"Getting the Word Out"

Policy Bloggers Use Their Soap Box To Make Change

Laura McKenna, Ph.D.
Ramapo College, NJ

Abstract:

This study examines policy bloggers, a subset of the political blogosphere. These bloggers focus on one policy area and attempt to "get the word out" about the importance of their policy area and policy recommendations. Information was gathered from in-depth interviews of nine policy bloggers and content analysis of their blogs during the summer of 2006. Findings show that most policy bloggers are highly educated, but aren't among the most influential in their policy areas; they are a substrata of policy elites. Policy bloggers all engage in six activities on their blog: filtering information, providing expertise, forming networks, gaining attention, framing arguments, and using windows of opportunity. They rarely urge their readers to partake in political activity. Nearly all received attention from major media sources and some gained a significant daily readership. Despite these victories, their blogs were primarily labors of love, bringing in little money or professional rewards.

New technology has the potential to create cracks in long standing customs of the American political system and enable new actors to circumvent obstacles. Bloggers have used this advantage to act as a watchdog on politicians and mass media. A subset of political bloggers devotes single-minded attention to one particular policy proposal, rather than a broad spectrum of political interests. These policy bloggers use the medium of Internet to provide them with a unique advantage. Though they are small in number, these bloggers may represent the vanguard of policy advocacy and a successful niche within the Internet. They have harnessed the Internet to champion their cause, to network with others, to influence political elites, to inform the public, and, perhaps, to make real change.

Through the use of content analysis and interviews, this paper investigates the work of policy bloggers. Who are these policy bloggers? Why did they choose the Internet, rather than traditional venues, to make change? How have they used the Internet to promote their pet causes? What obstacles have they faced? What successes can they claim? Can these bloggers be described as policy entrepreneurs, the key individuals that John Kingdom explains are the necessary source of policy change?

Findings show that most policy bloggers are highly educated, but aren't among the most influential in their policy areas; they are a substrata of policy elites. Policy bloggers all engage in six activities on their blog: filtering information, providing expertise, forming networks, gaining attention, framing arguments, and using windows of opportunity. They rarely urge their readers to partake in political activity. Nearly all

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Literature Review

A blog is a web page with minimal to no external editing, providing on-line commentary, periodically updated and presented in reverse chronological order, with hyperlinks to other online sources (Drezner and Farrell 2007a). Blogging only became popular in the past four years with the first surge of activity happening after September 11, 2001. Yet, blogs multiplied from a handful to millions in this very short time. There are now nearly 12 millions blogs and 57 million blog readers in existence (Lenhart and Fox 2006). Though most bloggers use their blog as a hobby to discuss knitting or baseball scores, nearly 1.4 million blogs contain purely political information (Lenhart and Fox 2006). Blogs increased by 58 percent between February 2004 and January 2005 alone (Rainie 2005). The top five blogs attract 1.5 million readers per day (Drezner and Farrell 2007a). Several high profile successes by bloggers have attracted the attention of the media and politicians. Most recently, Charles Johnson of *Little Green Footballs* (www.littlegreenfootballs.com) found alterations in Reuters photographs. The sheer numbers of bloggers engaged in online discussions, much of it about politics, demands attention from political scientists.

A good number blogs are personal webpages for teenagers to talk about prom gowns and contain no political content. A 2006 Pew Internet and America Life study estimates that 11 percent of the 12 million blogs are political (Lenhart and Fox 2006).

However, those numbers may not be entirely accurate.[1] To date, we do not have a clear picture of the composition of the blogosphere as a whole due to the amorphous nature of this enterprise.

The scholarly literature on blogs and politics is just arising. One large group of literature examines democratic promise of blogging. Putnam theorized that the Internet would further isolate Americans from their neighbors and local politics (2000). Sunstein concurred and feared that the Internet enable people to "cocoon" themselves into little groups of like minded individuals and form more extreme opinions (2004). Two separate studies by Hargittae, Gallo, and Kaine (2007) and Adamic and Glance (2005) tested Sunstein's claims by examining the linkage patterns among bloggers and found much cross linkage patterns between liberal and conservative bloggers. A preliminary study of elite bloggers by McKenna and Pole (2004) made the claim that blogging should be included as a form of participation, because blogging facilitates political discourse and participation through the posts, networks, comment section, blogrolls and links. In a later study, Pole and McKenna (2006) found that bloggers did not decrease their involvement in traditional political activities after the onset of blogging.

Other research includes studies of the influence of bloggers on journalists and political elite (Drezner and Farrell 2007b), case studies of high profile events (Hewitt 2005, Kennedy School 2004, Bloom and Kerbel 2007), the content of political blogs (Wallsten 2005, McKenna and Pole 2007), their role in the international arena (Drezner

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[1] Political bloggers may be a greater percentage of the total bloggers, if the definition is widened to include blogs that mix personal and political content. The total number of bloggers is also affected by broadening the definition of blog to include software aimed at teenagers for personal use. See Appendix C for further discussion of the methodological difficulties in studying blogs.

and Farrell 2004, McKinnon 2007, Zuckerman 2007), and their use by political officials

and candidates (Trippi 2004). However, the political blogosphere is not homogeneous

and its potential still untapped; scholars have only studied the tip of iceberg.

There has been no scholarly attention to date on bloggers who choose to

specialize on a particular political topic, such as energy, education, or transportation. The

single-interest bloggers are unlike the generalists who post on a wide range of topics with

an over arching political ideology that shapes their commentary. The missions of blog

generalists vary; some see themselves as "citizen-journalists" and others as political

activists. Since the "A-list" bloggers, which have attracted the most attention from

scholars, are generalists, the policy bloggers have not yet been studied. Yet, policy

bloggers are a significant force in the blogosphere. In fact, their activities closely

resemble the policy entrepreneurs that John Kingdon describes as central to policy

formation.

Policy entrepreneurs are the behind the scene characters who translate ideas into

policy. According to John Kingdon, a policy entrepreneur "softens up" policy

communities and the public at large, getting them used to particular ideas and building

acceptance for their programs. They lie in wait for a window of opportunities to open.

After the window is open and a problem is identified, they couple this problem with their

solution (Kingdon 1984).

Policy entrepreneurs are politicians, bureaucrats, or independent advocates, who

adapt ideas to real situations. They are not necessarily the originators of these plans, but

instead are able to "simplify and distill these complex ideas and link them to values

accepted by and familiar to the broader public" (Witte 2000). They are willing to invest

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time, energy, reputation, and money to promote a policy. Motivations may be personal

conviction, satisfaction from participation, or more selfish goods (job promotion,

financial gain, or publicity). Entrepreneurs are motivated by personal interests rather than

by the interests of an organized interest group (Kingdon 1984).

Entrepreneurs can also mobilize public sentiment by revealing a scandal or

capitalizing on a crisis, thereby putting their opponent's plan on the defensive. Policy

entrepreneurs also rely heavily on what Wilson described as "third parties," of which the

media may be the most important, to build support (Wilson 1980). One successful

strategy is to pursue policy proposals in a more favorable venue. For example, if a policy

cannot be passed in Congress, a resourceful entrepreneur will find a way for it to be

considered by the courts (Baumgartner and Jones 1991). Entrepreneurs also build

coalitions, drawing support from elites who are effective in persuading other interests to

participate (Baumgartner and Jones 1991). While much research has been conducted on

policy entrepreneurs in traditional politics, especially in the area of education policy

(Mintrom 2000, McKenna 2001, Roberts and King 1996), there has been no research

done on their virtual counterparts.

Why Study Policy Bloggers?

With 12 million bloggers in existence and several high profile political events,

scholarly attention to blogs is clearly needed. Policy bloggers, in particular, deserve

study. Though the numbers of policy bloggers are a small section within the political

blogosphere, they may offer the most promise to make the blogosphere a challenge to

politics as usual. Other bloggers with more grandiose objectives may be unrealistic about the extent that technology can alter business as usual in American politics.

Some have argued that the blogs will supplant the political parties by mobilizing the "netroots." According to Joe Trippi, "America's two political parties may not realize it yet, but in their current form they are nearing obsolescence. As technological advancements continue to bring more and better tools for communication, citizens are increasingly empowered to come together in common purpose and reject the current political system that seems designed by the two parties to keep us apart" (Trippi 2006). Despite the recent victory of Ned Lamont in Connecticut, the darling of the netroots, few writers have echoed this sentiment. Many question the lack of an agenda and political sophistication in the netroots (Lizza 2006).

Others have championed the notion that bloggers are "citizen-journalists" who will supplant the mainstream media. Hewitt (2005) explains that bloggers compete and challenge newspapers and television news programs, referred to as old media, print media, the mainstream media (MSM), or the media monopoly. According to these writers, the MSM is biased, arrogant, elitist, and corrupt. Hewitt likens bloggers to Martin Luther. Like Luther, bloggers act as a democratizing force challenging the establishment and the orthodoxy. Just as the printing press permitted Luther's ideas and the Bible to be disseminated to the masses, so too has the invention of the Internet enabled bloggers to distribute their messages quickly and cheaply (Hewitt 2005). This notion was recently ridiculed in the *New Yorker*. Nicholas Lemann writes that blogs may behave as pamphleteers or media watchdogs. "But none of that yet rises to the level of journalistic

culture rich enough to compete in a serious way with the old media – to function as a
replacement rather than an addendum" (Lemann 2006).

Not only are the goals of policy bloggers more modest, but niches may be what
the Internet does best any way. Anderson argues that businesses are able to take
advantages of niche audiences within the Internet; they no longer have to appeal to one
broad market (Anderson 2006). Policy bloggers are a niche within the blogosphere that
may prove more successful in the long term than all but a few generalists.

Methodology

The unit of analysis for this paper was policy bloggers. Policy bloggers were
identified if they had one policy interest clearly mentioned on the tagline or on the
sidebar of their blog. In some cases, the name of the blog actually reflected their policy
interest. Because the bloggers who focus on international affairs and the war on Iraq are
an unusually diffuse group, I chose to focus on American bloggers with domestic policy
agendas. Since there is a very high rate of blog abandonment, the sample was also
isolated to bloggers who posted on a regular basis for at least nine months.

Using reputational and content analysis, I created nonrandom sample of nine
bloggers who focused on one policy issue on their blog. Policy bloggers are still too few
in number to be isolated by employing random techniques. Bloggers were chosen from a
variety of policy areas and political ideologies. Because I examined a variety of policy
areas and limited research to long standing blogs, the sample size of policy bloggers was
small. However, other studies of A-list bloggers are also quite small in scope. These
bloggers were found through the analysis of the list of blogs at the *Truth Laid Bear*

(www.truthlaidbear.com). *Google* (www.google.com) searches of particular public policy issues and the word "blog" also proved to be useful. *Wampum* (www.wampum.wabanki.net) gives yearly award, the Koufax, to the best liberal bloggers. Their 2005 semi-finalist list for "Best Single Interest Blog" was a good source of liberal, policy bloggers (Williams 2006). In addition, some policy bloggers were located through recommendations of other bloggers. Since there are no directories of blogs categorized by topic, creating samples of subsets of bloggers is very difficult. Appendix C discusses the methodological challenges to studying blogs.

To gather further information about the methods and experiences of policy bloggers, I reviewed the current posts and the sidebar of their blogs. I also conducted nine interviews during the July and August of 2006. Interviews provided the in-depth information needed to provide a rich picture of the activities of policy bloggers. (See Appendix A for the interview instrument.) The interview lasted for approximately 50 minutes and included 53 questions.

The research in this paper is exploratory. It is the first look at a new phenomenon and provides a general overview of a virgin political landscape. The research in this paper hopes to generate as many questions as answers, to provide new directions for research in the future, and to provide a theoretical groundwork that will guide larger empirical studies.

This paper explores three main questions:

1. Who are these policy bloggers? What goals do they have for their blog?

2. How have they used the Internet to promote their pet causes? What activities do all policy bloggers participate in?

3. Have the policy blogs been successful in gaining attention for their key issues?

The Who and the Why of Policy Blogging

Policy bloggers are an elite corps of bloggers with high levels of education and high powered careers. Of the nine interviewees, one held a Masters Degree from an ivy league college; another blogger had two Master Degrees. Two bloggers had law degrees. Four bloggers had earned PhDs, and a fifth was working on his dissertation. Their careers were equally impressive: one lawyer, three policy researchers and consultants, three academics, one law professor, and one internet content provider. All described themselves as political people prior to starting their blog. The digital divide is alive and well in this corner of the blogosphere.

Many had a prior interest in technology prior to starting their current policy blog. Andrew Rotherham of *eduwonk* (www.eduwonk.com) started a biweekly e-mail list in 1994 that reached 14,000 people. Elizabeth of *A Half Changed World* (www.halfchangedworld.com) talked on online chat groups about family-life issues. Holt had a travel blog before starting his health care blog. All of the policy bloggers had read other blogs before starting their own. A 2006 study by the Pew Foundation also found that most bloggers were more likely to consume information online and to have broadband connection than average Internet users (Lenhart and Fox 2006).

Though these policy bloggers are highly educated and skilled, they may be less connected, younger, and less wealthy than traditional policy entrepreneurs. Most of these policy bloggers were not key players in their policy arena prior to blogging with the possible exception of David Hardy, the blogger of *Of Arms and the Law (www.armsandthelaw.com)*. Hardy identified himself as one of the top four writers in the

country on second amendment issues and had argued a case before the Supreme Court (Hardy 2006). Hardy is also at least ten years older than the rest of the sample. Many of other eight interviewees were highly regarded, but they were not among the most influential in their policy area prior to blogging. Three of the nine bloggers were writing about topics outside of their professional expertise. For example, "Prof. Goose" who blogs at *The Oil Drum (www.theoildrum.com)* is an untenured professor in the social sciences, but his academic work is not in the field of energy.

Prior to blogging, few of these bloggers had the means or the interest to attempt to make change through other channels. Other than Hardy, none had not tried and failed to bring cases before the Supreme Court or push a bill through Congress. Baumgartner and Jones write that when policy entrepreneurs find obstructions in one policy arena, such as the court or Congress, they try other venues (1991). The Internet may be a new venue for policy development, but there is no evidence that bloggers ended up blogging after facing obstacles elsewhere. Policy bloggers were not venue shopping.

This study limited its analysis to bloggers who had identified a sole political interest in their blog title or in the tagline of their blog[2]. Interests included: the second amendment, education, environmental politics, sentencing policy, work-life policy, family policy, and evolution. Most of the bloggers focused solely on this issue, although a few of them also discussed other topics. The bloggers had clearly defined the bounds of the issue. In some cases, it was broader, such as anything related to education policy. In other cases, it was very narrowly defined, such as sentencing law.

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[2] There are some other general interest bloggers who have done important work championing particular causes, such as Josh Marshall (www.talkingpointsmemo.com) on social security and Glenn Reynolds (www.instapundit.com) on congressional spending.

All of the interviewees could clearly identify a problem in political or social life that explained their interest in the policy area. PZ Meyers of *Pharynula* (www.scienceblogs.com/pharynula) reported that Republicans were pandering to the religious right and misrepresenting science in our schools. Rotherham said the main problem with education is that the system is designed to serve adults, not kids. Prof. Goose said, "the peak oil crisis is the intellectual issue of our time. It has global impact. It is the underlying cause of all problems." Jeff McIntire-Strasburg of *sustainablog* (www.sustainablog.blogspot.com) said, "we are burdened by a conspicuous consumer culture. People feel that they have a right to live in a wasteful manner."

While all these bloggers had clearly defined interests with firm ideas of the problems in the world, not all of the bloggers had distinct policy recommendations. Some required prompting to identify some policies that they supported on their blog. After prompting, all bloggers reported policies that they supported. Brad Wilcox of *Family Scholars Blog* (www.familyscholars.org/) said that he favored eliminating the marriage penalty and Bush's Healthy Marriage Amendment. Prof. Goose supported using multiple energy alternatives to fossil fuels. Elizabeth endorsed the Campaign for Paid Leave and protested cutbacks of FEMA by the Bush administration. A full list of political interests, problems, and recommendations of the policy bloggers in this study is available in Appendix B.

Bloggers differed in the length of time spent writing posts for their blog and performing maintenance tasks. Some bloggers reported that they blogged for only one hour per day, like Hardy and Wilcox. Others, like Matthew Holt of *The Health Care Blog* (www.thehealthcareblog.com), log two hours a day. Prof. Goose "spends two hours

per day, but I often find a huge story and then it's three or four hours a day. Or more. During Hurricane Katrina, I posted every hour." Most wrote at least one post a day, but some did more. Myers writes six to ten posts per day. Not surprisingly, those who spent more time blogging were the most enthusiastic about the enterprise and had the highest levels of readership. Bloggers whose blogs overlapped with their professional lives had difficulty isolating the time spent on efforts for the blog from the research that they needed to do for their jobs.

The intended audience also ranged from respondent to respondent. Holt said that his audience was not average people, but rather health care business, policy and media types, and people in healthcare who want to make things happen. Prof. Goose said that their audience was more elite and "not joe sixpack– average guys don't think about this stuff". While McIntire-Strasburg said that he was "preaching to the choir. Everyday average people."

The primary purpose of the blog for these bloggers is to get the word out. Elizabeth said, "I see my work as keeping the agenda alive. I want people to see that work-family policy is a policy issue and not just a personal issue. We're not just a bunch of whining mothers." Hardy said, "the blog is about getting the word out." Myers said, "it's a way to get my ideas out about issues I care about." Rotherham cautious that "a blog can get the word out. It can be a platform, a soap box. But you can't do that all the time. You want to have an impact. You have to be selective. There's a way to weigh into the debate."

None of the policy bloggers described themselves as political advocates, and, in fact, some took the time to explain why they weren't advocates. Holt said, "My blog

doesn't always tell people what to do. It offers analysis. It's not straight advocacy."

Rotherham said "I call attention to issue, but I'm not urging audiences. My blog is

mostly informative. I'm working for a not-for-profit and can't get involved in that way.

I do idea advocacy, but not advocacy in the sense of go take action."

In addition to getting the word out, bloggers confessed just having fun with this

medium. They enjoyed writing. They also enjoyed the debate. Elizabeth said she "liked

being part of the world of ideas." As a busy mother, full time policy analysis, and a

marathoner, blogging gives her the opportunity to talk about these issues that concerned

her. Myers echoed this sentiment. He said, "I live in a small town with a population of

5.068. I'm maintaining an intellectual conversation that I wouldn't be able to do here."

Blogging also has certain advantages over other mediums. Hardy said, "I have

the ability to do a brief post, something that you can't do in a law review article. Legal

journals expect 200 footnotes. They don't publish three or four page things. A blog is a

useful way to get things out. Also, scholarly publishing takes a year." Berman also said,

"blogging is a better use of my time that writing ponderous law review articles."

Rotherham said, "I thought it would be cool to do something in real time. A little

snarkier. I wanted to give you your spinach or the facts with the dessert or the snark."

Blogs enabled them to get information out more quickly and with more edge than is

typically allowed in more traditional mediums.

What Policy Bloggers Do

One of the beauties of blogging is its flexibility. There are many strategies that

bloggers use to get attention for their ideas. More creative, energetic, and technologically

savvy bloggers can pursue multiple methods towards success. Still, these policy bloggers all reported engaging in six distinct activities on their blog: filtering information, providing expertise, forming networks, gaining attention, framing arguments, and using windows of opportunity. They rarely urge their readers to directly engage in political acts, such as writing to their representative or attending rallies.

The Six Activities of Policy Bloggers
Filtering Information Providing Expertise Forming Networks Gaining Attention Framing Arguments Using Windows of Opportunity

Filtering Information

Filtering information for readers is one of the core missions of all bloggers (McKenna and Pole 2007), but it is especially important to policy bloggers. Policy bloggers seek to be a central hub for certain policy issues where readers can go to get expertise analysis and links on breaking news and new scholarship. Myers said that people come to his blog when they want to know more about evolution. Prof. Goose says that *The Oil Drum* is "the central node for energy bloggers." Predictability and thoroughness brings readership.   With ever expanding nodes of information on the Internet and elsewhere, centrality and expertise is much needed. Policy bloggers gain information from multiple sources: other bloggers, newspapers and popular magazines, and scholarly and legal journals.

All nine bloggers linked to other bloggers. Some used rss feeds to digest large number of blogs more easily. This paper was not able to explore if policy bloggers

linked primarily to link-minded or opposing bloggers. However, excellent work in this area has already been completed by other academics (Adamic and Glance 2005; Hargittae, Gallo, and Kaine 2007).

All policy bloggers linked to articles in major newspapers and magazines. McKenna and Pole found that 91 percent of political bloggers linked to articles in major newspaper and magazines (2007). All nine policy bloggers also said that they fact checked the media, although far less often than they approvingly linked to them. Myers says that he only critiques reporters when they "are grossly wrong" or if there was a problem with creating false balance. He said that he critiqued Jody Wilgoren from the *New York Times* who presented Intelligent Design as an equal alternative to evolution. Wilgoren wrote him back to say that she no time to research ID. Myers asks, "Whatever happened to the tradition of investigative reporting?"

Policy bloggers linked to information not published in the media. Hardy said that he does it "constantly." Rotherham said that he does it "all the time." They linked to census data, foundation reports, and scholarly journals. Readers read policy bloggers because bring together information from multiple sources.

Providing Expertise

The policy bloggers reported that expertise in their topic was the primary draw for gaining a popular readership and for gaining attention by the media and political elites. All of the bloggers brought an expertise to issues that did not exist elsewhere in the blogosphere. They all either had the ability to understand legal language or statistics or academic jargon. They were able to translate this information to the public and converse with other experts on this topic. Rotherham says that he understands statistics, research,

and policy. "I can unpack things. I'm also very plugged in." Prof. Goose blogs with three other bloggers at *The Oil Drum*; together they have two social science PhDs and two science PhDs.

Many advertised their credentials prominently on their blog. They provided links to their scholarly work on the sidebar. Only two of the nine blogged with pseudonyms. Many provided an "about" page, which listed their scholarly achievements. Others demonstrated their expertise in other ways. Myers said that he often wrote straight science posts with no political angle simply to demonstrate that he knew his stuff.

They have unique access to scholarly material, because of their academic credentials and connections. Myers puts in large excerpts with key figures from science journals. Most of these articles are behind firewalls so the average person could not get access to it. He is careful about citing sources. Rotherham says that he may see reports before they are widely distributed.

They combined their real world expertise with a certain blog professionalism. They stayed on topic. They didn't use foul language. They posted on a daily basis. They didn't provide much personal information, which is a signature trait of other blogs, particular those with female authorship. Elizabeth, the only woman in this study, did occasionally discuss her family in her blog and greatly admired the personal blogs, but her policy interest, work-family policy, merited personal anecdotes.

A few bloggers mentioned that objectivity and non-partisanship gave them an edge, though policy bloggers definitely ranged in terms of their partisanship of their blogs. Myers' blog may have had the clearest partisan preference of the nine in this study. Still, the policy bloggers as a whole are less partisan than the A-list general

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interest blogs. Prof Goose said, "It's not a policy of the blog to endorse a candidate. Objectivity brings credibility. We're as politically neutral as possible."

Rarely Advocating

Bloggers were hesitant to describe themselves as advocates. This is reflected in their descriptions of their actual blog activities. All the bloggers reported occasionally notifying their readers about upcoming votes. All of the bloggers informed their readers about the political stances of elected officials, although they did it rarely. Only Elizabeth reported that she had a post alerting her readers to upcoming rally. Only three of the nine bloggers reported that they had asked their readers to write a political official. Meyers said that he had provided links to e-mail addresses and street addresses. He had also suggested how to write a letter to a person of authority. "Don't call them an idiot," Myers advised his readers. None of the bloggers reported that they asked their readers to donate money to a candidate, cause, or interest group.

The Oil Drum was the only blog in the study that produced a press release aimed at political elites to call attention to their issue. Their press release, "The Politics of Oil: The Discourse Must Change," explained that less and less oil is being produced, resulting in greater political instability. They asked their readers to distribute it to their representatives (*The Oil Drum* 2006).

There have been some notable examples of bloggers using their blogs to donate money to campaigns. Markos Moulitsas, founder of the *Daily Kos* (www.dailykos.com*)*, directed more than $750,000 to the Democratic Party and candidates from 6,500 readers of his blog (Justice 2004). However, requesting political donations is a rarely done activity by most political bloggers. McKenna and Pole (2007) found that only 11 percent

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of bloggers had asked their readers to donate money to a political party or candidate. The political blogosphere as a whole is far more likely to filter information. Since political events are rare occurrences in American political life, this finding is perhaps not surprising. Opportunities for advocacy are especially rare for those who focus on a particular policy issue. Congress may only debate a major health bill once every year or two.

Forming Networks

All nine policy bloggers reported linking to other bloggers. Linking to other blogs not only serves as a means to centralize information, but it also serves to create connections with other bloggers with similar interests. These bloggers then return the favor and link to your posts, which brings in traffic and builds additional credibility. You become part of a community. This is most critical at the onset of starting a blog. Especially important are links from high traffic blogs. *Instapundit* (www.instapundit.com) has been very helpful for Hardy who reports that his "instalaches" brings in 4,000 readers per day. Prof. Goose mentioned that getting linked by *Daily Kos* (www.dailykos.com), *Boing Boing* (www.boingboing.net), and *Fark.com* (www.fark.com) was important for *The Oil Drum*, especially in its first year.

Through cross linking, bloggers network with other bloggers. Bloggers formalize relationship with other bloggers through a blogroll or hyperlinks to the bloggers' favorite blogs. All the bloggers in this study had blogrolls. Many also participated in "carnivals," which are link round ups of the best posts on certain topics. Hardy had contributed to "Carnival of Cordite" with other gun enthusiasts. The environmental bloggers were an especially tight-knit group and held a regular "Carnival of the Green."

Networks are also formed through a comment section. The Pew Foundation estimates that 90 percent of bloggers have a comments section for readers to offer feedback or ask questions about a particular post (Lenhart and Fox 2006). Seven of the nine policy bloggers in this study offered comment sections. In addition, *The Oil Drum* posts open threads daily that gather at least 300 comments. Open threads are designed to let commenters provide their own analysis to a topic, and they promote discussions amongst the readers. While most commenters tend to be sympathetic to the blogger, Wilcox mentioned that he gets a fair amount of commenters who are critical to our perspective. Blogger-to-reader and reader-to-reader networks are another key aspect of these blogs.

In some cases, formal networks are created by outside entities. The science blogs have been grouped together by *Seed* magazine. It's the central place on the Internet for talking about science. Berman is part of the Law Professor Bloggers, a hub for a blogs written by law professors.

Policy bloggers reported that they expanded their networks in other ways. *The Oil Drum* created local branches of the blog in New York City and the United Kingdom and are trying to recruit new people for new branch blogs located in Los Angeles, Canada, and Australia. Several bloggers posted on other blogs. Holt was wrote posts for *TPMCafé* (www.tpmcafe.com/) when they had a special series on health care. McIntire-Strasburg also blogs at *treehugger* (www.treehugger.com/). The bloggers may also expand their network by bringing in guest bloggers.

These networks not only serve to increase readership, but the networked bloggers work together to correct their mistakes and help hone a common argument. There is

constant conversation and debate about their issue. Prof. Goose said, "We wanted to create a place where smart people could come in and debate issues logically and not polemically."

Gaining Attention

Some activities of bloggers are simply designed to gain more attention for their blog. With 12 million blogs in existence, it is difficult to get noticed. Therefore, policy bloggers have to use the technology to call attention to themselves.

A few bloggers mentioned that they leave comments on high traffic blogs. When these comments are not meant to broaden the conversation, but specifically to drive traffic to their blog with a hyperlink, it is known as "blog whoring." One blogger mentioned participating in this activity. A few of the bloggers offer e-mail subscriptions to blog content, including Myers. McIntire said he uses trackbacks to other blogs and was pleased that many newspapers were offering trackbacks.

The Oil Drum has been especially active on using the technology to its height to gather new readership. They run ads on other high traffic blogs. They participate in webrings. They use link farms, such as *dig*, *reddit* and *del.icio.us*. They use trackbacks and tags for *Google* (www.google.com*)* and *Technorati* (www.technorati.com).

Policy bloggers also know what kind of posts grabs the short attention of Internet readers. Myers said that he interspersed posts about evolution and Intelligent Design with other more random topics and humorous posts. "If I hammered people with Intelligent Design every day, no one would come. I have familiar little tropes on the blog. People know that I like squids. They send me stories about squids and I post regular pictures of them."

Framing Arguments

By linking with other blogs, responding to posts of other bloggers, responding to content in the media, and responding to commenters, bloggers are consciously and unconsciously refining how they frame their argument. They are learning how to word their arguments to gain the most support of the public. Myers said that he is strengthening his side of the debate. Wilcox said, "we are trying to provide an intellectual framework to give people ammunition to respond to critics and people standing in the way." Rotherham said that he "likes debating ideas in real time… Blogging makes you think about things. The force that words have. You get called on things and you have to think about how can I be more precise about things."

Some bloggers reported that they had gotten better at making their case through blogging. McIntire-Strasburg said that while he had an academic background, he wasn't an expert in environmental policy. He said that blogging was a way to learn more about it. He feels smarter after blogging.

Using Windows of Opportunity

John Kingdon noted that policy entrepreneurs lie in wait for a window of opportunities to open. After the window is open and a problem is identified, they couple this problem with their solution (1984). Blogs are uniquely situated to respond quickly to events. Bloggers have the ability to publish opinions and reactions faster than print media. Through hyperlinks to fellow bloggers who situated in the thick of things, they can post eyewitness reports faster than television media. They have no word limits. Policy bloggers use this technological edge to their advantage when these windows of opportunity arise.

Bloggers find a way to find to fit their policy interest into every news event. When Hurricane Katrina hit, *The Oil Drum* was able to write about the impact on oil production in the Gulf Coast. They went beyond their daily blog habit of three posts a day and wrote almost continuously on their blog about this issue. As a result, their blog received great deal of attention from the media.

When a special bill comes up before Congress or in a state legislature, they act immediately. When the Deep Water bill came before Congress, Prof. Goose "tore it apart." Myers wrote about the bill banning stem cell research. Holt wrote about the Medical Modernization Act of 2003 and Prop 72 in California in 2004. These policy bloggers were able to dissect technical details of legislation and offer opinions about its impact.

Most of the policy bloggers said that when these windows of opportunity arise, they react with speed. However, two policy bloggers responded they chose to take their time and respond with a great deal of thought. Rotherham said that he already has a large audience and doesn't need to be first every time. Sometimes he prefers to digest information and "get it right."

These opportunities occur rarely, but the bloggers use them. They are times of peak attention to their blog and their policy interest. The previous months of work now come into play, as their arguments have been well framed and their alliances formed. They have already created a name of for themselves among the high traffic bloggers who then send them traffic at these times. Their policy gains attention.

Of course, the biggest window of opportunity of all is blogging itself. These policy bloggers had the foresight to jump into the Internet and see its potential as a

medium for policy development and agenda setting. They have been able to bypass the usual gatekeepers of power to get attention for their issue. Also, their early adoption gives them an edge over other competitors.

Measuring Success With Cites and Hits

It is very difficult to measure the success of policy bloggers. Bloggers have no way of knowing if they are reaching their target audience unless they receive direct contact from them. They cannot know for sure if their efforts are shifting the political agenda. There is little money gained from advertising. The A-list blogs have demonstrated their importance through high profile successes and through studies of blog reading habits of media professionals (Farrell and Drezner 2007b), but policy bloggers have flown under the radar of those studies. Some interviewees expressed real concern that their blog was having little impact. Others were more positive. There are several ways that policy bloggers may be able to measure their impact: direct contacts by media and political elites, readership numbers, and peer recognition.

Media Recognition

The Pew Foundation finds that 10 percent of all bloggers had received attention from public officials, political campaigns or politicians. Nine percent of bloggers have had their blog mentioned by the news media. These numbers are high considering that only 11 percent bloggers in their survey contained political content. The Pew Foundation does not indicate if the 10 percent who won the media's favor were the political blogs (Lenhart and Fox 2006).

Most policy bloggers hope to shift the policy agenda by turning the spotlight on their pet policy. Getting noticed by the media is a necessary step in that process. Receiving attention by the media increases the number of people talking about an issue and possibly forces political officials to take notice. Hardy noted that his policy concern, gun rights, was "hot" back in the 70s and 80s, but was no longer a key issue; he hoped that would change. Drezner and Farrell (2007) have argued that blogs are most influential in reframing political arguments when the media picks up their posts and reports on them. Farrell (2006) also noted that when an issue is much discussed in the blogosphere, but is never reported by the press, it has no impact.

Nearly every blogger had received attention from a major news source as a result of their blog. Prof. Goose reported that a major venture capitalist, Richard Rainwater, mentioned them as one of his favorite blogs in a story in *Fortune Magazine*. They have also been featured in *Financial Times*, *Mother Jones*, *MSNBC*, *BBC*, *Money*, *National Journal's Hotline*, among others. Myers has been contacted by the *New York Times,* and mentioned in the *Star Tribune*, and *Nature* magazine. Wilcox said that his blog had been mentioned in the *Washington Post* a couple of times, and that he had spoken on *NPR*. Holt said that he been contacted by *Rocky Mountain Press*, *Bloomberg*, *WebMD*, and other healthcare journals. The *Wall Street Journal* called Holt's Health Care blog "among the most widely read insider publications in the field."   McIntire-Strasburg was mentioned in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and invited to talk about sustainability to Walmart executives. Berman was profiled or discussed at length in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Legal Affairs* magazine, *Lawyers Weekly USA*, *Legal Times*, and several other print publications as a result of his blog. Rotherham has been quoted in *Education Week*,

the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *New Republic*. *Education Week* ranked *Eduwonk* as one of the key influentials in education policy in America. Elizabeth said she was quoted in the *New York Times*. Hardy wasn't sure if the media was reading his blog.

Berman reported that his blog was cited twenty times within legal opinions, the most of any law blog. He has also been in a few dozen law review articles. In addition, *Sentencing Law and Policy* was the first blog cited by the U.S. Supreme Court.

A few bloggers reported that being contacted by political officials. This summer, McIntire-Strasburg reported that the Democratic candidate for the Secretary of Agriculture in Iowa asked if he could interview her for his blog. Prof. Goose spoke with Congressman Roscoe Barns and reported that Barack Obama bought an advertisement on their blog. Berman is frequently contacted by judges who want their opinions publicized on his blog. Rotherham has been contacted by staff on the hill.

Others are receiving attention from their blog from interest groups and other institutions. Myers has been asked to speak before the Atheists for Human Rights organization in Minneapolis. He also talked to several high schools and colleges, as a result of his blog. Some reported that they had been on mailing lists for organized interest groups and publicists eager to win attention from bloggers. These findings are significant, because there has no been scholarly evidence to date that has shown that the major news outlets and political elites follow non A-list bloggers.

Readership

Bloggers care about readership. Every bloggers uses a counter that measures unique visitors and the number of hits. These counters also tell the blogger the location of the readers and whether he or she reached the blog via a hyperlink. The wider the

reach of a blog, the more respect they gain both with bloggers and non-bloggers alike.

They will also be more successful in getting a wider audience for their ideas.

The policy bloggers varied in the daily readership. Two blogs were small in scope, receiving between 100-500 visitors a day. Two were medium sized blogs and received 500 to 1,000 unique visitors per day. Four were large blogs that averaged between 1,000 to 30,000 visitors per day. One blogger did not provide readership numbers.

The lower and medium trafficked blogs are not necessarily less successful than the higher trafficked blogs. They may be very successful at reaching their target audience. Certain key posts may be publicized by higher trafficked blogs within their network. Idea formation and issue framing can still occur on blogs with lower traffic numbers, and during key political or social events, those numbers may spike. Several bloggers noted that traffic spikes during these formative periods also demonstrated their impact.

Peer Recognition

Peer recognition had eluded most policy bloggers. As an untenured professor, Prof. Goose was one of two bloggers in this study who would not risk revealing his name. The stories of academics losing tenure track positions because of their blogs are legendary within the blogosphere (*The Chronicle of Higher Education* 2006). Bloggers have coined the term "doocing" to mean losing one's job because of blogging. Myers who has tenure said that his blog had no impact on his career. He put a reference to it in the "service" section of his CV and noted wryly that service didn't count for much in academia. He also noted the blog was interfering with his plans to write a book. Holt

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was the most interested in using the blog to further his professional career as a consultant and his goal of becoming a medical pundit, but he wasn't sure if it had. Rotherham says that the blog may be a professional hindrance. "If you write that many words, you are going to piss somebody off." While Berman has received the most success within in his profession for his blog, he said that he would not advise a junior colleague to get involved with blogging.

Several bloggers mentioned that these blogs were labors of love. They spent hours upon hours blogging because of their passion for the topic and for blogging itself. Several mentioned that their family had complained about their time spent at the computer. While the costs were minimal and a few had earned some advertising money, no one was getting rich at this enterprise. Few reported professional gains from their blog. Those obstacles, plus the scarcity of real experts, explains the small number of policy bloggers.

Conclusion

The Internet has touched every aspect of American political life. Bloggers have helped unseat news anchors and Senate majority leaders. They helped candidates in state and national primaries. Major newspapers and networks monitor their activities. Blogs have also aided a new breed of policy entrepreneurs, as well.

Policy bloggers have gradually realized the potential of blogs to inform readers, to connect to the media and political elites, and to perhaps shift the policy agenda. While highly educated and well positioned in their careers, these bloggers found that blogs were a quick and more efficient way to make change than going through traditional channels.

Bloggers reported in engaging in six distinct activities on their blog: filtering information, providing expertise, forming networks, gaining attention, framing arguments, and using windows of opportunity. They rarely urge their readers to partake in political activity. Nearly all received attention from major media sources and some gained a significant daily readership. Despite these victories, their blogs were primarily labors of love, bringing in little money or professional rewards.

The Internet has opened up new opportunities for these unique individuals. They have gained a soap box to shape the views of the public, the media, and politicians. It's hard to say what the future holds. These bloggers may be absorbed into mainstream interest groups or media outlets. The lack of money, the huge time commitment, and the difficulty in identifying successes may frustrate some. They may grow in numbers, as they learn how to manipulate the technology better. They also may succeed in calling attention to the problems and solutions that concern them. It will be fascinating to follow their efforts in the years that come.

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Appendix A.

Interview Instrument

Introduction: I am working on a paper for APSA 2006 about policy bloggers – bloggers who focus on one political policy or interest. I see that _____ is a major interest for you. These questions are going to be more about your blog and how you use your blog than about your policy interest itself. (For bloggers who don't use real name – I can include it in the paper if wish or withhold it.)

Could you tell me a little bit about your blog? What is the main focus of your blog? What's the primary goal of you blog? Do you blog about other topics? Who is your intended audience (prompt: Political officials? Media? Academics? Average people?) When did you start your blog? How did you get interesting in blogging? What came first the policy interest or the blog? Prior to starting the blog, did you try to get your word out in more traditional means, such as letter writing or op-ed writing?

Can you tell me a little bit more about policy interest? What problem do you see with society or American politics at this time? Do you have a particular policy remedy? How did you get interested in this topic? Were there any books or an event that influenced you?

What expertise or skills did you bring to the blog? What's your occupation? Any background in politics? Political Affliliation/Ideology?

How many hours do you spend blogging (including time responding to comments and other blog maintenance)? How much money do you spend on the blog? How often do you blog?

What strategies do you use on your blog to attract more readers and to get more attention to your policy issue?

Prompts:
Have you written a post pointing to a political post on another blog?
Have you written a post pointing to an article in a newspaper?
Have you written a post pointing to an upcoming vote in congress, state legislature, city council or the UN? Do you urge readers to write their representative? Do you urge readers to donate money to anyone?
Have you written a post pointing to an upcoming rally, protest or march
Have you written a post pointing to the positions or activities of a candidate, political party, or interest group?
Have you written a post pointing to errors or omissions in the media?
Have you written a post pointing to the release of data or statistics not published in a newspaper (e.g. The Brookings Institute, US Census Bureau)?

Have you done your own research?

Have you formed alliances with other bloggers? Do they also have an interest in your pet topic? Networking? Organized a blog conference?

What happens when there is a major news event that touches upon your issue? Do you respond right away? Example.

I understand that it is very difficult to measure a success of a blog, but would you say that your blog has been successful in getting the word out to people? How many unique hits do you receive on a daily basis? How many comments do you receive on a daily basis? Do you believe that you have been able to influence the media? Have you been contacted by the media? By political officials? By interest groups? Have you gathered any advertising revenue? Has the blog led to any professional advancements for yourself?

Why do you like blogging? What advantages does blogging have over other ways of policy? Did the blog make you more aware of politics? Do you keep a closer eye on the news?

What has prevented you from doing more with your blog? (prompt – time, money)

What advice would you give other policy bloggers?

Appendix B.
Nine Policy Bloggers

Blog and Tagline	Url and Blogger Name	Policy Interest	Policy Proposal	Blogger Name
Half Changed World: dc mom/policy wonk's musings on work, parenthood, gender, politics, and the rest of life	www.halfchangedworld.com	Work-Life Policy	Supporting the Campaign for Paid Leave; Protecting FEMA against cutbacks	Elizabeth
Pharyngula: Evolution, development, and random biological ejaculations from a godless liberal	http://www.scienceblogs.com/pharyngula	The Politics of Evolution	Stem cell research; Keeping Intelligent Design out of the classroom	PZ Myers
The Oil Drum: Discussions about Energy and Our Future	www.theoildrum.com	Energy Policy	Awareness of the peak oil crisis; promotion of fuel alternatives	Prof. Goose

Family Scholars Blog: Your 24/7 research assistant on all things marriage and the family.	http://www.familyscholars.org/	Family Policy	Eliminate the marriage penalty in the tax code; push back on challenges to the family that come from Hollywood; Bush's Healthy Marriage Amendment	Brad Wilcox
Sustainablog: Sustainablog is dedicated to news, information and personal meanderings related to environmental and economic sustainability, green and sustainable business, and environmental politics.	www.sustainablog.blogspot.com	Environmental policy	A carbon or a broader green tax; cap and trade system; renewable energy	Jeff McIntire-Strasburg
Eduwonk	http://www.eduwonk.com	Education Policy	High quality teachers particularly in urban areas; supports charter schools; small classrooms; salary incentives; professional development	Andrew Rotherham

The Health Care Blog: Everything you always wanted to know about Health Care system. But were afraid to ask.	http://www.thehealthcareblog.com/	Health Care Policy	Gradual process towards universal health care.	Matthew Holt
Arms and the Law	http://armsandthelaw.com/	The Second Amendment	More lenient, saner laws concerning gun ownership; Repeal concealed weapon law.	David Hardy
Sentencing Law and Policy: A Member of the Law Professor Blogs Network	http://sentencing.typepad.com/	Sentencing Law	Shorter imprisonment times; Replace time in prison with death penalty, shaming, and GPS tracking system for sex offenders	Doug Berman