

**MEMBERS OF CONGRESS RESPOND
TO THE POLITICAL BLOGOSPHERE**

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by NICK MCCLELLAN

Dr. Betty Winfield, Thesis Committee Chair

May 2010

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS RESPOND
TO THE POLITICAL BLOGOSPHERE

presented by Nick McClellan, a candidate for the degree of Master of Journalism, and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Betty Winfield

Professor Daryl Moen

Professor David Konisky

Professor Glenn Leshner

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee for their valuable advice as I explored my research. Specifically, I would like to credit the guidance of the chair of my committee, Dr. Betty Winfield, whose instruction in the field of media and politics provided the seeds of my research, and whose extraordinary patience allowed my successful pursuit of this research to occur.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	II
LIST OF FIGURES	IV
ABSTRACT	1
CHAPTER	
1. Introduction.....	2
2. The emerging blogosphere and the narrow potential for policy influence.....	6
3. Examining narrow conditions for blog agenda response from members of Congress	20
4. Members of Congress' seeming ignorance of blog content.....	32
5. The evolving status of new media in a nonelection year	52
6. A minute response; a reason for further research.....	62
REFERENCES	67
FIGURES.....	72
APPENDICES	78
A. Collection of blog content.....	79
B. Words omitted from CatPac II analysis	80
C. Selection of issues	81
D: Issue queries	87

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
4.1: Issue tallies	73
4.2: H1a hypothesis test	74
4.3: H1b hypothesis test.....	74
4.4: H1c hypothesis test.....	75
4.5: H2a hypothesis test	76
4.6: H2b hypothesis test.....	77
B.1: List of concepts omitted from CatPac II analysis.....	80
C.1: Concepts highlighted among the combined content of all blogs.....	81
C.2: Hot Air concepts.....	82
C.3: Michelle Malkin concepts	83
C.4: DailyKos concepts	84
C.5: FiveThirtyEight concepts	85
C.6: Talking Points Memo concepts.....	86

MEMBERS OF CONGRESS RESPOND TO THE POLITICAL BLOGOSPHERE

Nick McClellan

Betty Winfield, Thesis Chair

ABSTRACT

As traditional media organizations faced challenging financial straights, closing their Washington news bureaus, an opportunity emerged for political blogs to seize upon the changing nature of political communication. New technologies and forms of communication forced the distinction between the traditional mainstream media and the new media formats, such as blogs. Blogs exhibited differing media effects and cultivated unique relationships among policymakers. This research encompassed the ability for blogs to elicit agenda response from policymakers on certain episodic news issues that blogs seized upon. Exploring the potential for this effect among members of the House of Representatives following the ascension of a new president in the nonelection year of 2009, this study revealed a diminished potential for policymaker response to the issues selected by the blogs in this study. While pointing to the long-supported view that blogs remain heavily dependent on the mainstream media for significant agenda-setting effect, the results of the study may confirm previous research that predicted blog influence would wane as the mainstream media and policymakers adjusted to the new medium's potential disruption.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

As the media environment adjusts to diversifying technologies and changing media, and some organizations shutter Washington D.C. bureaus (Ryfe, 2007; West, 2009), an opportunity emerges for new media to gain a greater share of attention from policymakers. Blogs, one form of new media originating on the Internet, constitutes a form of political speech growing in popularity and in recognition by policymakers. In 2010, in fact, the word blog appeared for the first time in a U.S. Supreme Court opinion, used by Justice Anthony Kennedy to support his reasoning in the historic campaign finance case *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, removing finance restrictions on corporate political speech. Acknowledging the changing nature of political speech in the past decade and the role blogs played, this study seeks to examine how policymakers respond to the issues discussed in this new medium.

Programmer Jorn Barger in 1997 first coined the term “weblog” (Perlmutter, 2008), the smallest piece of the collected medium of blogs on the Internet, known as the blogosphere. Many different blogs, from political blogs to personal blogs, developed over the course of the last decade (Bloom, 2003). Internet users increasingly reported reading blogs (Smith, 2008) and blogs numbered over 100 million across the world online in 2004 (Riley, 2005).

While blogs often lack the organizational advantages of the mainstream media (Cooper, 2006), survey evidence from the past four years suggest that the

blog readership is growing among policy elites. A recent survey of members of Congress and their staff members revealed some surprising results that indicate policymakers pay attention to what bloggers say. While the survey reveals that the members of Congress themselves read blogs less frequently compared to their staff, up to 90 percent of senior and junior staff members do read blogs regularly (Sroka, 2006). Case studies of blog attention to issues also demonstrated potential effects on Congressional policymakers. For example, in 2002, after Senator Trent Lott implied that the U.S. would be better off had it chosen then-segregationist Strom Thurmond for president in 1948, Lott soon found himself a target of the blogosphere. He made the comments at Thurmond's 100th birthday where members of the mainstream press attended and witnessed the remark. The media reported the exchange, but the story soon disappeared from the media agenda shortly after. Nevertheless, bloggers, primarily from the sites Escahton (<http://www.atrios.blogspot.com>), Talking Points Memo (<http://www.talkingpointsmemo.com>), and Instapundit (<http://www.instapundit.com>) kept the story alive by repeatedly highlighting those remarks and previous racial statements by both Lott and Thurmond. Eventually, the mainstream media revived the story and, following the uproar, Lott resigned his Republican Senate leadership position. (Roth, 2003).

Communication studies of blogs point to the potential for blog agenda-setting, especially as they relate to the media agenda. Wallsten's (2007a) content analysis of 2004 election issues found evidence of a bi-directional agenda-setting relationship between blogs and the mainstream media. Expanding this analysis to

the policy agenda, including the presidential candidates and members of Congress, Wallsten (2007b) found agenda-setting effects limited to a narrow slate of episodic issues where blog attention predicted media and policy attention to those issues. Since the 2004 election, blogs developed their approach, functioning in some ways as a supplementary political-party apparatus, providing financial and ideological support to political candidates. In Pirch's (2008) case study of the Connecticut Senate election race between incumbent Joe Lieberman and Democratic challenger Ned Lamont, he found that bloggers were instrumental in launching Lamont as an insurgent candidate. Though Lamont ultimately failed to take the election in 2006, bloggers demonstrated the utility of the Internet in sidestepping traditional political party support. By revealing how blogs paved a way to the ballot box, Pirch's study fueled speculation that increased participation by bloggers may eventually launch a blog-preferred candidate to victory. Blogs continue to specialize, with some blogs focusing exclusively on influencing policymakers. For example, specialized "policy blogs," or online publications that use the Internet to "champion their cause, to network with others, to influence political elites, [and] to inform the public," emerged in an attempt to influence the media and policy elites in government by employing the blogging approach (McKenna, 2007, p. 209).

This study examines the extent to which members of Congress respond to the blog coverage of issues. By exploring the agenda-setting effect of blogs on members of Congress during the nonelection year of 2009, the study tests whether policymakers are responding to blog content or if blog researchers have overstated

the effect of blog content. No published blog agenda setting study explores the agenda-setting role of blogs in a nonelection year, contributing to the uniqueness of this study. By constructing a time-lagged content analysis comparing the issue mentions of selected A-list blogs, the New York Times, and members of Congress, this study seeks to understand the origin of an agenda response through statistical tests. Examining the agenda-setting relationship between blogs and members of Congress, the results of this research may reveal the extent to which the changing media landscape has affected media influence and policymakers. The knowledge may help to characterize the altered state of mass media as it evolves to accommodate new and innovating media.

CHAPTER 2: The emerging blogosphere and the narrow potential for policy influence

Blogs, or weblogs, emerged late in the 1990s originally as personal diaries of Internet users who took advantage of the maturing Internet medium. Since then, blog authors, or bloggers, increasingly gained the notice of media and policy elites as the medium positioned itself as the next generation of “citizen journalists” (Perlmutter, 2008). In its simplest definition, blogs are Web sites containing frequently-updated messages displayed in reverse-chronological order. Blogs often contain a large number of links, which are indicative of the open reporting nature of blogs (Bloom, 2003). In fact, there are many kinds of blogs online. Personal journals, which primarily publish personal content related to individual authors, account for 70.4 percent of blogs. Lesser known are filter blogs, which primarily observe and reflect on public events, which account for 12.6 percent. K-logs, or knowledge blogs on an “external topic, project, or product,” make up 9.5 percent of all blogs (Herring, et al., 2005). About 4.5 percent of remaining blogs generally fall in more than one of the listed categories.

Communication studies of blogs characterized the many ways in which blogs differ from the mainstream media in their selection of issues. One primary role of blogs is to act as a fifth estate, or a check on the mainstream media; many studies support the principle of blogs as media watchdogs (Cooper, 2006; Wallsten, 2007a). According to Roth (2004), blogs are “used to express and circulate opinions, in

which pieces of information are synthesized and connected in new ways and act as checks against the mainstream media, and where public dialogue and debate on public issues can occur and eventually inform decision makers” (p. 4). Thus, bloggers are critical of news judgment in the news media. If, according to a blog, the media does not sufficiently attend to an issue, blogs are known to doggedly pursue stories. Cooper (2006) describes in detail the case of Roger Simon, a screenwriter and novelist with a blog, who disagreed with the media and its treatment of the UN oil-for-food scandal. In addition to highlighting what media stories reported on the scandal, Simon produced his own content and investigative reporting to keep the issue alive. As Cooper (2006) puts it: “...bloggers often define a different priority order for existing stories in the mainstream media; put another way, their media criticism consists of assessing the salience of various current events or issues differently from the mainstream press” (148). The majority of research into blogs analyzed the differences between blogs and the mainstream press and the ways these two media groups interact.

Many blog studies focus on the primary role the mainstream media play in driving blog agenda setting. Blogosphere studies reached a significant turning point with the 2004 presidential elections. That election served as a coming out election for blog research, where scholars received their first opportunity to study blogs during a major national campaign. In their analysis of the emerging blogosphere during the 2004 election, Drezner and Farrell (2004) found that the mainstream media, which has a more consistent agenda-setting effect on policymakers than the

blogosphere, in turn selected the issues chosen by blogs. In other words, whatever influence the blogosphere possesses is highly contingent on attention from the mainstream media to support any potential media effect. Yet, Drezner and Farrell are dismissive of the potential for blogs to gain more agenda setting potential and suggest that, as the mainstream media and policy actors become more acclimated to the blog agenda, they will better adapt to potential disruptions posed by the blog agenda. McCombs (2005) also posited that the stronger influence of the mainstream media limits of blog agenda-setting solely to an intermedia effect.

While the mainstream media count reach and influence with circulation and ratings, blogs gauge popularity differently. Researchers found that “influence in the political blogosphere appears to be driven by ideological considerations and highly skewed towards a few popular blogs” (Wallsten, 2007b, p. 8). Popular blogs find their influence reinforced by linking behavior, the primary engine for blog popularity (Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Herring, et al., 2005). The more blogs include hyperlinks to other blogs of interest, the more likely readers will return to that blog for more compelling content (Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Blood, 2002). Furthermore, in their analysis of the linking behavior of blogs, Adamic and Glance (2005) found that the ideological slant of a blog is the best predictor for this linking behavior. In fact, blogs become more popular if they align themselves to an ideological poll, contributing to the great ideological divide in the political blogosphere (Adamic & Glance, 2005).

Despite critical analysis of the influence of blog agenda setting influence, both political parties recognize the reach of blogs and make special considerations to bloggers and their content. The Democratic Party, for example, connects bloggers to Congressional press secretaries in an effort to build meaningful relationships between the blogs and Democratic Party operatives (Bluey, 2006). The Republican National Committee (NRSC) often monitors blog content as a barometer of issues resonating with their voter base (Pfeiffer, 2006). For example, Rep. Jack Kingston (R-GA) instructs his staff to survey at least 50 conservative blogs daily to understand how the base is reacting to issues (Pfeiffer, 2006). The House Republican Conference also reached out to conservative bloggers in 2010, offering access to story ideas and staff members of Republican members of Congress (Roderick, 2010). The National Republican Senatorial Conference also changed some of its communication practices to include blogs sooner in its routine communication strategies (Brown, 2007). During the 2006 Virginia U.S. Senate campaign between incumbent George Allen (R) and challenger Jim Webb (D), Webb's campaign staff filmed Allen using a racial slur when referring to the member of Webb's campaign staff filming him. The comment, reported heavily within the blogosphere, may have contributed to Allen's narrow loss. The NRSC drafted the new rules to gain support from like-minded conservative blogs to defend against future campaign disruptions.

Other studies have supported the susceptibility of members of Congress to blog messages, which members read more and more. The results found in Sroka's

(2006) survey of members of Congress and staffers reveal that this increased attention could translate into significant effects. Sroka concludes:

While the blogosphere has a unique and important relationship with mainstream media, the data we have looked at strongly suggests that blogs may be having a much more profound, direct effect on congressional policymakers and the offices that support them than theories of media-based policy and political effects of blogs might otherwise support. (2006, p. 27)

Sroka's analysis supports a deeper analysis at the potential effect of blogs in light of the growing role blogs play in the media marketplace.

The potential media effects exhibited blogs are very similar to the effects observed in traditional mass media studies (Cooper, 2006). For example, bloggers demonstrate gatekeeping through the selection of issues and comments they allow to post on their sites. The frequency of content devoted to a particular issue reflects blog agenda setting. Because the blog medium evolved out of the larger mass media, the theory of agenda setting translates to the blogosphere, albeit with some modifications. Political scientist Cohen (1963) began this limited effects research with agenda setting by pointing out that while the press may not possess the power to influence what the public thinks, the press is "stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about*" (13). McCombs and Shaw (1972), in their findings in their Chapel Hill study of the 1968 presidential campaign, provided the first empirical evidence that the press did in fact possess this stunning ability to influence what to public thinks about. They found that repeated stories on campaign issues raised that issue's salience, or measured interest, and that this salience positively correlated with issues reported by the public as important issues.

Repeated agenda-setting studies that replicated their approach supported their findings.

As related to the media agenda, the most consistent agenda-setting effect is limited to recorded salience between the media and public agendas. Study of the media agenda's influence on policymakers has not uncovered a similarly consistent agenda-setting effect, as communication researchers pointed to the more complex nature of the policy agenda (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). Researchers explicated the blog agenda similarly to the media agenda, with repeated issue mentions contributing to those issues' measured salience (Wallsten, 2007a). In instances where the salience of an issue differs widely from the media agenda, the potential of creating an influential alternative media agenda is possible (Cooper, 2006).

In the past few election cycles, blogs have become more active media participants; yet, researchers have not widely studied blogs' agenda-setting effect, especially as it relates to the policy agenda. Where evidence supports the blog agenda's agenda-setting effect, this effect is highly contingent on a combined effect with the mainstream media. Wallsten (2007a) assesses the relationship between the mainstream media and the blogosphere, comparing issues selected by a randomly-selected group of A-list blogs and less-popular blogs to issues selected by the *New York Times*, a common measure for the overall media agenda. The study points to a complex bi-directional agenda-setting effect between blogs and the mainstream media. As Wallsten notes, the study lays the groundwork for the exploration of blogs' impact on policymakers. Wallsten (2007b) expanded his blog agenda-setting

analysis to policymakers, observing the potential for a blog agenda-setting effect on the policy agenda on a limited slate of issues. He found blogs predicted policymakers' response on the issues related to the controversy surrounding Dan Rather's CBS News story on George W. Bush's National Guard service, the Swift Boat Veterans advertising campaign, and the al Qa Qaa, Iraq, missing explosives story (2007b). The results of Wallsten's study pointed to a limited agenda-setting effect on low-priority, episodic policy issues. Given the history of research on media influence on the policy agenda, this is not surprising.

Scholars found that the salience of an issue on the media agenda does not readily translate to the policy agenda as it does for the public agenda (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). While the media agenda can be a primary influence on the public agenda, the primary influence for the policy agenda is public opinion (Erikson, et al., 1993). Where there are identifiable examples of media influence on the policy agenda, the influence has not changed priorities set by policymakers (Cook, et al., 1983) or had any significant impact on the substance of policy (Linsky, 1986). In fact, Kingdon (1984) dismisses claims of a significant media effect on the policy agenda-setting process, casting it as overstated and, once empirically tested, insignificant and limited. He points to the media's short attention span as one reason why researchers do not consistently find significant press impacts. Because the mass media report on several issues every day, many issues appear only for a short time before more salient issues replace them (Kingdon, 1984; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993).

Despite the difficulty for media issues to make their way onto the policy agenda, scholars uncovered effects in limited capacities. Linsky (1986) explored the impact of the media agenda on policymakers through the extensive study of six case studies and found evidence for significant media influence in three of them. The potential of influence was limited to the early stages of the policymaking process, such as problem identification, and media attention did not result in substantive policy change. Instead, media attention would more often speed up the policy process or change the policymaker's chosen approach to policy adoption. Linsky also found differing press impacts across policymaking roles in government. In a survey of policymakers ranging from executive-branch officials to members of Congress, Linsky found support for a greater susceptibility of members of Congress to media influence. Compared to executive-branch officials, members of Congress reported, by a margin of 70 to 57 percent, a higher estimate of press influence. However, members of Congress also reported a greater success rate in having stories initiated in the press, suggesting a greater ability to manipulate the press. Overall, Linsky's interviews with policymakers revealed that policymakers were unlikely to admit to significant press influence, often overstating their own roles in policy action. Lacking this disclosure, communication scholars question any claim of a significant press impact. Also, the inconsistent nature of media attention, sometimes preceding and other times following government action, make identifying significant press impacts difficult, if not impossible, to establish (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993).

Other scholars subsequently advanced Linsky's understanding of media effects on policymakers as new media emerged, redefining the traditional media. Richard Davis and Diana Owen (1998) explore the impact of new media forms in the 1990s and how policymakers reacted to their emerging presence. In their comprehensive empirical analysis of new media forms, such as talk radio and the Internet, they define new media as "mass communication forms with primarily nonpolitical origins that have acquired political roles" and have "[enhanced] the public's ability to become actors, rather than merely spectators, in the realm of politics" (p. 7). Their definition could be appropriate for blogs, as many blogs encourage public participation, both in outlining content on their Web sites but also in actively participating in the political process (Bloom, 2003; Roth, 2004).

Policymakers have good reason to regard new media differently than mass media. New media tend to magnify public opinion by motivating individuals to become involved in the political process, potentially persuading policymakers that new media's expressed salience of an issue better reflect public opinion (Davis & Owen, 1998), the same primary motivator for the policy agenda (Erikson, et al., 1993). New media achieve this magnification by encouraging the public to "focus on small acts, easily performed by individuals, but when multiplied by hundreds or thousands of listeners, demonstrate the power of the forum" (Davis & Owen, 1998, p. 237). These tactics can be more persuasive for certain policymakers who may lack significant resources for sophisticated measures of public opinion, such as

scientific polling, and may perceive such interactions as more reflective of public opinion (Davis & Owen, 1998).

Davis and Owen (1998) detail many different ways new media interact with policymakers and characterize the resulting impacts. For example, in the 1990s, talk radio advanced the new media relationship with members of Congress. Radio hosts encouraged listeners to contact Democrats in Congress attending a retreat in the winter of 1988 after they attempted to grant themselves a 50 percent pay raise (Davis & Owen, 1998). Reminiscent of the Boston Tea Party, listeners mailed tea bags and faxed letters to the hotel where the members were meeting, emptying paper reserves and forcing the resort to turn off the machines. This minor revolt, dubbed the Teabag Revolution, is not unlike the new media-motivated Tea Party protests inspired recently, where blogs were active issue proponents, among many others. However, contrary to the impacts on policymakers in other analyses by Linsky (1986) and Goodman (1994), new media effects are more aptly described as response than influence. In the case of the Teabag Revolution, the Democratic majority responded by postponing action on the pay raise until 10 months later, when the pay raise was passed anyway (Moore, 1989).

New media also tend to lack many of the resources available to larger media organizations (Davis & Owen, 1998). While this can disadvantage new media, scholars found evidence of the potential interactive new media have to band together to broaden reach and successfully propagate issues despite organizational shortcomings (Pan & Kosicki 2001). Blogs demonstrate many of the new media

attributes examined by Davis and Owen. For example, blogs pool their resources by uniting to one of the two primary ideological polls, conservative or liberal. Adamic and Glance (2005) find in their analysis of the linking behavior of blogs that conservative and liberal blogs overwhelmingly link within their respective ideological pools, supporting the same issues, with fewer cross-linking between ideologies. In their analysis, Davis and Owen (1998) demonstrate that “the new media have had some impact on policy decisions. Certain policy issues — uncomplicated, nontechnical, bipolar — are more prone to influence by new media because citizens are able to assert a clear vocal position on them” (256), expanding on Linsky’s (1986) expectations and supporting Wallsten’s (2007b) finding for a limited blog influence on the policy agenda.

Studies during the 2004 and 2006 election cycles supported the role blogs played in eliciting policymaker response to blog content (Wallsten, 2007a; Wallsten, 2007b; Pirch, 2008). Although past analyses of blogs supported a greater effect for blogs to affect the mainstream media (Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Wallsten, 2007a), subsequent studies revealed the potential for blogs to elicit response from policymakers (Wallsten, 2007b), with an increased potential for response from members of Congress (Davis & Owen, 1998; Sroka, 2006). To advance the understanding of how blog agenda-setting effects changed since these previous election cycles, the following research question is submitted:

RQ: To what extent do members of Congress respond to blog content?

Based on the findings of several researchers, the major differences of blogs from the mainstream media guide the hypotheses for blog-initiated agenda-setting research. Scholars point to the mainstream media as a major driver of blog agenda-setting effects. However, these scholars found that on a narrow subset of issues, blogs can formulate an alternative blog agenda (Cooper, 2006). The issues do not relate to substantive policy issues (Wallsten, 2007b). The issues are “uncomplicated, nontechnical, bipolar policy issues” (Cooper 2006, p. 256). Any potential agenda setting effect is limited to Congressional public response and not indicative of significant influence on policy outcomes in Congress (Davis & Owen, 1998). As a new media form, blogs display a greater likelihood for agenda-setting influence when joining resources to encourage adoption of issues (Pan & Kosicki, 2001). Blogs achieve this by aligning themselves to ideological polls and choosing salient issues from amongst this network of peers (Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Adamic & Glance, 2005).

Given this knowledge concerning the potential agenda-setting effect of blogs on the policy agenda, these hypotheses are proposed:

H1a: There is a positive relationship between issues mentioned by blogs and issues mentioned by members of Congress.

H1b: Compared to the media agenda, members of Congress will respond more to blogs on episodic issues.

Episodic issues, or issues that appear for a limited period of time, such as the Swift Boat advertising campaign and the al Qa Qaa missing explosives story indicated by

Wallsten (2007b) during the 2004 election, are different from continuing issues, issues like health care and the war in Afghanistan that are debated throughout the year. While continuing issues may appear on the media and policy agendas through several weeks, episodic issues appear briefly on agendas and do not result in significant policy changes (Davis & Owen, 1998). Because scholars repeatedly point to the media's greater role in agenda setting compared to blogs, the following additional hypothesis is proposed:

H1c: Compared to the blog agenda, members of Congress will respond more to the mainstream media on continuing issues.

Scholars examining the partisan nature of blogs and the varying approaches of political parties also point to the potential for ideological blogs to curry response from respective members of Congress. The ideological nature of blogs drives the popularity of blogs, with the most popular blogs linked to primarily because of their ideological identification, either liberal or conservative (Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Adamic & Glance, 2005; Wallsten, 2007b). Different political parties that represent the ideological polls also court blogs based on this popularity (Davis & Owen, 1998; Pfeiffer, 2006; Bluey, 2007; Brown, 2007). To explore how these differences relate to these ideological approaches, the following additional hypotheses are submitted:

H2a: Compared to the liberal blogs, Republican members of Congress will respond more to conservative blogs.

H2b: Compared to conservative blogs, Democratic members of Congress will respond more to liberal blogs.

Given the potential research has pointed to for blogs, the study aims to cultivate quantitative data to support the growing influence of blogs independent of the mainstream media. Support for these hypotheses could provide firmer footing for future studies to explore the potential agenda-setting influence blogs wield among policymakers and what consequences this agenda-setting effect holds for traditional media forms and our democracy as a whole.

CHAPTER 3: Examining narrow conditions for blog agenda response from members of Congress

The review of literature in the previous chapter reveals a potential for a blog agenda to elicit response from policymakers, with particular potential for this response to originate from members of Congress (Linsky, 1986; Sroka, 2006; Wallsten, 2007b). Previous research has also supported a role for the ideological nature of blogs to drive the popularity of content (Adamic & Glance, 2005), opening the possibility for differing degrees of response to relative ideologies from Democratic and Republican members of Congress, especially given the differing efforts undertaken by the different parties toward these ideological poles among blogs (Bluey, 2006; Pfeiffer, 2006; Roderick, 2010; Brown, 2007). Thus, this study seeks to answer the research question: To what extent do members of Congress respond to blog content? Although survey results supported a greater potential for finding blog agenda response from these members' aides (Sroka, 2006), the method in this study focuses solely on the members of Congress rather than their staff aides as significant results would speak more toward the potential agenda-setting role blogs have on policymakers.

Previous agenda-setting research into the potential of blogs focused primarily on effects on the media agenda (Wallsten, 2007a). Further studies of blogs revealed a potential for policymakers to respond to blogs on episodic issues (Wallsten, 2007b). This conforms to conclusions found in studies examining the

influence of new media on policymakers, where response appeared only on simply-framed, clearly dichotomous issues (Owens & Davis, 1998). Blogs have a greater potential to demonstrate an agenda-setting effect when the salience of issues on the blog agenda differ greatly from the media agenda, creating an alternative blog agenda (Cooper, 2006). The partisan nature of the most popular blogs indicates the role ideology plays in driving popularity in the blogosphere, with alignment predominantly to one of two ideological poles, liberal or conservative (Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Adamic & Glance, 2005; Wallsten, 2007b).

To test this influence, this study conducted a content analysis of entries from the most popular blogs, transcripts of floor speeches from members of Congress, and content from the mainstream media. A content analysis was the most appropriate method to assess the extent of the agenda-setting effect of blogs as many researchers choose it to assess the impact of blogs (Wallsten, 2007a; Wallsten, 2007b; Ryfe, 2007; Lee, 2007). This chosen method presented two vexing issues that plagued other studies of blog agenda setting: The selection of blogs and the method of collecting public response from members of Congress.

Other content analyses used popular blog directories and ranking services online (Wallsten, 2007a; Wallsten, 2007b; Lee, 2007). Many of these online Web sites no longer exist or ceased updating directories or rankings. For example, the Michigan Institute of Technology-initiated project Blogdex, which tracked popular blog content and topics, shut down. Another popular measure of popular blogs, The Truth Laid Bear, has not updated site content since early in 2008. However, two

popular measures of popular blogs currently remain active: Technorati and Nielsen NetRatings' BlogPulse. Technorati, for example, lists separately political blogs based on authority to describe a blog's standing and influence in the blogosphere. Technorati calculates its authority "based on a site's linking behavior, categorization and other associated data over a short, finite period of time" (Technorati Authority FAQ). BlogPulse is a resource managed by Nielsen NetRatings, which monitors more than 100 million blogs and provides a listing of the top 40 blogs online (Nielsen FAQ). Previous studies used both measures to sample popular blogs (Lee, 2007; McKenna, 2007; Wallsten, 2007a; Wallsten, 2007b).

The content analysis focused on the top six blogs agreed upon by both Technorati and BlogPulse. The researcher selected only the most popular blogs because influence appears to be "highly skewed towards a few popular blogs" according to one statistical analysis that explored blog impact on policymakers (Wallsten, 2007b, p. 8). The six blogs in the study consisted of three conservative blogs and three liberal blogs, as ideology plays an important role as a driver of popularity and a primary dividing line in the blogosphere (Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Adamic & Glance, 2005). Ideology also aided in testing its effect on members of Congress aligning to the same ideologies. Because popularity ranks were not available for February 2009, the six blogs originated from popularity rankings from Technorati and BlogPulse in January 2010. The conservative blogs consisted of Michelle Malkin (<http://michellemalkin.com>), Hot Air (<http://hotair.com>), and RedState (<http://redstate.com>). The liberal blogs consisted of Think Progress

(<http://thinkprogress.org>), DailyKos (<http://dailykos.com>), and Talking Points Memo (<http://tpm.com>). The researcher omitted Think Progress, a liberal blog, from inclusion to eliminate a potential conflict of interest, as the researcher undertook an internship at the blog during the course of the study. The blog FiveThirtyEight (<http://fivethirtyeight.com>) was substituted because it was the next most popular blog. For more information on how the researcher collected content from each of these blogs, see Appendix A.

Similar to other past analyses (Wallsten, 2007a; Wallsten, 2007b), the researcher selected blog ideology in these steps. Previous blog studies noted that political blogs predominantly divide themselves between liberal and conservative ideologies (Bloom, 2003; Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Wallsten, 2007a). Many of these blogs include a specific declaration of ideological leaning, the researcher sought and sorted these declarations accordingly. Absent this, the researcher analyzed the blog's introductory description for any ideological leanings. Lastly, the researcher analyzed individual posts for policy outcome preferences. The researcher recorded as the blog's ideological slant any directional bias toward a liberal or conservative policy outcome. Ideology identification does not proceed beyond the first step for many A-list blogs as they have expressed ideological slants and have built readership primarily because of this (Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Adamic & Glance, 2005; Wallsten, 2007b). The selected blogs above were no exception: all expressed their ideological bias openly.

While communication researchers addressed the problem of selecting blogs for quantitative study in the recent decade (Lee, 2007; McKenna, 2007; Wallsten, 2007a; Wallsten, 2007b), the selection of policy content to represent accurately policy agendas preoccupied communication researchers and political scientists for decades. For communication researchers, the policy agenda presented a great challenge for its complexity (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). What studies there are that examined media influence on policy demonstrated inconsistent effects, diminishing its emphasis in agenda-setting research (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). Political scientists lacked a reliable approach in describing policy agendas; most political scientists instead focused on intensive case studies (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). Political scientists questioned the validity of proposed quantitative measures as many do not accurately record policymakers' salience of issues. (Greenberg, et al., 1977). For example, political scientists used media coverage of the policy process as a measure of policy attention to issues. Kingdon (1984) finds these measures unreliable, suggesting a perceived salience that is higher than it actually is. However, Baumgartner and Jones (1993) sought to apply systematic measures of the policy agenda by combining the virtues of cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, sidestepping some of these difficulties. They achieved this by recording the perceived tone of an issue mention along with the tally of the issue as it appears in the media, policy hearings, and speeches. Since Baumgartner and Jones (1993), researchers made great strides in to systematically measuring the policy agenda alongside the media and public agendas. The Policy Agendas Project (2008) (PAP),

for example, applies the same consistent policy content coding scheme for issues addressed by U.S. policymakers, along with resources that apply systematic standards to the media and public agendas (Jones, et al., 2008). The PAP includes consistent measures of the policy agenda from 1947 to 2006, with datasets updated roughly every year.

Media agenda-setting researchers applied many of the same techniques in measuring issue salience for policymakers. For example, scholars operationalize the salience for legislative policymakers as an issue's mention and discussion in committee hearings, floor speeches, media statements, and through more targeted research measurements, such as survey instruments and personal interviews (Linsky, 1986; Wallsten, 2007b).

The Congressional Record, accessed via the C-SPAN Congressional Chronicle, provided measures for issue response for members of Congress. The C-SPAN Congressional Chronicle includes transcripts of House and Senate floor speeches every day Congress is in session and C-SPAN posts transcripts within days. C-SPAN, which cites speech transcripts from the printed Congressional record, provides verbatim transcript services that are unedited. While other researchers have found success with measures like the Policy Agendas Project, this resource does not update records frequently enough to allow analysis of issues during the 2009 nonelection year.

For this study, the content analysis included tallied issue mentions from *The New York Times* during the same time period to control for possible agenda

response by members of Congress to the mainstream media. Because scholars consider *The New York Times* a primary newspaper of record (Winter & Eval, 1981; Chang, et al., 1987; Dearing & Rogers, 1996; Graber, 1997; Wallsten, 2007a; Wallsten, 2007b), it was the most appropriate choice to represent the agenda of the mainstream media. The researcher searched the online database LexisNexis for all *New York Times* articles published during the period of the content analysis. To limit mainstream media content to prominent national stories of chief concern, the researcher limited articles in the A section originating from on the national desk. The researcher coded this content for the same issue mentions as blogs and public statements from members of Congress.

The content analysis included blogs entries and mainstream media articles collected from a one-week period in 2009, beginning February 22 and ending February 28. The researcher collected the morning hour, special order, and one-minute speech transcripts for members of Congress, limited to the House of Representatives, in the following week, beginning March 1 and ending March 7. This limited series of speech types were most appropriate because all members of Congress may speak during these periods and those speeches allowed House members to respond to any issue of the day. The choice of year was purposeful.

Communications researchers found differing results for agenda-setting studies in years lacking a national election (Kosicki, 1993; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2004), and no study published conducted a blog agenda-setting study during a nonelection year (Wallsten, 2007b). The purposeful targeting of the nonelection

year 2009 contributed to this study's uniqueness in understanding of blogs' potential agenda-setting effect during a nonelection news cycle. The time period consisted of the first two weeks Congress was in session following the Presidents Day recess, ideal in that members of Congress returned from recess to tackle new issues.

Once the researcher collected the content, the program CatPac II, a content analysis program that identifies predominant concepts in a body of text, analyzed the content of all blogs and the content of each individual blogs for week one. The researcher then visualized the analysis with ThoughtView, a program that displays visually predominant concepts in a body of text. To aid in identifying ideal concepts that described communicable agenda issues, the analysis omitted several words from the content to prevent their selection (See Appendix B). Only narrow concepts that pointed to definable issues, such as "health," "Jindal," or "Stanford," were selected. Other broader concepts, such as "vote," "tax," or "election" were ignored. To determine whether a concept defined an issue, the researcher performed a text search of the content using the concept. The most relevant result on the text search helped to define the issue.

From this analysis, eight issues limited the content analysis: two selected from the combined content of all blogs and one issue selected from the combined content of each of the six individual blogs. The collected content of all blogs, when analyzed with ThoughtView, pointed to two issues that concurrently appeared in many of the other individual blog analyses: Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal's

response to Barack Obama's Feb. 24 address to Congress and the issue of health care. When performing ThoughtView analyses of the blogs Hot Air, Michelle Malkin, RedState, DailyKos, FiveThirtyEight, and Talking Points Memo, the researcher selected the following issues respectively: the Iraq withdrawal, the tea party protests, the Sir Allen Stanford campaign donation controversy, the implementation of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the debate on budget spending, and the nationalization of U.S. banks and industry. To read more on how the researcher selected issues, see Appendix C.

Among the issues selected, the researcher distinguished issues between continuing and episodic issues to satisfy the H1b hypothesis. The initial tea party protests, the Sir Allen Stanford controversy, and the Bobby Jindal response issues were coded as episodic issues. Although the tea party protests eventually became a continuing issue into 2010, constituting a budding political movement that rivaled both political parties, in late February and early March 2009, the movement had only spawned a handful of protests nationwide and, thus, was not considered a continuing issue in the course of this analysis. The Sir Allen Stanford controversy originated from media reports that tied members of Congress, chiefly Rep. Charlie Rangel, to disgraced financier Sir Allen Stanford, who was charged with fraud in February 2009. The final issue, the Bobby Jindal response, garnered widespread attention from blogs on both ideological poles among the blogs. Bloggers on the right and the left panned the Louisiana governor's response to Obama's first speech to Congress, extrapolating from the performance the overall health of Republican

opposition to Obama's initiatives as well as Jindal's own future in the party. Each of these issues also fulfilled previous studies predictions for episodic issues selected by blogs (Cooper, 2006; Wallsten, 2007b), as each was more widely covered in the blogosphere than the mainstream media.

The health care debate, budget spending debate, Iraq withdrawal discussion, implementation of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, and the nationalization of U.S. banks and industry were coded as continuing issues, as they made up issues that persisted beyond the scope of the study. The researcher tallied the number of issue mentions by blogs and the mainstream media during the first week and tallied the number of issue mentions by members of Congress during the second week. To control for potential opposing effects, such as mainstream media or blog response to members of Congress, the researcher also tallied blog and mainstream media issue mentions on the second week and issue mentions by members of Congress on the first week.

Before the researcher could tally issue mentions, each issue was defined by keywords and word associations based on the most relevant results in a content-wide search of blogs. To apply these keywords and word associations, the researcher used the program NVivo 8 to perform a narrow context keywords-in-context queries. For more on these content queries, see Appendix D. Using these queries, NVivo 8 tallied each of the eight issues among speech transcripts of members of Congress, selected blogs, and *The New York Times*. Regardless of multiple mentions of an issue in a single speech, blog entry, or news article, the

researcher only coded the content once. A speech, entry, or article could receive multiple issue codes, however.

Members of Congress were the unit of analysis for this content analysis. The researcher collected Congressional member data from the Poole and Rosenthal DW-NOMINATE data Web site, which included data such as party affiliation, ideological measures, Congressional district number, and state. During the two weeks chosen for the content analysis, there were 434 voting members of the House of Representatives. The seat of Rep. Rahm Emanuel, which he vacated to assume a staff role at the White House, remained vacant throughout the period of the content analysis. Members of Congress appeared eight times in the content analysis, once for each issue, receiving an issue tally unique to each level of analysis. The researcher applied the issue tallies for blogs and *The New York Times* onto each member of Congress corresponding to their mention of the same corresponding issue. To test predictors of Congressional response, the researcher used a Poisson regression model to compare the potential agenda setting effect of blogs and the mainstream media on members of Congress.

There were several limitations to this study. As with any content analysis, results are only applicable to the issues and population analyzed by this study. Results cannot be generalized to any population outside of these selected blogs or members of Congress in this analysis. However, purposive samples of A-list blogs are more likely to produce significant results (Wallsten, 2007a; Ryfe, 2007; Lee, 2007). The time frame of the content analysis also limits the understanding of blog

agenda-setting effects that may appear beyond the two-week period. However, the principle limitation is the complex nature of the policy agenda itself (Dearing & Roger, 1996). Because it is nearly impossible to control for all possible influences on policymakers, any significant findings from the study will pose questions as to the effectiveness of the measurements. The analysis contains far from all content available to members of Congress during the two-week study. The analysis does not control for material from lobbyists, political parties, advocacy groups, or other policymakers, such as the president. However, the approach taken emulates other content analyses and their chosen controlling variable (Wallsten, 2007a; Wallsten, 2007b).

CHAPTER 4: Members of Congress' seeming ignorance of blog content

Because the content analysis relied on counts for measures, the data is not normally distributed, precluding the use of an ordinary least-squares regression test. Instead, Poisson regression models were used to test each hypothesis. To provide a test for robustness, binary logistic models also tested each hypothesis. Each test controlled for the mainstream media based on the combination of issue mention tallies from *The New York Times* during the two weeks of the content analysis. Once NVivo tallied issue mentions across each of the individual blogs, the researcher combined these issue tallies to construct new variables to make up conservative blogs and liberal blogs.

When inspecting the issue tallies among blogs and the mainstream media during week one and issue tallies for members of Congress in the following week two, a clear pattern appears. Although all three agendas all mention the continuing issues examined in the content analysis, the episodic issues that primarily appear on the blog agenda with little mainstream media issue mention receive almost no attention from members of Congress. There are solely two episodic issue mentions from members of Congress following repeated issue mentions by blogs in the previous week. Even before mounting a statistical analysis, this descriptive results portend little hope for support of statistically significant support for Congressional response to blogs on episodic issues (See Figure 4.1).

H1a: There is a positive relationship between issues mentioned by blogs and issues mentioned by members of Congress.

To test the H1a hypothesis, a Poisson regression model was calculated to predict whether issues mentioned by blogs and the mainstream media in week one predicted issues mentioned by members of Congress in week two (See Figure 4.2). The model had a likelihood ratio chi-square = 44.144, $df = 2$ yielding p -value < .001. The predictors blogs ($m = 42.75$, $sd = 34.402$, $p < .05$) and mainstream media ($m = 9.37$, $sd = 9.448$, $p < .001$) were each statistically significant. For these data, the expected log count for a one-unit increase in blogs was -0.005. The expected log count for a one-unit increase in mainstream media issue mention was 0.048. This translates to a weak negative relationship to Congressional response from blogs and a positive relationship to Congressional response from the mainstream media.

To test the robustness of this result, a binary logistic regression model with identical blog and mainstream media independent variables and a dichotomous members of Congress dependent variable was used to further test the hypothesis. Blogs ($p < .01$) and the mainstream media ($p < .001$) were significant predictors of the member of Congress issue mention with a Nagelkerke R Square of .030. For every issue mention by a blog, the log odds of an issue mention by a member of Congress decreased by 0.007, while for every issue mention by the mainstream media, such odds increased by 0.057. Because the binary logistic model concurred with the Poisson regression model, the H1a hypothesis was rejected.

Congressional response in the study to the selected issues was inconsistent, perhaps unsurprisingly. While blogs and the mainstream media would mention an issue several times a week, attention to these issues seemed to have little relevance with members of Congress. The most discussed issues among members were the budget, the stimulus, and the health care. This was true for mainstream media, but blogs to a lesser extent. The issues blogs and the mainstream media both mentioned most in week one was the stimulus debate, but the emphasis from there shifted based on whether the issue was continuing or episodic. Overall, the largely ambivalent nature of Congress toward the issues chosen by blogs most explains the rejection of the H1a hypothesis.

Using the same statistical models, additional tests explored different relationships between the variables, such as the role members of Congress or the mainstream media play in predicting blog content or the role blogs and members of Congress play in predicting mainstream media content. On whether members of Congress and the mainstream media in week 1 played a role in predicting blogs in week two, the model had a likelihood ratio chi-square = 47567.884, $df = 2$ yielding p -value < .001. While the predictor mainstream media ($m = 9.37$, $sd = 9.37$, $p < .001$) reached statistical significance, the members of Congress predictor ($m = 0.06$, $sd = 0.263$) was not statistically significant and the null hypothesis on this main effect was accepted. For these data, the expected log count for a one-unit increase in mainstream media issue mention was 0.081. This translates to a very weak positive relationship to blog response to mainstream media content.

A binary logistic regression model with identical members of Congress and mainstream media independent variables and a dichotomous blogs dependent variable was used to test the robustness of the Poisson control test result. According to this binary logistic regression model, members of Congress and the mainstream media were not significant predictors of the blog issue mentions. This dissenting result called into question significant Poisson regression indicating a weak positive relationship to blog response to mainstream media content.

On whether blogs and members of Congress played a role in predicting mainstream media content, the model had a likelihood ratio chi-square = 7852.128, $df = 2$ yielding p -value $< .001$. Both blogs ($m = 42.75$, $sd = 34.402$) and the members of Congress predictors ($m = 0.06$, $sd = 0.263$) reached statistical significance. For these data, the expected log count for a one-unit increase in blog issue mention was 0.016 and a one-unit increase in member of Congress issue mention was 0.217. This translates to a weak positive relationship to mainstream media replies to blog content, with a slightly stronger positive relationship for mainstream media replies to issues chosen by members of Congress.

A binary logistic regression model with identical blogs and members of Congress independent variables and a dichotomous mainstream media dependent variable was used to test the robustness of the Poisson control test result. According to this binary logistic regression model with a Nagelkerke R Square of 0.625, blogs ($p < .001$) were a significant predictor of mainstream media mentions, although members of Congress were not. For every issue mention by a blog, the log odds of an

issue mention by the mainstream media increased by 0.139. The binary logistic regression model supported the appearance of mainstream media response to blog content but did not support the positive relationship for mainstream media replies to issues chosen by members of Congress.

Although the H1a hypothesis was rejected, both Poisson and binary logistic regression models indicated that, among all issues, mainstream media issue mention predicted blog response. This result provides some evidence of an intermedia agenda-setting effect, or the mutual agenda-setting ability of two distinct mediums. Previous studies also supported such an effect (Drezner & Farrell, 2005; Wallsten, 2007a; Wallsten, 2007b).

H1b: Compared to the media agenda, members of Congress will respond more to blogs on episodic issues.

A Poisson regression model was calculated to predict whether episodic issue mentions by blogs were a better predictor of episodic issue mentions by members of Congress than episodic issue mentions by the mainstream media (See Figure 4.2). The chi-square of the model was not statistically significant. As a result, the validity of the model fit was uncertain.

To test the robustness of this result, a binary logistic regression model with identical blogs and mainstream media independent variables and a dichotomous members of Congress dependent variable, all limited to episodic issues, was used to further test the hypothesis. According to this binary logistic regression model with a Nagelkerke R Square of 0, blogs and the mainstream media were not significant

predictors of the member of Congress episodic issue mentions. Because the Poisson regression test could not be interpreted and the binary logistic regression test was insignificant, the H1b hypothesis was not supported.

Of the three episodic issues chosen in this study, there appeared to be an overwhelming ignorance to blog content from members of Congress. For example, only one member of Congress responded to the tea party episodic issue following a week of consistent blog attention to the same issue. Rep. Todd Akin (R-MO), speaking on the economy and freedom, said, "They were dumping tea in the river in St. Louis this last weekend. I think people are starting to get wise and they're getting upset" (Akin, 2009, p. H2919). While weak, the reference was among the only episodic issues mentioned by a member of Congress that concurred with blog coverage a week prior.

Using the same model, additional tests explored different relationships between the variables, such as the role members of Congress and mainstream media play in predicting blog content on episodic issues or the role blogs and members of Congress play in predicting mainstream media content on episodic issues. On whether members of Congress and mainstream media predict blog content on episodic issues, the model had a likelihood ratio chi-square = 2014.286, $df = 2$ yielding p -value $< .001$. Both predictors, members of Congress ($m = .05$, $sd = .213$) and mainstream media ($m = 3$, $sd = 4.244$), were statistically significant, though the mainstream media covariate reached $p < .001$ while the members of Congress p value only reached $p < .05$. For these data, the expected log count for a one-unit

increase in issue mention by members of Congress was .074 and the expected log count for a one-unit increase in issue mention by the mainstream media was .072. This translates to a weak positive relationship to blog response from members of Congress and the mainstream media on episodic issue.

A binary logistic regression model with identical members of Congress and mainstream media independent variables and a dichotomous blogs dependent variable was used to test the robustness of the Poisson control test result. According to this binary logistic regression model with a Nagelkerke R Square of 0.410, members of Congress and mainstream media episodic issue mentions were not statistically significant predictors of blog response. The binary logistic regression model did not support the weak positive relationship to blog response from members of Congress and the mainstream media on episodic issues indicated by the Poisson regression model.

On whether blogs and members of Congress play a role in predicting mainstream media issue response on episodic issues, the Poisson regression model was not conclusive because the validity of the model was uncertain.

A binary logistic regression model with identical blogs and members of Congress independent variables and a dichotomous mainstream media dependent variable was used to test the robustness of the Poisson control test result. For these variables, the parameter covariance matrix could not be computed. As a result, the null hypothesis on both potential predictors was accepted.

Because results of control tests of the H1b hypothesis using Poisson and binary logistic regression dissented, it is difficult to support an intermedia agenda-setting effect similar to the one found in control tests on the H1a hypothesis. It is possible that, in this study, there was no observed intermedia agenda-setting effect observed on episodic issues.

H1c: Compared to the blog agenda, members of Congress will respond more to the mainstream media on continuing issues.

A Poisson regression model was calculated to predict whether continuing issue mentions by blogs were a better predictor of continuing issue mentions by members of Congress than continuing issue mentions by the mainstream media (See Figure 4.3). The model had a likelihood ratio chi-square = 30.953, $df = 2$ yielding p -value $< .001$. The predictors blogs ($m = 45.4$, $sd = 34.029$) and mainstream media ($m = 13.2$, $sd = 9.644$) were each statistically significant, though the mainstream media value reached $p < .001$ while the blogs p value only reached $p < .05$. For these data, the expected log count for a one-unit increase in mainstream media mention was 0.055. The expected log count for a one-unit increase in blogs issue mention was -0.007. This translates to a greater effect on continuing issue mentions by members of Congress from mainstream media compared to blogs.

To test the robustness of this result, a binary logistic regression model with identical blogs and mainstream media independent variables and a dichotomous members of Congress dependent variable, all limited to continuous issues, was used. According to this model with a Nagelkerke R Square of .027, blogs ($p < .05$) and the

mainstream media ($p < .001$) were significant predictors of the member of Congress continuous issue mentions. For every issue mention by a blog, the log odds of an issue mention by a member of Congress decreased by 0.007, while for every issue mention by the mainstream media, such odds increased by 0.059. Because the binary logistic model concurred with the Poisson regression model, the H1c hypothesis was accepted.

While the analysis revealed members of Congress as wholly unresponsive on episodic issues, this was not the case on continuing issues. Speaking members of Congress responded on many of the episodic issues, especially concerning the health care and budget spending debates that were ongoing through the week of the analysis and throughout 2009 in Congress.

Using the same model, additional tests explored different relationships between the variables, such as the role members of Congress and mainstream media play in predicting blog content on continuing issues or the role blogs and members of Congress play in predicting mainstream media content on continuing issues. On whether members of Congress and mainstream media played a role in predicting blog content, the model had a likelihood ratio chi-square = 38833.331, $df = 2$ yielding p -value $< .001$. While the mainstream media ($m = 13.2$, $sd = 9.644$) predictor was statistically significant, the members of Congress ($m = .08$, $sd = .289$) predictor was not and the null hypothesis on this predictor was accepted. For these data, the expected log count for a one-unit increase in mainstream media mention was .106. This translates to a weak positive relationship to blog response to

mainstream media content on continuing issues. Blog response to the mainstream media seemed to originate predominantly on the stimulus and health care issues, both continuing issues in the analysis.

A binary logistic regression model with identical members of Congress and mainstream media independent variables and a dichotomous blogs dependent variable was used to test the robustness of the Poisson control test result. The model could not be calculated because the validity of the model was uncertain.

On whether blogs and members of Congress play a role in predicting mainstream media issue response on continuing issues, the model had a likelihood ratio chi-square = 5695.609, $df = 2$ yielding p -value $< .001$. Both the predictor blogs ($m = 45.4$, $sd = 34.029$) and the members of Congress predictor ($m = 0.08$, $sd = 0.289$) reached statistical significance. For these data, the expected log count for a one-unit increase in blog issue mention was .014 and the expected log count for a one-unit increase in member of Congress issue mention was .019. This translates to a very weak positive relationship to mainstream media response to blog content and member of Congress issue mention on continuing issues.

A binary logistic regression model with identical blogs and members of Congress independent variables and a dichotomous mainstream media dependent variable was used to test the robustness of the Poisson control test result. For these variables, blogs ($p < .001$) were statistically significant predictors of mainstream media continuous issue mention, although members of Congress were not. The model had a Nagelkerke R Square of 0.355. For every issue mention by a blog, the

log odds of an issue mention by the mainstream media increased by 0.086. This result supported the Poisson regression result that pointed to a very weak positive relationship to mainstream media response to blog content, although a positive relationship to members of Congress response was not supported.

While control test results on the H1b hypothesis examining episodic issues came up inconclusive, Poisson and binary logistic models of the H1c hypothesis examining continuing issues did provide some interesting results. Like the H1a hypothesis, control tests concurred that blogs predicted mainstream media issue mention and mainstream media predicted blog issue mention. As such, this result further indicates the intermedia agenda-setting effect previous studies supported.

H2a: Compared to the liberal blogs, Republican members of Congress will respond more to conservative blogs.

Controlling for mainstream media issue mentions, a Poisson regression model was calculated to predict whether issues mentioned by liberal and conservative blogs better predicted the issues mentioned by Republicans in Congress (See Figure 4.4). The model had a likelihood ratio chi-square = 13.835, $df = 3$ yielding p -value < .01. Neither conservative blogs ($m = 23.38$, $sd = 19.526$), liberal blogs ($m = 19.37$, $sd = 15.989$), nor the mainstream media ($m = 9.37$, $sd = 9.45$) predictor reached statistical significance, though liberal blogs approached statistical significance at p -value = 0.075.

To test the robustness of this result, a binary logistic regression model with identical liberal blogs, conservative blogs, and mainstream media independent

variables and a dichotomous Republican members of Congress dependent variable, was used to further test the hypothesis. According to this binary logistic regression model with a Nagelkerke R Square of 0.057, the mainstream media ($p < .001$) was a statistically significant predictor of Republican members of Congress, although liberal and conservative blogs were not statistically significant. For every issue mention by a blog, the log odds of an issue mention by the mainstream media increased by 0.079. Because conservative blogs did not reach statistical significance in both the Poisson regression and binary logistic regression models, the H2a hypothesis was not supported.

Although research supported the important role ideology played in the blogosphere (Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Adamic & Glance, 2005), the H2a test results do not support that blog ideology predicts concurring member of Congress ideology. The Poisson regression test for this hypothesis did reveal that liberal blogs approached significance in their potential prediction of Republican members of Congress response to issue mentions. A greater attention to the health care issue, a popular one among members of Congress, may explain why liberal blogs approached significance on eliciting response from Republican members of Congress.

Using the same model, additional tests explored different relationships between the variables. On whether Republican members of Congress, the mainstream media, and liberal blogs predict conservative blog issue mention, the model had a likelihood ratio chi-square = 10389.011, $df = 3$ yielding p -value $< .001$.

While the mainstream media ($m = 9.37$, $sd = 9.450$) and liberal blog ($m = 19.37$, $sd = 15.989$) predictors reached statistical significance, the Republican members of Congress ($m = 0.07$, $sd = 0.270$) predictor did not reach statistical significance and the null hypotheses was accepted on that predictor. For these data, the expected log count for a one-unit increase in mainstream media issue mention was 0.014 and the expected log count for a one-unit increase in liberal blog issue mention was 0.004. This translates to a very weak positive relationship to conservative blog response to mainstream media and liberal blog issue mention.

A binary logistic regression model with identical Republican members of Congress, the mainstream media, and liberal blogs independent variables and a dichotomous conservative blogs dependent variable was used to test the robustness of the Poisson control test result. For these variables, Republican members of Congress, the mainstream media, and liberal blogs were not statistically significant predictors of conservative blogs' issue mention.

The Poisson model indicates that, while Republican members of Congress may have little influence on conservative blog issue mentions, other media forms like the mainstream media and liberal blogs have minimal influence, most likely on episodic issues. However, the effect size of this model indicates that potential effect is extremely minimal. Also, the dissenting binary logistic regression model calls into question these results.

On whether Republican members of Congress, conservative blogs and the mainstream media predict liberal blog issue mention, the model had a likelihood

ratio chi-square = 9592.901, $df = 3$ yielding p -value $< .001$. While the mainstream media ($m = 9.37$, $sd = 9.45$) reached statistical significance, the Republican members of Congress ($m = .07$, $sd = .270$) and conservative blogs ($m = 23.38$, $sd = 9.45$) predictors did not reach statistical significance. For these data, the expected log count for a one-unit increase in mainstream media issue mention was .101. This translates to a weak positive relationship to liberal blog response to mainstream media issue mention.

A binary logistic regression model with identical Republican members of Congress, conservative blogs, and mainstream media independent variables and a dichotomous liberal blogs dependent variable was used to test the robustness of the Poisson control test result. For these variables, Republican members of Congress, conservative blogs, and the mainstream media were not statistically significant predictors of liberal blogs' issue mention.

Similar to the observed effect on conservative blogs, liberal blogs are also susceptible to mainstream media coverage, most likely on continuing issues. The effect size is slightly larger, indicating a stronger influence from the mainstream media, a finding that is not surprising given previous research (Drezner & Farrell, 2004; Wallsten, 2007a). However, the dissenting binary logistic regression test casts doubt on this interpretation.

Finally, on whether Republican members of Congress, liberal blogs, and conservative blogs predict mainstream media content, the model had a likelihood ratio chi-square of 3295.879, $df = 3$ yielding p -value $< .001$. The Republican

members of Congress ($m = 6$, $sd = 7.684$), conservative blogs ($m = 23.38$, $sd = 19.526$), and liberal blogs ($m = 19.37$, $sd = 15.989$) predictors all reached statistical significance. For these data, the expected log count for a one-unit increase in Republican members of Congress issue mention was 0.303 while the expected log count for conservative and liberal blogs was 0.011 and 0.023 respectively. This translates to a positive relationship to mainstream media response to Republican members of Congress issue mention along with weaker positive relationships to mainstream media response from both liberal and conservative blogs.

A binary logistic regression model with identical Republican members of Congress, liberal blogs, and conservative blogs independent variables and a dichotomous mainstream media dependent variable was used to test the robustness of the Poisson control test result. For these variables, liberal blogs ($p < .001$) and conservative blogs ($p < .001$) were statistically significant predictors of mainstream media content, although Republican members of Congress were not. The model had a Nagelkerke R Square of 0.625. For every issue mention by a liberal blog, the log odds of an issue mention by a member of Congress increased by 0.123, while for every issue mention by conservative blogs, such odds increased by 0.142.

Because the H1b hypothesis could not support response by members of Congress on episodic issues, it is not likely that mainstream media response originated from these issues. Perhaps reflecting their role as watchdogs of power, these results support relatively strongly a Republican members of Congress prediction of media coverage on the issues they care about. Although the binary

logistic regression test results dissent from the Poisson results, this model indicates some support for the intermedia agenda setting role for blogs and the mainstream media.

H2b: Compared to conservative blogs, Democratic members of Congress will respond more to liberal blogs.

Controlling for mainstream media issue mentions, a Poisson regression model was calculated to predict whether issues mentioned by liberal and conservative blogs better predicted the issues mentioned by Democrats in Congress (See Figure 4.5). The model had a likelihood ratio chi-square = 13.835, $df = 3$ yielding p -value $< .01$. While the predictor mainstream media ($m = 9.37$, $sd = 9.449$) reached statistical significance, predictors liberal ($m = 19.38$, $sd = 15.988$) and conservative blogs ($m = 23.38$, $sd = 19.524$) were not statistically significant.

To test the robustness of this result, a binary logistic regression model with identical liberal blogs, conservative blogs, and mainstream media independent variables and a dichotomous Democratic members of Congress dependent variable, was used to further test the hypothesis. According to this binary logistic regression model with a Nagelkerke R Square of 0.017, the mainstream media ($p < .001$) was a statistically significant predictor of Democratic members of Congress, although liberal and conservative blogs were not statistically significant. For every issue mention by a blog, the log odds of an issue mention by the mainstream media increased by 0.040. Because liberal blogs did not reach statistical significance in

both the Poisson regression and binary logistic regression models, the H2b hypothesis was not supported.

As the rejection of the H2a hypothesis also reveals, the ideological nature of blogs does not further their influence with members of Congress of concurring ideology.

Using the same model, additional tests explored different relationships between the variables. On whether Democratic members of Congress, the mainstream media, and liberal blogs predict conservative blog issue mention, the model had a likelihood ratio chi-square = 14942.298, $df = 3$ yielding $p\text{-value} < .001$. While the mainstream media ($m = 9.37$, $sd = 9.449$) and liberal blogs ($m = 19.38$, $sd = 15.988$) predictors reached statistical significance, the Democratic members of Congress predictor did not reach statistical significance and the null hypotheses were accepted on this predictor. For these data, the expected log count for a one-unit increase in mainstream media issue mention was 0.068 and the expected log count for a one-unit increase in liberal blog issue mention was 0.004. This translates to a weak positive relationships to conservative blog response to mainstream media and liberal blog issue mentions.

A binary logistic regression model with identical Democratic members of Congress, the mainstream media, and liberal blogs independent variables and a dichotomous conservative blogs dependent variable was used to test the robustness of the Poisson control test result. For these variables, Democratic members of

Congress, the mainstream media, and liberal blogs were not statistically significant predictors of conservative blogs' issue mention.

Similar to the result in control tests for the H2a hypothesis, these relatively weak predictor effects support a positive relationship between other media sources, like liberal blogs and the mainstream media, to conservative blogs. However, this result was not found in a binary logistic regression test.

On whether Democratic members of Congress, conservative blogs, and the mainstream media predict liberal blog issue mention, the model had a likelihood ratio chi-square = 13799.221, $df = 3$ yielding $p\text{-value} < .001$. While the Democratic members of Congress ($m = .06$, $sd = .259$) and mainstream media ($m = 9.37$, $sd = 9.449$) predictors reached statistical significance, the conservative blog predictor ($m = 23.38$, $sd = 19.524$) did not reach statistical significance. For these data, the expected log count for a one-unit increase in Democratic members of Congress issue mention was -0.057 and the expected log count for a one-unit increase in mainstream media issue mention was 0.102. This translates to a very weak negative relationship to liberal blog response to Democratic members of Congress issue mention and a weak positive relationship to liberal blog response to mainstream media issue mention.

A binary logistic regression model with identical Democratic members of Congress, conservative blogs, and mainstream media independent variables and a dichotomous liberal blogs dependent variable was used to test the robustness of the Poisson control test result. For these variables, Democratic members of Congress,

conservative blogs, and the mainstream media were not statistically significant predictors of liberal blogs' issue mention.

These results underline a minimal dissenting relationship between blogs and members of Congress. Although the effect was weak, the issues chosen by Democratic members of Congress had a negative effect on liberal blogs, clearly indicating a break between the two ideological peers. However, because the binary logistic regression model dissented with this interpretation, accepting this result is difficult.

Finally, on whether Democratic members of Congress, liberal blogs, and conservative blogs predict mainstream media issue mention, the model had a likelihood ratio chi-square = 4616.871, $df = 3$ yielding $p\text{-value} < .001$. The Democratic members of Congress ($m = .06$, $sd = 7.683$), conservative blogs ($m = 23.38$, $sd = 19.524$), and liberal blogs ($m = 19.38$, $sd = 15.988$) predictors all reached statistical significance. For these data, the expected log count for a one-unit increase in Democratic members of Congress issue mention was 0.303 while the expected log count for conservative and liberal blogs was 0.011 and 0.023 respectively. This translates to a positive relationship to mainstream media response to Democratic members of Congress issue mention along with weaker positive relationships to mainstream media response from both liberal and conservative blogs.

A binary logistic regression model with identical Democratic members of Congress, liberal blogs, and conservative blogs independent variables and a dichotomous mainstream media dependent variable was used to test the robustness

of the Poisson control test result. For these variables, liberal blogs ($p < .001$) and conservative blogs ($p < .001$) were statistically significant predictors of mainstream media content, although Democratic members of Congress were not. The model had a Nagelkerke R Square of 0.625. For every issue mention by a liberal blog, the log odds of an issue mention by a member of Congress increased by 0.124, while for every issue mention by conservative blogs, such odds increased by 0.143.

Similar to the finding above within the H2a hypothesis, a relatively strong effect indicating Democratic member of Congress prediction of mainstream media content could indicate the media's traditional role in covering Congress. However, these results did not corroborate with binary logistic regression tests, which instead uncovered evidence of intermedia agenda setting.

CHAPTER 5: The evolving status of new media in a nonelection year

Previous research indicated a potential for policymakers, with emphasis on members of Congress, to respond to the issues selected by the mainstream media and blogs. (Linsky, 1986; Sroka, 2006; Wallsten, 2007b). While previous agenda-setting studies focused on the interaction between blogs and the mainstream media, recent studies pointed to the potential blogs have to predict media response on episodic issues (Wallsten, 2007a). Further research has supported a limited potential for blogs to predict response from policymakers (Wallsten, 2007b) and other case studies have posited that blogs can create an alternative media agenda when the issues it chooses differs greatly from the mainstream media agenda. (Cooper, 2006). This study sought to examine if such an effect occurred during a two-week period in the nonelection year of 2009. The researcher constructed a content analysis of eight issues, three episodic and five continuing, chosen by six blogs. The researcher split the sample of blogs between liberal and conservative blogs, each chosen according to the popularity ranking of each agreed upon by two widely used measures of blog popularity. The level of analysis was the individual member of Congress. Controlling for the mainstream media with issue tallies from *The New York Times*, a Poisson regression model tested issue response between the two weeks in the content analysis.

The H1a hypothesis was rejected because statistical tests showed that the issue selection of blogs chosen in the study had a very weak negative relationship to

the issues chosen by members of Congress. The observed effect was very weak, with a Poisson regression coefficient of only -0.007. These results demonstrate that blogs had a negative effect on members of Congress during the two-week period of the content analysis and their impact was very small. The mainstream media control in the test was a better, albeit weak, predictor, with a Poisson regression coefficient of 0.048. The finding that both blogs and the mainstream media were poor predictors of Congressional issue response seemed to confirm previous research that characterizes potential for media impact on Congress as weak and inconsistent (Kingdon, 1984; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). The finding also suggests that, during the period of the content analysis, members of Congress were not responsive to the issues of blogs and the mainstream media. On the Allen Stanford controversy, the Iraq withdrawal, and the bank and industry nationalization issues, members of Congress did not respond at all. On others issues, like the tea party and Bobby Jindal response issues, response was extremely limited. Members of Congress responded most to issues related to debates that occurred on the House floor, such as health care and the budget debate. The stimulus was also a relatively popular issue for members, although Congressional debate and passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 occurred earlier in February, before the content analysis.

Control tests exploring additional effects among the variables revealed some additional findings. Tests showed the mainstream media was a weak predictor of blogs as blogs were a weak predictor for the mainstream media. This finding

supports previous research that points to a dynamic interplay between blogs and the mainstream media known as intermedia agenda-setting (McCombs, 2005; Wallsten, 2007a, Wallsten 2007b). The strongest predictor in the models that tested H1a was the members of Congress themselves, which demonstrated a weak predictive effect on the mainstream media and the highest Poisson regression coefficient in the H1a model, 0.217. A possible explanation of this effect appears below.

The H1b hypothesis, which examined whether members of Congress responded more to blogs on episodic issues, was rejected because effect measures in the model did not reach statistical significance. The reason for this stems from observed data that members of Congress were incredibly unresponsive to the selection of episodic issues by blogs and the mainstream media. Among the three episodic issues, members of Congress showed response on the tea party and Bobby Jindal speech issues. Rep. Todd Akin (R-Mo.) mentioned the issue after it had been mentioned numerous times, primarily by the blog Michelle Malkin. Although more members of Congress mentioned the Bobby Jindal speech, only one mention by Rep. Shelley Berkley (D-NV) qualified as response to blog content since it occurred outside of the week time lag. On the Allen Stanford funding issue, no member of Congress addressed the issue. The absence of statistically significant response to the tea party and Allen Stanford issues hold the most theoretical consequence of the study. Aside from the Bobby Jindal issue, which was addressed by the mainstream media, the tea party and Allen Sanford issues were exclusively championed by blogs

in the study. Although research has suggested that blogs create an alternative agenda when issues on its agenda differ greatly from the media agenda (Cooper, 2006), this analysis found that the alternative agenda formed during this study did not translate to significant Congressional response. This finding dissents from previous case studies and content analyses that found significant response from policymakers on episodic issues (Cooper, 2006; Wallsten, 2007b). The result could also point to the role public opinion, long upheld as the primary driving force for policymakers (Erikson, et. al., 1993), may have played in the analysis. Although case studies have supported new media's ability to simulate shifts in public opinion (Davis & Owen, 1998), that effect was not observed here. Tests seeking additional effects between the variables, however, further supported evidence of an intermedia agenda-setting effect, with the mainstream media seen as a weak predictor of blogs on episodic issue. Members of Congress were seen as weak predictors of episodic issue response, similar to the finding above for the H1a hypothesis.

On continuing issues, tests revealed that the mainstream media was a weak positive predictor of issue response on members of Congress. This finding supported the H1c hypothesis. The main effect coefficient for Congressional response to the mainstream media was very weak, with a Poisson regression coefficient of only 0.055, further affirming previous research casting mainstream media influence on policymakers as weak and inconsistent (Kingdon, 1984; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). Because statistical tests found the mainstream media to be the strongest predictor in the model compared to blogs, the acceptance of this

hypothesis conforms to previous findings that characterize the mainstream media as the primary driver of the agenda-setting effect with blogs on continuing issues (Wallsten, 2007b). Mirroring the previous H1a finding, tests indicated that blogs had a very weak negative relationship to Congressional response on continuing issues, further characterizing a diverging agenda between the two institutions. The finding may also indicate the willingness of blogs to form opposing agendas to the mainstream media, in some cases acting as a check on mainstream media issue mention (Cooper, 2006). The weakness of the test coefficient, however, makes it difficult to accept this explanation.

Both hypotheses H2a and H2b were rejected as statistical tests demonstrated that liberal and conservative blog effects were not statistically significant, indicating that there was no ideological relationship between liberal and conservative blogs and their ideological counterparts in the House of Representatives. Liberal blogs did approach significance in the H2a model as a weak predictor of issue mentions made by Republican members of Congress, though research into blogs has not explored the potential for significant issue response between opposing ideologies. Previous research into the nature blogs indicated that the linking between blogs drove popularity in the blogosphere (Drezner & Farrell, 2004), and the alignment to an ideological pole is the biggest predictor of this activity (Adamic & Glance, 2005). The researcher choose blogs in the study based on online lists that rated the popularity of blogs based on this linking behavior in hopes that the chosen blogs would count themselves among the most influential partisan voices in the blogosphere. Because

both H2a and H2b failed to reach statistical significance, it is possible the selection method of blogs was not sufficient to test the desired effect. Previous studies included more blogs, with a wide array of popular and less popular blogs from the two ideologies (Wallsten, 2007a; Wallsten, 2007b). A redesigned study could more efficiently explore the potential relationship blog ideology has to concurring and opposing ideological peers in Congress.

Although tests between variables on hypotheses H2a and H2b produced further evidence of an intermedia agenda setting effect, the most surprising finding was that Democratic and Republican members of Congress were the greatest predictors of mainstream media issue response, producing the strongest Poisson regression coefficients of the study, 0.303. This finding, underlined by similar results among the other hypotheses, points to an overall greater effect for members of Congress to elicit response from the media. This could be a reflection of the media's role as a watchdog on government, covering the issues that preoccupy government.

EXPLICATION

The study attempted to characterize the extent of Congressional response to blogs. Research has supported the potential for an agenda-setting effect for blogs, but only on episodic issues where the salience of issues chosen by blogs differ from the mainstream media (Wallsten, 2007b; Cooper, 2006). Because the method failed to capture sufficient data conforming to this condition, the results may indicate a weakness in the conceptualization and justification of the research aim. Research

into blogs and other new media forms is limited and substantive analysis of potential media effects originating from these mediums may require further analysis. This content analysis could only find two members of the House of Representatives that mentioned an episodic issue chosen by blogs that was not mentioned by the mainstream media. The method, which focused on first-level agenda mention, did not examine attributes of each issue or explore the use of these attributes among the different variables. A future study that alters the approach to identifying issue mentions or issue attributes may reveal fuller results that could produce more illuminating test statistics.

Although the lack of data points to the need for more refined conceptualization and justification, the appearance of a only two instances of episodic issue response, which scholars indicated held the most potential for significant response to blog content (Cooper, 2006; Wallsten, 2007b), lends some credence to the chosen method. The greater of the two mentions, the issue response to the tea party protests, came after a week of exclusive blog coverage of the protests absent any mention in the mainstream media in the study. This observation could support a finding that whatever previously encouraged policymaker response to new media waned as these media forms reached the end of the recent decade.

Other factors may have negatively affected the success of the analysis. For example, the researcher limited the content analysis to the nonelection year of 2009, a departure from previous agenda-setting studies that examined the role of blogs (Wallsten, 2007a; Wallsten, 2007b; Pirch, 2008). Also, the arrival of a new president

and a new national agenda may have influenced the success of the study. Better results may have appeared in later weeks into 2009. Because researchers have not widely studied blogs these varying conditions, it is reasonable to speculate that they may have contributed to the lack of statistically significant results.

Also, the nature of the chosen episodic issues may have reflected on the success of the study. The issues, which included tea party protests, the Bobby Jindal response, and the Sir Allen Stanford campaign finance scandal, reflected topics that were inherently anti-establishment or inappropriate for Congressional response. While the Bobby Jindal speech and Allen Stanford scandal waned in the public consciousness during the course of 2009, the episodic issue of the isolated tea party protests in February swelled into a nationwide political movement, sparking a continuing debate on government spending and nurturing an anti-incumbent narrative. The Allen Stanford story, while chiefly used by conservative blogs to criticize Rep. Charlie Rangel (D-N.Y.), cut across party lines, embroiling Democrats and Republicans alike, perhaps tempering their potential response to the issue. The Bobby Jindal response, while widely popular among blogs and political commentators, may have simply been incompatible to the issues typically debated among policymakers on the floor of the House.

The narrow selection of a time period in the study may also explain the lack of Congressional response. On the more significant episodic issue that elicited Congressional response, later speeches in the House increasingly referenced the issue as the tea party movement gained momentum and increasing media attention.

For example, several House representatives began to address the tea party protests in the wake of nationwide demonstrations on April 15 and September 12, months after the content analysis. Perhaps future studies may incorporate multiple weeks, select a wider array issues, and control for multiple media effects beyond *The New York Times*.

Accepting that the chosen method was sound and the justification for research was not unfounded, the results could suggest that the potential for new media to demonstrate a measurable effect on Congressional response has waned. Previously, research encompassing new media and blogs supported the ability for members of Congress to be susceptible to new media messages that appeared to reflect shifts in public opinion (Cooper, 2006; Davis & Owen, 1998). This finding would dissent from previous conclusions on blog agenda-setting analyses that have posited the potential for increasing policymaker attention as the medium develops (Wallsten, 2007a, Wallsten, 2007b). The results may also suggest that, as blogs have cemented their place in the media spectrum, policymakers and members of the mainstream media have adapted to blogs' potential destabilizing agenda-setting effects. Both Drezner and Farrell (2004) and McCombs (2005) suggested that an adapting media and policy environment would curtail the emerging influence of blogs. For example, Singer (2002) found that, though the mainstream media often balks at some of the tenets of ideological and personal openness espoused by bloggers, traditional news forms attempted to normalize the form. As this pattern continued, perhaps this normalization mitigated some of the blog medium's

potential for a demonstrable agenda-setting effect. Further research would need to analyze the extent to which traditional media outlets have co-opted the blog approach and obscured its as a media outsider capable of forming an alternative agenda.

Finally, in what results did quantify Congressional response to blogs and the mainstream media, the effect is extremely weak. This data could suggest that members of Congress are simply not reading blogs, a finding supported by Sroka (2006) in her survey of members of Congress and their staffs. While staff members overwhelming reported reading blogs, members of Congress did not. Previous findings pointing to Congressional response on episodic issues supported a clear intermedia relationship between blogs and the mainstream media on these issues while the episodic issues explored in this study supported a weak intermedia relationship at best. Congressional response to issues selected by blogs could require a greater intermedia effect than the effect demonstrated in this study.

CHAPTER 6: A minute response; a reason for further research

A content analysis examining the potential for blogs to elicit response from members of Congress showed there is no evidence of agenda response on episodic issues. While previous research supported the potential for blog engagement on these issues to predict mainstream media and even policymaker response (Wallsten, 2007a; Wallsten, 2007b), the results of this study do not support these findings in 2009. Although the study supported the mainstream media's role in predicting response on continuing issues and further tests supported an intermedia agenda-setting effect between blogs and the mainstream media on these issues, the size of this effect was very weak, indicating that neither blogs nor the mainstream media were strong predictors of Congressional response on the issues chosen in this study.

The content analysis succeeded in pointing to two members of Congress who responded to episodic issues championed by blogs, offering some support for the study's conceptualization and justification that sought to enumerate Congressional response to episodic issues chosen by blogs. Although the results did not point to statistically significant support in this endeavor, the results did support the finding of a diminished potential for blogs to elicit response from members of Congress on any episodic issues. This may confirm previous research that predicted blog influence would wane as the mainstream media and policymakers adjusted to the new medium's potential disruption. Drezner and Farrell (2004) and McCombs

(2005) posited that the mainstream media would restrict the potential agenda-setting effect of blogs to an intermedia effect and that policymakers would adapt to potential disruptions from this new media form. Considering that an agenda-setting study during the 2004 election uncovered significant findings of policymaker response to blogs, the results of this study may indicate that this effect diminished in 2009.

When considering the results of this study against the sparse nature of blog agenda-setting studies and the inclusion of case studies examining the agenda-setting role of blogs, the results suggest that, while blogs do possess an ability to elicit a direct response from members of Congress, this response is rare and the episodic issues on which this occurs are very few. The ability for blogs to produce a response from members of Congress is certainly not systematic, as this study failed to reproduce this effect. Certain limitations built into the study, such as the early time period selected in the nonelection year 2009 at the dawn of a new presidency and national agenda, may have colored some of these conclusions and differing results may appear if similar content analyses were mounted at different periods in the year. Content analyses that have supported an intermedia agenda-setting or policymaker agenda-setting effect occurred during election years whereas this study did not. The absence of a purposive issue sampling method and the nonelection time period of this study suggests that these factors at least could weigh heavily on the potential for blogs to gain issue response. Previous case studies have focused on single issues that garnered widespread media and policymaker

response, such as the Sen. Trent Lott (R-Miss.) controversy concerning racial comments made during Sen. Strom Thurmond's 100th birthday (Roth, 2003). The findings of these case studies coupled with the lack of significant results here could indicate that significant response to blog content may only occurs during outrageous events or scandal.

Past content analyses of blogs, the mainstream media, and 2004 election candidates supported the ability for blog content to predict mainstream media coverage of and policymaker attention to episodic issues (Wallsten, 2007a, Wallsten, 2007b). Later studies explored the emerging role of blogs that sought to explicitly influence policymakers (McKenna, 2007) and, in some cases, provide logistical support akin to a political party apparatus (Pirch, 2008). New media studies, including case studies of blogs, supported the ability for these emerging media forms to gain the attention of policymakers, especially when this media constructed an agenda that diverged from that of the mainstream media (Davis & Owen, 1998; Cooper, 2006). This study sought to examine issues that best achieved this condition during 2009, five years after the most comprehensive content analyses examining the potential agenda-setting influence of blogs. Ultimately, response of policymakers did not appear significantly on the issues discussed by blogs. While the results of this study does not overturn previous findings related to the political influence of blogs, it does pose questions of previous conclusions that foresaw a growing influence of blogs in the realm of political communication.

Despite the failure of this research to support hypotheses exploring the potential influence of blogs, anecdotal evidence of the potential of an influential new media continues to amass. In 2010, as the Obama administration and Democrats refined its media outreach methods, policymakers have increasingly reached out to liberal bloggers to communicate their message to the public. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi invited a group of progressive bloggers to discuss House Democrats' plans for passing health care reform on March 15, 2010 (Klein, 2010). U.S. Treasury officials also invited liberal bloggers to an off-the-record meeting on economic policy a week earlier (Salmon, 2010), providing researchers more incentive to investigate the role bloggers continue to play in political communication.

Because of the limitation of the scope of the content analysis as well as the study's reliance on only quantitative methods, these conclusions are not certain enough to fully answer whether the potential influence of blogs has waned. Further research is necessary to clarify the results of this study. A second content analysis extending the time period beyond two weeks or later in the Congressional session may more effectively detect Congressional response to issues chosen by blogs. The longer time period could give rise to additional issues chosen by blogs that may prove better predictors to the issues selected by members of Congress. A refined conceptualization of the issues selected in the content analysis, such as an analysis of second-level agenda setting and the attributes of these issues, may provide a finer measure more apt at detecting meaningful Congressional response. Also, a

purposive issue and date selection method may better replicate previous findings of significant issue response of members of Congress to blogs.

Other qualitative methods may also uncover the role blogs play behind the scenes for members of Congress. A survey of members of Congress and their staffs found that, while staff members overwhelmingly reported reading blogs, the percentage of members of Congress who read blogs was far fewer (Sroka, 2006). An updated survey targeting members of Congress may expound on the uses these members have for the information provided by blogs and gauge how member attitudes toward the blogosphere have changed in the last few years. Also, staff and member interviews similar to those adopted in the approach by Linsky (1986) in his landmark study of press impacts on policymakers, may reveal the precise interplay between policymakers and blogs that this study could not glean from public comment on the floor of Congress.

REFERENCES

- Adamic, L. & Glance, N. (2005) "The Political Blogosphere and the 2004 Presidential Election." BlogPulse. Retrieved Oct. 16, 2009 from <www.blogpulse.com/papers/2005/AdamicGlanceBlogWWW.pdf>
- Akin, T. (MO). "The Economy And Our Freedom." Congressional Record, 155 (March 3, 2009) p. H2919.
- Baumgartner, F. R. & Jones, B. D. (1993) *Agendas and Instability in American Politics*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Blood, R. (2002). *The Weblog Handbook*. Basic Books.
- Bloom, J. (2003). "The blogosphere: How a once-humble medium came to drive elite media discourse and influence public policy and elections." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Philadelphia, PA, Aug. 27, 2003
- Bluey, Robert. (2006). "The Blog War on Capitol Hill." Human Events Online (<http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?print=yes&id=14070>).
- Brown, C. B. (2007). "GOP issues rules to avoid Macaca moments." Politico, June 13, 2007.
- Chang, T., Shoemaker, P. J., and Bredlinger, Nancy. (1987). "Determinants of International News Coverage in the U.S. Media", *Communication Research* 14, pp. 396-414.
- Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, 558 U.S. ___ (2010).
- Cohen, B. (1963). *The Press and Foreign Policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press
- Cook, F., Tyler, T., Goetz, E., Gordon, M., Protess, D., Leff, D., et al. (1983). *Media and Agenda Setting: Effects on the Public, Interest Group Leaders, Policy Makers, and Policy*. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 47(1), 16. Retrieved Oct. 18, 2009 from <<http://search.ebscohost.com>>
- Cooper, S. D. (2006). *Watching the watchdog: Bloggers as the Fifth Estate*. Spokane, WA: Marquette.

- Davis, R. and Owen, D. (1998) *New Media and American Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dearing, J. W., & Rogers, E. (1996). *Agenda setting*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Drezner, D. W., & Farrell, H. (2004). The power and politics of blogs. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago.
- Erikson, R. S., Wright, G. C., & McIver, J. P. (1993). *Statehouse democracy: Public opinion and policy in the American states*. New York: Cambridge University Press.)
- Gamson, W. (1996) "Media Discourse as a Framing Resource" in Crigler, A. (ed.) *The Psychology of Political Communication*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Graber, D. (1997). *Mass media and American politics* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Greenberg, G. D., Miller, J. A., Mohr, L. B., and Vladeck, B. C. (1977). Developing Public Policy Theory: Perspectives from Empirical Research. *American Political Science Review* 71: 1532-43.
- Herring, S.C., Scheidt, L. A., Bonus, S., and Wright, E. (2005). Weblogs as a bridging genre. *Information, Technology, & People*, 18(2), 142-171.
- Jones, B., Wilkerson, J., & Baumgartner, F. (2008). Policy Agendas Project. Retrieved Oct. 16, 2009 from <<http://www.policyagendas.org/>>
- Kingdon, J. W. (1984) *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Klein, Ezra. (2010). "Nancy Pelosi's strategy for passing health-care reform." *Washington Post*. March 15, 2010. Retrieved March 21, 2010 from <http://voices.washingtonpost.com/ezra-klein/2010/03/nancy_pelosis_strategy_for_pas.html>
- Kosicki, G. (1993). Problems and opportunities in agenda-setting research. *Journal of Communication*, 43(2), 100. Retrieved Oct. 16, 2009 from <<http://search.ebscohost.com>>
- Lee, J. K. (2007) "The Effect of the Internet on Homogeneity of the Media Agenda: A Test of the Fragmentation Thesis." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. Vol. 84, No. 4 (Winter 2007): 745-760.

- Linsky, M. (1986). *Impact: How the press affects federal policymaking*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- McCombs, M. (2005) "A Look at Agenda-setting: past, present and future," *Journalism Studies*, 6:4, 543-57.
- McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. (1972). "THE AGENDA-SETTING FUNCTION OF MASS MEDIA." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176-187.
- McKenna, L. (2007). "Getting the Word Out": Policy Bloggers Use Their Soap Box to Make Change. *Review of Policy Research*, 24(3), 209-229.
- Moore, S. (1989). "Congress vs. America: How Congress Raises Its Own Pay." Retrieved November 28, 2009, from The Heritage Foundation website: <<http://www.heritage.org/Research/GovernmentReform/bg744.cfm>>
- Neilsen FAQ. Retrieved Nov. 6, 2009, from Nielsen: <http://en-us.nielsen.com/main/news/news_faqs>
- Pan, Z. & Kosicki, G. M. (2001) "Framing as a Strategic Action in Public Deliberation." *Framing public life: perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world*. Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Perlmutter, D. (2008). "Political Blogging and Campaign 2008: A Roundtable." *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13(2), 160-170.
- Pfeiffer, Eric. (2006). "GOP urged to make greater use of blogs." *Washington Times*, April 13, 2006.
- Pirch, K. (2008). "Bloggers at the Gates: Ned Lamont, Blogs, and the Rise of Insurgent Candidates." *Social Science Computer Review*, 26(3), 275-287.
- Roderick, Kevin. (2010). "How Republicans reach out to bloggers." *LA Observed*, March 25, 2010. <http://www.laobserved.com/archive/2010/03/how_republicans_reach_out.php>
- Roth, M. M. (2004). "How journalists see the blogosphere." Retrieved September 24, 2009, from <<http://archive.org/www.asc.upenn.edu/usr/mmccoy/blogs.pdf>>
- Riley, Duncan. (2005). "The Blog Herald Blog Count October 2005: over 100 million blogs created". *The Blog Herald*. 10 October 2005. Retrieved Nov. 6, 2009 from <<http://www.blogherald.com/2005/10/10/the-blog-herald-blog-count-october-2005/>>

- Ryfe, D. (2007). The Future of Media Politics. *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, 10(4), 723-738.
- Salmon, Felix. (2010). "Bloggers @ Treasury." Reuters. March 8, 2010. Retrieved March 21, 2010 from <<http://blogs.reuters.com/felix-salmon/2010/03/08/bloggers-treasury/>>
- Scheufele, D. (2000). "Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing Revisited: Another Look at Cognitive Effects of Political Communication." *Mass Communication & Society*, 3(2/3), 297. Retrieved Oct. 16, 2009 from <<http://search.ebscohost.com>>.
- Singer, Jane B. "The Political J-Blogger: 'Normalizing' a New Media Form to Fit Old Norms and Practices." *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* Vol. 6, No. 2 (May 2002): 173-98.
- Smith, A. (2008). "New numbers for blogging and blog readership." Pew Internet & American Life Project. Retrieved Nov. 6, 2009 from <<http://www.pewinternet.org/Commentary/2008/July/New-numbers-for-blogging-and-blog-readership.aspx>>.
- Sroka, T. Neil. (2006). "Understanding the Political Influence of Blogs: A Study of the Growing Importance of the Blogosphere in the U.S. Congress." Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet Retrieved Nov. 6, 2009 from <<http://www.ipdi.org>>
- Sweetser, K. (2007). "Blog bias: Reports, inferences, and judgments of credentials bloggers at the 2004 nominating conventions." *Public Relations Review*, 33(4), 426-428. Retrieved Oct. 16, 2009 from <<http://search.ebscohost.com,do:10.1016/j.pubrev.2007.08.012>>
- Tankard Jr., J. W. "The Empirical Approach to the Study of Media Framing." *Framing public life : perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world*. Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Technorati Authority FAQ. Retrieved Oct. 14, 2009, from Technorati: <http://technorati.com/what-is-technorati-authority/>
- Walgrave, L. & Van Aelst, P. (2004). "The mass media's political agenda-setting power." Prepared presented at the pre-conference meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, Sept 1, 2004.
- Wallsten, K. (2007a). "Agenda Setting and the Blogosphere: An Analysis of the Relationship between Mainstream Media and Political Blogs." *Review of Policy Research*. November 2007; 24(6):567-587.

Wallsten, K. J. (2007b) "The Blogosphere's Influence on Political Discourse: Is Anyone Listening?" Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Palmer House Hotel, Chicago, IL, Apr 12, 2007.

West, D. M. (2009) "The New Digital Press: How to Create a Brighter Future for the News Industry." *Issues In Governance Studies*. No. 25 (May 2009).

Winter, J., & Eyal, C. (1981). "Agenda setting for the civil rights issues." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 45, 376-383.

Woelfel, J. (1993). "CATPAC: A Neural Network for qualitative analyze of text." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Australian Marketing Association, Melbourne, Australia. September, 1993

FIGURES

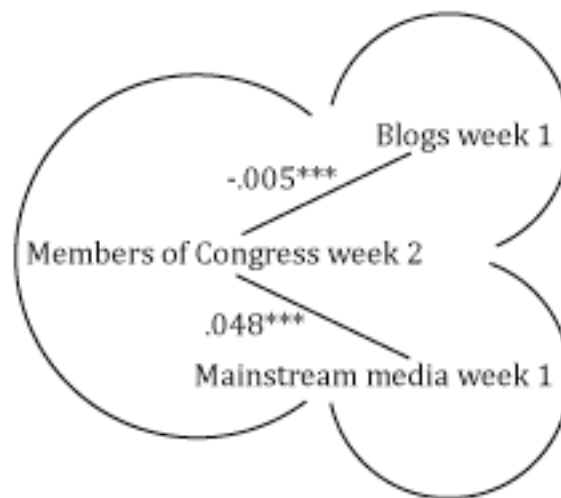
Figure 4.1: Issue tallies

Below are coded issue mentions for the collected blogs along with issue mentions in the New York Times during week one of the study. To the right are issue mentions by members of Congress in the following week.

	Blogs								Members of Congress					
	Feb. 22	Feb. 23	Feb. 24	Feb. 25	Feb. 26	Feb. 27	Feb. 28	March 2	March 3	March 4	March 5	March 6		
Continuing issues														
bank nationalization	2	7	3	5	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
stimulus	9	24	29	14	12	12	7	0	9	6	8	4	4	
health care	2	8	9	15	12	5	4	0	4	9	11	3	3	
Iraq withdrawal	0	2	1	2	1	1	1	0	4	2	2	0	0	
budget spending	1	5	4	8	8	4	3	2	11	8	10	6	6	
Episodic issues														
tea party	1	2	0	3	1	8	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	
Allen Stanford	0	3	5	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Bobby Jindal	4	3	16	24	12	20	8	0	0	1	0	0	0	
	Mainstream media													
Continuing issues	Feb. 22	Feb. 23	Feb. 24	Feb. 25	Feb. 26	Feb. 27	Feb. 28							
bank nationalization	0	0	0	1	0	0	0							
stimulus	4	6	3	2	2	5	1							
health care	2	5	1	4	2	4	3							
Iraq withdrawal	1	0	0	0	0	0	1							
budget spending	3	2	1	2	2	5	4							
Episodic issues														
tea party	0	0	0	0	0	0	0							
Allen Stanford	0	0	0	0	0	0	0							
Bobby Jindal	1	2	1	1	2	1	1							

Figure 4.1: H1a hypothesis test

Poisson regression examining blog and mainstream media covariates and their relation to issues mentioned by members of Congress.



Variable	B	SE	SD	p
Blogs week 1	-0.005	0.0021	34.402	0.000
Mainstream media week 1	0.048	0.0076	9.948	0.000

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$; NS = not statistically significant

Figure 4.2: H1b hypothesis test

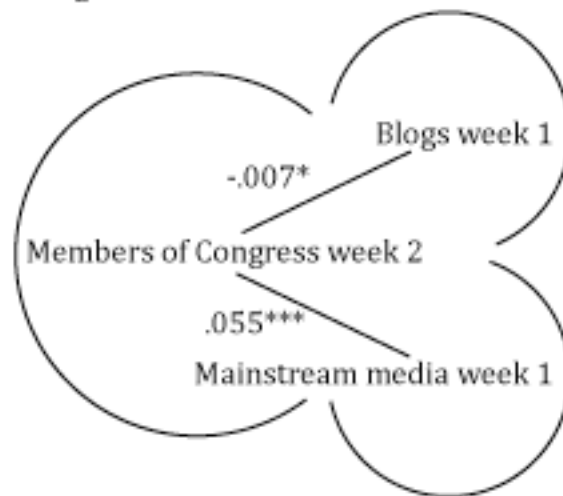
Poisson regression examining blog and mainstream media covariates and their relation to episodic issues mentioned by members of Congress.

Variable	B	SE	SD	p
Blogs week 1	0.020	0.0316	34.580	0.529
Mainstream media week 1	-0.149	0.2562	4.244	0.560

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$; NS = not statistically significant

Figure 4.3: H1c hypothesis test

Poisson regression examining blog and mainstream media covariates and their relation to continuous issues mentioned by members of Congress.

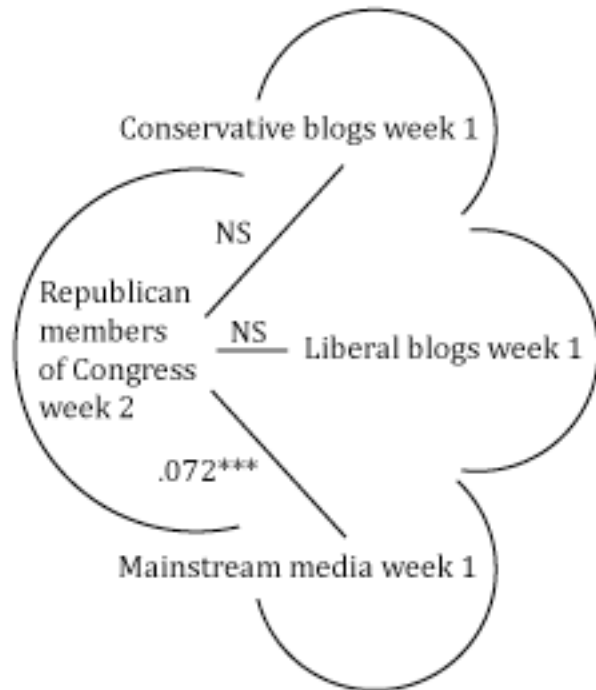


Variable	B	SE	SD	p
Blogs week 1	-0.007	0.0028	34.029	0.013
Mainstream media week 1	0.055	0.0108	9.644	0.000

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$; NS = not statistically significant

Figure 4.4: H2a hypothesis test

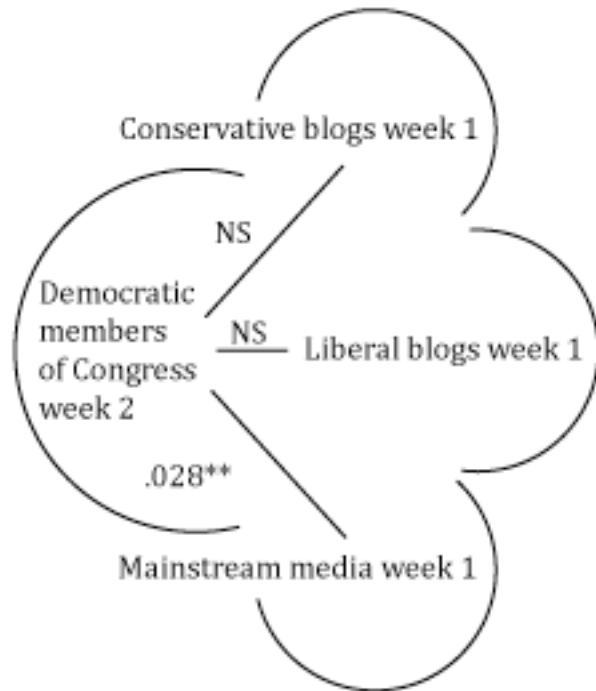
Poisson regression examining conservative blog, liberal blog, and mainstream media covariates and their relation to issues mentioned by Republican members of Congress.



Variable	B	SE	SD	p
Coservative blogs week 1	-0.005	0.0097	19.526	0.633
Liberal blogs week 1	-0.017	0.0098	15.989	0.075
Mainstream media week 1	0.072	0.0127	9.450	0.000

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$; NS = not statistically significant

Figure 4.5:
 Poisson regression examining conservative blog, liberal blog,
 and mainstream media covariates and their relation to issues
 mentioned by Democratic members of Congress.



Variable	B	SE	SD	p
Coservative blogs week 1	0.005	0.0080	19.524	0.545
Liberal blogs week 1	-0.009	0.0086	15.988	0.311
Mainstream media week 1	0.028	0.0102	9.449	0.007

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; *** = $p < .001$; NS = not statistically significant

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Collection of blog content

While researchers collect Congressional Record or past news articles routinely in political or communication research, the researchers do not widely engage in the collection of archived blog content. All of the blogs selected in this study maintained open archives of posts during the two-week period in 2009. The blogs Hot Air, Michelle Malkin, FiveThirtyEight, and Talking Points Memo each included listing of posts based on month or week content appeared. RedState and DailyKos differed, however.

RedState did not include an archive page on the Web site, only allowing visitors to explore archived content by clicking on the “previous posts” link at the bottom of the front page, navigating through 30-post pages arranged in reverse chronological order. The researcher clicked through several pages to reach content originated during the two-week time period of the study.

DailyKos used a similar archiving system to RedState, although the researcher accessed the content differently. The site allowed visitors to search through the archive starting at a specified date range, restricted to specific authors. Because only DailyKos editor staff posts appear on the front page of DailyKos, the researcher restricted archive queries to posts made by those authors for the dates of the study. A list of editors whose posts appear on the front page of the blog was available from the blog’s about page.

Appendix B: Words omitted from CatPac II analysis

To aid in issue selection, the researcher omitted the following indefinite concepts from textual analysis. The researchers omitted the words because they were not helpful in illuminating concepts that pointed to agenda issues chosen by blogs.

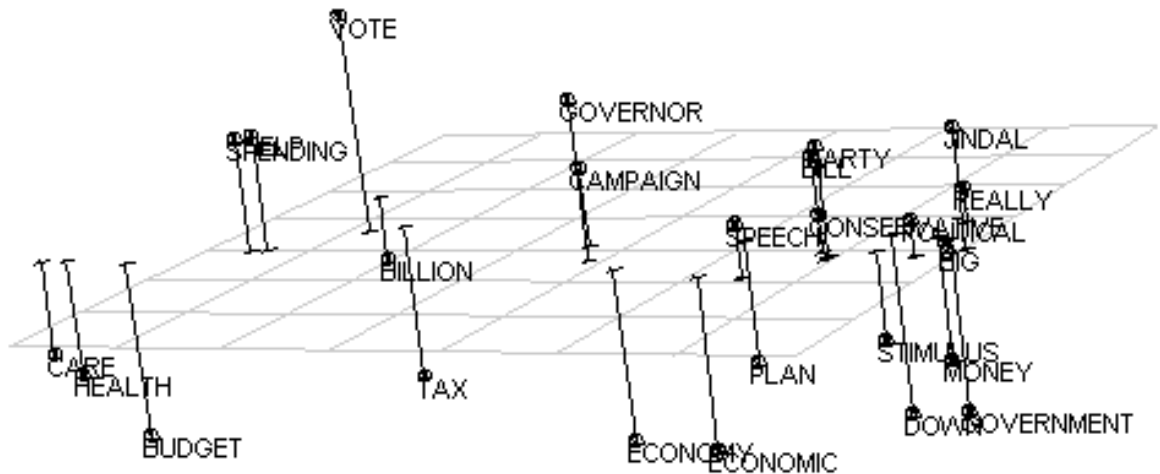
Figure B.1: List of concepts omitted from CatPac II analysis

ACTUALLY	HE'S	SAYS
ADMINISTRATION	HOUSE	SENATE
AGAINST	I	SHOW
AM	I'M	STATE
AMERICAN	KNOW	STORY
BETTER	LAST	SURE
C	LONG	THANK
CHAT	ME	THAT'S
CHEERS	MIGHT	THERE'S
COM	MR	THINK
CONGRESS	NEED	TIME
D	NEWS	TODAY
DEMOCRATS	NEXT	TPM
DEMOCRATS	OBAMA	TPMDC
DOESN'T	OBAMA'S	TWO
DON'T	OVER	UPDATE
EST	PEOPLE	US
FEB	PERCENT	VIDEO
FEBRUARY	PM	WANT
FEDERAL	POINT	WE'RE
FEW	POST	WEEK
FIRST	PRESIDENT	WHITE
FRIDAY	QUESTION	WHITE
GETTING	REPUBLICAN	WHOLE
GO	REPUBLICANS	WILL
GOING	RIGHT	YEAR
GOOD	ROUNDUP	YEARS
GOV	SAYING	YIELD

Appendix C: Selection of issues

To select the issues examined in the content analysis, the combined content of all blogs was analyzed by CatPac II and exported to ThoughtView, a program that visualizes concepts picked by CatPac II. Although several concepts appear more pronounced in some of the perceptual maps, the research attempted to choose concepts widely used among all blogs as well as concepts unique to each blog. On a three-dimensional plane, the following figure illustrates the concepts highlighted by CatPac II and ThoughtView. The location where ThoughtView places concepts above or below the three-dimensional plane is not significant; only the relative positions of the concepts matter (Woelfel, 1993).

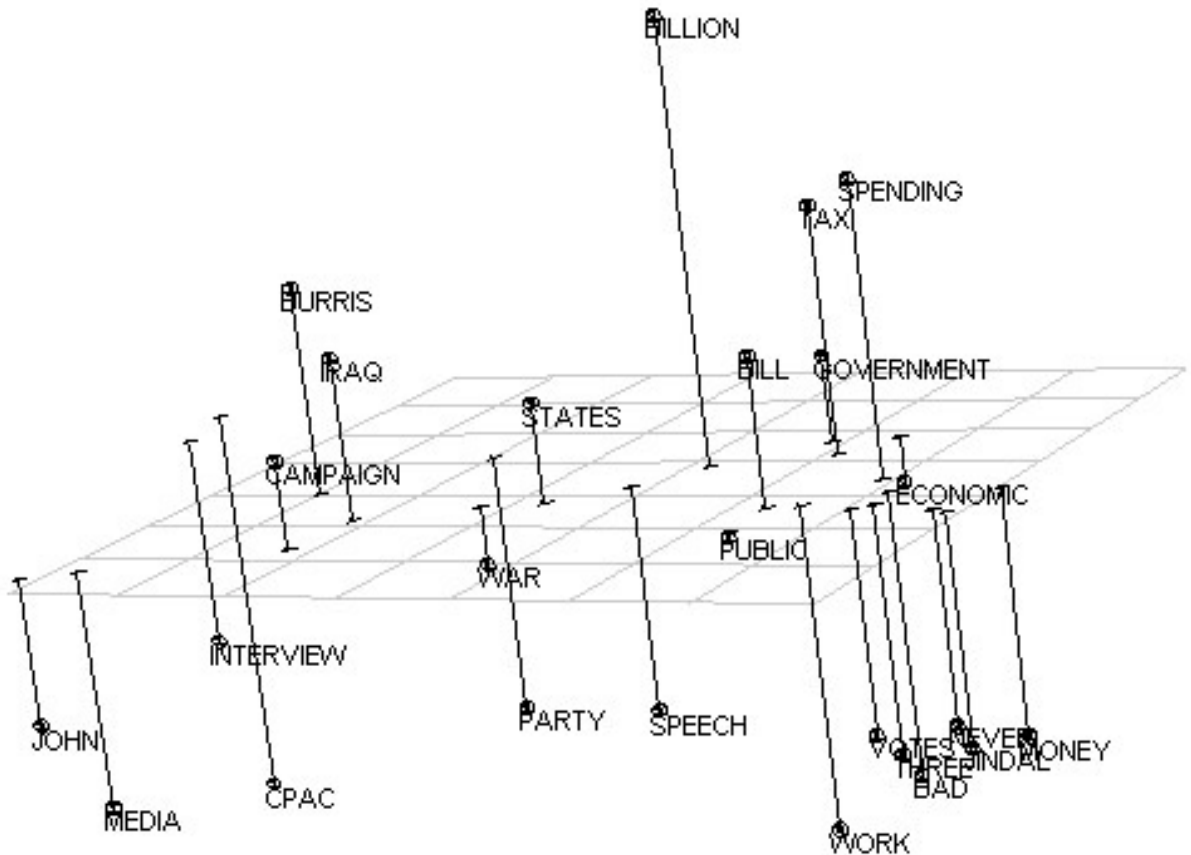
Figure C.1: Concepts highlighted among the combined content of all blogs



The issues health care and Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal's response to President Barack Obama's address to Congress were chosen from this figure.

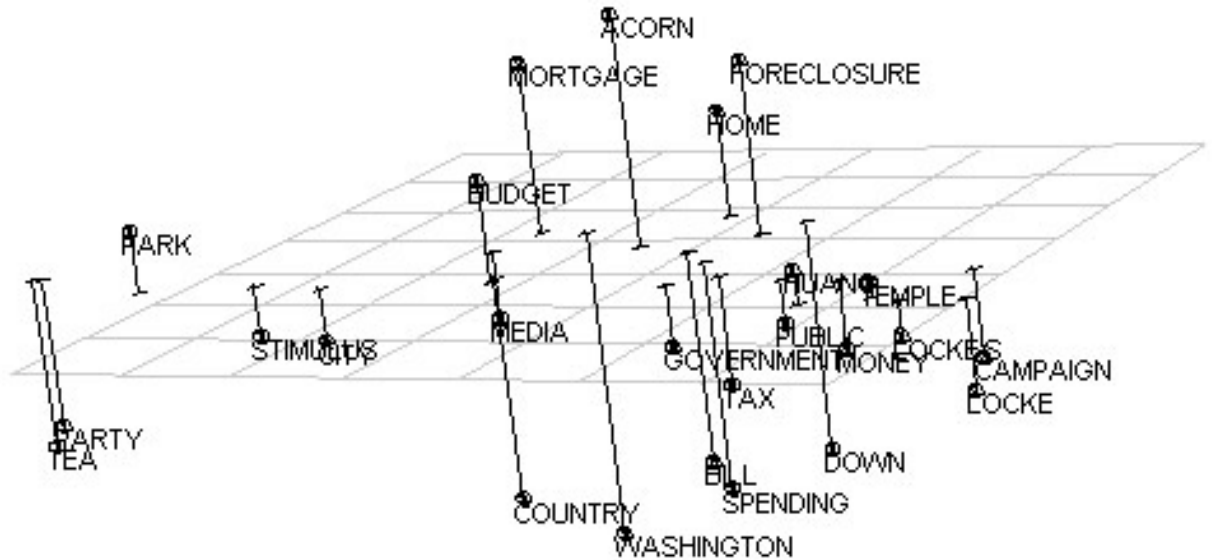
Following this analysis, the researcher conducted an additional CatPac II and ThoughtView analysis on each of the six blogs in the content analysis in order to include issues that may not have risen in the analysis of the combined content.

Figure C.2: Hot Air concepts



The issue concerning the withdrawal of troops from Iraq was chosen based on the ThoughtView display of concepts from the Hot Air blog.

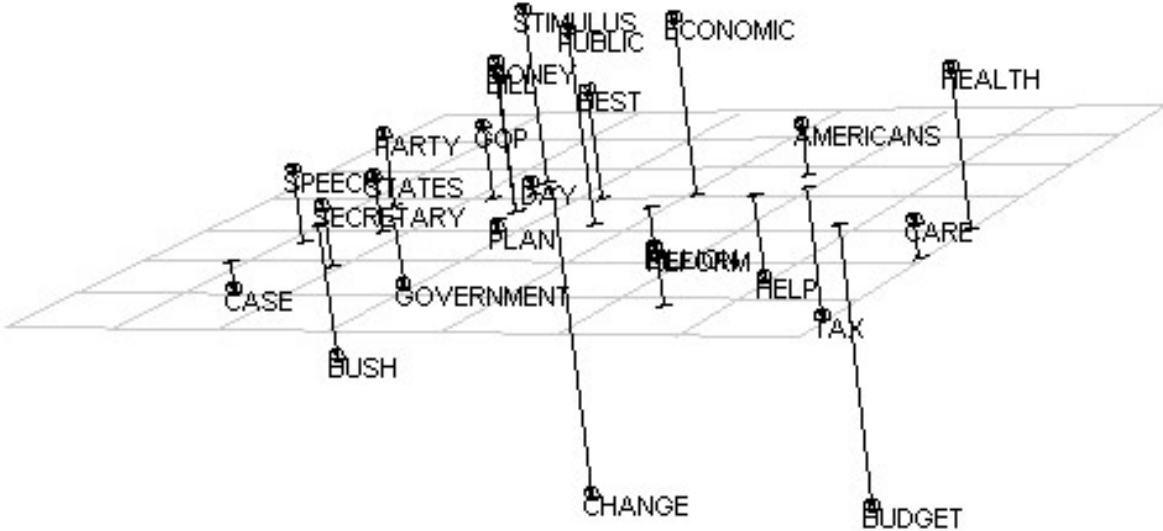
Figure C.3: Michelle Malkin concepts



The issue concerning the tea party protests was chosen based on the ThoughtView display of concepts from the Michelle Malkin blog.

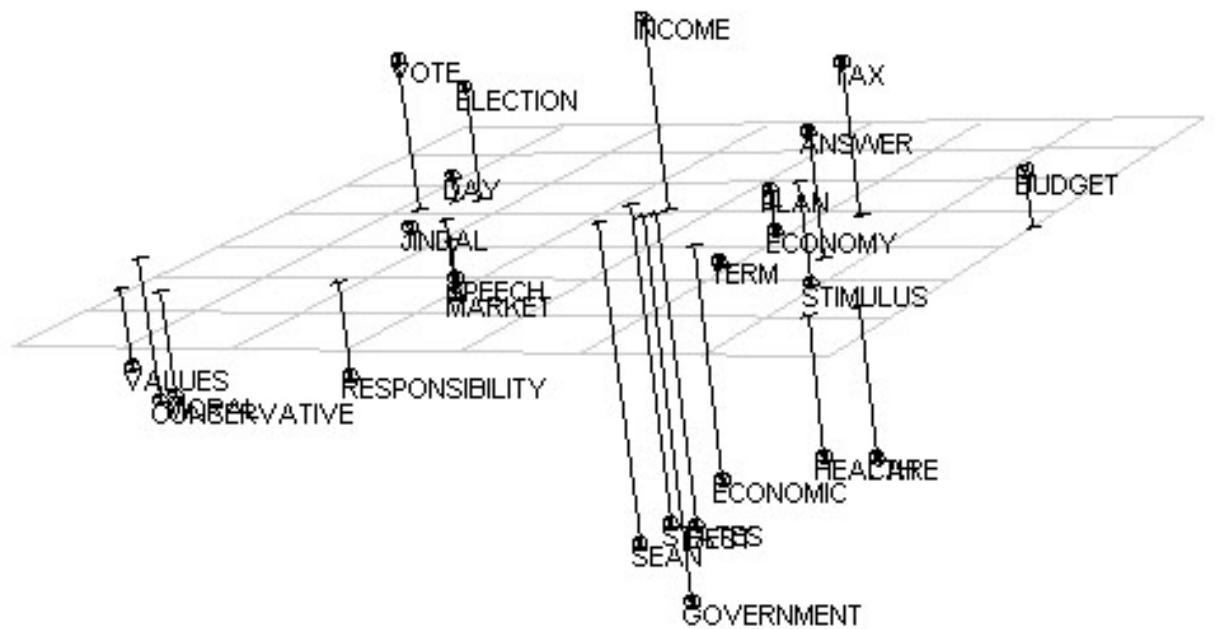
A ThoughtView display of concepts from the RedState blog was not helpful because the figure produced grouped many concepts together, preventing easy selection. As a result, the researcher chose the issue from a text file dendrogram produced by CatPac II, which ThoughtView bases its visualizations upon.

Figure C.4: DailyKos concepts



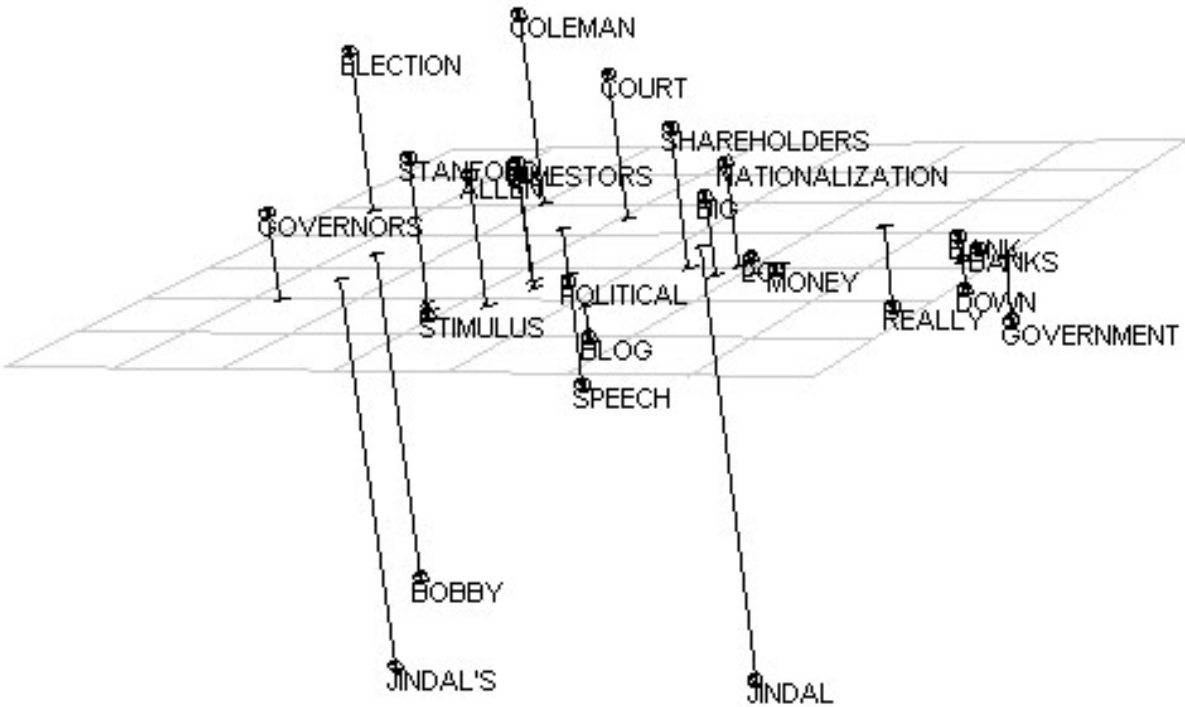
The issue concerning the implementation of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, or stimulus, was chosen based on the ThoughtView display of concepts from the DailyKos blog.

Figure C.5: FiveThirtyEight concepts



The issue concerning budget was chosen based on the ThoughtView display of concepts from the FiveThirtyEight blog. To narrow the concept, the researcher queried the combined blog analysis for concepts closely related most to the budget concept. The spending concept was added to this issue, narrowing its application in the content analysis.

Figure C.6: Talking Points Memo concepts



The issue concerning the nationalization was chosen based on the ThoughtView display of concepts from the Talking Points Memo blog.

Concepts chosen from each blog and the combined analysis of all blog content took into account the appearance of these concepts among the other blogs. For example, the most outstanding concept was not chosen from each ThoughtView analysis, rather, the combined outstanding concepts were chosen and each concept was determined to have appeared in at least one of the ThoughtView analyses.

Appendix D: Issue queries

Once the researcher selected concepts to represent issues in the content analysis, it was necessary to define the issues so that the program NVivo could accurately select them among the content.

Each concept selected was again searched among all individual articles, posts, and speeches. The most relevant results for each concept helped to define the parameters of each issue. The following text queries defined each issue:

- For the health care concept: The appearance of the words "health care" or the words health and reform.
- For the Iraq concept: The appearance of the words Iraq and combat mission, the words Iraq and withdraw, or the words Iraq and withdrawal.
- For the nationalization concept, simply the appearance of the word nationalization.
- For the stimulus concept, simply the appearance of the word stimulus.
- For the tea party concept: The appearance of the words tea and party, the words tea and parties, or the words tax and protest.
- For the Allen Stanford concept: the appearance of the words "Allen Stanford," the words Stanford and scandal, or the words Stanford and contributed.
- For the Bobby Jindal concept, simply the appearance of the word Jindal.
- For the budget concept: The appearance of the word budget and spending.

The researcher formed all content queries by inspecting the related words that defined each issue in the most relevant results returned by NVivo for each chosen concept. There was one exception to this: The budget issue query included the word spending after an Oresme search revealed that the two concepts related strongly among the collected content. This search, conducted within the CatPac II program, seeks concepts with strong connections among all other concepts in a body of content (Woelfel, 1993). To effectively limit the budget issue, which included a wide array of issues during the time period of the analysis, the researcher added the word “spending” to the content query in order to limit the issue to the most pertinent results related to blog discussion.