

WHO READS BLOGS: AN EXAMINATION OF BLOG READERS

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

WHO READS BLOGS: AN EXAMINATION OF BLOG READERS. (May 2007)

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Blogs have become a major part of American politics, with numerous politicians, pundits, and other political elites, as well as millions of ordinary Americans, reading and authoring them. This thesis seeks to determine who it is that reads political blogs by measuring their level of political engagement, involvement, and cynicism, as well as to determine the types of blogs they read.

To answer these questions, 308 Appalachian State University students from a broad array of academic majors were surveyed in the fall of 2006. The survey inquired to the respondent's knowledge of political blogs, the amount of time spent reading them, as well as to their own political views and levels of participation.

This thesis finds that those who read political blogs tend to be highly engaged and are in aggregate more involved in politics than those who do not read political blogs. Additionally, blog readers tend to have firm views on political issues and tend to generally read blogs that confirm their own ideological worldviews. Additionally, it is found that political science majors tend to be more likely to read political blogs than respondents with other majors.

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An Overview of Blogs

Blogs are fairly new to the American lexicon, but have proven to be quite influential. There is widespread public interest; in fact, the word *blog* was Merriam-Webster's top word of 2004. It has been suggested that blogs are now driving public policy and elections, as well as driving elite media discourse (Bloom 2003). In fact, a majority of reporters now report reading blogs and getting story ideas from them (Trammell and Keshelashvili 2005). That blogs are widely visited is indicated by the fact that some blogs are now generating revenue for their authors and advertisers (Torio 2005). Blogs have also gained attention from political leaders. Numerous American and world leaders have blogged. The influence of political blogs is also clear in the fear that some governments have of them. For example, blogs have been suppressed by several world governments, such as Egypt and China. While opinions may differ to the degree to which blogs are important, that they are important is no longer up for debate. In light of this, the critical question becomes this: who is reading political blogs?

Obviously, the rise of blogs would not be possible without the Internet. It is clear that the Internet has become a major part of American society. In less than two decades, the World Wide Web has gone from an obscure network of scientists to one of the dominant forms of communication in America, and, indeed, the entire world. "The Internet, because it lacks gatekeepers and filters," writes Jeremy Mayer (2006, 303), "is simply a profoundly different medium than any that has come before." With these changes have come the creation

and rise of blogs and other alternative media websites which report news and provide commentary that would not otherwise be readily available. The Internet has allowed anyone with Internet access and a basic understanding of web design to publish his or her own thoughts for a potential audience of millions (while few reach this many readers, the most famous online commentators, such as Glenn Reynolds or Michelle Malkin, receive substantial traffic).

One manifestation of this phenomenon has been the explosion of blogs. A blog, a shortened version of “web log,” can be defined as any frequently updated online journal. A political blog can be defined as any frequently updated online journal that focuses specifically on politics. The frequency of which they are updated varies widely. Some blogs, such as Instapundit or Daily Kos, are updated multiple times a day. Blogs can be created free of charge using such services as Blogspot, Typepad, or Blog City, as well as certain social networking sites like MySpace. While political blogs are my primary concern here, it is worth noting that many blogs serve as personal diaries in which authors share their personal experiences. This is particularly true of blogs on social networking sites, which often cater to teenagers and other younger demographics.

Political blogs can take many forms, but are predominately focused on political commentary. Some of them have only one author; on others, several authors publish their thoughts. While some political bloggers, notably Ariana Huffington and Michelle Malkin, gained notoriety prior to launching their blogs, many political bloggers are famous because of their blogs. Blogs often serve as a launching pad for each other; readers find new blogs through the blogs they already read. Blogs are usually heavily dependent on linkage – links to other blogs, stories from mainstream media websites, and links from more famous blogs to

boost their own traffic. Not surprisingly, most blogs feature a “blogroll,” or list of links to other blogs.

The “blogosphere,” or worldwide community of blogs, is populated by blogs of every political stripe imaginable, from the typical liberal and conservative viewpoints, to those focused on libertarian, green, and even more obscure ideologies, to those who do not fit any ideological label at all. Some bloggers are professional journalists or prominent commentators. Others are obscure citizens with little or no notoriety. Some blogs receive thousands of hits everyday, other blogs receive less than ten hits a day. Simply put, political bloggers are a diverse group, and making generalizations about them is difficult.

While it may be easy to dismiss these alternative media sites as the inconsequential ramblings of politically obsessed ideologues, discounting them so quickly would not be prudent. Many of them receive substantial traffic. For example, DailyKos, a liberal blog, received 7 million hits in the August just before the 2004 elections, 1.3 million hits more than Fox News’s website received during the same period. The ability of blogs to mobilize political support has been praised, and it has even been suggested that “political blogs may over time prove capable of mobilizing large enough sectors of the voting public unsatisfied with the limited choice offered by the two main political parties into a collective voting bloc sizable enough to sustain the launch of a viable third political party” (Kline 2005, 19). Joe Trippi, Howard Dean’s campaign manager during his 2004 presidential candidacy, has suggested that the role played by political blogs and online organizations during the 2004 elections will go down in history as being as just as transformative as television’s role in the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debates (Kline 2005).

Whether or not such an optimistic view will prove accurate remains to be seen, but political leaders are starting to take notice of the increasing power of blogs. For example, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist, 2004 Democratic nominee John Kerry, and Senator Edward Kennedy have all posted entries on blogs.¹

It is also worth noting that prominent bloggers received press passes for both the 2004 Democratic and Republican Conventions, an event which has been hailed as a “milestone,”² and a clear testament to the growing respect bloggers are receiving as journalists. “We want to treat them just the same as other reporters,” said Mike Liddell, the Democratic National Convention’s director of online communication. “A lot of young people blog now, and they’re important to us,” added Lina Garcia, spokesperson for the Democratic National Convention.³

Candidates have also made use of blogs. One notable example is cited by Jost and Hipolit (2006):

Different ethical issues were raised by the role of two political bloggers in South Dakota’s hotly contested 2004 Senate race. Senate Democratic Leader Tom Dashle was running neck and neck with Rep. Jim Thune, a Republican strongly supported by national GOP leaders. It turned out that two bloggers, Jon Lauck and Jason Van Beek, who sharply attacked Dashle on their sites, were paid \$27,000 and \$8,000, respectively, by the Thune campaign, though the campaign did not disclose the payments until after the election. Thune won by about 4,700 votes, and Van Beek now has a full-time job in Thune’s Senate office. The campaign insisted at the time that the bloggers were paid for research, not for blogging.

Attesting most strongly to the growing importance of blogs is a movement by congress to regulate the blogosphere under campaign finance laws. Bloggers of various ideologies united around a 2005 effort to exempt all Internet communication from campaign-

¹ Bill Frist blogged at <http://www.volpac.org>. Kerry and Kennedy blogged at <http://www.dailykos.com>.

² Peterson, Scot. “Bloggers in the house: Weblogs Deliver Democratic Convention Buzz in Droves.” *Eweek*, August 2, 2004.

³ Faler, Brian. “Parties to Allow Bloggers to Cover Conventions for First Time.” *Washington Post*, July 6, 2004. <http://www.washingtonpost.com> (accessed July 9, 2006).

finance regulations, which would have kept blogs, e-mails, and websites free from speech restrictions. However, this bill failed to pass when it could not muster the two-thirds vote needed in the House of Representatives to pass in the expedited nature desired by Republican leaders.⁴ The current regulations for blogs are largely the same as what exists for publishing offline: defamation, release of trade secrets, and copyright violations can be pursued legally. Authors are generally obliged to only publish facts they know to be true.⁵ In March 2006, the Federal Election Commission decided to grant blogs and other Internet publications the same exemptions as traditional media outlets: bloggers will not be required to disclose expenditures unless controlled by a campaign, and will not be required to disclose their costs of covering federal elections. Most blogging advocates applauded this decision (Jost and Hipolit 2006).

Bloggers in other nations have not been so fortunate. Bloggers in Egypt, Iran, and China have been arrested and jailed because of their criticism of their respective governments. Additionally, China has blocked numerous anti-government sites,⁶ as has India.⁷ Clearly, authoritarian regimes sense that bloggers may pose a threat to their rule. Whether or not bloggers will maintain influence for the long haul remains to be seen; however, for the time being at least, it is clear that bloggers have become something of a force in American and world politics, as evidenced by government interest in their possible regulation and suppression, as well as their potential for exploitation for political gains.

⁴ Klein, Rick. "Internet Campaign exemption defeated." *The Boston Globe*, November 3, 2005. http://www.boston.com/news/nation/washington/articles/2005/11/03/internet_campaign_exemption_defeated/ (accessed July 22, 2006).

⁵ Jennifer Balderama. "Free Speech – Virtually." *The Washington Post*, December 19, 2002. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A9204-2002Dec18> (accessed December 1, 2006).

⁶ Jost, Kenneth and Melissa J. Hipolit. "Blog Explosion." *Congressional Quarterly*, June 9, 2006.

⁷ Ramesh, Randeep. "Bloggers' fury as India blocks sites." *The Guardian*, July 19, 2006.

With this in mind, it is appropriate to determine who it is that reads political blogs, an area that seems to be somewhat neglected by researchers. In pursuing this, it is my goal to answer the question, “Who is a typical reader of political blogs?” Expanding on this question, it will need to be determined if blog readers tend to be highly ideological, as well as if blog readers are looking at a wide ideological range of blogs or only visiting those that share their own ideology (“balkanization”), a potential result predicted by Teachout (2005), and Drezner and Farrell (2004). If this is the case, blogs may be similar to talk radio in that they attract an audience that largely agrees with their points of view.

Teachout (2005) is particularly troubled by balkanization, and sees blogs as a symptom of the decline of a distinct, idealistic, and united American culture and the rise of a fractured citizenry who each selfishly pursues his or her own interests. In Teachout’s view, Americans no longer have a shared culture; instead, various subcultures have emerged as the ideal of the American “melting pot” began to disappear during the 1960s and 1970s. In her view, blogs are just more evidence of this cultural decline.

It is worth noting that such balkanization has also been warned about in other media. Some have suggested that talk radio, another alternative form of partisan media that actively promotes certain candidates, ideas, and policies may have a similar impact. Studies of the impact of talk radio from Barker (1999) and Barker and Knight (2000) have found that listening to the *Rush Limbaugh Show* can make listeners more in tune politically with Limbaugh, even going so far as to assert that listening to his show leads to significant changes in voting decisions (Barker 1999). Blogs are similar to talk radio in that they generally advocate particular worldviews and are openly partisan. It seems reasonable to suspect that the reading of political blogs may have similar effects.

Probably the most widely researched area of blog influence has been the influence blogs have on the mainstream media, a topic that has been explored by numerous researchers, among them Drezner and Farrell (2004), Beeson (2005), Kerbel and Bloom (2005), and Wallsten (2005). Their findings vary widely. For example, Drezner and Farrell (2004) argue that blogs serve as a sort of “barometer” of public interest in stories that might otherwise be neglected by the media, such as then-Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott’s 2002 comments at then-Senator Strom Thurmond’s birthday party that were considered racist by some. Kerbel and Bloom (2005, 13) argue that blogs are a legitimate form of journalism reminiscent of the “partisan press of the nineteenth century.”

Beeson (2005) contends that blogs fill a gap in information by offering immediate coverage of incidents that result in “a massive request for information,” such as the 9/11 attacks or the 2005 tsunami that impacted south Asian countries. He also contends that blogs and the mainstream media enjoy a sort of “symbiotic relationship,” thus feeding off one another. Berenger (2006) concurs, suggesting that blogs do in fact have an issue-setting role. Citing blog coverage of the 2003 Iraq War, it is pointed out that blogs were often quoted with the same authority as newspaper articles or academic studies, and highlights the rise of Iraqi bloggers, such as Salam Pax. Berenger also suggests that blogs may have a role as a watchdog for traditional media outlets, pointing out how blogs found numerous examples of staged or altered photos during the Iraq War, the 2000 Palestinian *Intifada*, and the Israeli-Hezbollah war of 2006.

There is not widespread agreement on the level of influence blogs exert on the mainstream media; Wallsten (2005) concludes that blogs have minimal influence on issues discussed by the mainstream media. However, the mainstream media does exert some

influence over blogs by highlighting certain issues that bloggers then blog about, although these instances of agenda setting are not consistent over time. Certainly, a cursory trip around the blogosphere will yield numerous examples of bloggers liking to, and often criticizing, stories from mainstream media websites.

It has also been suggested by Coleman (2005, 276) that blogs serve as a natural expansion of democracy, a 'free market of ideas' so to speak. Coleman also suggests that "...blogs have become a key source of information and analysis for people who prefer to trust their own judgement rather than depend upon the spin, censorship and narrow agenda of the usual sources," effectively "diminish[ing] people's need to be spoken for by others." Additionally, blogs can give a voice to those who are traditionally marginalized or ignored by political elites, such as the economically disadvantaged, or those living in the Third World.

In the United States, some contend that Internet access (although not necessarily access to blogs) has a positive impact on voter turnout. This is the argument of Tolbert and McNeal (2003, 184), who find that "access to Internet and online election news significantly increased the probability of voting by an average of 12 percent and 7.5 percent, respectively, in the 2000 election." However, this could just as easily be attributed to other factors, as those with Internet access are undoubtedly generally the affluent and well educated, and, as such, are more likely to vote in larger numbers than the less educated or affluent. Still, if these findings are accurate, it suggests that blogs can have a positive impact on political participation.

It should be noted that this optimistic view of blogs is not shared by all observers. A study by Jonack (2006) of the Blog for America (Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign

blog) contends that the idea of blogs expanding democracy is only an illusion. Dean's blog did not give most Americans a voice in his campaign. Indeed, Dean's blog remained largely on message, encouraged readers not to debate critical posts (who were termed as "trolls"), and remained quite ambiguous about the specifics of candidate Dean's policy positions. The study determined:

Campaigns are still structured to craft an image and a message, and the participants in the emerging online forum tend to engage each other in a way that supports the crafting of that image and message with minimal training from the campaign. In effect, Howard Dean's campaign weblog became a self-disciplining system in which comments that promoted the goals and echoed the strategies of the campaign were encouraged and those that did not were discouraged through subtle and not-so-subtle disciplinary strategies. Unfortunately, the campaign's (and hence the blog's) goals and strategies were not conducive to the lively debate among citizens that is necessary for a healthy representative democracy (Jonack 2006).

It is worth noting that Jonack's study deals only with Howard Dean's campaign blog; therefore, the applicability of his findings to non-campaign blogs is highly questionable, especially when one considers that most blogs are not explicitly associated with a political campaign. However, Lawson-Borders and Kirk (2005, 548) also hold a similar view of blogs, contending that while blogs may eventually become a major facet of effective campaign communication, they did not "have a significant impact on the 2004 election outcome." Bimber (2003) found similar results in his study of the 2000 presidential campaign websites, finding they did not stimulate voting, although his findings may now be dated given the proliferation of blogs over the past six years.

Li (2005, 123), while ultimately optimistic about blogs, also contends that blogs have not yet reached their full potential. "[B]logs are still on their way to obtaining popularity among people from all walks of life," he writes, "especially those who are deemed as digital right have-nots."

Blogs have also become popular with numerous scholars, among them Glenn Reynolds (www.Instapundit.com), Daniel Drezner (www.danieldrezner.com/blog), Steven Taylor (www.poliblogger.com), and Stephen Bainbridge (www.professorbainbridge.com). Indeed, some now argue that academics should seriously consider blogging. While it is obviously no substitute for publishing, it can be an effective extension of one's academic persona. Blogging can also be a good way to connect with the general public, allowing academics to bypass newspaper editors to present their ideas to a much wider audience of readers. Recent counts find 130 law professors with active blogs, and 85 philosophy professors or Ph.D. students currently blogging (Farrell 2005).

Blogs: A Brief History

Blogs were invented in 1994 by a Pennsylvania college student, but it would be several years before they became popular. In fact, the term "weblog" was not coined until 1997 by John Barger, who defined it as "a web page where a blogger 'logs' all the other web pages she finds interesting," making them distinct from other types of web pages (Du and Wagner 2006, 790). One distinction between blogs and other web pages is the frequency at which blogs are updated. Blogs, however, would not become widely popular until 2000 (Cohen and Krishnamurthy 2006). Political blogs would become even more popular following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, as people demanded information not available in the mainstream press and to express their own feelings concerning the attacks. Blogging also experienced growth in 2002, as bloggers began blogging about the pending war in Iraq (Wallsten 2005). As of March 2005, there were around 30 million blogs

according to Technorati.com, a blog search engine, although readership has leveled off since then, perhaps due to a decline in political interest during an electoral off year (Cochran 2006). Of course, no one knows the exact number of blogs in existence (Bloom 2003). Blogs can be considered direct descendants of bulletin boards (Kerbel and Bloom 2005). They are unique in their ability to disseminate their messages in real time to a potential audience of millions (Jost and Hipolit 2006). Unlike traditional media sources, bloggers are not restrained by editors, a fact that can be normatively considered either a positive or a negative, depending on one's normative perspective.

While some argue blogs are revolutionary, it is important to remember that they remain fairly obscure to most Americans: A 2005 Gallup poll found that less than 10 percent of respondents read blogs frequently. However, this percentage increases to almost 20 percent among those between the ages of 18 and 29, suggesting they are far more influential among younger Americans (Cochran 2006). Additionally, Bloom (2003) argues that many more people, including policymakers, politicians, and political reporters, have unknowingly read political blogs, making the exact number of readers impossible to find, but likely much higher than is typically represented in polls on the subject.

In driving public policy, it is still possible that blogs carry influence. Converse (1964) argues that less than one percent of the population speaks publicly about politics, and those who do rarely have their grasp of politics challenged. This was no doubt true at the time of Converse's paper, when speaking publicly meant speaking on television or writing in the newspaper, but more than four decades have passed. With the advent of blogs, speaking publicly is much more accessible to the layman. Virtually anyone is able to do so today. Certainly, the time has come to reevaluate Converse. Are bloggers elites? Most probably they

are not, but bloggers with significant followings could be considered as such. In theory, at least, anyone can become a famous blogger, and thus a “political elite.” And certainly, the potential now exists for virtually everyone to speak publicly about politics. Most will probably not do so, but it is not unreasonable to think that more than a fraction of one percent will, given that around 32 million Americans now read blogs (Du and Wagner 2006). While everyone will not, many more Americans will likely now speak publicly about politics than Converse could have imagined.

Converse’s claim that a commentator’s grasp of politics is rarely challenged also no longer holds true. Bloggers can question each other’s grasps in the comments section of blogs, as well as on their own blogs. Additionally, bloggers may question the credibility of political elites and challenge the views they hold, Dan Rather’s use of faulty documents concerning George W. Bush’s military service being the most obvious example of this. Bloggers frequently critique media coverage, pointing out what they see as biases and misinformation. Certainly, blogs have made the challenging of political elites much more accessible and common today than it was in Converse’s time.

However, Converse still proves useful in providing a theoretical groundwork for examining blogs. As one descends through levels of political sophistication, constraints are removed. For example, a sophisticated observer is not likely to support both tax cuts and increased government spending because he or she will see the contradiction. A less sophisticated observer, however, may not. Thus, his or her ideas are not constrained by such reasoning. On the other hand, those toward the bottom of political sophistication are much more likely to be personally impacted by political issues; the issue is more tangible for him or her.

What if such an individual reads blogs? Will he or she become more enlightened and note the ideological contradictions? Or will he or she simply do, as Zaller (1992) suggests, and rejects those arguments that he or she is not predisposed to agree with? On the other hand, what if an individual with low sophistication starts a blog? Will the unconstrained ideas be exposed by readers? I supposed it depends on how sophisticated the readers of his or her blog are.

Of course, an individual impacted by healthcare prices or some other political item could also use a blog to speak personally about the situation, carrying a credibility others are not likely to have.

Still, the effectiveness of blogs in driving public opinion remains in question. While blogs were at the forefront of “Rathergate,” it is possible that the situation would have unfolded as it did without them. It is also notable that blogs did not force Rather’s resignation on their own; instead, Rather’s fall was caused by mainstream media outlets picking up on the story from blogs and reporting it themselves. Had the scandal never made it into the mainstream media, it seems highly unlikely that Rather would have been forced to resign.

Having said this, some facts are obvious. Clearly, blogs have experienced profound growth. Over 12,000 new blogs are created daily, according to David Sifry,⁸ founder of Technorati, a popular blog search engine. Additionally, a telephone survey of American Internet users found an increase of 58% in blog readership between February and November 2004 as the number of blog readers grew to 32 million (Du and Wagner 2006). It would be difficult to imagine blogs not having *some* impact on politics with such a large number of blog readers now present.

⁸ Sifry, David. “State of the Blogosphere, October 2004.” *Sifry’s Alerts*, October 10, 2004. <http://www.sifry.com/alerts/archives/000387.html> (accessed December 1, 2006).

Who Reads Blogs?

All of this may be interesting, but it tells us little about who actually reads blogs. Because blogs are a new medium, there is limited research on them, and thus not a broad academic consensus. One might suspect that the average blog reader would be relatively young given the reliance on technology by bloggers. However, a detailed survey conducted by Copeland (2006) found this belief unfounded. The survey, which was placed on the main page of several major blogs and filled out by those blogs' readers, found that 84% of political blog readers are over the age of thirty. Additionally, 72% of these readers are male; 49% are Democrats, while 20% are Republicans. An overwhelming majority also said they read five or more blogs daily. Most respondents (82%) reported not having their own blog. However, it is worth noting that these results are likely skewed as three major Republican blogs, Andrew Sullivan, Little Green Footballs, and Michelle Malkin, did not take part in the survey. Given the well-known gender gap between the parties (Norrander 2003) it seems reasonable to suggest that men are also underrepresented in the sample, and the actual percentage of blog readers that are male may be even higher than Copeland suggests.

The study found blog readers to be extremely skeptical of most mainstream news media outlets. Eighty-two percent of respondents believe that television news is "worthless or only somewhat useful as a source of news and opinion." Although this survey did not attempt to determine the most popular political blogs, an earlier survey (also by Copeland) found the most popular blogs among respondents were Atrios (38%), Instapundit (29%),

Daily Kos (27%), and Talking Points Memo (26%) (Copeland 2004, 2006).

If these findings are accurate, political blog readers tend to be older than conventional wisdom would suggest. They also tend to be overwhelmingly male and tend to be very politically minded, since only 1.8% identify themselves as apolitical. Additionally, and perhaps surprisingly, the number of blog readers who identify with either major party is substantially lower than among the general electorate (49% of which consider themselves Democrats and 41% as Republicans).⁹ Perhaps blog readers feel underrepresented by the two major parties, and turn to blogs as a means to hear alternative points of view.

It is worth noting that comparing ANES data to the Copeland survey is not an exact science. ANES does not allow respondents to identify themselves as Libertarians, so Libertarian respondents likely identified with one of the major parties, or as Independents. Additionally, ANES survey data allows for respondents who identify as Independents to classify themselves as Republican- or Democrat-leaning, unlike the Copeland survey. Still, these findings seem to suggest that blog readers are less partisan than the average voter.

Not everyone finds similar results. For example, Henning (2003) finds a majority of blogs (51.5%) were created by teenagers, and only a very few (7.5%) bloggers are over the age of 40. This study also finds a much higher percentage of female bloggers (56%) than does Copeland. However, Henning surveys a broad range of blogs, not only political blogs. Additionally, a blog maintained on a blogger's server would not be included in the study.¹⁰ Also, the proliferation of blogs on websites such as MySpace, which cater largely to teenagers, likely skews the research. Thus, while Henning may be quite useful for

⁹ American National Election Studies Data, 2004.

¹⁰ For example, www.myspace.com/yourblog would be included, but www.yourblog.com would not. Henning surveys only blogs that are affiliated with blogging provider sites and are hosted using the domain of the provider. A blog with its own domain would not be included. This may be significant as the top ten blogs, as well as seventeen of the top twenty, are all maintained on their own servers.

understanding the entire blogosphere as a whole, the conclusions that can be drawn from his study concerning political blogs are very much in question.

Polling agencies have also examined blogs. A February 10, 2006 Gallup poll confirms certain parts of both Copeland (2006) and Henning's (2003) research, while contradicting other aspects. Gallup finds, consistent with Copeland, that Democrats are more likely to read blogs than Republicans. Additionally, as of June 1, 2006, liberal blogs were more popular than their conservative counterparts. Somewhat (though not completely) consistent with Henning, Gallup also finds that respondents between the ages of 18 and 29 are much more likely to read blogs than any other age group (Jost and Hipolit 2006). These inconsistencies clearly highlight the need for more research of this topic.

There is only limited research concerning the political involvement and attentiveness of blog readership, although the low percentage of apolitical respondents in Copeland's study would suggest that blog readers are more ideological than the general public (Copeland 2006). Kerbel and Bloom (2005) echo this by suggesting that Howard Dean bloggers viewed themselves like soldiers, fighting for a very difficult and important cause. Furthermore, Kerbel and Bloom also suggest that blogs are just a product of the partisan, passionate times we currently live in.

As for the bloggers themselves, they appear to fit a similar profile as blog readers. Li (2005) finds that bloggers tend to be senior Internet users with regular access to the Internet. Additionally, they tend to be college educated and have computer literacy skills that are above average. Slightly more bloggers are male than female, but among A-list bloggers, 71% are male. Most bloggers are relatively new to the scene; 44% have blogged for less than a year, and 41.4% have published less than a hundred entries. Younger bloggers are more

likely to blog for the purposes of documenting their lives, expressing themselves, and passing time than older bloggers. He contends, “blogs mostly satisfy instrumental gratifications rather than ritual ones, quite different from its precedent media.”

Li’s (2005) sample contains only a small number of political bloggers, so his findings do not give many specifics on what a typical political blogger looks like, although some of his findings do corroborate other research. Li does find that political bloggers are more likely to be male. It is also noted that it is important for bloggers to connect with their audience to some degree by revealing information about themselves (Li 2005). Trammell and Keshelashvili (2005) point out that the vast majority of A-list bloggers use their actual names, supplied contact information, and provided personal facts about themselves.

Hypothesis

Even a casual observer of politics can predict that a high amount of political engagement generally leads to an interest in seeking political information. This is a view that has been widely accepted since Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes (1960) found that a mere interest in campaigns increases the chances of an individual voting by thirty percent. Blogs certainly provide such information freely and thoroughly, and can be monitored, and even authored, by anyone with Internet access.

It can also be reasonably assumed that those who take the time to seek out political blogs and read them on a regular basis tend to have an interest in politics. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine what would motivate someone to read political blogs were this not the

case. It seems safe to contend that an individual's interests will be mirrored in his or her choice of reading material. If someone reads political blogs, then they probably have an interest in politics. This interest in politics will most likely lead them to be more politically engaged than someone who does not have a similar interest. Therefore, it is predicted that political blog readers tend to be more politically engaged than those who do not read political blogs.

H1a: Readers of political blogs will be more politically engaged than those who do not read political blogs.

If it is assumed that reading political blogs constitutes a form of political participation, then the Resource Model of Political Participation, proposed by Brady, Verba, and Schlozman (1995) may be applied, which posits that political participation may be predicted by three resources: time, money, and civic skills. Certainly, time and money are important in determining who is likely to read political blogs. Indeed, Li (2005) finds that blogs are less popular among the less affluent who are not as likely to have Internet access or the time to visit blogs. The role of civic skills is somewhat less obvious. While civic skills may indeed be a determinate in who reads blogs, it could also be argued that blogs themselves help build civic skills. Bloggers, after all, are known to regularly express their own political opinions and author political commentary. Work on blogs may also help to make individuals more Internet savvy, which is now an important aspect of the political process.

Li (2005) finds that a significant number of bloggers maintain blogs in order to help improve their writing, obviously a component of civic skills. If this is the case, then blogs may serve as both a means of political participation, as well as an encouragement to participate in more traditional ways. The Internet in general, and blogs in particular, have lowered the threshold of time requirements; it is no longer necessary to attend political rallies to get involved; instead, one need only become involved in virtual communities or comment on blogs, which obviously takes much less time and energy than going door-to-door for a candidate. Thus significant political involvement, which may have taken hours a week in years past, may now be fit into almost anyone's schedule.

This may not be the only way in which blogs motivate political participation. As Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) point out, "people participate in electoral politics because someone encourages or inspires them to take part," and that mobilization is the primary reason people participate in elections. Additionally, when mobilizing, parties are more likely to contact strong partisans than non-partisans, and to target the well connected: homeowners, churchgoers, and others. Since blog readers tend to be somewhat affluent, they would make prime targets. Bloggers with large followings are also well connected (to their readers), making them prime targets as well. If blogs are, in effect, preaching to the choir, as Kline (2005) contends, then they could well become important mobilization devices. Indeed, this is where Kline believes the true power of blogs reside.

This does not suggest that blogs are responsible for the increase. While blogs *may* be responsible, it is also plausible that a strong interest in politics encourages both participation and blog reading. Determining if blogs are responsible for the increase is beyond the scope of this thesis and would require additional study. However, it is predicted that blog reading will

have a significant, positive (although not necessarily causal) relationship with political participation.

H1b: Blog reading will have a significant and positive (although not necessarily causal) relationship with political participation.

The gender of bloggers and blog readers is a question that has received some attention, with Copeland (2006) finding a heavily bias toward men as readers, even with his over sampling of Democrats, which may actually skew his results by sampling too many women. Henning (2003) found that a majority of bloggers are female, but his study focused on the blogosphere as a whole, not on political blogs, and likely was skewed by MySpace-type personal bloggers. The “Truth Laid Bear Ecosphere” shows a strong bias toward men in their rankings of blogs; eight of the top ten blogs are maintained predominantly by males.¹¹

Additionally, Verba, Burns and Schlozman (1997) argue that a gender gap exists in political participation; women are less interested and engaged in politics. Women are also less likely than men to use computers. In light of all these facts, it seems reasonable to predict that males are more likely to read political blogs than females.

H2: Males are more likely to read political blogs than females.

An interesting facet of blogs may be in how they influence non-mainstream opinion. There are, after all, numerous libertarian and Green blogs, as well as blogs that advocate even

¹¹ <http://truthlaidbear.com/ecosystem.php>, February 12, 2006.

less mainstream views, such as communism,¹² Nazism, and racism. Theoretically, the public may now be exposed to unfiltered, non-elite opinion. For the first time elite opinion, at least in theory, may be supplanted. Kline (2005) is particularly optimistic in this view, arguing that blogs may eventually create a voting bloc capable of supporting a legitimate third party candidate. Coleman (2005) also takes such a revolutionary view, arguing that blogs remove the need to be spoken for by others, and give voice to those ignored by political elites. Mayer (2006) also suggests that the Internet may lead to more nonconformist political thought. If this proves true, blogs may go down in history as being as important as the invention of the printing press.

However, if more traditional theory is applied, the idea that blogs will lead to the downfall of elite dominance does not appear very realistic. As Zaller (1992) points out, individuals tend to resist arguments that are inconsistent with their own preconceived political predispositions.

Of course, this is assuming that the average person will ever see such blogs in the first place. As Berenger (2006) contends, individuals are more likely to seek out information that confirms their beliefs. If blogs are indeed merely “preaching to the choir,” as Kline (2005) suggests, then only those relatively few individuals who hold opinions contrary to the elites will seek out such blogs in the first place. They will be ignored or maligned by virtually everyone else.

Additionally, many bloggers are still heavily dependent on mainstream media for information. With a few exceptions, bloggers do not often do original reporting. Beeson (2005) contends that blogs and the mainstream media enjoy a “symbiotic relationship,”

¹² See, for example, “The Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade at <http://rcybsea.blogspot.com/>.

feeding off one another for information. Thus, it seems likely that individuals who read blogs are also frequently exposed to elite opinion through television, newspapers, talk radio, and even the blogs themselves. Therefore, the dominance of elite opinion on the mass public is not likely to be changed by political blogs. Instead, blog readers will likely have greater exposure to it, as can be reasonably expected of anyone with a strong interest in politics.

H3: Exposure to elite opinion increases with exposure to political blogs.

If it is true, as Kline (2005) contends, that blogs generally “preach to the choir,” and this is their true power, then it is reasonable to suspect that blog readers tend to only read those blogs that confirm their beliefs. As Zaller (1992) finds, individuals tend to resist arguments that are inconsistent with their own preconceived political predispositions. It seems unlikely that most blog readers would bother to search out opinions only to actively resist them. Indeed, Markos Moulitsas Zuniga of “Daily Kos” even acknowledges: “We’re all partisan. We don’t pretend to be otherwise and would not be constrained by bounds of having to balance out what we write with the other side.”¹³ A quick survey of most major blogs (with a few exceptions) would seem to confirm Zuniga’s argument.

Baumgartner and Jones (1993) find that images are very important in the public mind, and that these images are closely linked with policy issues. They also contend that reporters often serve as allies to policy makers in framing public images on a particular issue. If we accept this thesis, it seems fair to predict that bloggers will also fill this role. Partisan bloggers, who clearly have an agenda in propagating a particular ideology, will be

¹³ Faler, Brian. “Parties to Allow Bloggers to Cover Conventions for First Time.” *Washington Post*, July 6, 2004. <http://www.washingtonpost.com> (accessed July 9, 2006).

particularly quick to link certain issues with images, such as the war on terror with either patriotism or human rights, or abortion with either murder or women's rights (depending on the blogger's ideology). Such simplistic images and emotional appeals should tend to make blog readers more partisan.

H4a: Readers of political blogs will report stronger connections to political parties than non-readers.

Teachout's (2005) warnings of "balkanization," Kline's (2005) contention that bloggers "preach to the choir," as well as testimony from bloggers themselves to this effect,¹⁴ it also seems a reasonable assumption that blog readers will be more ideologically extreme than non-readers.

H4b: Readers of political blogs will be more ideologically extreme than non-readers.

Another important question concerning blog readers concerns the type of blogs they read, namely do blog readers read blogs that confirm their own ideologies, or do they read blogs of opposing viewpoints? Given the partisan nature of the current political scene, as well as relevant research by Copeland (2004, 2006), and Berenger's (2006, 178) contention that "individuals are more apt to choose information that strengthens and supports their preconceptions, biases, ideologies, and core beliefs," it seems clear that blog readers tend to read blogs that confirm their own partisan views.

¹⁴ Markos Moulitsas Zuniga, as quoted in Faler, Brian. "Parties to Allow Bloggers to Cover Conventions for First Time." *Washington Post*, July 6, 2004. <http://www.washingtonpost.com> (accessed July 9, 2006).

This is an issue that has been addressed by Drezner and Farrell (2004), as well as by Teachout (2005), who described such phenomena as “balkanization.” In normative terms, Teachout is very troubled by this potential, seeing it as a symptom of the decline of American culture and belief in the ideal of the “melting pot.”

Zaller’s (1992) model for understanding mass opinion may prove quite useful in understanding the role of blogs. The model consists of four axioms: (1) the greater a person’s engagement with an issue, the greater the likelihood of being exposed to and comprehending messages concerning the issue, (2) people reject arguments that contradict preexisting political predispositions, but only if they recognize a relationship between their predispositions and the message, (3) the more recently a consideration has been thought of, the less time it takes to retrieve the consideration, and (4) individuals respond to survey questions through averaging considerations immediately accessible or salient to them.

By applying this model, blogs seem likely to reinforce a person’s preexisting views, as readers will seek out information that is salient to them. Should they come across information that contradicts their views, they will simply reject it. However, blogs may keep items active in individual’s minds for long periods of time. Blogs that focus on certain issues allow individuals to reinforce their views much more frequently than general media coverage, meaning that information can be more quickly retrieved from a person’s recollection.

In light of this research, it is hypothesized that blog readers tend to read blogs that confirm to their own ideological orientation.

H5: An individual’s partisan views will be reflected in the blogs he or she reads.

Research by Baumgartner and Morris (2006) finds that *The Daily Show* has a significant, negative impact on viewer's perceptions of political figures; jokes about candidates cause viewers to view the candidates more negatively. Cappella and Jamieson (1996) likewise find a link between cynicism and the media, blaming media framing of the news for rises in cynicism among the American public. In their view, the media often present actions and statements by politicians as simply political strategy and not statements of deeply held convictions. Since blog readers tend to be more knowledgeable about politics, it seems reasonable that they may also view political statements with suspicion. It has also been found that blog readers tend to be very skeptical of the mainstream media. This is most apparent in Copeland's (2006) research, in which he finds that eighty-two percent of respondents believe that television news is "worthless or only somewhat useful as a source of news and opinion." Additionally, Kerbel and Bloom (2005) suggest "these are passionate, partisan times, perfectly suited to a vehicle like the Dean blog, and in such times the blog makes a valuable contribution to political discourse and system efficacy."

In light of this, given that blogs often rely on jokes and cynicism to promote agendas, as well as frequently demonize those on the opposite side of the political spectrum, and that their audience tends to be suspicious of the mainstream media, it is predicted that blog readers tend to hold more cynical views about the American political system than those who do not read political blogs.

H6: As exposure to political blogs increases, cynicism will also increase.

Finally, it is also necessary to determine if political science majors are more likely to read political blogs than students with other majors. It can be reasonably assumed that students who major in political science are likely to have some interest in politics. It seems obvious, for instance, that an interest in politics would be a motivating factor in choosing political science as a major. That such an interest also leads to an individual seeking out political information is a widely held view among academics, dating back to at least Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes' (1960) groundbreaking work. Blogs can be sought as another means of gaining political information.

Given the classes they take and their pre-existing interest in politics, it seems reasonable to suggest that political science majors will be more knowledgeable of politics than non-majors, and also be more likely to participate politically. All of these factors would also suggest that political science majors will be more likely to read political blogs than non-majors.

H7: Political science majors will be more likely to read political blogs than non-political science majors.

Methodology

To determine who reads blogs, surveys were distributed among a convenient sample of 308 undergraduate students at Appalachian State University where I am enrolled as a graduate student at the time of this study. While a sample of college students may not provide a true representative sample of all blog readers, I argue this sample will provide a reliable and valid analysis of the general population of blog readers. A public institution, Appalachian State University has an enrollment of around 13,500 undergraduate students with 227 majors available. This allows for a diverse student body which should be reflected in my sample.

College students tend to be in an age group likely to read blogs (Jost and Hipolit 2006). In order to receive a broad representation of students, the sample was selected from a broad array of courses and departments across the Appalachian State University. However, because of the focus of this analysis on political blogs, an over sampling of political science courses was purposely included. Specifically, sixty-six students from two undergraduate business classes, one hundred sixty students from two political science introductory classes, and seventy-seven students from four upper-division political science classes were surveyed. Such a sample will allow for students who most likely have an interest in politics, as well as those in areas with little connection to political science. In order to determine if blog readers tend to be more engaged politically than the average American, respondents were asked

about their political activity and their opinions on political issues. Survey questions concerning ideology and political involvement were selected using survey data from the 2006 American National Election Studies (ANES). ANES's seven-point ideological scale and five-point partisanship scale were used in my survey, as were their questions concerning respondents' discussion of politics with friends or family, and respondents' following of news concerning government and public affairs.

The survey sought to measure respondent's familiarity with blogs. To determine this, students were asked about their familiarity with political blogs, amount of time spent reading them, number of blogs read regularly, the ideological leanings of these blogs, if the respondent has his or her own blog, frequency of posting comments on blogs, and the respondent's favorite blog. These questions should provide for a detailed account of each respondent's familiarity with, as well as interest in, political blogs. These questions are found in Appendix One.

In order to determine the most popular political blogs, the "Truth Laid Bear Ecosystem"¹⁵ was consulted, which ranks blogs by the number of links they receive from other blogs. Using links as a criterion for inclusion is entirely appropriate, since, as Drezner and Farrell (2004) point out, links serve as lifeblood in generating traffic to blogs. Many blogs are discovered through links from other blogs.

The survey also sought to gauge student readership of seven of the most popular political blogs. In order to gain a representative sample of blog readers, three of the top liberal blogs (as of March 23, 2007) – Daily Kos, Talking Points Memo, and Eschaton; three of the top conservative blogs – Michelle Malkin.com, Power Line, and Little Green

¹⁵ Available at <http://truthlaidbear.com/ecosystem.php>

Footballs; and the most popular libertarian-leaning blog (and top blog overall), Instapundit, were included in the survey.

As of March 23, 2007, Instapundit had 4,623 incoming links; Michelle Malkin had 4,475; Daily Kos has 3,864; Power Line had 3,141; Little Green Footballs had 3,707; Talking Points Memo had 2,368; and Eschaton had 2,003, according to the “Truth Laid Bear Ecosystem.” Given that all the blogs rank in the top twenty blogs online in terms of links (as of April 4, 2007), it is clear that they are among the most influential blogs on the Internet.

Then, I examined each respondent’s interest in the Internet by measuring the amount of time spent online and inquiring about the ownership of computers. I also examined the respondent’s political attentiveness and attempted to determine his or her trust in media outlets by asking which news networks are considered the most reliable.

Next, the survey attempted to examine political engagement by asking about voting habits, concern with outcomes of elections, and past involvement in political campaigns, all major aspects of political engagement. This should be quite useful in determining the political engagement of blog readers.

Finally, the survey sought to examine the level of cynicism of the respondent by inquiring about levels of faith in the U.S. electoral system and the news media. These questions were selected with the help of research by Baumgartner and Morris (2006). They are especially useful in determining what correlation, if any, exists between the reading of political blogs and cynicism.

In analyzing the data, respondents were categorized as either blog readers or non-blog readers. Those who responded that they did not read political blogs were coded as “Non-Blog Readers,” while those who reported that they had spent any time at all reading political blogs

were classified as “Blog Readers.” Additionally, a second variable was established with three categories: Non-Blog Readers, Blog Readers, and “Uber-Blog Readers” (uber-blog readers are those who spent more than one hour reading political blogs a week).

Political engagement was measured by analyzing respondents’ concern with the outcome of the 2006 elections, the respondents’ following of news concerning government and public affairs, and the frequency of discussions concerning politics with friends and/or family. Concern with the 2006 elections was recoded with “not concerned at all” and “not very concerned” combined into a single value, with the other two responses remaining individual and separate. The respondents’ following of government news was also recoded; “only now and then” and “hardly at all” were combined into a single value, with the other values remaining individual and separate. For frequency of political discussions, “rarely” and “never” were recoded into a single value, as were “only around elections” and “once a week or less”; “several times a week” and “everyday, or almost everyday” were recoded into the third value. These three recoded variables were then combined into a single variable, called “engagement.”

Political participation is measured in two ways. First, the percentage of respondents who voted in 2004 was compared between blog readers and non-blog readers (those who were not eligible were disregarded). Second, variables measuring if a respondent voted in 2004 were combined with whether or not respondents had volunteered or worked for a political campaign.

Familiarity with political blogs was recoded into two values. Those who described themselves as either very or somewhat familiar were combined into one value, as were those who responded that they were not very familiar or not familiar at.

Respondents' exposure to elite opinion is measured by how many days during the past week they watched the 6:30 national network news, as well and how much time they spent reading print newspapers during the past week. The former was recoded into four values: none, one day, 2-3 days, 4 days or more. The latter was unaltered. These two variables were then combined to form a single variable that measures respondent exposure to elite opinion.

Connection to political parties is measured by how respondents rated their partisanship; those who identified as "Strong Democrats" and "Strong Republicans" are combined into a single value. Those who identified with "other party" were also given a single value. All others were combined into a "weak connection" value. Since the goal is to determine if blog readers tend to be more partisan than non-blog readers, which party a respondent belongs to is less important than his or her attachment to the party.

Ideology is measured similarly; extreme liberals and extreme conservatives are combined into a single value, with all others being combined into a different value, with the exception of those who responded that they had not thought much about this, who were disregarded. Here I am attempting to determine if blog readers tend to be stronger ideologues than non-blog readers, so, as with partisanship, the actual ideology of the respondent is less important than the level of attachment to the ideology.

In examining balkanization, respondents' actual ideological views are more important since I am trying to determine if blog readers read only blogs that confirm to their own views, or if they read a wide range of opinion. In classifying respondents' ideologies, ideological responses were recoded into three categories: liberal, moderate, and conservative. Those who identified as slightly liberal, liberal, or extremely liberal were coded as simply

“liberal.” Conservative responses were recoded similarly. Those who identified as “moderate or middle of the road” were coded as “moderates.” Those who had not thought much about this were disregarded.

The choice of blogs listed by respondents was also recoded into four categories. Those who responded “All liberal” or “Mostly liberal, but some conservative” were recoded as “Liberal.” Similarly, “All conservative” and “Mostly conservative, but some liberal” were recoded simply as “Conservative.” Those who responded that they read a mixture of conservative and liberal blogs were recoded into the “Mix” category. Those who responded “Other/Don’t know” were disregarded.

In measuring cynicism, both faith in the news media and faith in the U.S. electoral system were considered separately. For both variables, “strongly disagree” and “disagree” were recoded simply as “disagree,” while “agree” and “strongly agree” were recoded simply as “agree.” “Neither agree nor disagree” remains an individual value.

Finally, those who responded that they were political science majors were combined with those who listed themselves as double majors (as long as at least one of the majors was political science), those who listed international or comparative politics, and those who listed PS campaign media were combined into a single “political science” value, with all other majors likewise combined as the “other” value.

Results

The sample consisted of 308 undergraduate students at Appalachian State University from a wide variety of academic disciplines who were surveyed during the fall of 2006. As previously stated, political science classes were purposely over sampled due to the focus of this analysis on political blogs which resulted in them amounting to forty-four respondents, fourteen percent of the sample.

The sample proves to be only somewhat blog savvy: eighty-two percent of respondents (249) indicate that they know what a blog is. However, far fewer of those who know what a blog is indicate much familiarity with political blogs; only thirty percent (76) state that they were very or somewhat familiar with political blogs, while nearly seventy percent (176) indicate that they were not very or not at all familiar with political blogs. Likewise, only a small minority, eighteen percent (46), of those who know what a blog is report having their own blog.

The sample also reports significant use of the Internet. A majority, fifty-eight percent (178), report spending at least five hours each week surfing the Internet. Only five percent (16) reported spending less than one hour a week online. Given these numbers, it is not surprising that ninety-eight percent (302) of respondents reported owning a computer.

Of the respondents who listed their gender in the survey, fifty-six percent (169) identified as males, while forty-four percent (132) identified as females. Predictably, the

overwhelming majority, ninety-one percent (274), of respondents are between the ages of 18 and 22, with almost a third (98) being 18 years of age. Respondents also reported a diversity of political ideologies and academic majors and were quite politically active: only twelve percent (38) were eligible to vote but did not do so in 2004.

Blogs and Political Engagement:

A test reveals that a majority of blog readers are highly engaged politically, as opposed to less than one fifth of non-readers (see Table 1). Additionally, more than forty percent of non-readers report only low political engagement, more than four times the percentage of blog readers.

Table 1: Blog Status by Political Engagement

	Low Engagement	Moderate Engagement	High Engagement	N
Non-Blog Reader	42.17%	39.16%	18.67%	166
Blog Reader	9.64%	38.55%	51.81%	83
Pearson Chi Square	39.14			
Significance	.000			
Gamma	.641			

These results are even more pronounced when blog readers are divided into three categories, with over three fourths of uber-blog readers being highly engaged, and less than ten percent reporting low engagement (see Table 2).

Table 2: Blog Status by Political Engagement

	Low Engagement	Moderate Engagement	High Engagement	N
Non-Blog Reader	42.17%	39.16%	18.67%	166
Blog Reader	10.14%	43.48%	46.38%	69
Uber-Blog Reader	7.14%	14.29%	78.57%	14
Pearson Chi-Square	45.78			
Significance	.000			
Gamma	.636			

These findings support my hypothesis that blog readers tend to be more politically active than non-blog readers. It seems safe to conclude that blog readers tend to be highly engaged, although more research will be needed to determine what causal role, if any, blogs have in such engagement.

Blogs and Political Participation:

Blog readers tend to be similarly participating in the political process with nearly ninety percent of blog readers who were eligible reporting that they voted in the 2004 presidential election (see Table 3).

Table 3: Blog Status and Voting

	No	Yes	N
Non-Blog Reader	28%	72%	100
Blog Reader	12%	88%	50
Pearson Chi-Square	4.87		
Significance	.0135		
Lambda	.000		

Table 4 reveals a rather curious finding: uber-blog readers were slightly less likely to vote than blog readers, although they remain high above the non-blog readers' average. While interesting and certainly worthy of further study, the significance (.0425) is highly

questionable given the small number of uber-blog readers in the sample, as well as the only slight variation.

Table 4: Blog Status and Voting

	No	Yes	N
Non-Blog Reader	28%	72%	100
Blog Reader	11.11%	88.89%	36
Uber-Blog Reader	14.29%	85.71%	14
Pearson Chi-Square	4.93		
Significance	.0425		
Lambda	.000		

The second test of political participation yields similar results; again, blog readers are significantly more likely to exhibit high participation than non-readers, with more than a quarter exhibiting high participation (see Table 5). Also, a paltry twelve percent report low participation, confirming my hypothesis that blog readers are more politically engaged than non-readers.

Table 5: Blog Status and Political Participation

	Low Participation	Moderate Participation	High Participation	N
Non-Blog Reader	24%	66%	10%	100
Blog Reader	12%	62%	26%	50
Pearson Chi-Square	8.05			
Significance	.009			
Gamma	.428			

The percentage increases even more among uber-blog readers, indicating that even if their voting rate is slightly (though not significantly) lower than less intense blog readers, their overall political participation may be higher (see Table 6). If true, this would seem to rule out cynicism as a possible reason for the lower voting rate. A higher significance provides further evidence of high participation among blog readers and uber-blog readers.

Table 6: Blog Status and Political Participation

	Low Participation	Moderate Participation	High Participation	N
Non-Blog Reader	24%	66%	10%	100
Blog Reader	11.11%	63.89%	25%	36
Uber-Blog Reader	14.29%	57.14%	28.57%	14
Pearson Chi-Square	8.25			
Significance	.0415			
Gamma	.390			

Blogs and Gender:

There are some gender differences in blog familiarity. While majorities of both male and females know what a blog is, males were significantly more likely to know what a blog is (see Table 7). Only seventy-five percent of females reported knowing what a blog is, while over eighty-seven percent of males in the sample know what a blog is. The test also reveals a high significance (.003).

Table 7: Gender and Knowledge of Blogs

	No	Yes	N
Female	25%	75%	132
Male	12.73%	87.27%	165
Pearson Chi-Square	7.43		
Significance	.003		
Lambda	.065		

In addition to being more likely to know what a blog is, males were also significantly more likely to be familiar with political blogs, with thirty-eight percent reporting familiarity

with political blogs as opposed to only eighteen percent of females who reported familiarity with political blogs (see Table 8). Again, the test reveals a strong significance (.0005).

Table 8: Gender and Familiarity with Political Blogs

	Unfamiliar	Familiar	N
Female	82%	18%	100
Male	61.64%	38.36%	146
Pearson Chi-Square	11.69		
Significance	.0005		
Lambda	.000		

Males are also significantly more likely to read political blogs than females with forty percent reporting that they read political blogs as opposed to only twenty-two percent of females. These findings are likewise significant.

Table 9: Blog Status and Gender

	Non-Blog Reader	Blog Reader	N
Female	78%	22%	100
Male	59.59%	40.41%	146
Pearson Chi-Square	9.11		
Significance	.0015		
Lambda	.000		

One interesting finding is that, while males are more active with blogs in all other areas examined, females are significantly more likely to have blogs themselves (see Table 10). Indeed, a full quarter of female respondents reported having their own blog, nearly twice the percentage among male respondents. However, as Table 11 reveals, the overwhelming majority of these blogs are focused on the owner's personal life and not politics. This is probably the result of females being more likely to start blogs on social networking websites such as MySpace or Facebook, which was reflected in Henning's (2003) research. Though

possibly interesting, such blogs are of little interest to political scientists. Certainly, more research is needed in this area before any solid conclusions can be drawn.

Table 10: Gender and Blog Ownership

	No	Yes	N
Female	74.75%	25.25%	99
Male	86.99%	13.01%	146
Pearson Chi-Square	6		
Significance	.007		
Lambda	.042		

Table 11: Gender and Personal Blog Focus

	Politics	Personal Life	Politics and personal life	Other	N
Female	4%	72%	12%	12%	25
Male	12.50%	62.50%	4.17%	20.83%	24
Pearson Chi Square	2.75				
Significance	0.2155				
Lambda	.100				

These findings seem to confirm my hypothesis that males are more likely to be familiar with political blogs than females, with males showing more familiarity with them in three of the four tests. Males are more likely to know what a blog is, to be familiar with political blogs, and to read political blogs. Only when it comes to starting a blog do females show more familiarity than males, but this familiarity is revealed to be with personal blogs, not political blogs.

Blogs and Exposure to Elite Opinion:

My tests find that the percentage of blog readers exposed to large amounts of elite opinion is nearly three times the percent of non-blog readers exposed to large amounts (see

Table 12). Additionally, less than one-fifth of blog readers report minimal exposure to elite opinion as opposed to almost half of non-blog readers.

Table 12: Blog Status and Elite Opinion Exposure

	Minimal	Moderate	Large	N
Non-Blog Reader	42.26%	45.83%	11.90%	168
Blog Reader	19.28%	45.78%	34.94%	83
Pearson Chi-Square	23.57			
Significance	.000			
Gamma	.503			

My second test reveals that uber-blog readers are even more likely to be exposed to large amounts of political opinion than blog readers (see Table 13), with nearly half of uber-blog readers reporting large amounts of exposure to elite opinion, significantly more than non-blog readers or even blog readers.

Table 13: Blog Status and Elite Opinion Exposure

	Minimal	Moderate	Large	N
Non-Blog Reader	42.26%	45.83%	11.90%	168
Blog Reader	18.84%	47.83%	33.33%	69
Uber-Blog Reader	21.43%	35.71%	42.86%	14
Pearson Chi-Square	24.5			
Significance	.000			
Gamma	.477			

These findings confirm my hypothesis that blog readers tend to be more widely exposed to elite opinion than non-blog readers. This would also seem that there is plenty of room for both blogs and traditional media sites; it appears that largely the same audience is utilizing both. It can also be suggested that “old media” outlets need not fear blogs. Blogs, at least from my findings, seem to be complementing elite opinion, not supplanting it.

Blogs and Partisanship:

One of the more surprising findings of this thesis may be that non-blog readers appear to be more partisan than blog readers (see Table 14), although this could hardly be considered significant. Additionally, my test reveals that blog readers are also slightly less likely to identify with a third party than are non-blog readers, although again the significance is highly questionable.

Table 14: Blog Status and Partisanship

	Strong partisan	Weak/Non-partisan	Other Party	N
Non-Blog Reader	26.38%	67.48%	6.13%	163
Blog Reader	23.46%	71.60%	4.94%	81
Pearson Chi-Square	0.45			
Significance	0.3992			
Lambda	.000			

The results are largely unchanged when I test for uber-blog readers. As Table 15 reveals, the percentage of uber-blog readers who identify as strong partisans increases slightly over that of non-blog readers. Additionally, uber-blog readers are also slightly more likely than non-blog readers or blog readers to identify with a third party. However, as with the previous test, these findings cannot be considered significant.

Table 15: Blog Status and Partisanship

	Strong partisan	Weak/Non-partisan	Other Party	N
Non-Blog Reader	26.38%	67.48%	6.13%	163
Blog Reader	22.06%	73.53%	4.41%	68
Uber-Blog Reader	30.77%	61.54%	7.69%	13
Pearson Chi-Square	1.21			
Significance	0.43831			
Lambda	.000			

These findings seem to discount my hypothesis that blog readers will be more partisan than non-blog readers. Indeed, it appears that the relationship between reading blogs and partisanship is minimal at best, as blog readers and non-blog readers alike show similar rates of partisanship. Clearly, more research is needed here before any definitive conclusions can be drawn.

Blogs and Ideology:

A test of blog readers and ideological strength shows that blog readers tend to be less ideological than non-blog readers (see Table 16). However, the significance is highly questionable due to the extremely small variation between the two (7.14% of non-blog readers report being strong ideologues as opposed to 6.02% of blog readers). It seems reasonable to assume from my findings that blog readership does not significantly correlate with strong ideological leanings.

Table 16: Blog Status and Ideology

	Strong Ideologue	Weak/Non-Ideologue	N
Non-Blog Reader	7.14%	92.86%	154
Blog Reader	6.02%	93.98%	83
Pearson Chi-Square	0.11		
Significance	.3715		
Lambda	.000		

However, things change when uber-blog readers are considered (see Table 17). I find that blog readers tend to be highly non-ideological, while uber-blog readers are very ideological, with more than a fifth reporting themselves as being strong ideologues.

Additionally, this test yields a strong significance (.02). Thus my hypothesis appears to be confirmed, at least for uber-blog readers, who are much more ideological than non-readers or blog readers.

Table 17: Blog Status and Ideology

	Strong Ideologue	Weak/Non-Ideologue	N
Non-Blog Reader	7.14%	92.86%	154
Blog Reader	2.90%	97.10%	69
Uber-Blog Reader	21.43%	78.57%	14
Pearson Chi-Square	6.46		
Significance	.02		
Lambda	.000		

These findings prove quite difficult to explain, and, like the partisanship findings, clearly needs more research before any definitive conclusions can be reached. Perhaps my findings suggest that excessive exposure to political blogs tend to drive readers toward one ideology or another while the impact of moderate exposure to political blogs is not very influential in ideological leanings.

Blogs and Balkanization:

In testing for balkanization (the phenomena of viewing only news and commentary that supports one's own political leanings), I find that both liberals and conservatives are very homogenous in their blog readership, as Table 18 reveals. My findings appear to suggest that liberals are more balkanized than conservatives: Eighty percent of liberals reported reading only or mostly liberal blogs, and none reported reading only or mostly conservative blogs. For conservatives, the numbers are also lopsided, although less so: Fifty-nine percent reported reading only or mostly conservative blogs, and only twelve percent reported reading

only or mostly liberal blogs. Theorists can debate the normative implications of this phenomenon, but it would appear that balkanization is indeed a reality.

Table 18: Blog Status and Balkanization

	Liberal Blogs	Mixture of Blogs	Conservative Blogs	N
Conservative	12.24%	28.57%	59.18%	49
Moderate	28.57%	35.71%	35.71%	14
Liberal	80%	20%	0%	35
Pearson Chi-Square	46.31			
Significance	.000			
Lambda	.422			

My data suggest my hypothesis and Terry Teachout's (2005) warning are supported: individuals tend to read mostly those blogs that confirm their own ideological worldview. Only moderates read a fairly even mixture of blogs; conservatives overwhelmingly read conservative blogs, and liberals overwhelmingly liberal blogs.

Blogs and Cynicism:

My findings suggest that blog readership would appear not necessarily to make individuals more or less cynical toward the U.S. electoral system, but rather to push individuals in one direction or another: a higher percentage of blog readers reported both having and lacking faith in the U.S. electoral system, and comparatively few reported no opinion (see Table 19). This is most likely the result of blog readers being more interested and informed about politics, and thus having devoted more thought to the subject than non-readers, who are more likely to be apolitical.

Table 19: Blog Status and Faith in U.S. Electoral System

	Disagree	Neither agree/disagree	Agree	N
Non-Blog Reader	24.70%	34.94%	40.36%	166
Blog Reader	35.80%	18.52%	45.68%	81
Pearson Chi-Square	7.70%			
Significance	.0105			
Lambda	.000			

This is not to say that blog readership cannot drive faith in the electoral system, however. As Table 20 reveals, uber-blog readers reported a strong faith in the system: over sixty percent agreed that they had faith in the U.S. electoral system, significantly higher than non-blog readers or blog readers. Additionally, only a small minority, less than eight percent, reported no opinion on the matter. Testing also reveals this finding to be highly significant (.026).

Table 20: Blog Status and Faith in U.S. Electoral System

	Disagree	Neither agree/disagree	Agree	N
Non-Blog Reader	24.70%	34.94%	40.36%	166
Blog Reader	36.76%	20.59%	42.65%	68
Uber-Blog Reader	30.77%	7.69%	61.54%	13
Pearson Chi-Square	9.38			
Significance	.026			
Lambda	.000			

These findings may point to a tendency toward idealism among those most involved in politics. Certainly, political activists and those heavily involved in the process believe that the government can work, or, at the very least, can be responsive to the people. After all, why bother to get involved if the government is irresponsive? Thus, it seems reasonable to suggest that uber-blog readers, who, as I have shown, tend to be more ideological, might also be more idealistic about the U.S. electoral process.

Blog readers may be somewhat divided on faith in the U.S. electoral system, but they are overwhelmingly negative in their view of the media, with seventy-five percent reporting no faith (see Table 21). This is only slightly higher than non-readers; however, sixty-eight percent of them likewise report negative views of the media. These negative ratings of the media from across the board are probably the result of widespread media criticism from all ends of the political spectrum; liberals frequently criticize Fox News and talk radio, while conservatives criticize the mainstream media in general; both sides claiming the media has an ideological (or at least big business) bias. The difference between blog readers' and non-blog readers' view of the media does not appear to be highly significant (.24).

Table 21: Blog Status and Faith in Media

	Disagree	Neither agree/disagree	Agree	N
Non-Blog Reader	68.07%	20.48%	11.45%	166
Blog Reader	75.31%	14.81%	9.88%	81
Pearson Chi-Square	1.47			
Significance	.24			
Lambda	.000			

My second test reveals an interesting, although not necessarily significant, finding (see Table 22). Uber-blog readers report slightly less negative feelings toward the media than blog readers. Perhaps this is more evidence of idealism among highly involved blog readers; or perhaps they have sampled numerous media sources and found ones they appreciate, thus tempering their own cynicism of the media as a whole. Again, more research will be needed before any definitive conclusions can be drawn.

Table 22: Blog Status and Faith in the Media

	Disagree	Neither agree/disagree	Agree	N
Non-Blog Reader	68.07%	20.48%	11.45%	166
Blog Reader	76.47%	14.71%	8.82%	68
Uber-Blog Reader	69.23%	15.38%	15.38%	13
Pearson Chi-Square	1.98			
Significance	.3695			
Lambda	.000			

These findings neither confirm nor disprove my hypothesis that blog readers are more cynical than non-blog readers. Instead, they seem to suggest that blog readers have stronger held beliefs concerning the trustworthiness of the U.S. electoral system and the media. This is not unexpected; as I have demonstrated, blog readers tend to be more politically sophisticated. In light of this, these findings are not surprising.

Blogs and Academic Majors:

Table 23 reveals that political science majors are disproportionately more likely to read political blogs than those respondents with other majors. In fact, a majority of political science majors report reading political blogs, while less than a third of other majors do. This is almost certainly the result of political science majors' interest in politics and their desire to seek out political information.

Table 23: Blog Status and Academic Major

	Non-Blog Reader	Blog Reader	N
Political Science	47.50%	52.50%	40
Other	70.28%	29.72%	212
Pearson Chi-Square	7.86		
Significance	.0025		
Lambda	.016		

These findings do not change substantially when I control for uber-blog readers (see Table 24), although it is interesting to note that nearly three times the percentage of uber-blog readers are political science majors than other majors.

Table 24: Blog Status and Academic Major

	Non-Blog Reader	Blog Reader	Uber-Blog Reader	N
Political Science	47.50%	40%	12.50%	40
Other	70.28%	25.47%	4.25%	212
Pearson Chi-Square	9.3			
Significance	.005			
Lambda	.000			

Confirming my hypothesis, the data here clearly indicated that political science majors are more likely to read political blogs than non-political science majors. These results may be among the easiest of my findings to interpret. Presumably, they reflect a simple interest in politics that is present in most people who choose to major in the subject. Those who do not major in political science might have an interest in politics, but it is a safe bet that a political science major has such an interest. However, that blogs are widely read among people who care about politics does suggest they might have some influence in American politics; it is those who care about politics who wield the most influence in the system.

Taken together, these findings indicate that blog readers tend to be highly engaged and interested in politics. My findings indicate that blog readers are not significantly more partisan or ideological than non-readers, contrary to the findings of Coleman (2004, 2006), and possibly revealing Kline's (2005) belief that blogs could lead to a viable third party to be overly optimistic.

Blog readers are not significantly more cynical than non-readers. They do, however, tend to have stronger opinions on issues, notably the U.S. electoral system. Blog readers also

tend to be highly skeptical of the mainstream media, but not significantly more so than non-readers. Blog readers also tend to read mostly blogs that confirm their own ideological worldview, which could result in further balkanization.

It would seem then that the typical blog reader is a male with a keen interest in politics. He would have well formed views on the U.S. electoral system, but would not be significantly more partisan than a non-reader. He would generally seek out blogs that confirm his ideology – if a liberal, he probably reads the Daily Kos, and if a conservative probably Michelle Malkin. He generally votes in elections and is concerned with their outcomes, and perhaps is slightly more idealistic than a non-blog reader. It is also highly likely that he is majoring in political science.

Conclusion

My findings support the conclusion that blog readers tend to be highly engaged politically and have strong views on the American political system. Blog readers do not tend to be overwhelmingly more or less cynical than non-readers, but they are much more likely to have a formed solid opinions. Few of them are undecided in their views of the media or the political system. This engagement also carries over into other forms of participation: blog readers are more likely to participate in the political process than are non-readers. This strong tendency toward political engagement and participation probably explains why blog readers tend to disproportionately major in political science.

One possible surprise is that even though blog readers are more strongly engaged and participate politically with more frequency than non-readers, there is little evidence that blog readers are more ideological or partisan than non-readers. Perhaps this is the result of them not feeling represented in either of the two major political parties.

My research also indicates that males tend to be more familiar with blogs than females, although females are significantly more likely to have started their own (non-political) blogs.

Blog readers are also a heavily balkanized group: very few blog readers visit blogs that are ideologically opposed to their own views. There does appear to be empirical backing for Terry Teachout's (2005) fears of balkanization.

One of the many often heard claims of blog proponents is that blogs are revolutionizing the American political system. Today, virtually anyone has the power to share his or her political views with the world. Realistically, however, very few bloggers will achieve this. Most will undoubtedly toil in obscurity. Having said this, there is the potential for a star to rise in the blogosphere. Glenn Reynolds of Instapundit.com, for example, was not widely known before he started his blog, and now he is the most famous blogger in the world. Gaining a large audience is the result of incisive commentary, frequent posts, a recognizable persona, and, probably, some luck as well.

By giving power to the masses, blogs are indeed a natural extension of American democracy. Average Americans now have the power to challenge political elites. Theoretically, everyone's voice can now be heard. Americans can now receive information from as many different sources as they wish. Certainly, this would be considered a positive by most normative democratic theorists.

The potential is not all positive, however. Teachout (2005) does appear correct in her concern about balkanization – most blog readers are only reading blogs that confirm their own ideological worldview. Blogs make it possible to avoid opposing viewpoints quite easily. Most blogs are commentary driven and have a clear agenda. As a result, they do not usually tell both sides of the story. As a result, someone who reads only blogs confirming his or her own predispositions is likely to be ill informed. Additionally, a blog reader might come to believe that only one side's arguments are valid, and the opposing side need only be ignored at best or demonized at worst. Additionally, blogs often rely on slogans and stereotypes over substance, which may further the trend toward sound byte campaigns and style over substance in selecting candidates.

In a nation already plagued by bitter partisan divides, the consequences of this could be significant. Instead of desiring leaders who consider all angles of complex issues, such partisans will want leaders who are ideologues that always support “liberal” or “conservative” positions. The result could be even more gridlock and an even more polarized nation.

Blogs do represent a pure, populist democracy with all the advantages and disadvantages associated with it. The common person has more power, and passions will likely be flared. But, as my research shows, blog readers are not significantly more partisan or ideological than non-readers, which provides hope that fears of balkanization are overstated. Ultimately, American democracy will likely survive the onslaught of the blogs just as it has survived past perceived “threats” like talk radio. It should also be noted that, since blog readers tend to be sophisticated, they should be governed by the constraints of highly sophisticated individuals that Coverse (1964) pointed out decades ago.

Taken as a whole, my research supports the idea that blogs can be important to the political system. While an overwhelming majority of my sample does not read them, those who do tend to be highly involved and engaged. Individuals also tend to read blogs that confirm their ideological views. This is where Kline (2005) and the popular liberal blogger Markos Moulitsas Zuniga contend that the power of blogs lies. Because of this, blogs may be an effective avenue for politicians and political elites to reach their supports and to rally the base. Indeed, as we have seen, some politicians have already done this.

Blogs will also be highly attractive to politicians because they allow politicians to speak directly to the voters. The filter of the media, at least in the blogosphere, can be removed if a politician starts his or her own blog. Granted, politicians are likely to continue

to speak in sound bytes and use talking points and press releases, but an interested citizen can at least get information directly from the politician (or, at least, his campaign) without any spin from the media.

Since blogs are generally read by sympathetic readers, they will also create an attractive avenue for fundraising as well as to recruit sympathetic volunteers. Howard Dean did this in 2004, and many more candidates will likely follow his lead.

Some optimistic observers of blogs have suggested that they will bring about the fall of the mainstream media. This does not seem realistic. As my research indicates, blog readers are more likely to be exposed to elite opinion. Instead of replacing elite opinion, blogs are supplementing it.

Having said this, the media must be more careful, as millions of blogs are now keeping an eye of them. If the media serves as a watchdog for the public, blogs serve as a watchdog for the media. The downfall of Dan Rather is simply one example of this. With bloggers meticulously examining everything the media produces, media figures are experiencing more accountability than they ever thought possible. As a result, the quality of the media may be improved by the blogosphere. News agencies must be more careful today that what they are reporting is accurate, because if it is not, chances are someone, somewhere will find out and expose it.

Most of the mainstream media seems to be co-opting blogs. The websites of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the BBC, CNN, Fox News, ABC, MSNBC, and CBS all boast blogs. The mainstream media will likely continue to use blogs as a means of communicating informally with viewers and showing the personalities of

reporters and hosts. Although often viewed as enemies, newspapers and television stations do not always have to fear blogs. Incorporating them into their own formats has its advantages.

As for the future of blogs, it seems certain that the growth cannot continue forever. Ultimately, the number of blogs, as well as the number of blog readers, will stabilize. Indeed, we may have already reached this point. This does not mean that blogs will become irrelevant. The numbers of readers a blog has is not as important as *who* reads the blog. If elites read blogs, as evidence suggests, they will remain influential.

As with most technology, blogs are always in a state of evolution. It seems likely that the blogosphere will be very different in five years than it is today. Perhaps blogs will evolve into something else entirely. The rise of Youtube.com and podcasting makes online interaction even more personal. A new type of blog – called a “vlog” – is also beginning to appear, which uses video technology as a major part of the interaction. It remains to be seen if “vlogosphere” will supplant the blogosphere.

It will also be interesting to see what future legislation has in store for blogs. There have already been movements in Congress to regulate blogs. These movements will likely continue. Any efforts to regulate the blogosphere will likely be opposed by bloggers of various political persuasions. For the time being, at least, the blogosphere remains unregulated – a true free market of ideas.

This thesis creates a broad overview of who reads blogs that may serve as a starting point for future researchers. Since blog readers have not been widely examined in the political science literature, there is very little existing literature from which to begin. The thesis may suffer from a small sample whose members are all students at a public university

in the mountains of North Carolina. Time and financial resources did not allow me to survey a broader sample. Future researchers with greater resources may consider doing so.

My research opens the doors for much future research. One possible area for examination is the causal role of blogs in engagement and participation. While my research finds that blog readers are highly engaged and frequently participate, it says nothing about the possible causal link between the two. Determining if such a link exists would be an interesting and important project for future study.

Another important area of future study would be the puzzling overrepresentation of female bloggers. While females are significantly less familiar with blogs, they are significantly more likely to have started their own blogs. While these blogs are most likely non-political, this has not been confirmed by my research. Future researchers might consider examining the types of blogs both males and females are likely to own and consider examining gender differences (and the reasons for these differences).

Finally, future researchers may consider examining why blog readers tend to be less ideological and partisan than non-readers, but why uber-blog readers are more strongly ideological (yet very non-partisan). My research also indicates a tendency toward third parties among blog readers. Future researchers might consider determining why this is the case, and which third parties they gravitate toward.

Political participation is motivated by an interest in politics and encouragement to participate. Blog readers tend to be highly interested, and blogs themselves often encourage likeminded individuals to participate. Thus, it is not surprising that the reading of blogs and political participation appear to go hand in hand.

Ultimately, this thesis has found that blog readers are engaged, informed individuals with a keen interest in politics. What they lack in numbers, they make up for in intensity. If, as Zaller (1992, 6) argues, “opinion is a marriage of information and predisposition,” blogs may play an important role in the future of politics, as they are a source of information usually transmitted to readers of similar predispositions. Politicians ignore bloggers and blog readers at their own peril.

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APPENDIX A

Survey of Blogs and Politics

Political Participation Survey

The following survey is part of a MA thesis project in the Department of Political Science. It is designed to better understand college students' attitudes and use of technology regarding politics. Participation in the survey is completely **voluntary** and you are welcome to return the survey without answering any questions. However, your participation in this survey will assist a fellow ASU student and will improve our understanding of students' political attitudes and behavior. These surveys contain no personal identifiers and all of your responses will remain confidential. Only aggregate analyses will be reported in the final thesis which will be available on the Department of Political Science Graduate Web Page in the Spring of 2007. If you have any questions or comments, please contact Phillip Ardoin at ardoinj@appstate.edu.

1) Do you know what a blog is? **(If you answer "No" to this question, please skip ahead to question number 12 on the next page.)**

- a) Yes
- b) No

2) How familiar are you with political blogs?

- a) Very familiar
- b) Somewhat familiar
- c) Not very familiar
- d) Not familiar at all

3) How many hours each week do you normally spend reading political blogs?

- a) More than 5 hours
- b) 3-5 hours
- c) 1-3 hours
- d) Less than 1 hour
- e) I do not read political blogs

4) How many political blogs do you read on a regular basis (more than once a week)?

- a) None
- b) 1
- c) 2-5
- d) 6-10
- e) More than 10

5) Most political blogs have some sort of ideological orientation. How would you describe the ideological orientations of the blogs you read?

- a) All liberal
- b) Mostly liberal, but some conservative
- c) An even mix of liberal & conservative blogs
- d) Mostly conservative, but some liberal
- e) All conservative
- f) Other/Don't Know

6) Do you have your own personal blog (if you answer "No," please skip ahead to question number 8)?

- a) Yes
- b) No

7) What is the primary focus of your blog?

- a) Politics
- b) My personal life
- c) Other (please specify):

8) Do you frequently post comments on blogs?

- a) Yes, on most of the blogs I visit
- b) Yes, on a few of the blogs I visit
- c) Rarely
- d) Never

9) What is your favorite blog?

10) How often do you visit this blog?

- a) Everyday
- b) 4-7 times a week
- c) 2-3 times a week
- d) Once a week
- e) Less than once a week

11) Below is a list of seven of the most popular political blogs (plus a blog of your choice). For each blog, please mark the appropriate number of times you visit that blog:

	Everyday	More than once a week	Once a week	Once a month	Rarely	Never
Instapundit						
Daily Kos						
Talking Points Memo						
Eschaton (Atois)						
Michelle Malkin.com						
Power Line						
Little Green Footballs						
Other (specify):						

12) How many hours each week do you normally spend surfing the Internet?

- a) 10 or more hours
- b) 5-10 hours
- c) 1-5 hours
- d) Less than 1 hour
- e) I do not use the Internet

13) Do you own a computer?

- a) Yes
- b) No

14) During the past week, how many days did you watch the 6:30 NATIONAL network news broadcasts on ABC, NBC, or CBS?

- a) None
- b) 1 Day
- c) 2-3 days
- d) 4-6 days
- e) Everyday

15) Which of the following TV news sources do you consider most reliable (please rank your top 3 by placing a number in the space provided, 1 = most trusted, 2 = 2nd most trusted, 3 = 3rd most trusted.)?

- a) ABC ____
- b) NBC ____
- c) MSNBC ____
- d) CBS ____
- e) Fox News ____
- f) PBS ____
- g) CNN ____
- h) Other (please specify: _____)
- i) No preference
- j) Don't know

16) How much time have you spent reading newspapers (PRINT; not online) during the past week?

- a) None
- b) Less than 1 hour
- c) 1-3 hours
- d) More than 3 hours

17) Have you ever volunteered for or worked on a political campaign?

- a) Yes
- b) No

18) Did you vote in 2004?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) No, I wasn't eligible

19) How would you rate your concern with the outcome of the Fall 2006 elections?

- a) Very much concerned
- b) Somewhat concerned
- c) Not very concerned
- d) Not concerned at all

20) Some people follow the news about government and public affairs most of the time, even when no election is going on. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?

- a) Most of the time
- b) Some of the time
- c) Only now and then
- d) Hardly at all

21) How often do you talk about politics with friends or family?

- a) Everyday, or almost everyday
- b) Several times a week
- c) Once a week or less
- d) Only around elections
- e) Rarely
- f) Never

22) Are you registered to vote?

- a) Yes
- b) No

23) When it comes to politics, how would you think of yourself?

- a) Extremely liberal
- b) Liberal
- c) Slightly Liberal
- d) Moderate or middle of the road
- e) Slightly conservative
- f) Conservative
- g) Extremely Conservative
- h) Haven't thought much about this

- 24) Generally speaking, which of the following categories best describes your partisanship?
- a) Strong Democrat
 - b) Independent Democrat
 - c) Independent
 - d) Independent Republican
 - e) Strong Republican
 - f) Other Party
- 25) Do you agree with this statement: "I have faith in the U.S. electoral system"?
- a) Strongly disagree
 - b) Disagree
 - c) Neither agree nor disagree
 - d) Agree
 - e) Strongly agree
- 26) Do you agree or disagree with this statement: "I trust the news media to cover political events fairly and accurately"?
- a) Strongly disagree
 - b) Disagree
 - c) Neither agree nor disagree
 - d) Agree
 - e) Strongly agree
- 27) What is your gender?
- a) Male
 - b) Female
- 28) What is your age? _____
- 29) What is your major or planned major? _____
- 30) Not counting this semester, how many semesters of college have you completed? _____

Thanks for completing this survey!!

APPENDIX B

Compressed Data Frequencies

How familiar are you with political blogs?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not familiar at all	84	27.3	33.3	33.3
	Not very familiar	92	29.9	36.5	69.8
	Somewhat familiar	68	22.1	27.0	96.8
	Very familiar	8	2.6	3.2	100.0
	Total	252	81.8	100.0	
Missing	System	56	18.2		
Total		308	100.0		

How many hours each week do you normally spend reading political blogs?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	I do not read political blogs	168	54.5	66.7	66.7
	Less than 1 hour	70	22.7	27.8	94.4
	1-2 hours	10	3.2	4.0	98.4
	3-5 hours	1	.3	.4	98.8
	More than 5 hours	3	1.0	1.2	100.0
	Total	252	81.8	100.0	
Missing	System	56	18.2		
Total		308	100.0		

How would you describe the ideological orientation of the blogs you read?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	All liberal	10	3.2	4.2	4.2
	Mostly liberal, but some conservative	30	9.7	12.6	16.8
	An even mix of liberal and conservative blogs	26	8.4	10.9	27.7
	Mostly conservative, but some liberal	30	9.7	12.6	40.3
	All conservative	4	1.3	1.7	42.0
	Other/Don't know	138	44.8	58.0	100.0
	Total	238	77.3	100.0	
Missing	System	70	22.7		
Total		308	100.0		

How many hours in past week did you watch national news?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	None	138	44.8	45.0	45.0
	1 Day	79	25.6	25.7	70.7
	2-3 days	69	22.4	22.5	93.2
	4-6 days	21	6.8	6.8	100.0
	Total	307	99.7	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.3		
Total		308	100.0		

How much time have you spent reading newspapers during past week?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	None	51	16.6	16.6	16.6
	Less than 1 hour	154	50.0	50.0	66.6
	1-3 hours	87	28.2	28.2	94.8
	More than 3 hours	16	5.2	5.2	100.0
	Total	308	100.0	100.0	

Have you ever volunteered for or worked on a political campaign?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	263	85.4	85.4	85.4
	Yes	45	14.6	14.6	100.0
	Total	308	100.0	100.0	

Did you vote in 2004?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No, I wasn't eligible	136	44.2	44.2	44.2
	No	38	12.3	12.3	56.5
	Yes	134	43.5	43.5	100.0
	Total	308	100.0	100.0	

How would you rate your concern with the outcome of the Fall 2006 elections?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not concerned at all	19	6.2	6.2	6.2
	Not very concerned	79	25.6	25.6	31.8
	Somewhat concerned	144	46.8	46.8	78.6
	Very much concerned	66	21.4	21.4	100.0
	Total	308	100.0	100.0	

Some people follow the news about government and public affairs most of the time, even when no election is going on. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all??

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Hardly at all	125	40.6	40.8	40.8
	Only now and then	99	32.1	32.4	73.2
	Some of the time	82	26.6	26.8	100.0
	Total	306	99.4	100.0	
Missing	4	1	.3		
	System	1	.3		
	Total	2	.6		
Total		308	100.0		

How often do you talk about politics with friends or family?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never	82	26.6	26.8	26.8
	Rarely	27	8.8	8.8	35.6
	Only around elections	78	25.3	25.5	61.1
	Several times a week	74	24.0	24.2	85.3
	Everyday, or almost everyday	45	14.6	14.7	100.0
	Total	306	99.4	100.0	
Missing	System	2	.6		
Total		308	100.0		

When it comes to politics, how would you think of yourself?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Haven't thought much about this	10	3.2	3.3	3.3
	Extremely conservative	10	3.2	3.3	6.6
	Conservative	89	28.9	29.5	36.1
	Slightly conservative	49	15.9	16.2	52.3
	Moderate or middle of the road	61	19.8	20.2	72.5
	Slightly liberal	26	8.4	8.6	81.1
	Liberal	46	14.9	15.2	96.4
	Extremely liberal	11	3.6	3.6	100.0
	Total	302	98.1	100.0	
Missing	System	6	1.9		
Total		308	100.0		

How would you describe your partisanship?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strong Democrat	13	4.2	4.3	4.3
	Independent Democrat	55	17.9	18.4	22.7
	Independent	97	31.5	32.4	55.2
	Independent Republican	52	16.9	17.4	72.6
	Strong Republican	55	17.9	18.4	91.0
	Other party	26	8.4	8.7	99.7
	Libertarian	1	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	299	97.1	100.0	
Missing	System	9	2.9		
Total		308	100.0		

Do you agree with this statement: "I have faith in the U.S. electoral system"?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	20	6.5	6.6	6.6
	Disagree	60	19.5	19.9	26.5
	Neither agree nor disagree	102	33.1	33.8	60.3
	Agree	107	34.7	35.4	95.7
	Strongly agree	13	4.2	4.3	100.0
	Total	302	98.1	100.0	
Missing	System	6	1.9		
Total		308	100.0		

Do you agree or disagree with this statement: "I trust the news media to cover political events fairly and accurately"?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	67	21.8	22.2	22.2
	Disagree	139	45.1	46.0	68.2
	Neither agree nor disagree	63	20.5	20.9	89.1
	Agree	32	10.4	10.6	99.7
	Strongly agree	1	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	302	98.1	100.0	
Missing	System	6	1.9		
Total		308	100.0		

What is your major?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	political science	33	10.7	11.1	11.1
	history	9	2.9	3.0	14.1
	business	17	5.5	5.7	19.9
	education	4	1.3	1.3	21.2
	recreational mgt	2	.6	.7	21.9
	music ind	5	1.6	1.7	23.6
	athletic training	1	.3	.3	23.9
	public relations	5	1.6	1.7	25.6
	broadcasting	2	.6	.7	26.3
	graphic art	7	2.3	2.4	28.6
	communication	4	1.3	1.3	30.0
	construction tech	5	1.6	1.7	31.6
	construction mgt	2	.6	.7	32.3
	marketing	1	.3	.3	32.7
	industrial tech	1	.3	.3	33.0
	psychology	5	1.6	1.7	34.7
	accounting	6	1.9	2.0	36.7
	small business/entrepreneurship	2	.6	.7	37.4
	business mgt	6	1.9	2.0	39.4
	corporate PR	1	.3	.3	39.7
	business and psychology	1	.3	.3	40.1
	management	1	.3	.3	40.4
	criminal justice	49	15.9	16.5	56.9
	business - hospitality and tourism mgt	1	.3	.3	57.2
	interior design	1	.3	.3	57.6
	graphic design	1	.3	.3	57.9
	CIS	3	1.0	1.0	58.9
	GAIT	3	1.0	1.0	59.9
	communication/advertising	1	.3	.3	60.3
	community and regional planning	1	.3	.3	60.6
	applied math	1	.3	.3	60.9
	undecided	6	1.9	2.0	63.0
	biology	1	.3	.3	63.3
	spanish	1	.3	.3	63.6
	business/journalism	1	.3	.3	64.0
	middle grades education	2	.6	.7	64.6
	social work	7	2.3	2.4	67.0
	communcation/electronic media	1	.3	.3	67.3

environmental politics	1	.3	.3	67.7
elementary ed	40	13.0	13.5	81.1
theatre	1	.3	.3	81.5
political science/history ed	1	.3	.3	81.8
international business	1	.3	.3	82.2
political science and criminal justice	2	.6	.7	82.8
creative writing and photography	1	.3	.3	83.2
computer science	1	.3	.3	83.5
prelaw	11	3.6	3.7	87.2
psychology and criminal justice	1	.3	.3	87.5
information systems	1	.3	.3	87.9
creative writing	1	.3	.3	88.2
psychology/social work	1	.3	.3	88.6
business/marketing	1	.3	.3	88.9
business/criminal justice	1	.3	.3	89.2
psychology/CIS	1	.3	.3	89.6
town and city mgt	5	1.6	1.7	91.2
exercice science	1	.3	.3	91.6
film	1	.3	.3	91.9
secondary ed - history	2	.6	.7	92.6
international/comparative politics	3	1.0	1.0	93.6
elementary ed/spanish	3	1.0	1.0	94.6
photography	1	.3	.3	94.9
english/secondary ed	1	.3	.3	95.3
biochemistry	1	.3	.3	95.6
secondary ed - sociology	1	.3	.3	96.0
law	1	.3	.3	96.3
communication/political science	1	.3	.3	96.6
business administration	1	.3	.3	97.0
biology - premed	1	.3	.3	97.3
early childhood development	1	.3	.3	97.6
internation/comparative and spanisj	1	.3	.3	98.0
banking/insurance	1	.3	.3	98.3
political science and journalism	1	.3	.3	98.7
journalism	1	.3	.3	99.0
broadcasting/political science	1	.3	.3	99.3
history and criminal justice	1	.3	.3	99.7
political science campaign media	1	.3	.3	100.0
Total	297	96.4	100.0	

Missing	System	11	3.6		
Total		308	100.0		

VITA

John Norris Brown was born in Harriman, TN, on March 25, 1981. He attended elementary schools in that city and graduated from Harriman High School in May 1999. After high school, he received an Associate of Science degree from Roane State Community College. He then attended Cumberland University before transferring to the University of Tennessee in Knoxville from which he was awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree in 2004. In the fall of 2005 he enrolled in graduate classes at Appalachian State University and began study toward a Master of Arts degree in political science with a concentration in American Government. The M.A. was awarded in May 2007.

Mr. Brown is a member of North Carolina Epsilon Chapter of Phi Gamma Mu as well as the Eta Tau chapter of Pi Sigma Alpha. His home address is P.O. Box 1201, Harriman, TN, 37748. His parents are The Hon. George W. Brown and Dr. Patricia Norris Brown, both of Harriman.

John Norris Brown maintains his own blog at <http://johnnorrisbrown.com/blog>.