should be.
    b. The American political system is not democratic enough.
    c. American politics is not sufficiently liberal or conservative.
    d. The Democratic and Republican parties are not sufficiently liberal or conservative, respectively.
2. This codebook was developed to deal with different parts of a verbal discussion, some of it face-to-face, some of it computer mediated, all synchronous. Therefore, it is built upon the level of analysis of a thought.
    a. How many thoughts happened in the deliberation?
2. This study uses the codebook for text. Therefore, it asks, how many elements of deliberation are found in each text, which could be thought of as groups of multiple thoughts.
    a. In the scheme, "a thought is defined as an utterance that expresses an idea on a topic" (3). Talk, then, becomes an important part of the codebook.
    b. Within the text, there is talk about the problem, talk about the talk process, talk about deliberation, and off-topic but important social talk.

Categorizing the aspects of the texts

1. Authors may include different amounts of text in the body of each diary. Within this space, there is much that can take place. Categorizing what we see happening within the text is imperative for accurate assessment.
2. Each diary is broken the four categories of talk, shown above.
    a. Talk about the common problem of American governance. Anything, such as facts, arguments, or opinions that deal with the problem is problem talk.
    b. Metatalk, or metatext, is talk about the talk. Luckily for us, members of the Political Blogging Communities understand the implications about metatalk, and often 'tag' it as such. This often takes the form of criticism of the content of other texts in aggregate, and the interaction displayed in texts found in the comments section. Metatalk is also defined as talk about the basic direction or ideological or partisan slant of the general conversation taking place in the community.
    c. Social talk, or socialtext, is talk that strengthens the bonds between participants, or authors. This is a very important aspect of this study, as the main impetus for the research is that the content in a community may adhere to more deliberative norms. Some of the socialtext encountered in the study is strictly off-topic. Some of it takes shape through the sharing of personal stories that are the basis for the content found in the diaries. Moreover, authors mentioning the names of other

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authors creates a sense of community within a community, even if potentially tens of thousands of people are involved.

   d. Process talk, or processtext, is talk that is concerned with how the process of publishing diaries or comments works. This often takes the form of questions on how to include links, photos, or videos in the diaries. It is very rare, but is found early on in some author's texts.

3. Once the texts are segmented in this fashion, they are considered separately as thoughts, or, in the context of this study, arguments. The textual argument is the principle unit of analysis for which the deliberation at the Political Blogging Community is coded.

4. Authors may intend to write for a large audience or for a few people. The diary might refer to other authors or diaries written by his/herself or other authors. Each reference to another text is coded as a separate thought or argument.

5. Authors demonstrate that they are talking to each other by hyperlinking to other posts, mentioning them by name, or by generally referring to something said within the community prior to the posting of the current diary.

6. Authors signal that they are presenting different arguments through orienting talk. Looking for indications that the authors themselves think they are presenting another or different thought or argument is the key.

   a. For example, authors indicate new arguments by using key words such as
      i. "I think that…" "Second, I think that…" "One thing this reminds me of is that…"
      ii. "Another…" "Another thing…" "Moreover…" etc.
      iii. "Going back to what *x* said…" "Going back to *x topic*…" etc.
      iv. "Earlier, when we were all talking about…" "What I said earlier…" "What *x author* said earlier about *x topic…"*
      v. "As far as *x prior argument* is concerned…"

   b. Answering a question raised by another author in another diary, or in another of the author's own diaries, or in the comments section of any diary. Continuing the line of questioning or introducing new aspects of the question is considered a new argument. Answering a question with an opinion is considered only 1 argument.

Coding at the level of the diary

1. Diary-type – identify whether and to what the diary is referring to. This could be three things:
   a. Starting a new topic not prompted by the moderator
      i. It is hard to know how the author was prompted to write the diary unless they specifically indicate so. For example, starting a new topic can include discussing a new position, policy, or program that the American political system should consider. But, often these ideas are planted in the minds of the authors by the set of front page editors that are a very different animal from the authors considered in the study.
   b. Responding to a topic
      i. A diary that is written in response to a prior text or is on the major topic of the blogging community, such as the remaking of the American political system.

c. Continue self
   i. A diary that does not appear to respond to anything text appearing on the site prior to the publication of it, but does elaborate on the author's ideas from one of his or her prior diaries.

Coding at the level of the argument (thought)

Problem – the general problem of American politics

a. Opinion
   i. An expression of the author's belief about the way the world works.
      1. Opinions signaled by judgments made on the part of a person, a policy, an event, a general social problem, a crisis, an election, etc.
b. Agreement
   i. A show of support for some prior text not authored by the author in question.
      1. Statements such as "I agree with…" or "I know that…" or "What *x author* said is correct…" or "what *x author* said about democracy is right…" A statement of agreement is an opinion.
c. Disagreement
   i. A show of opposition to something in a prior text not authored by he author in question. It is conducted in the following ways:
      1. "I tend to disagree…" "I am unsure that…" "This is incorrect…"
      2. Using the words "well", "but", "rather" is often a signal of a refutation of something found in a prior text.
      3. Authors may repeat arguments in other texts and substitute small parts of texts to refute other arguments.

1. Problem text, formulated as an opinion, an agreement, or a disagreement, can be constituted by:
   a. Fact
      i. A fact is a statement that a circumstance has, does, or will exist. As such, a fact stands on its own without a statement of opinion directly connected to it.
      ii. Facts are likely to be closely related to arguments regarding the state of the American political system, and items found on the front page stories drafted by editors.
      iii. Facts can be flagged by the hyperlinks used by authors to other documents that can be found on the Internet.
   b. Question
      i. A question that is directed to another author in order to gain information or an opinion.
         1. Operator before the subject
            a. How? Are you certain? Is that a fair assessment?
      ii. Assertion question

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1. A statement with a question mark at the end. Suggests a tone like that found in live dialogue.
   iii. 'wh' questions
      1. Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?
   iv. Directive questions
      1. Asks for more information in statement form. "Give me an example of that."
   v. Rhetorical questions
      1. Questions asked that advance an opinion or argument instead of seeking information. For example, "why in the world would Cheney want to get more federal money to Halliburton?"
      2. These are questions that other authors or participants either cannot answer or are not supposed to answer, or an answer is immediately given by the asking author. Sometimes, however, these questions may be answered and participants will see them as straightforward questions.
      3. Detecting sarcasm in the text, here, is key. *Rhetorical questions are coded as opinions, not questions.*

2. <u>Metatext</u> is text about the text. It is talk that, rather than advancing an argument or opinion, attempts to observe what has happened in the deliberation and why it's happening. An argument must be about the whole conversation in order for it to be considered metatalk.
   a. Consensus
      i. Consensus metatext is text that contains an author's sense about the overall consensus of the group. "We can all agree that the Democratic party is not liberal enough, right?"
   b. Conflict
      i. Text that highlights disagreement among the Political Blogging Community. "Based on what I've been reading in the stories, diaries, and comments, and I can see that we're disagreeing on *x topic*.
   c. Clarify own
      i. Text that attempts to clarify an author's opinion or presentation of facts. "What I mean here is…" It is text that clarifies meaning. It occurs after an opinion has been provided, and as such, could be found in the diary itself or the comments attached to it. Someone has likely misunderstood them.
   d. Clarify other
      i. Text that clarifies another author or participant's argument containing facts or opinion. "What you're saying here is not *x*, it's *y*". It clarifies the meaning of what someone else has said because someone else either has misunderstood it, or misunderstanding is anticipated. One participant using the name of another participant is often a sign of this kind of thought.

3. <u>Process text</u>
   a. Technical problems

      i. Text that contains a question or statement about problems with the blogging software, WordPress (Red State) or DK3 (Daily Kos).
- b. Technical benefits
  - i. Text that contains a statement about how the blogging software works well to facilitate deliberation on the American political system.
- c. Deliberation process
  - i. Text that contains a statement or question about the purpose of the Political Blogging Community, about what all the participants are supposed to be doing here.
- d. Deliberation problems
  - i. Text that conveys frustration about what all the participants are supposed to be doing in the Political Blogging Community. It includes questions or expressions about confusion over the purpose of authors producing texts in community. Text may also include suggestions that the other participants have moved into areas that are off-topic in their texts, and that the diary is supposed to get them back on topic.
  - ii. As we shall see, this is a very common argument in Political Blogging Communities.
- e. Deliberation positive
  - i. Text that contains a statement about the author's belief that the discussion of *x topic* has been helpful developmentally for them, the group, the state, the country, etc.

4. <u>Social text</u>
   - a. Salutations
     - i. Text that contains welcomes, greetings, etc.
   - b. Apologies
     - i. Text that contains apologies, such as "I am sorry for being so angry about this issue…" "I hope I was able to help us all out here despite my lack of rhetorical skill."
   - c. Praise
     - i. Text that includes items like "thank you", as well as praise for other participants or the Political Blogging Community as a whole. "We've had a good conversation here…" "This has been fun for me to hear your ideas…" In particular, participants have the ability to recommend diaries for promotion because they are deemed to be of high quality. This information will be incorporated when appropriate.
     - ii. However, praise that is in the service of an argument about the problem topic—the American political system—is coded as a problem argument. "I want to congratulate *x candidate* on his victory on Tuesday. We need more conservatives like him in congress."
   - d. ChitChat
     - i. Text that contains statements that are off-topic relative to the American political system but are indeed arguments. This could include jokes, puns, etc, or items about the weather, how their days went, etc.

<u>Topic</u>

If the text has an argument that is on the topic of the improvement of the American political system, indicate yes. If the text has an argument that is not on topic, indicate other. For the purposes of this coding, topic will be differentiated in two ways: 1) by introducing seemingly new topics that have not yet been seen on the Political Blogging Community website, and 2) by reintroducing topics that have been discussed in other texts by the same or other authors. Special attention must be paid to the focus of each argument to accurately define the topic. If the argument is one of the six topic choices, then the valence is selected.

1. <u>Campaigns and elections</u> – text that contains arguments about past, future, and ongoing campaigns and elections. This includes campaigns or movements for a particular set of policies, such as gay rights or environmental protection.
    a. Reason
        i. Blogs have traditionally been outlets for information regarding political campaigns and elections. Bloggers often take particular interest in local elections that fly below the national political radar.
        ii. Bloggers take interest in candidates or policy campaigns that are particularly progressive or conservative, or in races that seem to have special meaning beyond the local context.
        iii. For example, Markos has said that one of the major goals of Daily Kos is to help get progressive democrats elected, across the country (dailykos.com/dkosopedia/wiki/FAQ).
    b. Valence
        i. Support status quo
            1. For – arguing for the continuation of the current situation or scheme
            2. For-but – arguing for the continuation of the current situation or scheme but expressing some hesitation, such as with the way the goals might be met.
        ii. Advocate change
            1. Against – arguing against the continuation of the current state of affairs
            2. Against-but – arguing against the continuation of the current state of affairs but also offering a positive alternative of some kind, proposing a counterargument. "I think this is going to fail unless they do this instead."
        iii. Unsure/None/Both equally – the expression of hesitancy with the topic at hand. "I'm not sure whether or not this is a good plan. I'm going to need more information before I express my support."
2. <u>Party platform</u> – text that contains arguments about the Republican or Democratic party platforms.
    a. Reason
        i. Blogs have been seen as places for the articulation of more persuasive and effective party platforms. This includes policies that should be supported

and positions that should be taken. Blogs provide a space to persuade party officials and politicians that they should take a particular stance.
  - ii. Daily Kos has been called a blog for progressive Democrats.
  - iii. Red State self-identifies as a community for conservatives.
- b. Valence
  - i. Support status quo
    1. For – arguing for the continuation of the current situation or scheme
    2. For-but – arguing for the continuation of the current situation or scheme but expressing some hesitation, such as with the way the goals might be met.
  - ii. Advocate change
    1. Against – arguing against the continuation of the current state of affairs
    2. Against-but – arguing against the continuation of the current state of affairs but also offering a positive alternative of some kind, proposing a counterargument. "I think this is going to fail unless they do this instead."
  - iii. Unsure/None/Both equally – the expression of hesitancy with the topic at hand. "I'm not sure whether or not this is a good plan. I'm going to need more information before I express my support."
3. Policy – debate about current or proposed public policies
  - a. Reason
    - i. While many blog posts are inspired by political news, many take on particular policies in consideration currently or in the future. For example, over 2009, a large percentage of all posts addressed the Affordable Care Act. (Support will be provided here once the handcoding is complete).
    - ii. Posts are often in response to mass media accounts of policies under consideration.
  - b. Valence
    - i. Support status quo
      1. For – arguing for the continuation of the current situation or scheme
      2. For-but – arguing for the continuation of the current situation or scheme but expressing some hesitation, such as with the way the goals might be met.
    - ii. Advocate change
      1. Against – arguing against the continuation of the current state of affairs
      2. Against-but – arguing against the continuation of the current state of affairs but also offering a positive alternative of some kind, proposing a counterargument. "I think this is going to fail unless they do this instead."
    - iii. Unsure/None/Both equally – the expression of hesitancy with the topic at hand. "I'm not sure whether or not this is a good plan. I'm going to need more information before I express my support."

4. <u>Critique</u> – text that contains arguments about the performance of the political system and American governance
   a. Reason
      i. Blogs have been heralded as spaces for citizens to launch critiques of politics, the American political system in general. Sometimes, a blog's most useful purpose is to provide a critical, if not always constructive, perspective.
      ii. Blogs are imagined as geographically removed from insider or 'beltway' politics, and thus, spaces of innovation.
      iii. Many bloggers turn to blogs because they are frustrated with the limited ways in which they can participate politically, especially those who live in areas where they do not share beliefs or values with many of their neighbors.
   b. Valence
      i. Support status quo
         1. For – arguing for the continuation of the current situation or scheme
         2. For-but – arguing for the continuation of the current situation or scheme but expressing some hesitation, such as with the way the goals might be met.
      ii. Advocate change
         1. Against – arguing against the continuation of the current state of affairs
         2. Against-but – arguing against the continuation of the current state of affairs but also offering a positive alternative of some kind, proposing a counterargument. "I think this is going to fail unless they do this instead."
      iii. Unsure/None/Both equally – the expression of hesitancy with the topic at hand. "I'm not sure whether or not this is a good plan. I'm going to need more information before I express my support."
5. <u>Politicians</u> – text that contains arguments about particular politicians and/or evaluates their performance
   a. Reason
      i. Blogs, in addition to providing coverage of campaigns and elections, are also a platform for ongoing coverage of politicians.
      ii. Bloggers feel this is one way to hold politicians accountable once elected, especially for those who were aided in some way by the blogging community.
      iii. The performance of politicians is integral to the functioning of the American political system.
   b. Valence
      i. Support status quo
         1. For – arguing for the continuation of the current situation or scheme

2. For-but – arguing for the continuation of the current situation or scheme but expressing some hesitation, such as with the way the goals might be met.

    ii. Advocate change
1. Against – arguing against the continuation of the current state of affairs
2. Against-but – arguing against the continuation of the current state of affairs but also offering a positive alternative of some kind, proposing a counterargument. "I think this is going to fail unless they do this instead."

    iii. Unsure/None/Both equally – the expression of hesitancy with the topic at hand. "I'm not sure whether or not this is a good plan. I'm going to need more information before I express my support."

6. Media
    a. Reason
        i. An overwhelming number of posts concern media coverage of American politics.
        ii. Blogs are seen as a space to hold traditional media accountable and make it of higher quality.
        iii. Many bloggers see themselves as amateur reporters fully capable of producing high quality political news and information as an alternative to traditional of 'mainstream media.'
        iv. Blogs are often places in which perceived unfair coverage or treatment of events or politicians by various media outlets is criticized.
        v. The performance of the independent media is traditionally considered integral to the proper functioning of the American political system.

    b. Valence
        i. Support status quo
1. For – arguing for the continuation of the current situation or scheme
2. For-but – arguing for the continuation of the current situation or scheme but expressing some hesitation, such as with the way the goals might be met.

        ii. Advocate change
1. Against – arguing against the continuation of the current state of affairs
2. Against-but – arguing against the continuation of the current state of affairs but also offering a positive alternative of some kind, proposing a counterargument. "I think this is going to fail unless they do this instead."

        iii. Unsure/None/Both equally – the expression of hesitancy with the topic at hand. "I'm not sure whether or not this is a good plan. I'm going to need more information before I express my support."

7. Other
    a. Any text that contains an argument that does not pertain to one of the five choices, or areas of critique of the American political system, but does mostly pertain to

the overall topic of the American politics. They may mention one of the areas, but overall, the diary is vague or overly general.

      i. These topics were tabulated, and those with 10 or more instances were substantively considered in the analysis.

Further coding at the level of the argument

1. Is there *elaboration* of the problem or metatalk argument?
    a. An elaboration is defined here as a statement (argument) with additional elaboration that is a form of further justification, a clarifying definition, a reason for holding a particular opinion, an example, a personal story, a fact or statistic, an hypothetical example, a solution to a problem, further elaboration as to why a problem is a problem, a comparison to another like phenomenon, a consequence of the problem or a proposed solution, a signal that something actually exists or does not exist, or any further elaboration that attempts to restate what is meant or justification for why a particular position has been taken.
    b. Key words within the text that signal elaboration are "because" "so" "the reason for this is". If there is elaboration, indicate 'yes'.
2. If elaboration
    a. Personal experience
        i. Elaboration that includes personal experience, such as stories, first hand accounts, accounts from close friends or family.
    b. Mass media
        i. Elaboration that includes explicit references to the mass media, especially those found on the Internet.
    c. Alternative media
        i. Elaboration that includes specific references to alternative media found on the Internet, such as blogs or forums.
    d. Other participants
        i. Elaboration that includes references to arguments provided by other authors or participants within the Political Blogging Community. It must be an explicit reference, to an actual participant, such as "KagroX said that…" The argument needs to clearly use another participants argument or evidence as a reason for their own position. In terms of blogs, this is often done using the blockquote technique.

Appendix D:
PASW Codebook

Variable	Label	Measurement Level
Diary_author	Author	Nominal
Site	Political Blogging Community	Nominal
Diary_Words	Number of Words	Scale
Comments	Number of Comments	Scale
Diary_Date	Date	Ordinal
Diary_number	Number (sequential)	Scale
Diary_Type	Diary Type	Nominal
0	Continue Self	
1	Respond to Topic	
2	New Topic	
Diary_Aspect	Dominant Aspect of the Diary	Nominal
0	Text about the problem	
1	Text about the text	
2	Text about the process	
3	Text that is social	
Diary_Aspect_Count_Problem	Number of Aspects that talk about the problem	Scale
Diary_Aspect_Count_Meta	Number of Aspects that contain metatext	Scale
Diary_Aspect_Count_Social	Number of Aspects that contain socialtext	Scale
Diary_Aspect_Count_Process	Number of Aspects that contain processtext	Scale
Aspect_Reference_Text_Count	Number of Aspects referencing another text	Scale
Aspect_New_Argument_Count	Number of Aspects beginning a new argument	Scale
Aspect_Answer_Question_Count	Number of Aspects that answer a question	Scale
TOTAL_ARGUMENTS	Number of Discrete Arguments in the diary	Scale
Argument_Problem_Type_Count	Number of Arguments that contain text about	Scale

	problem	
Argument_Meta_Type_Count	Number of Arguments that contain text about the text	Scale
Argument_Social_Type_Count	Number of Arguments that contain social text	Scale
Argument_Process_Type_Count	Number of Arguments that contain text about the process	Scale
Argument_Respond_To_Site_Count	Number of Arguments that contain text that suggests it responds to something else in the community	Scale
Argument_Respond_To_Participant_Count	Number of Arguments that contain text that responds to other participants or the work of others	Scale
Argument_Continue_Self_Count	Number of Arguments that contain text that continues a from another previously authored text	Scale
Problem_Argument_Type	Does the diary contain ANY opinion, agreement, or disagreement over the problem?	Nominal
0	No	
1	Yes	
Problem_Argument_Opinion_Count	Number of Arguments about the problem that contain opinions	Scale
Problem_Argument_Opinion_Fact_Count	Number of Arguments about the problem that contain opinions formulated by factual statements	Scale
Problem_Argument_Opinion_Question_Count	Number of Arguments about the problem that contain opinions formulated as general questions	Scale
Problem_Argument_Opinion_Question_Assertion_Count	Number of Arguments about the problem that contain opinions formulated as assertive questions	Scale

Problem_Argument_Opinion_Question_Directive_Count	Number of Arguments about the Problem that contain opinions formulated as directive questions	Scale
Problem_Argument_Opinion_Question_Rhetorical_Count	Number of Arguments about the problem that contain opinions formulated as rhetorical questions	Scale
Problem_Argument_Agreement_Count	Number of Arguments about the Problem that express agreement	Scale
Problem_Argument_Agreement_Fact_Count	Number of Arguments about the problem that express agreement formulated as opinion	Scale
Problem_Argument_Agreement_Question_Count	Number of Arguments about the problem that express agreement formulated as general questions	Scale
Problem_Argument_Agreement_Question_Assertion_Count	Number of Arguments about the problem that express agreement formulated as assertive questions	Scale
Problem_Argument_Agreement_Question_Directive_Count	Number of Arguments about the problem that express agreement formulated as directive questions	Scale
Problem_Argument_Agreement_Question_Rhetorical_Count	Number of Arguments about the problem that express agreement formulated as rhetorical questions	Scale
Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Count	Number of Arguments about the problem that express disagreement	Scale
Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Fact_Count	Number of Arguments about the problem that express disagreement formulated as factual statements	Scale
Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Question_Count	Number of Arguments about the problem that express disagreement formulated as general questions	Scale

Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Question_Assertion_Count	Number of Arguments about the problem that express disagreement formulated as assertive questions	Scale
Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Question_Directive_Count	Number of Arguments about the problem that express disagreement formulated as directive questions	Scale
Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Question_Rhetorical_Count	Number of Arguments about the problem that express disagreement formulated as rhetorical questions	Scale
Meta_Argument_Type	Does this diary contain ANY?	Nominal
0	No	
1	Yes	
Meta_Consensus_Count	Number of arguments about the text that express consensus	Scale
Meta_Conflict_Count	Number of arguments about the text that express conflict	Scale
Meta_Clarify_Own_Count	Number of arguments about the text that seek to clarify the author's thoughts	Scale
Meta_Clarify_Other_Count	Number of arguments about the text that seek to clarify the another participants thoughts	Scale
Social_Argument_Type	Does this diary contain ANY?	Nominal
0	No	
1	Yes	
Social_Salutation_Count	Number of arguments that are social in nature and formulated as salutations to participants	Scale
Social_Apology_Count	Number of arguments that are social in nature and formulated as apologies to participants	Scale
Social_Praise_Count	Number of arguments that are social in nature and formulated as	Scale

	praise for other participants	
Social_ChitChat_Count	Number of arguments that are social in nature and formulated as small talk	Scale
Process_Argument_Type	Does this diary contain ANY?	Nominal
0	No	
1	Yes	
Process_TechProblems_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about problems with the blogging software/platform	Scale
Process_TechBenefits_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about the benefits of the blogging software/platform in facilitating deliberation	Scale
Process_DeliberationProcess_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about the process of posting and responding to diaries in the community	Scale
Process_DeliberationProblems_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about the problems posed to deliberation by the process of posting and responding to diaries in the community	Scale
Process_DeliberationPositive_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about the benefits of the process of posting and responding to diaries to deliberation	Scale
Diary_Topic	Does this diary contain ANY?	Nominal
0	No	
1	Yes	
Campaigns_and_Elections_Argument_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about campaigns and elections in the U.S.	Scale

Campaigns_and_Elections_Argument_Status_Quo_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about campaigns and elections that supports the status quo	Scale
Campaigns_and_Elections_Argument_Change_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about campaigns and elections that advocates change	Scale
Campaigns_and_Elections_Argument_Unsure_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about campaigns and elections that do not support the status quo or advocate change explicitly	Scale
Party_Platform_Argument_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about general party platforms	Scale
Party_Platform_Argument_Status_Quo_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about party platforms that supports the status quo	Scale
Party_Platform_Argument_Change_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about party platforms that advocate change	Scale
Party_Platform_Argument_Unsure_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about party platforms that do not support the status quo or advocate change explicitly	Scale
Policy_Argument_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about U.S. public and foreign policy	Scale
Policy_Argument_Status_Quo_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about policy that support the status quo	Scale
Policy_Argument_Change_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about policy that advocate change	Scale
Policy_Argument_Unsure_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about policy that do not support the status quo	Scale

	or advocate change explicitly	
Critique_Argument_Count	Number of arguments that contain text that critiques the general American political system	Scale
Critique_Argument_Status_Quo_Count	Number of arguments that contain text that critiques the system yet supports the status quo	Scale
Critique_Argument_Change_Count	Number of arguments that contain text that critiques the system and advocates change	Scale
Critique_Argument_Unsure_Count	Number of arguments that contain text that critiques the system but does not support the status quo or advocate change explicitly	Scale
Politicians_Argument_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about specific politicians or policymakers	Scale
Politicians_Argument_Status_Quo_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about politicians and support the status quo	Scale
Politicians_Argument_Change_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about politicians and advocates change	Scale
Politicians_Argument_Unsure_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about politicians but do not support the status quo or advocate change explicitly	Scale
Media_Argument_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about the mainstream or mass media	Scale
Media_Argument_Status_Quo_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about the media that support the status quo	Scale

Media_Argument_Change_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about the media that advocate change	Scale
Media_Argument_Unsure_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about the media but do not support the status quo or advocate change explicitly	Scale
Other_Argument_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about other topics that are related to the general problem of the American political system	Scale
Other_Argument_Status_Quo_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about the general problem that support the status quo	Scale
Other_Argument_Change_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about the general problem that advocate change	Scale
Other_Argument_Unsure_Count	Number of arguments that contain text about the general problem but do not support the status quo or advocate change explicitly	Scale
Off_Topic_Argument_Count	Number of arguments that are completely off-topic	Scale
Elaboration_Argument_Problem_Type	Does this diary contain ANY?	Nominal
0	No	
1	Yes	
Elaboration_Argument_Meta_Type	Does this diary contain ANY?	Nominal
0	No	
1	Yes	
Elaboration_Argument_Problem_Personal_Count	Number of arguments about the problem that contain references to personal stories	Scale

Elaboration_Argument_Problem_MSM_Count	Number of arguments about the problem that contain references to mass media	Scale
Elaboration_Argument_Problem_AltMedia_Count	Number of arguments about the problem that contain references to alternative media	Scale
Elaboration_Argument_Problem_OtherParticipants_Count	Number of arguments about the problem that contain references to the text authored by other participants	Scale
Elaboration_Argument_Meta_Personal_Count	Number of arguments about the text that contain references to personal stories	Scale
Elaboration_Argument_Meta_MSM_Count	Number of arguments about the text that contain references to mass media	Scale
Elaboration_Argument_Meta_AltMedia_Count	Number of arguments about the text that contain references to alternative media	Scale
Elaboration_Argument_Meta_OtherParticipants_Count	Number of arguments about the text that contain references to the text authored by other participants	Scale
Reasoned_Opinion_Expression	Number of arguments grouped as the deliberative pillar of reasoned opinion expression	Scale
Sourcing	Number of arguments grouped as the deliberative pillar of sourcing	Scale
Disagreement	Number of arguments grouped as the deliberative pillar of disagreement	Scale
Topic	Number of arguments grouped as the deliberative pillar of topic	Scale
Engagement	Number of arguments grouped as the deliberative pillar of	Scale

	engagement	
Score1	Deliberative score that counts each time any arguments are grouped as any deliberative pillar	Scale
Score2	Deliberative score that counts each time 5 or more arguments are grouped as any deliberative pillar	Scale

The Deliberative Score

Reasoned opinion expression

- Problem_Argument_Opinion_Fact_Count
- Problem_Argument_Opinion_Question_Count
- Problem_Argument_Opinion_Question_Assertion_Count
- Problem_Argument_Opinion_Question_Directive_Count
- Problem_Argument_Opinion_Question_Rhetorical_Count
- Problem_Argument_Agreement_Fact_Count
- Problem_Argument_Agreement_Question_Count
- Problem_Argument_Agreement_Question_Assertion_Count
- Problem_Argument_Agreement_Question_Directive_Count
- Problem_Argument_Agreement_Question_Rhetorical_Count
- Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Fact_Count
- Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Question_Count
- Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Question_Assertion_Count
- Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Question_Directive_Count
- Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Question_Rhetorical_Count

Sourcing

- Elaboration_Argument_Problem_Personal_Count
- Elaboration_Argument_Problem_MSM_Count
- Elaboration_Argument_Problem_AltMedia_Count
- Elaboration_Argument_Problem_OtherParticipants_Count
- Elaboration_Argument_Meta_Personal_Count
- Elaboration_Argument_Meta_MSM_Count
- Elaboration_Argument_Meta_AltMedia_Count
- Elaboration_Argument_Meta_OtherParticipants_Count

Disagreement

- Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Fact_Count
- Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Question_Count
- Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Question_Assertion_Count
- Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Question_Directive_Count
- Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Question_Rhetorical_Count

Topic

- Campaigns_and_Elections_Argument_Count
- Party_Platform_Argument_Count
- Policy_Argument_Count
- Critique_Argument_Count
- Politicians_Argument_Count
- Media_Argument_Count
- Other_Argument_Count

Engagement

- Argument_Respond_To_Site_Count
- Argument_Respond_To_Participant_Count
- Meta_Consensus_Count
- Meta_Conflict_Count
- Meta_Clarify_Own_Count
- Meta_Clarify_Other_Count
- Social_Salutation_Count
- Social_Apology_Count
- Social_Praise_Count
- Social_ChitChat_Count
- Problem_Argument_Opinion_Question_Count
- Problem_Argument_Opinion_Question_Assertion_Count plus Problem_Argument_Opinion_Question_Directive_Count
- Problem_Argument_Agreement_Question_Count
- Problem_Argument_Agreement_Question_Assertion_Count
- Problem_Argument_Agreement_Question_Directive_Count
- Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Question_Count
- Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Question_Assertion_Count plus
- Problem_Argument_Disagreement_Question_Directive_Count

Deliberative process (other)

- Process_TechProblems_Count
- Process_TechBenefits_Count
- Process_DeliberationProcess_Count
- Process_DeliberationProblems_Count
- Process_DeliberationPositive_Count