

Stability and Change in the Political Blogosphere in the 2008 Election: An Institutional Approach

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Abstract: This paper presents the first round of findings from a new dataset, the Blogosphere Authority Index (BAI). Building off of the agenda set out in “Understanding Blogspace” (Karpf 2008b), the paper treats elite political blogs as quasi-interest groups, gathering places for online communities-of-interest and asks how the increased traffic and heightened attention of the 2008 campaign season affected the institutional development of these new internet-mediated organizational forms. Three core questions are explored: (1) how much stability is there in the relative influence of these blogs? Does the #1 blog during offyear elections remain #1 during the heightened attention of the presidential election season? (2) How have conservative community blogs in particular fared during the election cycle? The community blog format is particularly useful for converting blog discussion into collective action, and progressive bloggers have a demonstrated edge in this type of blog. Has the 2008 election cycle led to an increase in conservative community blogs’ sphere of influence? (3) Do progressive blogs or conservative blogs gain relatively more traffic during the election season? Previous research (Karpf 2008a) demonstrates a small advantage for the political left. Has this advantage increased, diminished, or remained unchanged?

Drawing upon a set of weekly and monthly BAI rankings, the paper demonstrates that the system is indeed quite stable, supporting Hindman’s (2008) suggestion about the stability of website rankings. It finds that the gap between the political left and political right has substantially grown since 2007, and also finds that conservative community blogs have entered a surprising downward spiral. The paper ends by discussing avenues for future research on the blogosphere and internet-mediated organizational forms.’

Introduction

The 2008 election season will likely be remembered, among other things, as the year when blogs ceased to be a novel feature of the political landscape. A surprising innovation as recently as the 2004 election, weblogs (“blogs”) initially signaled a shift in the political use of the internet, from static information repository to networked

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conversation tool. Blogging was identified both as a promising new medium for participatory democracy and as the latest overhyped online “bubble.” By 2006, elite political bloggers were endorsing and fundraising for candidates, influencing media frames and regularly being featured in mainstream media (MSM) political programs as guest commenters. Ned Lamont’s “netroots”-fueled victory over Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman in the state Democratic primary indicated that blogs could serve as a meaningful platform for influencing politics, while Lieberman’s victory in the general election served to vindicate skeptics of the blogosphere’s influence. By 2008, blogs had been incorporated as a standard offering in the online presence of various media, commercial, and political institutions. Online news sites such as the Huffington Post and Politico.com feature blogs as one in a multitude of news offerings. Traditional news organizations like CNN and the New York Times have followed suit. Think tanks, interest groups, and political campaigns have all added blogging into their suite of online offerings, while millions visit major independent political blogs like DailyKos and HotAir and millions more post an occasional diary at their own, rarely-visited personal blog.

The spread of the technology comes with a note of caution for researchers interested in understanding its impact. This paper takes as a baseline assumption that we can no longer treat “bloggers” as a single, undifferentiated group. Blogging is, quite simply, the practice of posting some form of commentary online (usually in reverse-chronological order, often with the opportunity for reader feedback in a “comments” section). The differences between a featured political blog hosted by CNN or the Washington Post, a recommended diary on progressive mega-site DailyKos, a call-to-

action at the conservative site Townhall, and a pseudonymous blogger posting their thoughts on a free blogspot.com site far outweigh their similarities. If we are to understand how new media affects political participation and engagement, we must understand how it is incorporated into the existing institutional landscape.

This is not a paper on the blogosphere's impact on the 2008 election. Such a paper necessarily runs into the thorny population-definition issue of "who and what constitutes 'the blogosphere?'" A Blog is a relatively basic technological artifact, and it is employed in myriad and competing directions. Rather, this paper further develops a set of theoretical propositions laid out in a previous publication, "Understanding Blogspace." (Karpf 2008b) That paper centrally argues that political blogs can be spatially divided into four distinct categories based on their architectural choices and relationship to existing institutions of authority. It presents evidence that certain blog types, "community blogs" in particular, operate as gathering spaces for online communities-of-interest and can best be understood as quasi-interest groups, rather than mass amateur attempts at "citizen journalism." Political community blogs endorse candidates, launch affiliated Political Action Committees, attempt to move issues up the public agenda, move their readers and diarists up a "ladder of engagement" and even hold annual in-person conventions. The difference between a major community blog and a traditional interest group lies in staff and fundraising infrastructure, indicative of a broader change in the political economy of interest group representation, rather than in goals, niches, or objectives.

Given that networks of elite political bloggers function as quasi-interest groups, and given that the election season produces a well-known increase in traffic to these sites,

the question emerges, “how has the 2008 election affected the political blogosphere?” More specifically, the 2008 election season offers an excellent venue for studying how these budding organizations operate, which in turn yields important implications for our understanding of the changing interest group landscape. Is this an increasingly “liberal” medium? Are conservatives learning to adopt the no-longer-novel technological artifacts, making up ground in the online interest group space? How stable is the hierarchy of the elite political blogosphere? Do the low transaction costs of the medium allow for effective launch of a plethora of new online issue groups, or does the heavily skewed distribution of web traffic and hyperlinks, approximating a power law distribution in nature (Hindman 2003, 2008), lead to stability in the system and limit the opportunities for new political blogs to a substantial following? Under what conditions should we expect a blog to substantially improve its user-base and traffic? What, in essence, can the 2008 election teach us about the *institutional development* of “netroots” organizations? This study is designed to help interest group and new media scholars begin to grapple with this set of questions.

Literature Review

Interest in political blogs first surfaced with a set of papers at the 2003 and 2004 American Political Science Association annual meetings, including Drezner and Farrell’s “The Power and Politics of Blogs,” McKenna and Pole’s “Do Blogs Matter? Weblogs in American Politics,” Matthew Hindman’s “Googlearchy,” and Joel David Bloom’s “The Blogosphere: How a Once-Humble Medium Came to Drive Elite Media Discourse and

Influence Public Policy and Elections.” All of these papers reflected a reality of the blogosphere at that time: it was comprised of early-adopting individuals – “bloggers” – who were networked together through their blogrolls and active hyperlinks.¹ Bloggers exhibited certain similarities in writing style and many of them took up the mantle of “citizen journalism,” using the infinitesimal costs of online self-publishing to challenge traditional media institutions. Bloom illustrated the central role bloggers played in the 2002 Trent Lott scandal. Hindman found that the skewed distribution of hyperlinks suggested an online “A-List” within the blogosphere, while Drezner and Farrell challenged his suggestion of just how difficult it might be for non-A-List blogs to break into the elite circle. McKenna and Pole conducted an e-mail survey of political bloggers to investigate the bloggers’ own sense of political efficacy.

The 2004 election saw a surge of interest in the medium, particularly as the Howard Dean campaign raised record online funds with the help of liberal bloggers affiliated with MyDD and DailyKos. Lada Adamic and Natalie Glance conducted a well-known study of blog hyperlink patterns, “The Political Blogosphere and the 2004 US Election: Divided They Blog” demonstrating that the political left and political right constitute rarely-overlapping network neighborhoods. They also found a slight edge in favor of the conservative blogosphere, given their higher density of hyperlinking between sites. Robert Ackland re-analyzed their dataset in “Mapping the US Political Blogosphere: Are Conservative Bloggers More Prominent?” and found that conservative “A-List” bloggers had a substantial edge in hyperlink activity. Kevin Wallsten took a

¹ A blogroll is a list of bloggers that the site owner(s) recommends or frequently visits, usually running along a side column of the blog itself. Each name in the list consists of a passive hyperlink to the recommended site. Active hyperlinks refer to links appearing within the text of a blog entry.

different approach to the 2004 election, coding and analyzing a large set of individual blog posts, with the aim of investigating how ordinary people use blogs as a form of political expression. Antoinette Pole also contributed interview-based studies of Hispanic bloggers, black bloggers, and a content analysis based study of congressional blogs. This last study is noteworthy as an indication of how, as the medium of blogging gained popularity and wider adoption, its uses were beginning to be applied to an expanding set of tasks. Traditional media institutions, congressional offices and political campaigns, policy institutes and advocacy organizations all started to incorporate blogs into their suite of web-based offerings. The community blogging format, which includes the opportunity for users to register with the site and post “diaries” of their own within the sites boundaries, further blurred the distinction between “blogger,” “commenter,” and “reader.” While the early blogosphere was made up of bloggers who hyperlinked to each other’s sites, the post-2004 blogosphere was made up increasingly of community hubs where like-minded partisans would gather and engage in a dialogue. Noted web scientist Joichi Ito has referred to this tendency as “place-based organizing.” Ali Savino of the Center for Independent Media reflected on this trend during a 2007 panel and concluded, “[In the elite blogosphere] There really is no longer the individual blogger-type.” The necessarily slow pace of academic publishing could not keep pace with these changes, and the small amount of research being published and presented on the blogosphere fell further and further out of step with the shifting uses of the medium.

My own entry into the blog research field came in response to these early studies. With the geometric expansion of the blogosphere, from an estimated 1 million in 2004 to over 112 million by 2007,² two methodological issues had come into focus. First, all of

² As measured by technorati.com

the papers listed above constructed their sample of “A-list” blogs through some merger of publicly available “top 100” lists. This means of sampling had become untenable, as all of those data sources had, in reaction to this explosive growth, been rendered defunct, systematically flawed, or overbroad (Karpf 2008a). Furthermore, as indicated by Ackland’s study of hyperlinks, whose finding of conservative dominance stood at odds with public perceptions of an increasing left-wing online advantage, there were substantial problems with equating “hyperlinks” with “authority” or “prominence.” If conservative blogs on average have much larger blogrolls than progressive blogs, is that any indication that they are actually more *effective*?

The second methodological issue lay in equating “blogs” with “bloggers” and, more tendentiously, with citizen journalism. Is DailyKos best understood as the blog of Markos “kos” Moulitsas, its proprietor and namesake, or as the gathering space for the tens of thousands of active commenters and diarists who contribute to it daily? At what point does a reader/commenter/diarist at DailyKos become a “blogger,” and if they are using the blog to support their political campaign efforts, why should we equate that with journalism rather than political activism? Equally problematic is the case of blogger James Wolcott, who is hosted by VanityFair.com. Wolcott does not enable user comments, he generally posts one essay-length entry per day, and he does not blog on weekends. The only noticeable difference between Wolcott and a traditional journalist is that his columns appear online rather than in print. If blog scholars treat Wolcott – clearly a member of the blogging “A-list” – as part of an undifferentiated class of “bloggers” attempting to affect politics, then the population boundary definitions become so untenable as to render future research meaningless.

This led to my previous two research publications. The first, “Measuring Influence in the Political Blogosphere: Who’s Winning and How Can We Tell” introduced the Blogosphere Authority Index (BAI) as a new system for tracking influence among elite blogs. The BAI combines four distinct measures of blog effectiveness – Network Centrality, Site Traffic, Hyperlinks, and Community Activity – into a single aggregate ranking system. The paper presents the BAI methodology and offers initial “top 25” rankings of the progressive and conservative blog neighborhoods based on data collected in November 2007. The network centrality measure is a sociometric tool, allowing us to focus on “clumps” or neighborhoods of interlinked blogs. The other three measures tell us how often the sites are visited, referenced by other sites, and how often blog posts receive comments from readers.

The second publication, “Understanding Blogspace” introduces a typology of blog software platforms to help solve the troubling population-definition issue. A simple, four-part typology, the blogspace map spatially locates blog sites according to their use of community-enhancing software code and their relationship to traditional media and political institutions (see figure 1, reproduced from “Understanding Blogspace”). The paper then places the top 25 progressive and conservative blogs from the November 2007 BAI into the blogspace typology, classifying them as either “classic blogs,” “community blogs,” “institutional blogs,” or “bridge blogs.” While classic blogs operate as megaphones, amplifying an individual’s (or collection of individuals’) voice through the hyperlinked internet, community blogs use their added features to serve as gathering places for online communities-of-interest. Institutional blogs lack these membership-engaging tools, but are associated with a media outfit, political campaign, or other

organization. They are thus used to augment an organization's existing mission, rather than to challenge existing structures of authority. Bridge blogs, which have only recently begun to emerge, combine the institutional reputation of an offline media entity with software code that enables broad participation. There are only a few such bridge blogs, though trends appear to head in the direction of this platform. The paper demonstrated that the progressive blog network had a small overall advantage when the two "top 25" lists were merged into a combined "top 50" list, and it also found that the political left had a particularly large edge in the area of community blogs. Using fundraising data from the 2006 congressional elections, it demonstrated that community blogs prove to be a particularly effective format for "netroots" activists to operate as quasi-interest groups, attempting to affect elections by endorsing candidates, raising staggering sums of money for them in short periods of time, influencing media frames and mobilizing short-burst campaigns.³

In the aftermath of these two papers, I sought to automate the BAI ranking methodology in order to compile a dataset that tracks the elite blogosphere and reveals how it changes over time. In particular, I was interested in learning how stable the rankings would prove to be (potentially supporting Hindman's earlier work) and also in seeing whether the progressive edge in the community blogging quadrant of blogspace would diminish over time as online conservatives sought to mimic the trumpeted success of online progressives. This paper presents the first round of data analysis from those automated BAI rankings, relying upon the initial November 2007 BAI, monthly rankings from August 2008 through February 2009, and weekly rankings from September 21,

³ I further explore the subject of community-blogs-as-interest groups in a recent conference paper for the 2009 International Studies Association Annual Meeting, "The Superdelegate Transparency Project and the New Rules of Latent Group Activation."

2008 through December 14, 2008, encompassing the heightened public interest and traffic levels during the 2008 presidential campaign and the return to normal traffic levels in the post-campaign period. I further discuss the methodology and initial hypotheses below.

	Closed Authorship/Mobility	Open Authorship/Mobility
Personal Reputation	Blogging Classic (mywackythoughts.blogspot.com)	Community Blogging (www.dailykos.com)
Organizational Reputation	Media Blogs, Campaign Blogs, Organizational Blogs (James Wolcott, Howard Kurtz, Carl Pope)	“Bridge Blogs” (www.huffingtonpost.com)

Figure 1: the basic blogspace typology

Research Methodology

The Blogosphere Authority Index is a ranking mechanism for “neighborhoods” or “clumps” of interlinked blogs. It is important to note at the outset a few things that the BAI therefore does *not* accomplish. First, the BAI necessarily ignores the millions of blogs that are either non-elite, non-political, or not considered *by their peers* to be part of the progressive or conservative political community. This can yield some noteworthy

exceptions. Ron Paul bloggers, for instance, were shunned by the elite conservative blogs during the 2008 primary season. As a result, though they clearly were political in nature, and a few attracted substantial traffic, the BAI identifies them as an empirically distinct “neighborhood.” Conservative and progressive refer not to objective ideological indicators, or even revealed partisan preferences, but rather to elite networks of actors who read and interact with each other. Borrowing from Adamic and Glance (2005), political preference in the blogosphere can be observed by the company you keep. According to this perspective, if a conservative blog author is rarely listed in blogrolls of their peers, then they are treated as an outlier or a member of some other, unexamined blog neighborhood. The BAI methodology can be usefully applied to any neighborhood with an identifiable central hub site, though for the purposes of my research, I have only applied it to the two neighborhoods dominated by DailyKos and HotAir.

After identifying this networked clump of associated blogs, the BAI gathers three other types of information about their authority. Hyperlinks, site traffic, and comment activity each represent a different form of blog strength, each with their own strengths and pitfalls. Rather than seeking to independently determine how many site visits a hyperlink is equivalent to, we convert each measure (including the sociometric network centrality measure) to an ordinal ranking. This is designed to be a “plug and play” system, such that we take the best publicly available system for ranking these three forms of proxy data, then convert to rankings. At present for instance, Technorati provides the best measure of hyperlink patterns. If, years from now, another system rises to prominence and provides better data on hyperlinks, we can seamlessly swap data sources without overturning the tracking system. So long as the raw data can be converted to

ordinal rankings, it can be used by the BAI. This feature potentially makes the BAI more durable than competing tracking systems as new features of the internet rapidly develop.

Blog data collection is an inherently noisy endeavor. There is substantial value in launching spam blogs or “splogs” to artificially boost a site’s Technorati score, or in using bots to artificially boost site traffic. Either of these can help generate additional revenue for the sites. With talented coders fighting an ongoing war to game the system and keep it accurate, any single measure of blog influence is vulnerable to manipulation. The final BAI measure is calculated by the formula [FinalRank = Rank1+Rank2+Rank3+Rank4-LowestRank], where each of the contributing ranks consists of an ordinal ranking along the metrics of Network Centrality Score, Hyperlink Authority Score, Site Traffic Score, and Community Activity Score. This allows blogs that do not allow comments, blogs which are not tracked by Technorati, or blogs whose site traffic is not publicly available to be included in the rankings. It also allows bridge blogs like HuffingtonPost and Townhall, which often are not listed in blogrolls because many individual bloggers consider them media ventures rather than blogs per se, to overcome their artificially low scores in this area. For more details on the construction of the BAI, consult Karpf 2008a or contact me directly.

For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that blogs which lack *two* of these inputs are excluded from the BAI. Thus “The Corner,” a popular conservative site hosted by National Review Online, is not included because its site traffic cannot be determined and it does not allow comments.⁴ Also, since blogrolls are rarely and slowly

⁴ Institutional blogs generally display problems in gathering site traffic data. Site traffic is primarily calculated with Sitemeter data, an opt-in system for sites to record unique visits/day. Blogs that don’t use sitemeter can be included through triangulation using the traffic rankings at Alexa.com, but Alexa rankings cover complete domain names rather than specific URLs. Thus a blog hosted by Slate or NRO will be treated by Alexa as if it

updated, new sites such as FiveThirtyEight.com can, in practical terms, become an oft-cited member of a blog community before the system can record it as such. The Site Traffic and Community Activity measures can exhibit heavy week-to-week fluctuation, while the Network Centrality and Hyperlink Authority measures change more slowly. Finally, in order to capture popular blogs that do not rank highly in the original Network Centrality rankings, the system gathers data on twice as many blogs as it reports. I have set the BAI to report “top 25” rankings for each blog network, so it gathers data on the 50 most-central blogs in each network. 25 is an arbitrary cutoff point, but reflects what I believe to be a reasonable size for capturing all of the major sites in a neighborhood.

After the initial hand-calculation of the November 2007 BAI, I set about automating the system for continuous data collection. With the help of a research assistant with substantial computer programming background, the system was up and running by August 2008 and it has recorded monthly rankings ever since. We increased this to weekly rankings for the heightened traffic of the 2008 election and the post-election “return to normalcy” in blog traffic levels. The complete dataset therefore currently includes 17 weeks of BAI rankings, including the November 2007 initial input, August 2008, 13 entries of weekly data spanning from September 22nd through December 14th (data is calculated and posted on Sunday for the preceding week), and monthly data for January and February 2009. Each of these postings includes a progressive “top 25,” a conservative “top 25,” and a combined “top 50” that allows for comparison of network centrality, hyperlinks, traffic, and comments between the two blog communities. All

received all the traffic to the online news magazine’s site. Similarly, bridge blogs systematically underperform in the network centrality rankings and community blogs occasionally underperform in the comment rankings by enabling comments in unrecordable areas of the site.

ranked data is publicly available online at www.blogosphereauthorityindex.com, and all raw data is free to researchers upon request.

For this particular paper, I use the BAI data to investigate three research questions, detailed below.

Research Question 1: Systemic Stability in the Political Blogosphere

The political blogosphere experiences a well-known traffic increase during every election season. Consider figure 2, which charts the total number of blog entries posted monthly at DailyKos since the site launched on the “Scoop” community blogging platform in October 2003. Scoop allows visitors to register and post their own content in the form of user “diaries, making the total volume of diaries an appropriate indicator of traffic or activity. Note the volume of postings indicated by the Y-axis; the volume of blog posts on DailyKos in a given day usually meets or exceeds the volume of blog posts generated in either the rest of the elite progressive blogosphere or the entire elite conservative blogosphere. Along with a general upward trend as the site has gained exposure and attracted a larger population of “kossack” members, we can see three obvious spikes occurring during November of 2004, 2006, and 2008. As demonstrated in figures 3 and 4, if we sum the total number of sitemeter visits⁵ and comments to the top 25 progressive and conservative blogs across the 17 BAI data capture periods, we find a similar increases for the election season. Given the overwhelming volume of progressive

⁵ The sitemeter graph records a skewed portion of the overall BAI. Due to the vagaries of tracking site traffic through a combination of sitemeter, and alexa data (see Karpf 2008a), chart 3 only includes data from 13 of the top 25 progressive sites and 16 of the top 25 conservative sites.

comments attributable to the DailyKos community blog, figure 4 has been divided into three columns, progressive, conservative, and DailyKos.

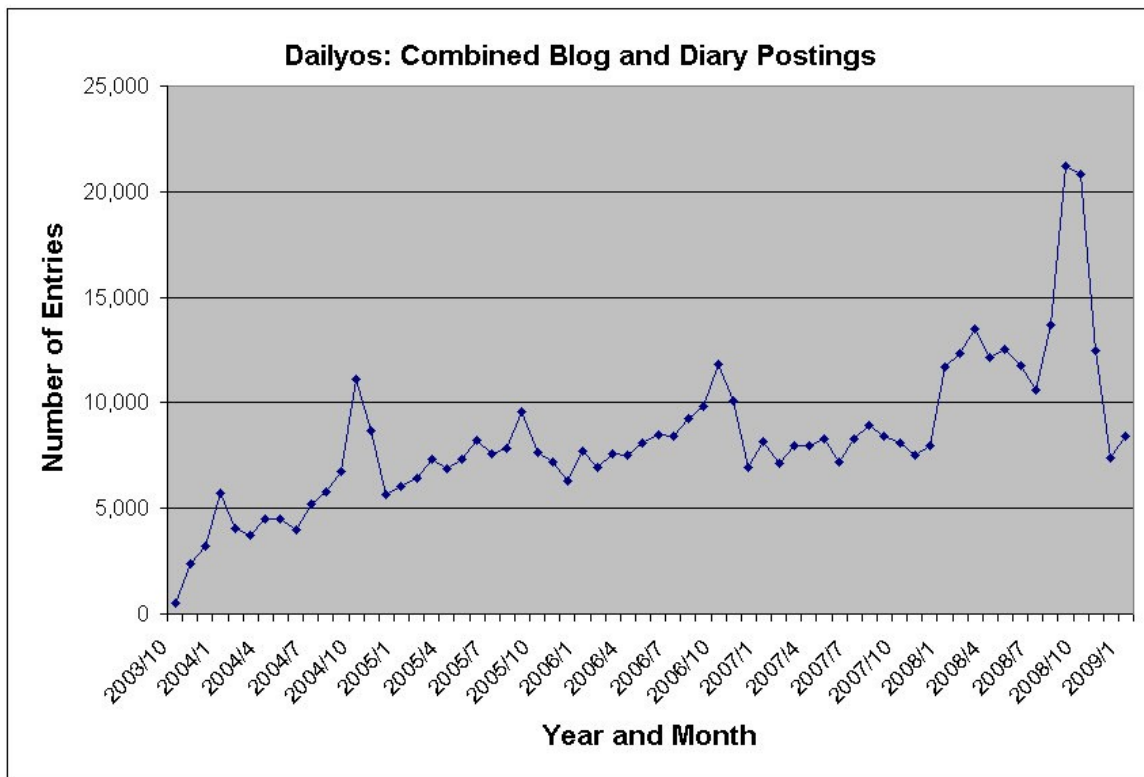


Figure 2: Blog and Diary entries over the lifetime of DailyKos.com

Total Site Visits Per Week (only including sites that offer Sitemeter.com data)

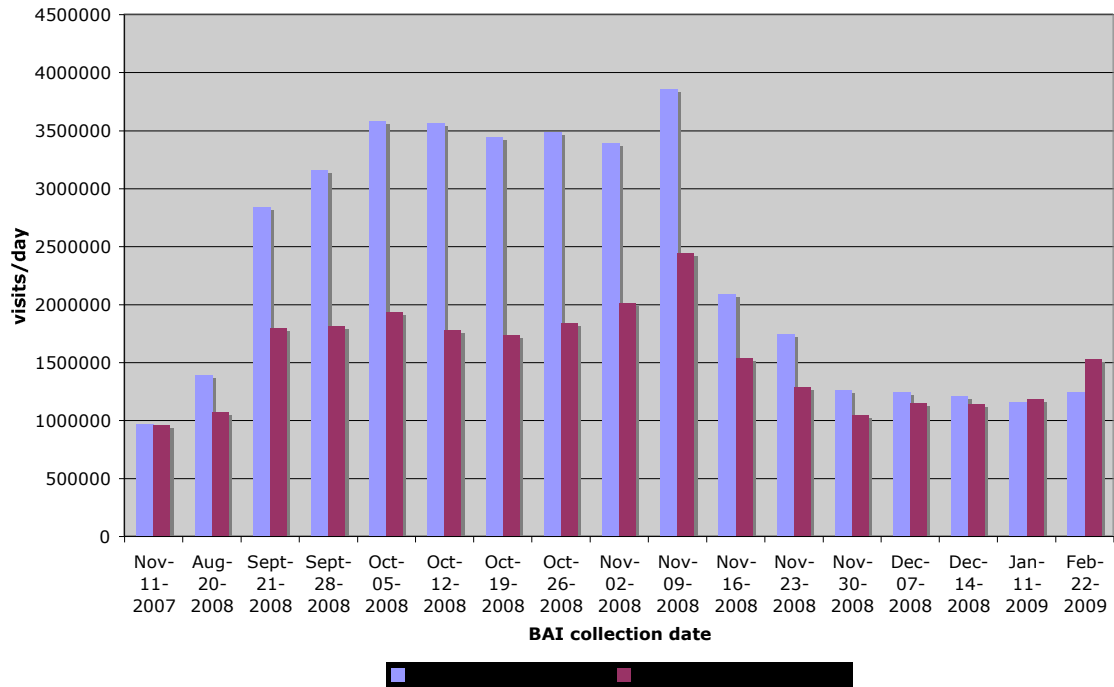


Figure 3: Total site traffic among Sitemeter.com blogs

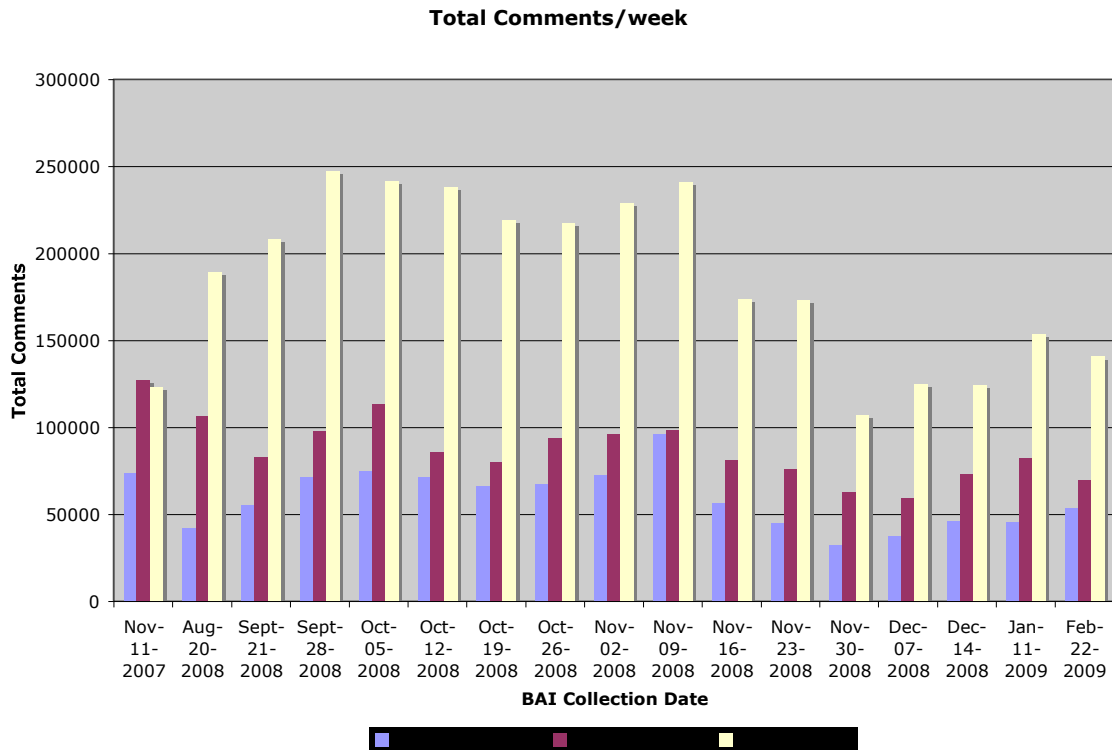


Figure 4: Total comments/week for DailyKos, top 25 progressive and conservative blogs.

Matthew Hindman advances the argument in *The Myth of Digital Democracy* that the political blogosphere follows a power law distribution, and that this leads to overwhelming stability among the elite sites. Given the traffic surge of the election season, the time series data from the BAI provides an excellent test of this stability hypothesis. Research Question 1 can therefore be framed as follows:

RQ1: How stable are the top 25 rankings in the progressive and conservative blog neighborhoods? If a site is at Rank x at time 1, how far is it likely to deviate from Rank x at time 2?

Given the highly skewed traffic distributions across Hyperlink Authority Scores, Site Traffic Scores, and Community Activity Scores, I further hypothesize that variance will increase as we move down the rankings. The distance between the 20th- and 21st- ranked political blogs, in other words, is much smaller than the distance between the 2nd and 3rd.

Research Question 2: The Dearth of Healthy Conservative Community Blogs

One major finding of “Understanding Blogspace” was the substantial advantage that the progressive blogosphere held in the area of community blogs (quadrant II in the blogspace map). DailyKos, MyDD, and OpenLeft all act as quasi-interest groups, while HuffingtonPost and TalkingPointsMemo have community engagement features, but mimic traditional media institutions enough to place them among the quadrant IV bridge blogs. Conservative blogs, meanwhile, primarily appeared in quadrants I and III. Of particular note was the odd tendency among top conservative blogs to require user registration before commenting, but then close off registration so that no new user/members could participate on the site. *Of the top 5 conservative sites, three had closed registration and one did not allow any comments.* This is essentially the opposite of the broad-based communities-of-interest found among the top progressive blogs, where the acts of registering for an account, posting a comment, leaving a rating, and posting a diary serve as the first critical steps in a “ladder of engagement” similar to those found in traditional civic associations (Andrews et al 2005). I hypothesized at the time that this might be due to the earlier network status of top conservative bloggers in conservative media and think tank circles. Michelle Malkin, who at the time hosted both

the #1 and #4 blogs (MichelleMalkin.com and HotAir.com), is a contributor to Fox News, and many other individual bloggers also had roots in traditional conservative media journals, newspapers, or television outlets. Given the demonstrated advantages of the community blog format in terms of encouraging large-scale participation (including, critically, fundraising – see Karpf 2008b), it is my expectation that the heightened activity of the election season would see conservative community blogs improve in the rankings, reducing the infrastructure deficit between the online political Left and Right.

RQ2: If we classify the members of the conservative top 25 by blogspace quadrant, do type 2/community blogs improve relative to the other software platforms?

Research Question 3: Progressive Dominance Under Heightened Conditions

A third and final research question borrowed from the initial findings of Karpf 2008a. In “Measuring Influence,” I found that the November 2007 Combined BAI exhibited evidence of an online advantage for the progressive blogging sites. When the top 25 progressive and conservative sites were given ordinal top 50 rankings, I found that there were seven progressive sites among the top 10, and the average rank of all progressive sites was 23.5, while conservative sites only occupied 3 of the top 10 slots and averaged out to a rank of 27.48. This four point gap between the two blog networks was indicative of a substantial overall progressive lead, because the power law distribution of the hyperlink, traffic, and community activity measures meant that the lion’s share of activity was occurring among the top handful of sites. Graphs of the raw

data for each individual metric indicated huge gaps between the top 5 progressive and conservative sites, but sites ranked 6-25 in the two networks converged to approximate parity.

The third and final research question designed in this first-run analysis asks how the influx of blog traffic affected this comparative advantage. Did progressive and conservative sites benefit equally from the flood of new visitors? Did conservative sites in general decrease the gap, or did progressive sites pull further ahead?

RQ3: How did the top 10 rankings and average rank of progressive and conservative sites change between November 2007 and the 2008 election season?

Results

RQ1:

For research question 1, I began by recording the week-by-week rank of each site in the progressive, conservative, and combined BAIs over the course of 15 data collection periods. November 2007 and August 22, 2008 were excluded from this analysis, the former because it represents such a substantial time-lapse that it is best used as baseline data rather than as part of the time series, the latter because it was the single “pre-election season” data collection. Though useful for future research questions, I cannot rule out the possibility that August 22nd rankings were heavily biased by discussion of the pending Democratic Convention the following week. The monthly data collection from January and February 2009 is included because this is part of an ongoing data collection and is verifiably “post-election.” I expect to continue to add month-by-month data to this analysis as it comes available. From these site-by-site data tables (reproduced for

transparency in appendix 1), I converted all rank-changes into a transition matrix for the top 25 rankings. Any ranks of 26 or above are noted as “25+” and left blank in the matrix. The transition matrix measures week-to-week stability and change in the system as a whole. In all instances where a progressive site was ranked third, for instance, the matrix recorded the rank that site held the following week – in this case, 3rd-ranked progressive sites remained 3rd in 15 cases and dropped to 4th in 3 cases.⁶ Note that this measures stability of each *rank* in the system, but does not measure stability of each *site*. If a site began the election season ranked 3rd and steadily declined to 10th, that would be a substantively interesting finding, but one that would not be revealed by this method of data analysis. *Site* stability will be a subject of future investigation, but is not a part of this research report.

The two transition matrices are reproduced below. I also graphically transform them into scatterplot charts which include the expanding confidence intervals as we move from the highest site rankings to the lowest. Standard deviation is calculated for each individual rank, then “squiggly” confidence interval boundaries are drawn on the scatterplot by connecting the lower and upper 2-standard-deviation boundaries for each rank. This is a less-than-ideal representation of the confidence interval, as a number of ranks appear to have only one tail. Looking at rank 3 in figures 5a and 6a, for instance, no 3rd-ranked site among the progressive or conservative bloggers ever reached rank 2, but 3 3rd-ranked progressives and 2 3rd-ranked conservatives dropped to a lower rank in a subsequent week. I am considering alternate representations of systemic stability and am open to recommendations or comments.

⁶ Note that this sums to nineteen cases of a site ranking 3rd in the fifteen time-series rankings. The BAI awards two sites whose FinalRank is equivalent with the same rank. Thus when a tie for 3rd place occurs, the BAI lists rankings as 1,2,3,3,5,...

BAI Rankings on Successive Weeks - Progressive Blogs

		BAI Rank The Following Week																									Total	Conf Interval		
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25		Lower	Upper	
BAI Rank	1	19	3																								22.0	0.5	1.8	
	2	3	5																								8.0	0.7	2.6	
	3			15	3																							18.0	2.4	3.9
	4			2	8	5	3	1																				19.0	2.6	6.7
	5			1	3	4	1	1																				10.0	2.6	7.0
	6				5	1	8	2																				16.0	3.3	7.6
	7			1		1	2	8																				12.0	4.0	8.7
	8								12	2	1	1																16.0	6.7	10.2
	9								3	8		1	1															13.0	7.0	11.4
	10									2	9	3			2	2												18.0	6.8	15.5
	11									1	5	4	1	4	2		1	1	1									20.0	7.4	17.2
	12								1	1	1	2	1		3		2	2										13.0	7.1	18.9
	13										2	3	4	4		1	1		1									16.0	8.4	16.8
	14										1	4	2	2	2	2	2											15.0	9.1	16.8
	15											1		3	1		3							1				9.0	8.5	21.5
	16								1	1		1	3	1	3	3		1	1	1			1					17.0	7.5	20.7
	17											1		1	1		1	1		3	1		2					11.0	10.6	24.3
	18											1				2	2	1	1		1	2	1					11.0	11.1	23.8
	19																1	3	2	1	1	5			1			14.0	15.0	23.7
	20																1	1	2	3	2		1	1	1			12.0	15.0	24.2
	21																2		2	3	1	2	2		1			13.0	15.1	24.2
	22																		1	1	3		2	3	1	3		14.0	17.6	26.6
	23																	1		1	1	1	1	4	1	5		15.0	17.5	27.7
	24																				1	2	2	2	1	5		13.0	19.7	26.6
	25																						2	3	2	9		16.0	21.9	26.3

Figure 5a: Progressive Transition Matrix

Progressive Blog

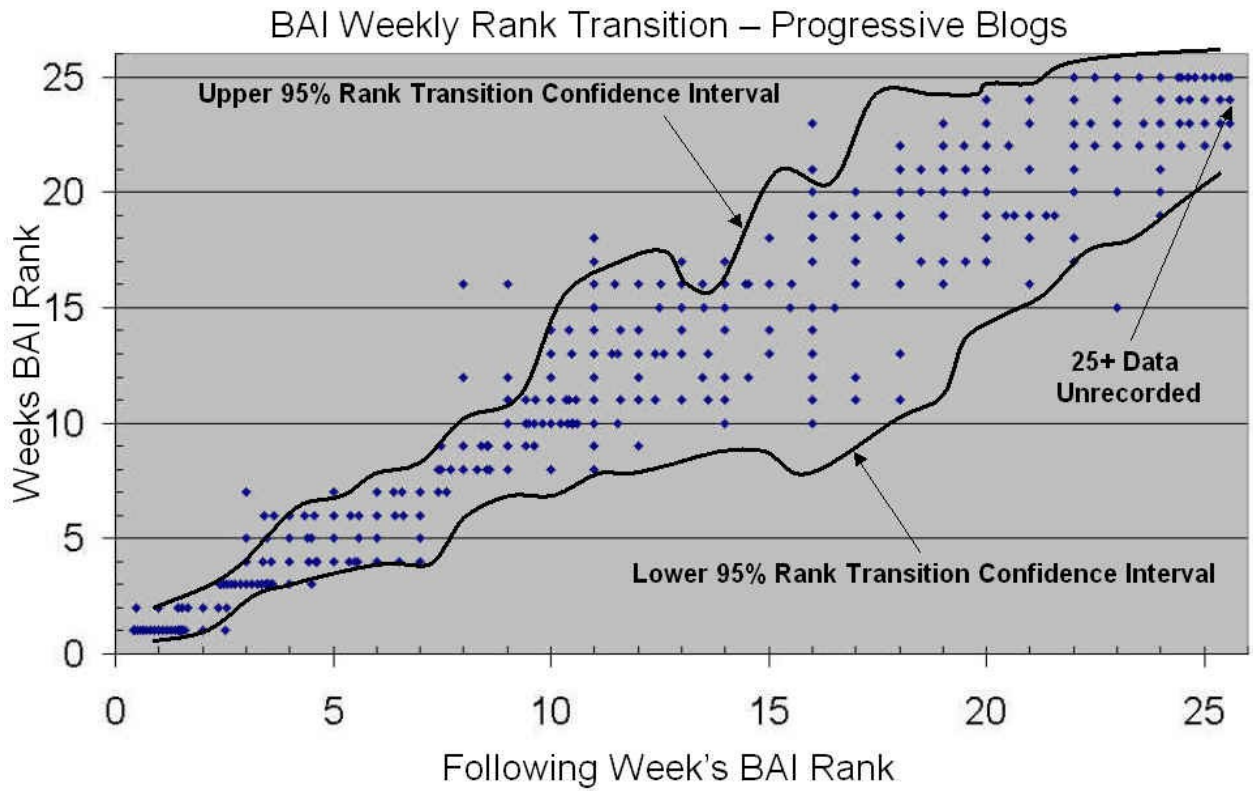


Figure 5b: Progressive Transition Scatterplot w/ confidence intervals

BAI Rankings on Successive Weeks - Conservative Blogs

BAI Rank	BAI Rank The Following Week																									Total	Conf Interval		
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25		Lower	Upper	
1	15																									15.0	1.0	1.0	
2		15																								15.0	2.0	2.0	
3			13	2																						15.0	2.5	3.8	
4			3	9	4	2	2																			20.0	2.2	6.9	
5				4	2	4		1																		11.0	2.8	7.7	
6				3	3	7	2	1																		16.0	3.5	7.9	
7				3		2	3	5			1			1												15.0	1.8	13.1	
8					2		3	3	5																	13.0	4.9	10.5	
9					1		5	1	6	3	2		1			1										20.0	4.4	13.9	
10									2	1	2		3				1									9.0	7.0	16.6	
11							1	1	2		5	4	1	1				1								16.0	6.6	15.9	
12									1	2	4	3	1	1												12.0	8.7	14.0	
13							1		2	2	1	1	3	1	1	2	4									18.0	6.8	19.4	
14						1				1		2	2	2	1	3	4									16.0	9.2	21.0	
15										1	1	1	2	2	2	1	3		1							14.0	9.6	19.4	
16												1	2	2	4	4		2								15.0	11.8	18.4	
17												3	1	1	3	1	4	1								14.0	11.9	20.1	
18								1		1		1	5	1	1			1	1							12.0	8.7	20.2	
19															1	1		1	5	7	2		1			18.0	15.6	23.1	
20																			5	2	4	4				15.0	18.1	22.9	
21									1											3	3	4			2	13.0	13.3	28.3	
22																				1	2	1	2	5	2	4	17.0	18.1	25.4
23																				2		2	2	3	2	4	15.0	18.8	26.7
24																						1	2	2	7	12.0	22.2	26.3	
25																				2	1			3	1	11	18.0	19.5	27.8

Figure 6a: Conservative Transition Matrix
Conservative Blog

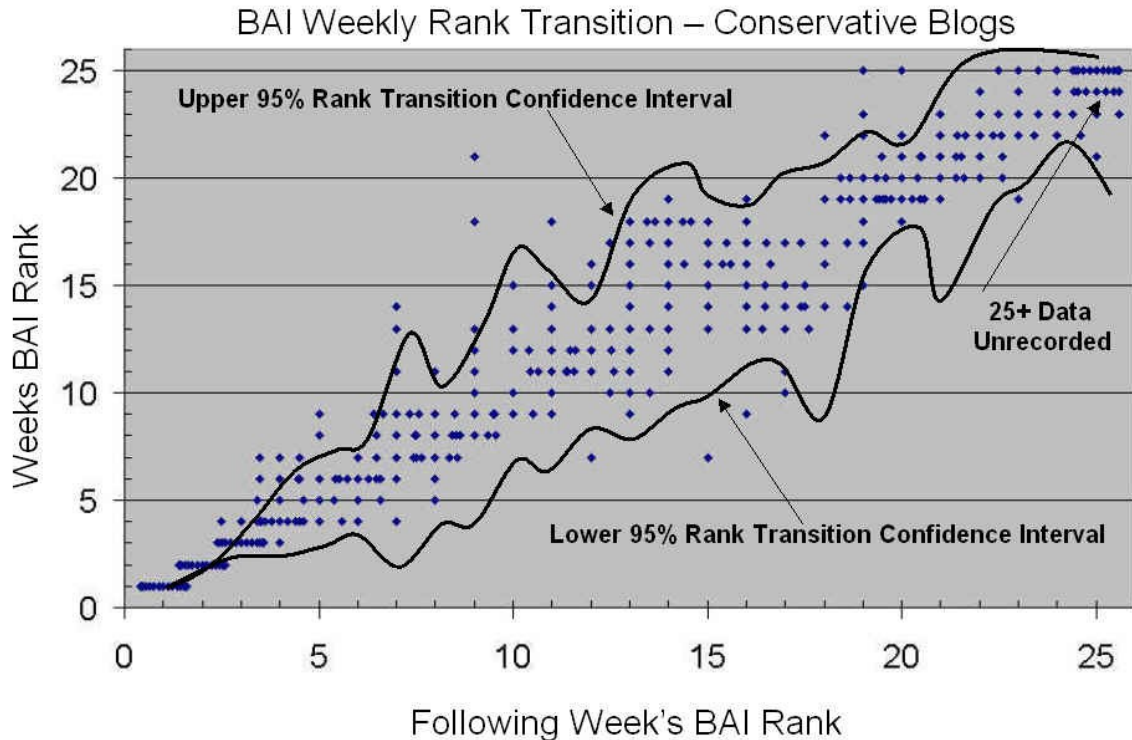


Figure 6b: Conservative Transition Scatterplot w/ Confidence Intervals

What these scatterplots tell us is, firstly, that there is overwhelming stability at the very top of the rankings, and this stability becomes mildly more erratic as we move downward. Among progressive sites, DailyKos remained #1 through the entire time-series, and HuffingtonPost either remained #2 or tied for #1. Among conservative sites, HotAir and MichelleMalkin.com remained #1 and #2 for the duration. As we move down the rankings, the best fit line continues to depict a 1:1 ratio, indicating that the most likely ranking for a site at time T+1 would be the ranking it held at time T. The confidence intervals diverge, however, as the “cloud” of data points scatters further. This, again, is to be expected when a power law or similar heavily-skewed distribution is present. There is an ongoing technical debate about whether the blogosphere demonstrates a power law distribution, a lognormal distribution, or some other heavily-skewed variant (see Drezner and Farrell, pps 8-9 for discussion). That debate concerns the behavior of the long tail, whereas this dataset is meant to exclusively study the short head of the distribution. At present, we can affirmatively state that the combined ordinal ranking system of the BAI supports longstanding previous findings from Hindman 2003, Kottke 2003, Shirky 2003 and others that the elite political blogosphere is characterized by a power law or similar distribution of influence.

This also supports my baseline contention that political blogs can be treated as *institutions*. The population in the top 25 rankings fluctuates mildly, but keep in mind that there are 50 top progressive blogs and 50 top conservative blogs being recorded. The conservative blog at rank 15 at time T may fluctuate out to rank 10 or 19 at time T+1, but it consistently remains within the top 25. These interlinked blogs are building regular

visitors, commenters, and contributors. Progressive community blogs, more than any of the other platforms, have found a way to treat this reader base as community members and engage them in online collective action, but all of the elite sites demonstrate resilience in their elite status.

There is an additional question to be pursued in the second round data analysis, concerning whether the post-election traffic decline represents a statistically significant “breaking point” in the stability of the rankings, but that goes beyond the scope of this initial foray.

RQ2:

For research question 2, I took the median rank of each conservative blog during the week-by-week data and compared it to the original rank recorded in November 2007. Though this compares a single set of data points to the average of 15 sets of data points, the stability demonstrated in RQ1, above suggests that a single set of data points is a reasonable approximation of where the rankings stood in this essentially-stable system one year previously. Each blog’s median rank approximated its mean rank, so I chose the median for the sake of simplicity in the data presentation. Given that this is a relatively small sample of 25 blogs, I placed each site within the two-dimensional blogspace map developed in Karpf 2008b to look for changes in the rankings over the intervening year. Recall that the hypothesized relationship is that blogs that use the community-supporting features found in quadrants II and IV should benefit from their more sophisticated, engaging software platforms and see an increase in the rankings. Figure 7 displays the results of this exercise, with particularly interesting results in bold:

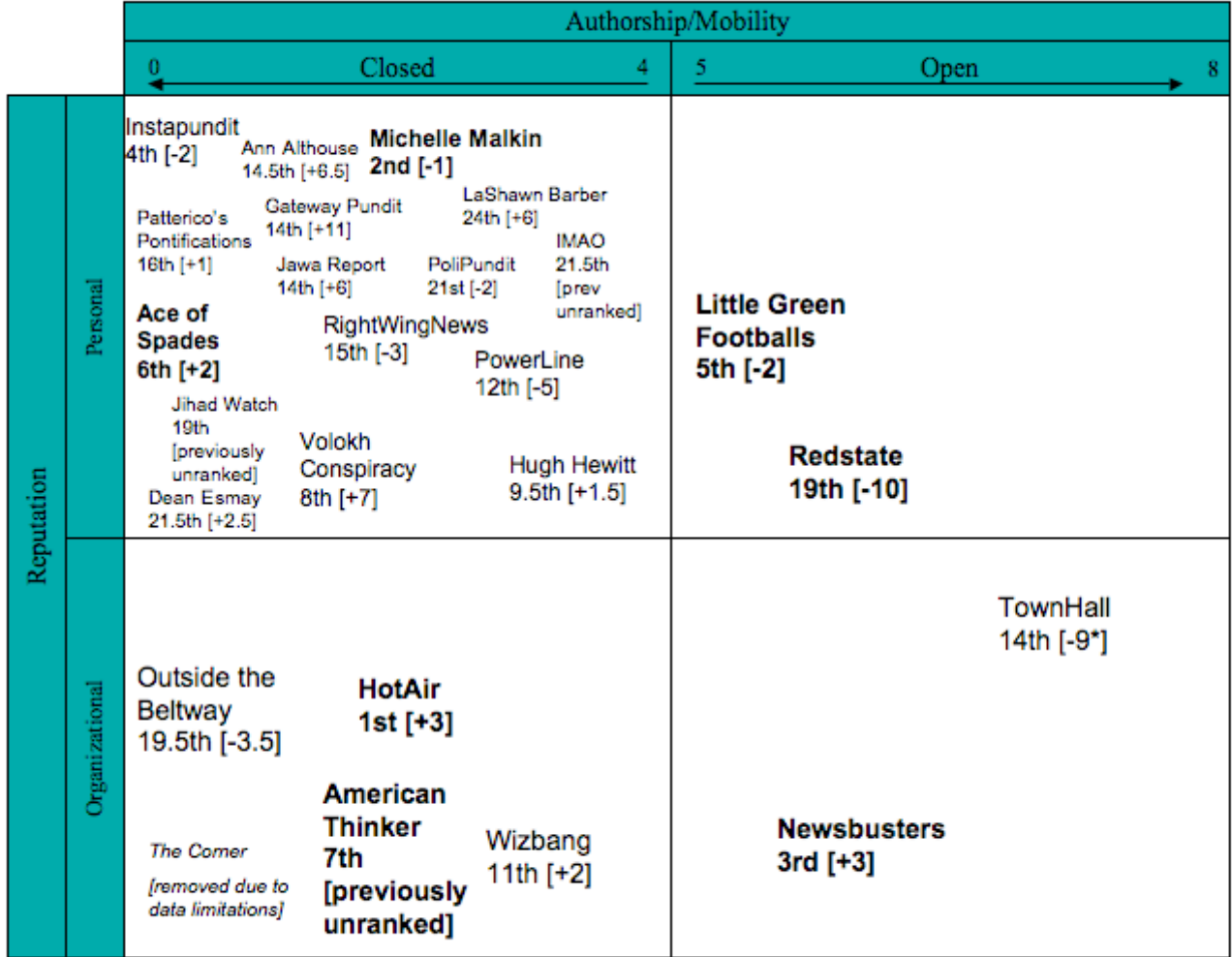


Figure 7: Blogspace map of conservative blogosphere, with rankings and rank shifts

While Newsbusters experienced a substantial increase in the rankings, moving from the 6th-ranked blog to the 3rd-ranked, all other community and bridge blogs experienced a major and unexpected decline in overall authority. It is possible that TownHall's decline is due to coding issues with that site⁷, but the decline of Little Green

⁷ There is a bug in Technorati's hyperlink tracking software which they have yet to fix. Additionally, the separate treatment by other conservative bloggers of Hugh Hewitt and the rest of TownHall leads to a unique coding problem in counting comments and site traffic.

Footballs from 3rd to 5th and the collapse of RedState from 9th to 19th in the rankings run absolutely counter to expectations and are easily the most surprising finding revealed by the dataset thus far. There is no simple or obvious explanation for these sites' decline. There has been no public rupture among lead bloggers on the sites, nor any mainstream media discussion of their activity tailing off. At present, I am at a loss to explain what is occurring here, and I expect further investigation of the decline of conservative community blogs will be a major element of the next stage of the research project.

I produced a similar map of the progressive blogosphere, produced in Figure 8, to see if this shift might have occurred across communities, suggesting a general weakening of community blogs or perhaps a flaw in the coding system. As is clear from the progressive blog map, this is not the case. The elite progressive blogs continue to reside in the community-engaging quadrants, with the other blogs that steeply rose in the rankings benefiting from substantial traffic during the Democratic primaries and/or unveiling new software platforms that included increased community-engagement functionality. What we can definitively conclude in regards to RQ2 at this juncture is that *the gap between the conservative and progressive "netroots," if we understand netroots as internet-mediated grassroots political networks, substantially grew during the 2008 election season.* Conservatives lag much further behind progressives in online community infrastructure than they did in 2007, despite publicly recognizing their need to adapt the technological platforms used by progressives in the 2006 election.

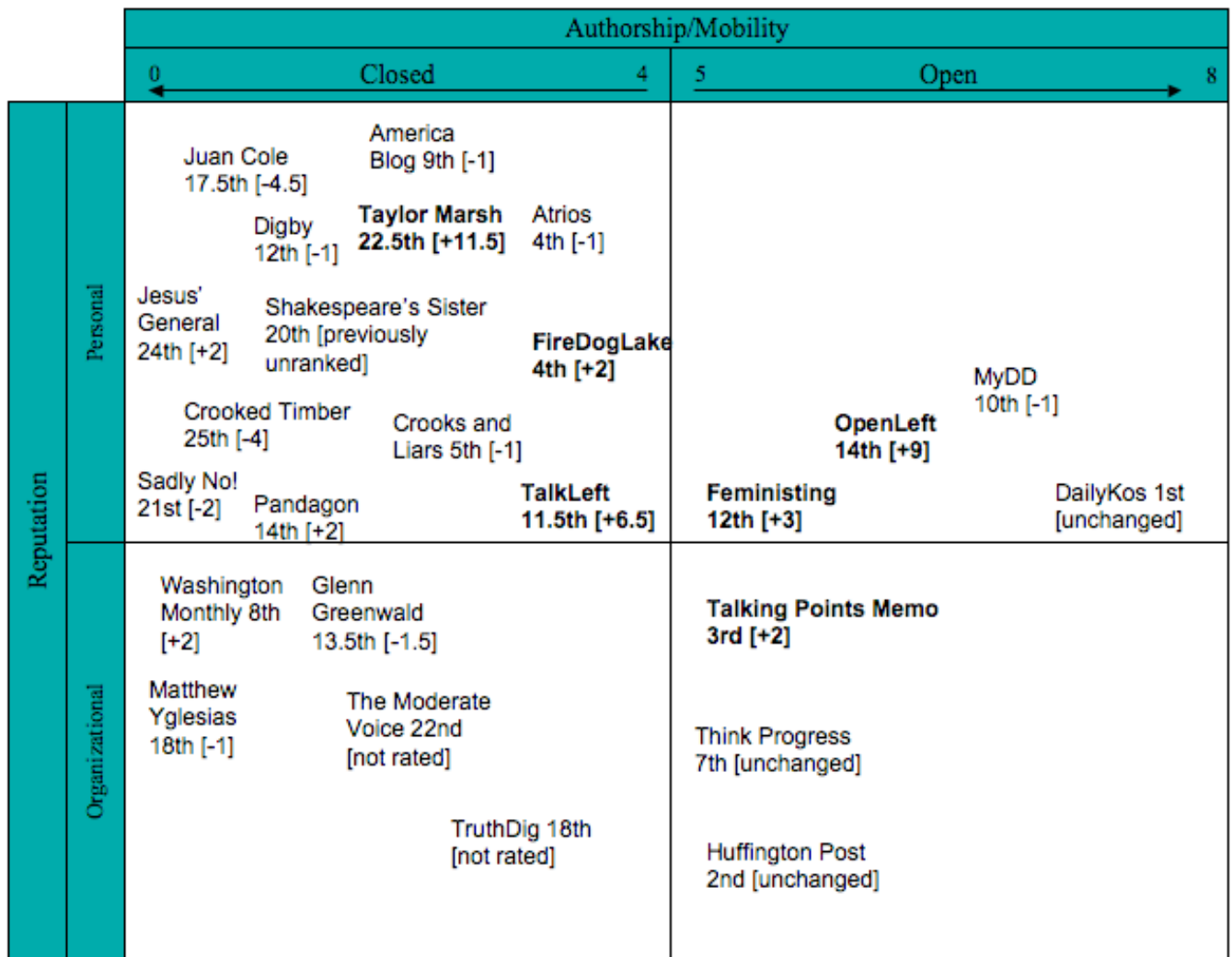


Figure 8: Blogspace map of progressive blogosphere, with rankings and rank shifts

RQ3:

Given that conservative *community* blogs took a significant step backward in the rankings during the 2008 election season, increasing the conservative *infrastructure* deficit, what can we say about elite conservative blogs as a whole? The “American Thinker” blog, for instance, is an example of a conservative institutional blog that was not even in the conservative top 50 in November 2007, but it routinely ranked between 4th and 8th throughout the election season. Perhaps conservative audiences just prefer the

quasi-newspaper format found among Quadrant III right-wing blogs. It is possible that the overall gap between the two blogospheres still decreased during the 2008 cycle, providing evidence that conservatives are competitive in the blogosphere, but simply prefer to interact as reader/commenters rather than diarists. To test for this, I took the top 50 rankings presented in the Combined BAI and performed a simple arithmetic exercise. All progressive blogs are visually represented in the dataset with the color blue, all conservative blogs with the color red. For each BAI collection date, I calculated the mean rank of the blue sites and the mean rank of red sites. Complete randomness and/or equality would be indicated by scores at or approaching 25. The greater the difference between these two scores, the greater the conservative/progressive deficit/advantage. Recall that in the original dataset, the mean progressive rank was 23.5, while the mean conservative rank was 27.48. The results of this exercise for all collection dates are presented in Figure 9:

Date	ProgAvgRank	ConsAvgRank	Difference
November 2007	23.5	27.48	P +3.98
August 24, 2008	18.72	31.96	P +13.24
Sept 21, 2008	19.6	30.96	P +11.06
Sept 28, 2008	20.48	30.32	P +9.84
Oct 5, 2008	19.28	31.36	P +12.08
Oct 12, 2008	20.08	30.56	P +10.48
Oct 19, 2008	20.28	30.16	P +9.88
Oct 26, 2008	19.92	30.68	P +10.76
Nov 2, 2008	21.52	28.92	P +7.4
Nov 9, 2008	20.72	30.12	P +9.4
Nov 16, 2008	19.72	30.84	P +11.12
Nov 23, 2008	20.24	30.4	P +10.16
Nov 30, 2008	19.64	31.04	P +11.4
Dec 7, 2008	19.96	30.72	P +10.76
Dec 14, 2008	21.4	29.32	P +7.92
Jan 11, 2009	21.12	29.48	P +8.36
Feb 22, 2009	20.76	29.8	P +9.14

Figure 9: average site ranks in combined BAI dataset

The average rank of the 25 progressive sites in the combined BAI during the election period (Sept 21-Nov 9) was 20.24, while it was 20.41 during the post-election period (Nov 16-Feb 22). The average rank of the 25 conservative sites in the combined BAI during the election period was 30.39, while it was 30.23 post-election. This sums to a difference of 10.15 rank-spots during the election period, and 9.82 rank-spots post election. The overall gap between the progressive and conservative elite blogospheres grew roughly 250% from the 3.98 progressive advantage in November 2007. This gap is accentuated in the top 10 rankings, where only Michelle Malkin's two web properties, MichelleMalkin.com and HotAir.com, and Newsbusters.org ever pierced the top 10 list, with median ranks of 7, 4, and 9 respectively. Simply put, *progressive dominance in the elite blogosphere was wide-ranging and complete*. As interest in political blogs steeply increased during the 2008 election cycle and more people than ever before turned online for their political news (Smith and Rainie 2008), progressive bloggers firmly increased their advantage over their conservative counterparts, regardless of blog platform-type.

Discussion

There are two mitigating circumstances that we must consider when evaluating this data. First, the 2008 election featured an extremely excited Democratic base and a largely dispirited Republican base. John McCain lacked the enthusiastic support of vocal conservatives, bloggers included, while Barack Obama built a list of 13 million volunteers and financial contributors in what was arguably the largest electoral mobilization in American history. This "enthusiasm gap" simply must have been

reflected in some online form, and it is likely that it helps explain the increasing advantage of the progressive blogosphere. I would not conclude, based on this single election period, that the American left is fundamentally more engaged online during periods of heightened electoral attention; if Obama is deeply unpopular in 2012 and a star Republican candidate has invigorated the conservative base, we are likely to see a reversal of these online trends.

Second, it remains possible that conservative blog infrastructure is somewhat stronger than the data suggests, but in areas muted by the methodological choices in the BAI. Matt Drudge's conservative protoblog, DrudgeReport.com, for instance, receives heavy site traffic and has been credited by reporters as a crucial agenda-setter (Cillizza 2008). The Drudge Report is rarely listed in blogrolls and it allows no comments. Launched in 1994 and surging in public notoriety by breaking the 1998 Monica Lewinsky scandal, the Drudge Report provides links to breaking news items, but maintains a software platform so outdated that few classify it as a blog per se. Likewise, "The Corner" at New Republic Online is a blog that features several popular conservative columnists, but the lack of comments and irresolvable problems in identifying their accurate traffic levels exclude the site from the dataset. Finally, FreeRepublic.com is a popular conservative discussion forum dating back to 1997. Though definitively not a blog, it is possible that traffic to non-blog internet sites like Free Republic and Drudge fill some of the institutional space for online conservatives that otherwise would be occupied by community and bridge blogs.

Despite these two mitigating circumstances, the stability of the elite blogosphere, the decline of conservative community blogs, and the increasing gap between elite

progressive and conservative blogospheres demands further attention from the research community. Whether the series of post-2004 research findings of distinct blogospheres with a slight conservative advantage were a remnant of the single data-type methodology employed or an indication of a genuine conservative blog advantage, this study authoritatively demonstrates that progressive bloggers have not only seized the lead, but that their lead has in fact substantially grown since late 2007. The software platforms associated with “netroots” community blogs are not especially complex, yet conservative attempts to build online communities-of-interest have actually gotten *less* effective during the 2008 election cycle. If internet-mediated organizations like DailyKos, MoveOn, and Organizing for America are examples of a generational shift in the political economy of interest group mobilization⁸, then the chasm between the online left and online right speaks to a broader trend of right-wing interests becoming less capable of competing with their left-wing counterparts. Given the pace of innovation diffusion in the online space, it is surprising that attempts by conservative blog sites to mimic innovative progressive architecture have seen such disappointing results.

There are three possible explanations for the dearth and continuing decline of conservative online infrastructure. First, many commentators assert that the internet as a medium is ideologically or demographically better-suited to progressives. The notion here is that the “bottom-up nature” of the internet does not mesh well with the hierarchical or managerial tendencies of the conservative movement, or that blogs are trafficked by white-collar progressives and academics with ample time to spend online, while conservative mediums like talk radio cater to blue-collar conservatives as they

⁸ I make the case for this premise in the broader dissertation project, *Power Laws and Internet-Mediated Organizations: The Emerging Landscape of Collective Action*. The dissertation is currently undergoing revisions for a June 2009 defense.

drive to work. I see a number of problems with this explanation, not the least of which being that online demographic research by the Pew Internet Center does not seem to support these assertions, and of course as recently as 2002 the blogosphere was considered a conservative medium. I intend to investigate this thesis through a comparative institutional study of the US and UK netroots (tentatively scheduled for winter 2009), but for the moment I will just note that most formulations of this thesis are heavily teleological.

A second explanation, and the one I believe to be most broadly supportable, involves the opportunity structure for campaign innovations. It may be the case that, broadly speaking, the outparty – or set of partisan activists currently enduring a losing streak in elections – has an incentive to incorporate new campaign technologies and techniques in an effort to “change the rules of the game,” in a sense. From a network analysis perspective, it likewise seems to be the case that new campaign technologies are brought into the party by new campaign *consultants*, while older/established campaign consultants hold tight to the technologies and campaign techniques that first let them rise to prominence. If this is empirically the case, then the mechanism for quick diffusion of new campaign technologies could be understood as “porousness” in the partisan campaign consulting community. And as public calls to “Fire the Consultants” in the Democratic Party after the 2004 Presidential Election loss would indicate (Sullivan 2005), parties that routinely lose elections are more likely to bring on new and different campaign professionals. Finally, it may be the case that it is simply easier to organize grassroots resistance to a governmental agenda than it is to organize grassroots support. It is widely argued (though not supported in the data) that DailyKos and MoveOn are

declining now that they no longer have the Bush Administration to criticize.

Conservative community sites like Newsbusters primarily target “liberal media bias,” and it may be the case that this has attracted conservative community support because, until very recently, the fourth branch of government is the only one they could effectively label as left-dominated. Though Democrats took over both houses of Congress in the 2006 election, the broad public disapproval of both parties in Congress may have made House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid poor targets for mobilizing grassroots conservative ire.

Frankly, it is *because* of the Democratic victory in 2006 that I expected conservative community blogs to gain strength through the heightened traffic of the 2008 election. While conservatives may have been relatively dispirited compared to their progressive counterparts, explaining the results of Research Question 3, why are those conservatives motivated enough to visit blogs and leave comments flocking to walled gardens like HotAir, American Thinker, and Michelle Malkin rather than the open participatory platforms of RedState and TownHall? A third explanation to consider is that bands of “merry pranksters” from the well-organized progressive blogosphere might be hijacking conservative community spaces during their vulnerable early development phases. The SadlyNo! comedy blog makes good sport of this activity, regularly linking to and ridiculing conservative blogs, leading to a flood of snarky liberal comments that derail and frustrate the conservative community members. Here the lowered transaction costs of the internet serve as a double-edged sword. The size advantage enjoyed by progressive communities-of-interest means that, though individual conservatives are capable of the same activity on progressive community sites, it does not qualify as a

“proportionate response.” One explanation for the closed registration found at top conservative sites may be that the site authors were so barraged by obnoxious progressives that they closed down registration. Given that open registration is a first necessary step for massive scaling of site participation, it may be that the ease with which the left can use their size advantage prevents the right from successfully developing online infrastructure.

Whatever the set of explanations for increasing progressive dominance in the blogosphere, what should be clear from this study is that comprehensive blog rankings demonstrate a real and deepening online infrastructure deficit for the American Right. To the extent that elite blogs serve as partisan political institutions or internet-mediated pressure groups, this is evidence of a systemic advantage for next-generation progressive interest groups. The causes, implications, and consequences of this advantage have yet to receive even the tertiary academic attention. Students of political organizations and parties in America, as well as those interested in a comparative institutional approach to online organizations, would be well advised to devote attention to the new topic area highlighted by this data analysis.

Conclusion and Questions for Further Research

This paper represents a first attempt at putting an extensive empirical dataset to work in answering questions about the institutional development of the blogosphere. Meant to further the research agenda launched through the dissertation project, it asks what effect the 2008 had on political blogs as institutions, rather than asking the more obvious yet theoretically dicey question of political blogs’ effect on the 2008 election.

Fundamental to this endeavor is the assertion that large political blogs, and community blogs in particular, function as quasi-interest groups, and are thus worthy of study in their own right as evidence of the changing political economy of interest group representation in American politics.

The paper has demonstrated that there is substantial stability within the top 25 rankings of the progressive and conservative blog networks. This finding supports the assertions of many previous researchers, and also undergirds the claim that elite political blogs can be treated as political institutions. It has also demonstrated a surprising decline in the rankings for conservative community blogs, running counter to what I had previously hypothesized, and it has demonstrated a deeply widening gap between progressive and conservative rankings according to the Combined BAI top 50 rankings. Though this may be attributable to the “enthusiasm gap” in the 2008 election, it nonetheless increases the advantage that progressive communities-of-interest enjoy over their conservative counterparts.

Future research with this dataset will attempt to recast the stability question with a more sophisticated statistical model, and will also examine activity among four individual scores that make up the BAI rankings, to see in which areas of traffic and influence conservative sites over- and underperform. I will also delve into the time-series elements of the dataset, comparing the heightened activity of the election period to the standard traffic levels of the post-election period. Additionally, the data from this study will be used to support three up-and-coming research projects, a comparative institutional analysis of the US and UK “netroots,” a social network analysis of the Democratic and Republican campaign consulting industries, and an American Political Development-

based study detailing the argument for an “opportunity structure” model of the role of innovation in political competition.

One aim of this paper has been to introduce the BAI dataset itself to a larger segment of the political science research community. I hope to have demonstrated its substantial value to scholars interested in blogs, information technology, and political organizations and parties. There are a wealth of questions which I do not personally have the bandwidth to investigate on my own with this dataset, and I am happy to offer it as a resource to our community for others’ research efforts. If I am correct in my initial assertion that 2008 will be known as the year when blogs ceased to be a novel element of the political landscape, then it stands to reason that 2008 should also be the year when political scientists begin to more fully incorporate the blogosphere into our understanding of American politics.

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Appendix 1

Site-by-site rankings from the progressive, conservative, and combined BAIs are reproduced in jpeg form below:

BAI Rankings - Progressive Blogs

Blog Name	2008												2009		Descriptive Statistics						Conf Int		
	Sep		Oct				Nov				Dec		Jan	Feb	min	max	range	n	avg	stddev	Lower	Upper	
	21	28	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30	7	14	11	22								
DailyKos	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	15	1.0	0.0	1.0	1.0		
Huffington Post	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	15	1.5	0.5	0.5	2.6		
Talking Points Memo	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	15	3.0	0.0	3.0	3.0		
Firedoglake	3	4	4	4	4	7	6	6	4	4	4	5	5	4	5	3	7	4	15	4.6	1.1	2.5	6.7
Atrios	6	6	6	4	6	4	4	4	6	6	4	3	4	5	4	3	6	3	15	4.8	1.1	2.6	7.0
Crooks And Liars	3	4	5	6	4	5	5	5	4	4	6	6	6	6	7	3	7	4	15	5.1	1.1	2.9	7.3
Think Progress	6	7	7	6	6	5	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	5	5	7	2	15	6.5	0.7	5.0	8.0
Washington Monthly	10	10	9	9	8	10	9	9	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	10	2	15	8.7	0.8	7.0	10.3
America Blog	8	8	8	8	9	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	9	9	12	8	12	4	15	8.7	1.0	6.7	10.8
MyDD	8	11	10	10	10	11	10	10	10	11	10	16	12	12	8	8	16	8	15	11.0	2.2	6.6	15.4
Talk Left	11	9	11	10	10	14	12	11	13	11	18	15	13	13	12	9	18	9	15	12.2	2.3	7.7	16.7
Digby	13	12	14	12	10	14	11	11	11	13	12	17	11	11	14	10	17	7	15	12.4	1.8	8.8	16.0
Feministing	12	12	11	16	13	12	14	14	15	13	10	11	10	16	9	9	16	7	15	12.5	2.2	8.2	16.9
Glen Greenwald	15	23	16	14	16	12	17	13	13	11	14	11	13	10	10	10	23	13	15	13.9	3.3	7.2	20.5
Open Left	16	14	13	13	15	16	12	14	16	15	13	11	13	13	18	11	18	7	15	14.1	1.8	10.4	17.8
Pandagon	14	15	14	14	13	16	15	16	11	17	14	11	12	16	14	11	17	6	15	14.1	1.8	10.5	17.7
Juan Cole	20	17	17	19	17	22	18	18	17	20	18	15	16	15	11	11	22	11	15	17.3	2.6	12.2	22.5
Truthdig	17	16	19	16	17	19	19	17	19	18	22	20	19	21	18	16	22	6	15	18.5	1.7	15.0	21.9
Shakespeares Sister	22	20	19	18	21	18	16	18	21	19	20	18	20	20	20	16	22	6	15	19.3	1.5	16.2	22.4
Sadly, No!	19	17	22	23	23	20	24	23	19	21	16	21	21	19	21	16	24	8	15	20.6	2.3	16.0	25.2
The Moderate Voice	24	21	22	20	19	21	21	20	22	22	23	21				19	24	5	12	21.3	1.4	18.6	24.1
Taylor Marsh	21	19	21	22	19	24	20	23	26	24	25	24	22	23	29	19	29	10	15	22.8	2.7	17.4	28.2
Crooked Timber			25		22			25	25	23	24	23	23	22	22	22	25	3	10	23.5	1.2	21.1	25.9
Jesus' General	25	22	29	21	24	25	22	25	23	25	26	25	24	22	24	21	29	8	15	24.1	2.0	20.1	28.1
Correntewire	23	27	24	24	27	26	23	28	24	30	26	29	29	26	25	23	30	7	15	26.1	2.3	21.6	30.6
Calitics	26	26	27	25	25	28	26	31	29	27	28	27	26	26	23	23	31	8	15	26.7	1.9	22.9	30.4
Lawyers, Guns, and Money	27	24	25	25	27	31	27	30	28	31	27	26	25	26	26	24	31	7	14	27.1	2.2	22.6	31.5
Buzzflash	30	28			31	29	29	28	28	26	29		29	31		26	31	5	11	28.9	1.4	26.0	31.8
Left Coaster	35	32	31	28	26	27	25	28	33	28	29	26	33	29	27	25	35	10	15	29.1	3.0	23.1	35.1
Swing State Project	32	33	32	30		33	28	22	27			34	32	28	27	22	34	12	12	29.8	3.5	22.8	36.9
Burnt Orange Report	28	28	30	27	27	29	26	33	31	32	32	30	34	33	31	26	34	8	15	30.1	2.5	25.1	35.1
Michigan Liberal	30	30	32	31	27	31	32	35	33	30	34	30	29	36	37	27	37	10	15	31.8	2.8	26.3	37.3
Raising Kaine	32	31	35	29	32	34	29	32	32	33	36	39	37	38		29	39	10	14	33.5	3.1	27.2	39.8
Ezra Klein	29	35	27	35			35			36		33	39	38	32	27	39	12	10	33.9	3.8	26.4	41.4
Tom Tomorrow		37					34	36	38	35	38	40	28	33	32	28	40	12	10	35.1	3.5	28.1	42.1
Daily Howler	32		36	35	33	37	41	37	41	34	35	37	25	40	36	25	41	16	14	35.6	4.1	27.4	43.9
Down With Tyranny		37		31	35	35	33	34	37	40	36	41	35	35	35	31	41	10	13	35.7	2.7	30.4	41.0
The Side Show	37	42	36	38	39	39	38	44	35	37	33	32	40	30	34	30	44	14	15	36.9	3.8	29.4	44.4
Skippy	41		39	34	34	36	39	38	40	38	39	36	42	37	30	30	42	12	14	37.4	3.2	31.0	43.7
Majikthise		40	40	37	41		35		36	40		38	36	32	41	32	41	9	11	37.8	2.9	32.0	43.6
Albany Project	38	35	40	33	37	38	37	39	42	39	44	35	38	41	43	33	44	11	15	38.6	3.1	32.5	44.7
Mahablog	42	43	40	42	40	44			48	46	41	41	40	43	38	38	48	10	13	42.2	2.7	36.7	47.6
Tapped	36	33	38	43	44	44	44	45	43	43	41	47	47	48	38	33	48	15	15	42.3	4.3	33.7	50.9
Square State	39	39	44	40	41	39	41	41	46	44	47	45	46	43	44	39	47	8	15	42.6	2.8	37.1	48.1
Rising Hegemon						41	39	40	43	46	40	45	47	43		39	47	8	9	42.7	2.9	36.9	48.4
Altercation	46	45	43	41	45	42	41	42	43	42	41	44	43	47	46	41	47	6	15	43.4	2.0	39.4	47.4
FLA Politics	44	44	47	44	41	46	46	45	47	45	48	49	45	46	44	41	49	8	15	45.4	2.0	41.5	49.3
Needlenose	48	47	45	45	47	47		48		49	49	48	49	49	48	45	49	4	13	47.6	1.4	44.8	50.4
James Wolcott	49	50	49	49	49	50	50	49	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	49	50	1	15	49.7	0.5	48.7	50.6

BAI Rankings - Conservative Blogs

Blog Name	2008														2009		Descriptive Statistics						Conf Int	
	Sep		Oct				Nov					Dec		Jan	Feb	min	max	range	n	avg	std	Lower	Upper	
	21	28	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30	7	14	11	22									
Hot Air	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	15	1.0	0.0	1.0	1.0		
Michelle Malkin	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	15	2.0	0.0	2.0	2.0		
Newsbusters	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	15	3.1	0.3	2.6	3.6		
Instapundit	4	5	4	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	3	4	7	4	3	7	4	15	4.3	0.9	2.5	6.1	
Little Green Footballs	4	4	4	4	6	4	4	5	4	5	6	8	5	6	6	4	8	4	15	5.0	1.2	2.6	7.4	
Ace Of Spades HQ	7	6	6	6	4	6	5	6	6	6	5	6	6	5	5	5	4	7	3	15	5.7	0.7	4.2	7.1
American Thinker	6	7	12	9	7	7	8	9	7	7	6	6	7	4	7	4	12	8	15	7.3	1.8	3.7	10.8	
Volokh Conspiracy	8	9	7	8	9	9	8	7	8	8	8	5	8	9	9	5	9	4	15	8.0	1.1	5.9	10.1	
Hugh Hewitt	11	8	8	7	8	9	7	7		9	9	9	10	10	13	7	13	6	14	8.9	1.7	5.6	12.3	
Jihad Watch						15	11	11		9	10		9	7	8	7	15	8	8	10.0	2.4	5.1	14.9	
Wizbang Blog	10	11	9	11	12	13	10	13	10	9	13	11	12	11	11	9	13	4	15	11.1	1.3	8.4	13.7	
Powerline Blog	12	12	11	11	14	11	11	11	12	12	11	17	13	12	12	11	17	6	15	12.1	1.6	8.9	15.3	
Gateway Pundit	18	16	13	16	15	15	13	13	9	16	12	10	11	12	10	9	18	9	15	13.3	2.7	8.0	18.6	
Townhall	17	13	17	18	11	7	15	10	17	14	15	12	14	18	14	7	18	11	15	14.1	3.2	7.8	20.5	
Jawa Report	16	15	16	14	15	17	16	15	14	18	14	13	14	14	14	13	18	5	15	15.0	1.4	12.3	17.7	
Right Wing News	9	10	13	16	15	19	19	16	16	13	17	16	16	16	18	9	19	10	15	15.3	2.9	9.4	21.1	
Red State	13	13	9	9	9	11	13	17	18	19	20	19	19	20	21	9	21	12	15	15.3	4.5	6.4	24.3	
Ann Althouse	14	17	15	13	13	17	17	18	13	15	15	14	18	15	17	13	18	5	15	15.4	1.8	11.8	19.0	
Patterico's Pontifications	15	17	18	14	18	14	17	19	14	16	18	14	17	16	16	14	19	5	15	16.2	1.7	12.8	19.6	
Outside The Beltway	19	19	20	19	19	21	21	22	19	23	19	18	20	21	22	18	23	5	15	20.1	1.5	17.2	23.0	
Dean Esmay	19	21	20	22	22	23	23	22	22	20	21	20	22	22	23	19	23	4	15	21.5	1.2	19.0	24.0	
IMAO	23	22	22	21	21	22	21	21	20	22	24	23	21	22	19	19	24	5	15	21.6	1.2	19.1	24.1	
PoliPundit	19	20	19	20	19	20	20	20	21	28	22	22	24	25	25	19	28	9	15	21.6	2.7	16.2	27.0	
LaShawn Barber	22	24	23	23	24	24	26	26	24	25	28	24	26	25	24	22	28	6	15	24.5	1.5	21.5	27.5	
American Digest	23	23	24	24	25	25	25	27	25	23	26	30	28	27	27	23	30	7	15	25.5	2.0	21.4	29.5	
Tim Blair	26	26	25	26	28	27	29	29	27	27	28	26	25	19	20	19	29	10	15	25.9	2.9	20.1	31.6	
QandO	29	32	29	25	27	28	29	28	26	31	23	25	26	29	28	23	32	9	15	27.7	2.4	22.9	32.4	
Anti-Idiotarian	37		32	33	31		33	25	23	21	25	20	22	24	36	20	37	17	13	27.8	6.0	15.9	39.8	
Belmont Club	32	34	26	26	28	29	27	24	27	29	26	26	29	28	28	24	34	10	15	27.9	2.5	22.9	33.0	
Winds Of Change	25	29	26	28	23	25	23	29	30	26	31	31	31	31	34	23	34	11	15	28.1	3.3	21.5	34.8	
Iowahawk	31	31	28	30	31	30	33	34	32	30	30	28	30	29	25	25	34	9	15	30.1	2.2	25.8	34.5	
Betsy's Page	27	28	29	32	28	32	32	33	33	34	33	32	34	32	31	27	34	7	15	31.3	2.3	26.8	35.8	
Right Wing Nuthouse	34	33	35	29	25	34	31	29	33	33	32	32	35	33	30	25	35	10	15	31.9	2.7	26.5	37.3	
Memoorandum	27	27	31	34	34	35	36	36	37	32	36	36	33	34	33	27	37	10	15	33.4	3.1	27.2	39.6	
Mudville Gazette	33	36	33	31	31	33	35	35	31	36	34	34	36	35	32	31	36	5	15	33.7	1.8	30.0	37.3	
Professor Bainbridge	35	37	36	36	35	36	37	36	35	35	34	37	39	36	41	34	41	7	15	36.3	1.8	32.8	39.9	
Daily Pundit	37	39	36	37	38	37	39	38	36	38	37	38	37	37	38	36	39	3	15	37.5	0.9	35.6	39.3	
My vast Right Wing Conspiracy	35	37	34	38	36	38	38	39	39	37	39	40	40	38	38	34	40	6	15	37.7	1.7	34.3	41.2	
Alarming News	40		40		37			40	38	40	38	39	41	39	40	37	41	4	11	39.3	1.2	36.9	41.7	
INDC Journal	42	46	40	40	44	42	43	41	42	42	41	41	43	40	41	40	46	6	15	41.9	1.6	38.6	45.2	
Lileks	46	44	45	41	42	40	42	41	40	39	40	43	38	42	46	38	46	8	15	41.9	2.5	37.0	46.9	
Austin Bay	44	42	43	45	40	42	41	45	41	44	42	45	41	45	48	40	48	8	15	43.2	2.2	38.8	47.6	
Little Miss Attila	44	44	43	41	40	41	47		45	46	42	42	48	48	43	40	48	8	14	43.9	2.6	38.6	49.1	
Galley Slaves	39	40	38	44	44	46	46	44	48	41	46	47	46	44	45	38	48	10	15	43.9	3.0	37.8	49.9	
Sundries Shack	46	43	46	41	42	39	43	45	44		46		47	46	43	39	47	8	13	43.9	2.4	39.2	48.6	
Donald Sensing	48	48	48	47	46	44	45	48	45	45	44	44	44	42	47	42	48	6	15	45.7	1.9	41.8	49.5	
Chequer Board Of Nights And Days	48	47		48	47	45	48	47	45	47	45	46	45	48	48	45	48	3	14	46.7	1.3	44.2	49.2	
PrestoPundit	43		47		48	47		49	49	48	48	48	49	47		43	49	6	11	47.5	1.7	44.2	50.9	
Indepundit	41	49	49	49	49	49	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	41	50	9	15	49.0	2.3	44.5	53.5	

BAI Rankings - Combined Conservative and Progressive Blogs

Type	Blog Name	2008														2009		Descriptive Statistics						Conf Int	
		Sep		Oct				Nov				Dec		Jan	Feb	min	max	range	n	avg	stddev	Lower	Upper		
		21	28	5	12	19	26	2	9	16	23	30	7	14	11	22									
Prog	DailyKos	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	15	1.0	0.0	1.0	1.0		
Prog	Huffington Post	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	15	2.0	0.0	2.0	2.0		
Prog	Talking Points Memo	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	15	3.2	0.4	2.4	4.0		
Cons	Hot Air	5	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	5	2	15	3.7	0.6	2.5	4.9	
Prog	Crooks And Liars	3	5	6	5	5	5	5	5	7	5	5	7	6	6	5	3	7	4	15	5.3	1.0	3.4	7.3	
Prog	Firedoglake	6	5	5	5	6	9	8	7	5	6	5	5	7	7	6	5	9	4	15	6.1	1.2	3.6	8.6	
Prog	Atrios	8	8	8	7	7	6	5	6	5	6	5	7	5	5	5	7	5	8	3	15	6.3	1.2	3.8	8.7
Cons	Michelle Malkin	7	7	6	7	7	6	7	7	8	8	8	8	7	10	7	6	10	4	15	7.3	1.0	5.4	9.3	
Prog	Think Progress	9	9	10	10	7	8	10	10	10	10	10	9	10	8	7	7	10	3	15	9.1	1.1	6.9	11.4	
Cons	Newsbusters	9	10	9	9	10	10	9	9	9	8	10	9	8	10	8	10	2	15	9.2	0.7	7.8	10.6		
Cons	Little Green Footballs	11	11	12	11	11	11	11	12	12	12	14	11	14	14	15	11	15	4	15	12.1	1.4	9.3	14.9	
Prog	Washington Monthly	16	16	13	14	14	17	12	13	11	11	11	11	11	12	13	11	17	6	15	13.0	2.0	8.9	17.1	
Cons	Instapundit	12	12	13	12	11	13	15	14	14	12	13	13	12	18	12	11	18	7	15	13.1	1.7	9.6	16.5	
Prog	America Blog	17	14	11	13	16	12	13	11	13	14	12	17	16	17	18	11	18	7	15	14.3	2.4	9.5	19.0	
Cons	Ace Of Spades HQ	20	18	18	16	11	14	13	15	14	16	16	16	14	12	17	11	20	9	15	15.3	2.4	10.5	20.2	
Cons	American Thinker	13	15	25	19	14	18	18	20	17	17	14	14	13	11	11	11	25	14	15	15.9	3.8	8.4	23.4	
Prog	MyDD	15	17	15	17	18	16	16	16	16	15	19	21	24	19	28	15	28	13	15	18.1	3.7	10.7	25.5	
Prog	Talk Left	14	12	15	14	19	20	19	19	18	20	27	25	20	22	22	12	27	15	15	19.1	4.1	10.8	27.3	
Prog	Digby	18	18	20	18	19	18	17	18	19	19	20	26	18	21	23	17	26	9	15	19.5	2.4	14.8	24.2	
Prog	Glen Greenwald	20	28	19	20	23	20	26	22	20	17	23	18	22	15	16	15	28	13	15	20.6	3.5	13.5	27.7	
Prog	Feministing	19	20	17	26	21	22	22	28	23	24	17	19	19	26	18	17	28	11	15	21.4	3.4	14.5	28.3	
Cons	Volokh Conspiracy	25	23	23	29	27	29	20	17	21	22	18	14	17	20	20	14	29	15	15	21.7	4.4	12.8	30.5	
Prog	Open Left	26	21	21	20	23	25	20	23	24	23	24	20	27	23	30	20	30	10	15	23.3	2.8	17.6	29.0	
Prog	Pandagon	22	25	21	23	17	26	27	26	21	25	27	22	22	26	26	17	27	10	15	23.7	2.9	18.0	29.5	
Prog	MattYGlesias						32		32	26	21	20	28	25	24	23	20	32	12	9	25.7	4.3	17.0	34.3	
Prog	Truthdig	24	24	27	22	22	28	30	23	25	27	25	27	26	37	27	22	37	15	15	26.3	3.7	18.8	33.7	
Cons	Jihad Watch						36	32	33		30	33		20	15	14	14	36	22	8	26.6	8.8	8.9	44.3	
Prog	Shakespeares Sister	37	33	24	24	31	22	24	25	31	26	22	23	32	32	29	22	37	15	15	27.7	4.7	18.2	37.1	
Prog	Juan Cole	28	31	26	30	26	33	34	30	27	30	29	24	31	25	20	20	34	14	15	28.3	3.7	20.9	35.6	
Cons	Powerline Blog	28	25	28	25	28	27	25	29	30	28	31	35	30	30	32	25	35	10	15	28.7	2.8	23.2	34.3	
Cons	Hugh Hewitt	32	27	28	28	30	30	28	27	32	32	30	28	29	26	35	26	35	9	15	29.5	2.4	24.6	34.4	
Cons	Townhall	32	30	34	32	23	22	23	21	34	29	33	31	33	35	31	21	35	14	15	29.5	4.8	19.9	39.2	
Cons	Gateway Pundit	38	35	36	33	31	35	30	30	28	35	32	28	28	29	25	25	38	13	15	31.5	3.7	24.1	38.9	
Prog	Sadly, No!	30	34	35	33	33	33	36	36	29	33	26	32	35	30	32	26	36	10	15	32.5	2.8	26.9	38.0	
Cons	Wizbang Blog	31	28	31	33	35	37	28	35	34	34	37	36	34	33	34	28	37	9	15	33.3	2.8	27.7	38.9	
Cons	Red State	34	36	28	26	29	31	32	34	37	37	42	44	38	38	41	26	44	18	15	35.1	5.2	24.6	45.6	
Cons	Ann Althouse	35	37	37	31	36	38	35	37	32	36	36	33	39	34	36	31	39	8	15	35.5	2.2	31.1	39.9	
Cons	Right Wing News	23	22	39	36	38	41	37	39	39	37	40	38	36	39	41	22	41	19	15	36.3	5.8	24.7	48.0	
Prog	The Moderate Voice	39	37	38	37	37	40	41	38	34	39	38	34				34	41	7	12	37.7	2.1	33.5	41.9	
Prog	Taylor Marsh	36	40	31	38	33	43	38	41		39	41	39	41	41		31	43	12	13	38.5	3.4	31.7	45.4	
Cons	Jawa Report	42	39	40	40	42	41	40	41	38	41	39	37	36	36	37	36	42	6	15	39.3	2.1	35.2	43.4	
Cons	Patterico's Pontifications	40	41	44	39	38	39	38	45	40	42	43	40	40	42	39	38	45	7	15	40.7	2.1	36.4	44.9	
Prog	Crooked Timber			42		41			44	43	42	44	40	44	43	38	38	44	6	10	42.1	2.0	38.2	46.0	
Prog	Jesus' General	42	42		41	40	43	44	43	40	47		40	43	40	45	40	47	7	13	42.3	2.2	38.0	46.7	
Cons	Outside The Beltway	46	47	49	43	45	46	47	49	44	48	45	45	45	45	46	43	49	6	15	46.0	1.7	42.5	49.5	
Cons	PolitPundit	44	46	46	43	44	45	43	46	47		48	47	50	50	50	43	50	7	14	46.4	2.5	41.4	51.3	
Cons	Dean Esmay	45	45	45	47	47	48	49	51	47	42	47	46	47	47	49	42	51	9	15	46.8	2.1	42.6	51.0	
Cons	IMAO	49	50	50	48	46	46	47	48	46	49	49	48	49	49	47	46	50	4	15	48.1	1.4	45.3	50.8	
Cons	American Digest	47	48	48	49	50	51	50		49	46						46	51	5	9	48.7	1.6	45.5	51.8	
Cons	LaShawn Barber	48	49	51	50	51	50		50	49		49		50	51		48	51	3	11	49.8	1.0	47.9	51.8	