Substitution versus Expansion:

The Contrasts between Offline and Online Political Participation

Russell J. Dalton

Center for the Study of Democracy
University of California, Irvine

Abstract

Online political participation has apparently expanded in recent years, while some forms of conventional offline participation have apparently decreased. This paper uses Pew Center surveys from the 2008 and 2012 U.S. presidential elections to compare the patterns of online and offline political participation in electors and other forms of action. We also examine the correlates of participation to determine whether new forms of online activity are substituting for traditional offline activism or represent an overall expansion of political engagement. We conclude by discussing whether changing patterns of participation affect the levels and access to political voice in contemporary American politics.

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There is a general consensus that citizen participation is vital to the functioning of democracy. As Sidney Verba and Norman Nie have written, citizen participation is "at the heart of democratic theory and at the heart of the democratic political formula in the United States." [1] Without public involvement in the process, democracy lacks both its legitimacy and its guiding force.

Against the background of an ongoing debate about the level of citizen participation in America,[2] the development of the Internet since 2000 potentially opens up new channels and forms of political action—especially for younger generations who are generally engaged in online activity. Technological innovations may be changing the ways in which people express their political views and try to influence politics, especially with the development of social media, blogging, file sharing and other elements of an interactive Internet 2.0. Election campaigns are increasingly embracing the Internet as a communication tool, and various reforms are expanding eGovernment.

This paper explores the usage of online forms of political participation in comparison to offline activity. Some new online forms of action seem to be the continuation of traditional participation by other means, such as written letters to public officials being replaced by contacting via email. Other forms of online activism seem to represent new participation opportunities—such as blogging or file sharing—and potentially may draw additional citizens into the political arena.

At the heart of these developments are three questions that guide our research. First, what is the extent of online participation and its trajectory over the last two US presidential elections? Second, do these new forms of action substitute for or expand traditional levels of political participation? Third, does online participation recruit a different group of citizens to engage in politics?

To address these questions we use two surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project (http://www.pewinternet.org/). Early in the 2008 and 2012 election years, Pew asked a sample of Americans to report on their political activity.[3] Our core

interest is in a paired set of questions that ask about comparable offline and online activities. These two surveys provide the empirical base for our research.

This paper proceeds in four steps. First, we briefly discuss the development of online activism and past research related to our interests. Second, we introduce the Pew Center data used in this paper. Third, we present the empirical analyses to address our research questions. And finally we discuss the implications of our findings for debates about Americans' political participation and the vitality of contemporary democracy.
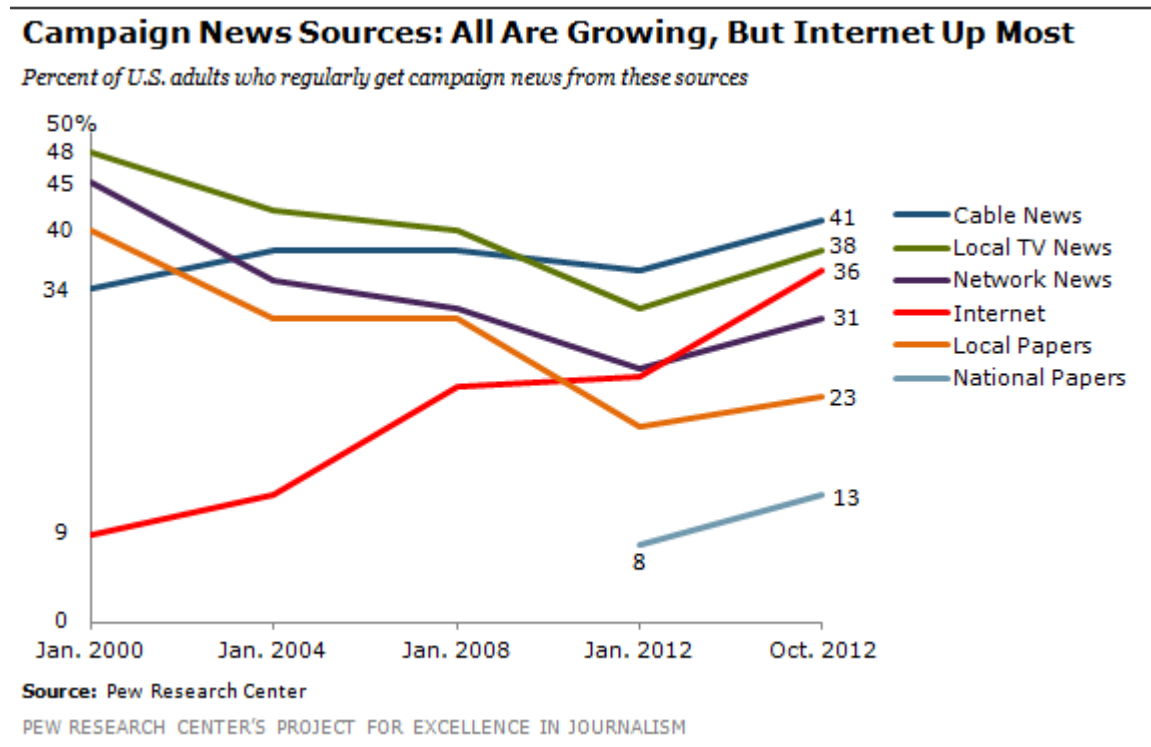
The Development of Online Activism

The Internet has created a new way for people to be politically engaged: to connect with others, to gather and share information, and to attempt to influence the political process.[4] Summarizing these developments, Yannis Theocharis states "Digital media have added inexhaustive, creative and non-political ways to engage in social and political life that not only often appear to form the basis of political participation, but, in a plethora of everyday contexts, seem to become embedded into what eventually evolves to become a politically meaningful act."[5]

Perhaps the clearest evidence of this change is the usage of the Internet as a political information source in campaigns. The Pew Center reports that the percentage of Americans who regularly get campaign news from Internet sources increased from 9 percent in 2000 to 36 percent in 2012—a four-fold increase (Figure 1). And among citizens under age 30, the Internet is now the most commonly used news source. Television usage as a political information source has a mixed pattern depending on the exact form (national, cable or local news). These data also show the marked decline in newspaper usage over time.

This expansion applies to other Internet activities. E-mails are now the most common form of communication from constituents to members of the U.S. Congress. Candidate web sites were unheard of in the 1992 U.S. elections, but today they are a standard feature of electoral politics in America and Europe. Online petitions and online political contributions are also becoming commonplace. The blogosphere is a still newer source of political information and commentary that potentially empowers individuals as rivals to the established media. Some local governments are even experimenting with Internet voting.[6]

Figure 1. Sources of Campaign Information over Time

Campaign News Sources: All Are Growing, But Internet Up Most
Percent of U.S. adults who regularly get campaign news from these sources

	Cable News	41
	Local TV News	38
	Network News	36
	Internet	31
	Local Papers	23
	National Papers	13

Source: Pew Research Center

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

In addition, the Internet is creating political opportunities that had not previously existed. The most dramatic example of change is Barack Obama's 2008 campaign (Issenberg 2009). The email addresses of those who attended early campaign events created a database the campaign used to recruit volunteers and contributors. The campaign created a social networking site, MyBo, where Obama supporters could meet online, discuss the campaign, and coordinate their activities separate from the official campaign. Facebook affinity tags replaced yard signs in the 2008 campaign, and YouTube videos became important conduits of campaign information. The online funding efforts of the Obama campaign achieved unprecedented success.

A wide range of political groups, parties, and interest groups now use the Internet to disseminate information. President Obama had almost 15 million followers at the start of 2012, and more than 60 million as this paper is being written. Moveon.org now boasts more than 5 million members and boasts a long list of other political actions organized through their website. The Tea Party movement used the Internet to communicate and coordinate their activities with great success in the 2010 elections. The Internet is becoming an important method of political

communication and mobilization across the political spectrum. And more conventional Internet activities, such as sending emails to political figures, have grown substantially over time.

Consequently, our first task is to determine the levels of offline and online participation in the 2008 and 2012 elections. We realize that this is a moving target as the percentage of Internet users and the methods of communication are changing even over these four years. For example, Zuckerberg launch the first Facebook page at Harvard in 2004, providing the SNS environment for peer-to-peer networking. Now it has almost 1.5 billion users. Twitter was established in 2006 and only 400,000 twitter messages were posted worldwide in the first quarter of 2007. In 2012 Twitter was recording 340 million tweets a day! Much of this content is about friends, gossip, and celebrities—but a significant amount touches on political themes and is a tool of collective action. And while the 2008 election was a milestone because of the Obama campaign's aggressive use of the Internet, the subsequent four years experienced a growing reliance on the Web as a source of political information (Figure 1), and potentially a means of political action.

Our second research question is whether this represents a real change in the amount of political participation, or a shift from offline to more efficient (or easier) online forms of action. For example, do online political contributions change the composition of contributors, or only shift contributions from writing a check to making a Paypal contribution. Is an email to a government official comparable to a letter in the past; or does it expand contacting to a new group of citizens. The Pew Center surveys offer the rare opportunity to directly compare offline and online activity for several forms of political action.

Third, much of the prior literature on online participation suggests that the traditional predictors of political activity extend to these new methods. For example, the preliminary analyses of the 2008 Pew Survey summarized their findings by saying "contrary to the hopes of some advocates, the internet is not changing the socioeconomic character of civic engagement in America. Just as in offline civic life, the well-to-do and well-educated are more likely than those less well off to participate in online political activities."[7] The importance of skills and resources is possibly even more relevant to online activism because of the dependence on individual initiative, possession of computer skills, and relatively easy access to the Internet. Thus Cantijoch, Cutts and Gibson's analysis of comparable items in the 2010 British Election Study found that social class predicted online contacting and petition-signing more strongly than for the

comparable offline activities.[8] The question of whether online activism creates a new digital divide is continuing. Since part of this social status divide was based on varying levels of access and use of the Internet, the extension of data to 2012 gives more perspective on the Internet's political potential.[9]

The evidence is ambiguous in how the attitudinal predictors of participation might vary across offline and online activities. Offline activities often require greater effort; it takes more effort to write and mail a letter than to send a quick email. Part of this effort might be counterbalanced by feelings of political efficacy, which might play a larger role in predicting offline activism. We also investigate whether Democratic/Republican party cues affect levels of offline or online participation.

Finally, the variation in political participation across certain demographic characteristics also has significant implications. Part of the debate on youth participation suggests that many young people maybe turning to online activism (as well as other non-electoral activities) and thus their activity is missed if we study only traditional methods of participation.[10] Such claims are reinforced by the higher rates of Internet usage among the young, while the Web remains a mystery to many seniors. Similarly, lower levels of Internet access among racial and ethnic minorities may potentially deepen their participation deficit beyond what is normally found for offline activity.

Separating offline and online activity can provide insights into the participation patterns of the citizens today, and how the expansion of online participation options might be reshaping how we participate and who uses various methods of activism.

Data Sources

The Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project regularly monitors Americans' use of the Internet and its impact on society and its citizens. A subset of this program tracks the political uses of the Internet. The first survey was done in August of 2008 and it sampled 2,251 adults aged 18 and over.[11] The survey used random digit dialing telephone methods to include listed and non-list landline numbers. Pew conducted the second survey in July-August 2012.[12] The survey includes 2,253 adults aged 18 and older. The 2012 survey changed procedures to also sample individuals with only cellphone access.

A battery of questions form the core of our analyses; they ask about both offline and online participation in five comparably worded pairs of activities:

- How often do you **discuss politics and public affairs** with others in person, by phone, or by a letter -- every day, at least once a week, at least once a month, less than once a month, or never? [or, "by e-mail or instant message, on a social networking site, or in an online chat"]
- In the past 12 months, have you... **Contacted a national, state or local government official** in person, by phone or by letter about an issue that is important to you. [or, "sent an email"]
- In the past 12 months, have you... **Sent a "letter to the editor"** through the U.S. Postal Service to a newspaper or magazine [or, "emailed a letter"]
- In the past 12 months, have you... **Signed a paper petition** [or, "signed a petition online"]
- Thinking about the past 12 months, **have you contributed money** to a political candidate or party, or any other political organization or cause [Did you make those contributions on the Internet… or did you make those contributions offline, say, in person, by phone or through the mail… or have you made contributions both on the internet and offline]

These questions tap engagement in campaigns, contacting, financial contributions, and more assertive participation through petitions.[13]

Because the Internet world is dramatically changing, we view these data as snapshots of an evolving relationship between citizens and political life. Thus, Bruce Bimber et al. caution that results highlighted in one study are often not replicated in the next.[14] A major advantage of the Pew studies is that they produce snapshots of participation in two different elections with comparable survey questions, so we can assess the consistency of results over time and perhaps the emergence of trends. In addition, the pairing of offline and online participation questions creates a rich opportunity to examine both methods simultaneously.

Offline and Online Activity

We begin our analyses by simply describing the levels of offline and online political activity in 2008 and 2012 for the five actions (Table 1).[15] Offline activity generally exceeds the level of the comparable online action, except for letters to the editor. Most clearly, significantly more people report discussing politics monthly in face-to-face interactions (62.6 percent in 2012) than in online interaction (31.1 percent). Contacting government officials and signing petition display only slightly higher activity in their offline forms.

Table 1. Offline and Online Political Activity, 2008-2012

Activity	2008			2012		
	Offline	**Online**	**r**	**Offline**	**Online**	**R**
Discuss politics monthly	68.3	18.4	.36	62.6	31.1	.48
Contact a national, state or local official	24.5	17.8	.56	21.4	17.6	.51
Sent a "letter to the editor"	4.9	6.8	.38	4.0	5.2	.43
Contributed money to a candidate, party, or other political organization	15.3	5.6	--	12.2	6.2	--
Signed a petition	24.7	14.6	.24	23.9	16.9	.30

Source: Pew Internet Studies, 2008 and 2012; table includes non-users of Internet.
Note: Table entries are the percentage who have done each activity and the Pearson's r correlation between offline and online activity. .

Participation overall slipped slightly in 2012, which is consistent with other survey evidence. Otherwise, these data paint a consistent picture of participation levels—both offline and online—across the two surveys. While one example of offline participation might be up slightly, another dips. And the same mixed pattern occurs for online activity, even though the 2012 might contain a more representative group of tech-savvy individuals because of its different sampling frame. Or we might have expected that 2008 participation levels would be exceptional because of the online mobilizing efforts of the Obama campaign and the public attention to online activism. Still, there is little change in each item over these four years.

Typically research then examines the correlates of offline and online participation as separate dependent variables. However, logic (as well as previous empirical analyses) argue that

these two parallel forms of political action tend to overlap.[16] This is plainly seen in the correlation between each pair of items in Table 1. The cross-item correlations are substantial, and generally increase by the second survey.

       This overlap creates an analytic challenge for comparing offline and online activity, because many people do both. Figure 2 displays the extent of the overlap. The figure differentiates between those who do each activity 1) offline only, 2) both offline and online, and 3) online only.

       The overlap in methods varies across participation modes. For contacting political officials, for example, the plurality use both methods in 2008 (12.4 percent) and 2012 (11.5 percent). Signing petitions also shows substantial overlap; those who stop to sign a petition while they are shopping are also likely to sign when offered the option online. This overlap is especially problematic if we want to focus on online activity, because the percentage using both methods equals or exceeds the percentage doing only online activity for most of these examples. And for political discussion, nearly all those who discuss online also discuss politics offline (although obviously not vice versa).

Figure 1 Overlapping Offline and Online Political Activity, 2008-2012
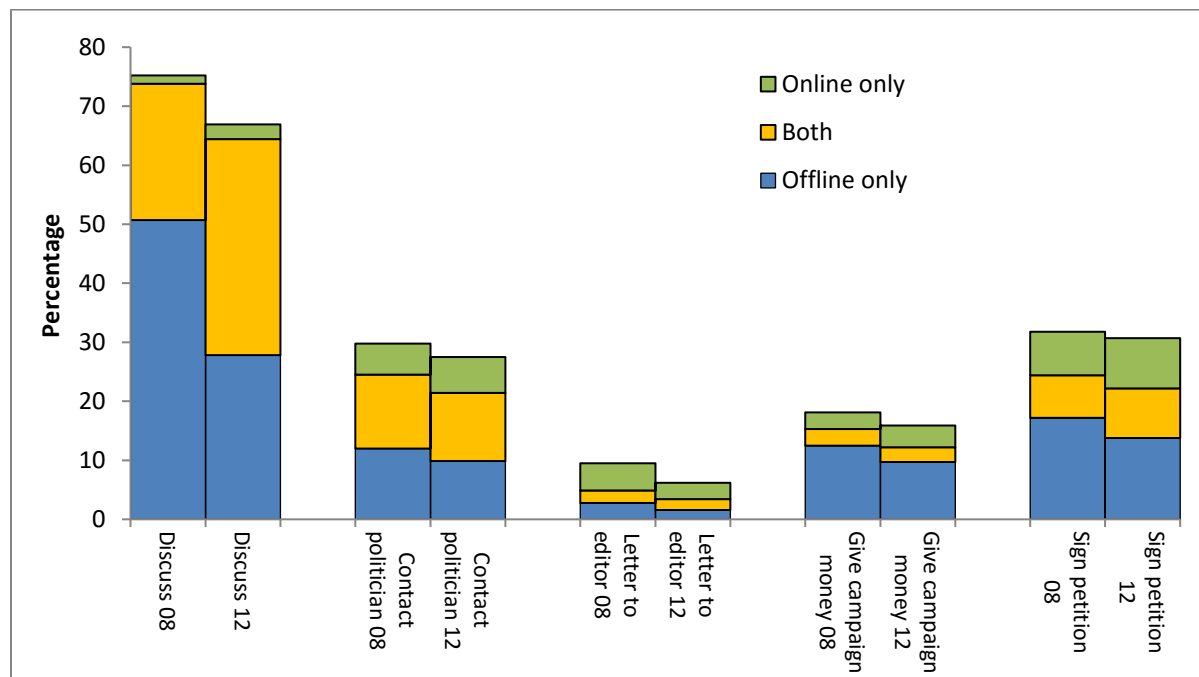
Source: Pew Internet Studies, 2008 and 2012; figure includes non-users of Internet.
Note: The figure presents those who are active offline, online or both offline/online in the last 12 months.

The Correlates of Action

The overlap between offline and online action described in the previous section means that to predict one form of action is often to predict the other as well. Thus it is not surprising the correlates of action are similar across both methods of participation when analysts treat both methods as separate variables.

Typically researchers construct an index of online activity and a separate index of online activity. However, this approach may blur any distinctions that exist between offline and online activism because of the overlap. Our goal is to disentangle this overlap, which requires a different analysis strategy. We examine each activity separately, rather than through summary indices of several forms of participation, in order to differentiate the patterns of participation. Two modes of activity have sufficient numbers of offline and online participants to allow more detailed analyses: contacting a government official, and signing a petition. Fortunately, one deals with more conventional activity and the other is a semi-contentious form of action.

The next issue is how to control for the overlap between offline and online methods, and thus isolate who performs one method versus the other. Constructing summary indices for both methods seems flawed if the goal is to measure the 'added value' of online participation opportunities, because of the overlap between methods. Controlling for one method in a multivariate model of the other also has limitations and seems to fall short of our goal. Consequently, we decided to disaggregate participation patterns as much as possible.

Thus, we developed a multivariate model to predict activity, and apply this to offline and online participation as two separate dependent variables. Then we further disaggregate the analyses to compare inactive citizens to those who participate: 1) only offline, 2) only online, and 3) both offline and online. This does not completely achieve the goal of separating offline and online methods because of endogeneity issues, but it allows us to compare subgroups in more detail than the separate measures of both methods.

Our predictive model emphasizes three themes derived from the classic civic voluntarism model of Verba and his colleagues.[17] First, we consider the importance of *skills and resources* for political participation. In simple terms, are more educated and higher status individuals better equipped to engage in both forms of political participation?[18] These traits routinely emerge as important for both offline and online activism.[19] Empirical results are less clear on the relative importance of skills and resources for offline versus online activity. Writing a letter to a member

of Congress may be more demanding than sending off an email, but developing online skills also might be challenging to many Americans, especially older citizens who are less computer literature. We judge the relative importance of resources and skills using education and family income as predictors.

A second set of predictors tap citizen values. The Pew surveys includes a question tapping a sense of political efficacy.[20] Given the often inner-directed nature of online activity, such feelings might prove more important when compared to traditional offline forms of participation that might be externally mobilized. A higher level of efficacy also might spur more demanding forms of offline participation. Another relevant measure is party identification, to see if Democratic versus Republican partisanship affects participation patterns.

A third set of predictors includes several demographic characteristics. The ongoing debate on generation change in participation means that it is important to consider age as a predictor. Most research demonstrates higher levels of traditional political activity among older Americans. At the same time, there are frequent claims that younger generations are turning to the Internet as a political information source and a means of political expression and participation.[21] We also include gender, African-American race, Hispanic identity, and rural/urban residence as control variables. The these variables address the question of whether variations in Internet access and skills might further limit the political involvement of minority groups.

Another empirical decision is how to deal with individuals who do not use the Internet as defined by the Pew surveys. One approach excludes those without Internet access from the analysis of online activity, which presumes that the lack of access distorts patterns of participation or potential participation. This approach tends to accentuate the apparent levels of participation by excluding the 15-20 percent of the public that does not go online. In contrast, this paper treats those without Internet access as non-participants. Our logic is that they are not using Internet opportunities, whether by choice or not. By a similar token, those who lament the decline of newspaper readership do not adjust for declining numbers of families that subscribe to their local paper. In several ways, utilization of the Internet as a media source represents some of the same causal processes that lead people to participate.[22] To be certain about our findings, the appendix to this paper illustrates how excluding those without Internet access may yield different results for the models presented below.

Table 2 presents our multivariate models predicting political contacting. Contacting has become more frequent over time as Americans' skills and resources have expanded.[23] While distinct from participation in campaigns or voting, it still involves interactions with government officials who are elected officials. In this sense, contacting can be considered a traditional, conventional, elite-centered methods of participation.

The left side of the table presents the results from 2008, and the right side the results from 2012. For 2008, for example, we first present the separate survey questions about contacting politicians by post or phone, then a separate model for contact only offline, only by email, or by both methods. As others have shown, the correlates of contacting appear quite similar when these two methods are compared for the first two models. The only substantial relationships are for education, family income and political efficacy—and all three run in the same direction for both forms of contacting.

Our innovation is to separate both methods of contacting. The third column in table 2 shows the relationship for those who contact a political figure *only through offline methods*. Somewhat surprisingly given the past literature, social status has little apparent influence; instead, the strongest predictor is the higher levels of contacting among older Americans (β=.15). The next column presents the comparable multivariate model for those who contact politicians *only through online methods*. Social status now emerges as a substantial predictor of participation, and the effect of age drops to a third of the offline coefficient. The fifth column in the table describes the relationship for people who use *both offline and online methods* of contacting. The results are actually quite similar to the average of the first two columns, since it blends both: social status is important, more important than for either offline or online alone. Political efficacy is also important, and age differences are modest.

These broad patterns are discernable in the 2012 survey as well. The skills and resources represented by social status are most important in enabling individuals to use both offline and online methods of contacting. Feelings of political efficacy are also significantly linked to participation, although more when offline activity is involved. (This might reflect the lower commitment necessary to email a public official versus writing or calling.) And one now begins to see a distinct age pattern. Contacting is higher for older Americans for offline contact or both methods of contact, but the age relationship is weaker for online only users, or even reversed in

Table 2. Predicting Contacting Officials, 2008 and 2012

Predictor	2008						2012				
	Contact Offline	Contact Online	Only Offline Contact	Only Online Contact	Both Offline & Online		Contact Offline	Contact Online	Only Offline Contact	Only Online Contact	Both Offline & Online
Education	.14	.21	.08	.18	.20		.18	.24	.07	.14	.23
Income	.07	.15	-.03	.06	.15		.02	.06	-.05	.06	.07
Efficacy	.11	.10	.07	.03	.12		.11	.09	.08	.01	.10
Partisanship (Dem)	.00	-.03	-.01	.05	.01		.02	.0`	.04	.02	-.01
Age	.12	.04	.15	.05	.06		.08	.05	.06	-.03	.06
Gender (female)	-.01	-.03	-.04	.02	-.05		-.01	-.02	-.03	-.04	.00
Black	-.02	-.03	-.01	-.06	.00		-.05	-.08	-.03	-.06	-.07
Hispanic	-.01	-.01	-.02	-.01	.00		.06	-.06	-.08	-.06	-.03
Community size (rural)	.03	.01	.06	.01	.03		.03	-.01	-.04	.04	-.00
Multiple R	.26	.34	.18	.24	.35		.26	.33	.16	.22	.32

Source: 2008 and 2012 Pew Internet Surveys; table includes non-users of Internet.

Note: Table entries are standardized OLS regression coefficients, pairwise deletion of missing data.

the case of the 2012 surveys. The other socio-demographic control variables seldom rise to a level of substantive significance, except for the persisting lower participation levels among African-Americans and Hispanics.

Table 3 presents the comparable models for petition signing. While petitions have a long democratic tradition, they also represent a modest form of elite-challenging political action (albeit less than protesting or other contentious action). Thus, we might expect petitions to draw different individuals into political activity.

The first two columns of Table 3 present our models predicting offline and online petition signing as separate acts. Social status again emerges as a significant predictor of both, especially as represented by educational level. Feelings of political efficacy significantly affect online participation in both the 2008 and 2012 surveys, but the effect on offline petition signing is much weaker. Perhaps the most notable pattern involves the age variable. *Older Americans are slightly more likely* to sign a paper petition, but this relationship is clearly reversed for signing a petition online. Despite the strong relationship between offline and online petition signing, this is a case where their effect diverge for the age variable.

Disaggregating participants into different methods shows more complex patterns. Offline only activists generally mirror the pattern for offline activity overall; that is, education and political efficacy have substantial effects, but the other predictors are only weakly tied to participation. Note the weak multiple R for this model in both surveys, indicating that participation is not clearly structured by this model. Online petition signers also tend to have higher social status—this is consistent across all models as the civic voluntarism framework would predict. In addition, the *young are substantially more likely* to sign petitions online in both surveys, in contrast to offline petitions. Those who have signed petitions both offline and online generally follow the pattern of online only signers, with an even strong effect for the two social status variables. Indeed, one of the consistent patterns for both surveys and both modes of participation is the strong predictive pattern for those who use both offline and online methods of participation—as noted by the larger Multiple R in these models. The multivariate model is least successful in predicting offline only participation, even though this model was developed when there was only offline methods of participation. To me, this suggests that higher status Americans have expanded their participation to include online activism when this became possible.

Table 3. Predicting Petition Signing, 2008 and 2012

Predictor	2008						2012				
	Signed Paper Petition	Signed Online Petition	Only Paper Petition	Only Online Petition	Both Paper & Online		Signed Paper Petition	Signed Online Petition	Only Paper Petition	Only Online Petition	Both Paper & Online
Education	.14	.16	.10	.10	.19		.11	.19	.08	.17	.16
Income	.05	.11	.02	.09	.11		.05	.07	.04	.07	.06
Efficacy	.10	.04	.11	.03	.06		.08	.05	.06	.01	.08
Partisanship (Dem)	.04	.01	.02	-.05	.04		.04	.05	.03	.04	.06
Age	.02	-.08	.00	-.06	-.07		.01	-.10	.03	-.10	-.04
Gender (female)	.04	.08	.05	.10	.05		.04	.03	.02	.01	.04
Black	-.03	-.03	-.02	-.01	-.03		-.04	-.06	.01	-.02	-.08
Hispanic	.05	-.02	-.05	-.01	-.04		.03	-.07	-.02	-.08	-.04
Community size (rural)	-.02	.00	-.02	.00	-.01		.00	.01	-.00	-.01	.00
Multiple R	.23	.27	.18	.22	.30		.18	.29	.13	.26	.26

Source: 2008 and 2012 Pew Internet Surveys; table includes non-users of Internet.

Note: Table entries are standardized OLS regression coefficients; pairwise deletion of missing data.

The Lessons of Online Participation

This paper began by asking the research question: "Does online political participation represent substitution or expansion in the methods of political action?" The answer is . . . yes. This is because both traits are apparent in our empirical findings.

The evidence of substitution is present, but indirect. We know that higher social status individuals are more likely to participate; but this is not so apparent for offline only activities because higher social status leads to online activity or both methods of action. In addition, just as newspapers are seemingly becoming passé, so is writing letters to editors. However, emailing an editor or posting an online comment on a newspaper or magazine website is becoming commonplace because of the ease of comment. Thus most letters to editors are now written online. Since online activity often places lower demands on individuals, it is natural that some activity shifts to online methods.

The expansion of political repertoires is more apparent in our findings. First, the combined levels of offline and online contacting, petition signing and even political donations is greater than what is normally found by simply asking the traditional questions that imply offline activity.[24] Online methods of engagement include more individuals in the political process, even if they are only using email or online petitions to perform activities that could be done by traditional offline means. In addition, the Internet also offers new opportunities for online participation. The 2012 Pew Center survey separately asked about participation via social networking sites. Two-fifths of SNS users took part in some political activity as part of a social networking site.[25] Seventeen percent posted a political comment to a SNS or a blog, about a tenth posted a political video or sent a political text message. The numbers are modest, and the uses are still growing, but the Internet is adding to the tools of political activism, especially among the young who are more involved in most online forms of action.

There is also evidence in our results that online methods can expand participation among the young. The results on petition signing show a distinct generational patterns, with potentially less engaged youth being more active when they can participate online. Most research mirrors this pattern, and the young are more positively oriented toward online methods.[26] By extension, if policy makers were really more concerned about low turnout rates among younger voters, then automatic registration and online voting deserve more attention.

Second, potentially more significant evidence of expansion is the multiple use of both offline and online methods by the same individuals. The patterns for contacting and petition signing suggest that people with greater skills and resources are most likely to expand their participation repertoire to include both methods. The less-educated are barely involved in either method. This means that the expansion of political participation to online methods likely increases the inequality of voice between higher and lower social status individuals. The fading limits on campaign funding (by any method) presumably compound this problem of unequal voice, and social network activity may further widen inequality.

Political participation is thus entering a new world as the technology of the Internet is changing how we can participate as citizens. This is a dynamic process, and is likely to continue to evolve into new forms of individual action and collective involvement. Increasing citizen participation should be a benefit for democracy. So on the one hand, this expanded political access should be applauded and encouraged. But on the other hand, democracy also requires political equality of voice, and the development of new forms of online activism appears to challenge this principle. In other words, the politically rich are getting richer through the expansions of participation opportunities, and the politically poor are becoming relatively poorer in expressing their political voice.

Another challenge involves the mechanisms to aggregate diffuse interests if participation becomes an increasingly individualized activity done online. Part of the value of public meetings and collective action is that it fosters a deliberative process, much in line with Jefferson's notion of participation as a learning process as well as means of influence. Perhaps through social media the Internet can foster deliberation, and there are various experiments aimed in this direction. But it remains uncertain whether the anonymity of the Internet and the lack of face-to-face contact will generate the same effects. Indeed, civility isn't one of the hallmarks of open commentary on Internet media sites or other venues. Creating a public consensus for governmental action requires more than autonomous individuals typing on their computers.

If democracy adapts to these new methods, and minimizes the negativities, the process will be improved as a result.

Appendix: Alternative Models

The complex interrelationships of variables predicting offline and online participation are made even more complex because some individuals do not have access to the Internet and are therefore excluded from online activity. The body of this paper included this group as non-participants, but other analysts would question whether this is appropriate, asking whether the treatment of this group significantly effects the patterns of participation.

To directly address this question, this appendix presents the multivariate results for the 2012 Pew Survey when we code those without Internet access as missing data (instead of non-participants). Table A shows the same multivariate models as Table 2 and 3 for participation patterns in 2012. Comparing results between the models, two broad patterns are apparent. First, Internet usage is strongly related to education, so excluding non-users tends to attenuate the influence of social status. For example, education had a .23 regression coefficient in 2012 for those who are active in both offline and online activities (Table 2), but if we exclude those without Internet access the relationship drops to .15 (Table A). Second, Internet usage is also related to age. This affects the strength and the polarity of age relationships across participation modes. For instance, petition-signing has a negative age relationship in Table 3, but a weak positive correlation if non-users are excluded in Table A.

On the whole, however, the inclusion/exclusion of those without Internet access now has a relatively small impact on the correlates of online participation. The strongest influences on participation are relatively robust across models. In addition, the percentage of Internet users continues to expand, so the excluded proportion of the public has less significance than it likely did in earlier elections with lower levels of Internet access.

Table A. Predicting Contacting and Petition Signing for Internet Users

| Predictor | Contacting | | | | | | Petition Signing | | | | |
	Contact Offline	Contact Online	Only Offline Contact	Only Online Contact	Both Offline Online		Signed Paper Petition	Signed Online Petition	Only Paper Petition	Only Online Petition	Both Paper & Online
Education	.11	.23	.08	.14	.23		.11	.17	.05	.19	.15
Income	.05	.05	-.07	.04	.04		.05	.03	.03	.04	.02
Efficacy	.08	.06	.09	.00	.00		.08	.04	.05	.06	.08
Partisanship (Dem)	.04	.00	.05	.02	.02		.04	.07	.05	.08	.08
Age	.01	.10	.10	.03	.03		.01	-.03	.04	-.02	.02
Gender (female)	.04	-.02	-.02	-.04	-.04		.04	.02	.04	.03	.05
Black	-.04	-.09	-.02	-.07	-.07		-.04	-.08	-.01	-.09	-.10
Hispanic	.05	.05	.07	.06	.06		.03	-.07	.01	-.08	.04
Community size (rural)	-.02	.04	.04	-.05	-.05		.00	.01	-.01	-.01	.00
Multiple R	.23	.32	.18	.22	.33		.18	.25	.12	.28	.24

Source: 2012 Pew Internet Surveys; table excludes non-users of Internet.

Note: Table entries are standardized OLS regression coefficients; pairwise deletion of missing data.

Endnotes

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[1] Sidney Verba and Norman Nie, *Participation in America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 3.

[2] On the critical side are Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Renewal of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), ch. 2; also see Stephen Macedo, ed. *Democracy at Risk: How Political Choices Undermine Citizen Participation, and What We Can Do about It* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005). A more positive view is offered by Russell Dalton, *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation is Reshaping American Politics,* 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2015), ch. 4; Cliff Zukin et al., Scott Keeter, Moly Andolina, Krista Jenkins, and Michael X. Delli Carpini, *A New Engagement? Political Participation, Civic Life, and the Changing American Citizen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006

[3] Aaron Smith et al., "The Internet and Civic Engagement." Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project (2009) (http://www.pewinternet.org/); Kay Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus: Unequal Political Voice and the Broken Promise of American Democracy*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), ch. 16.

[4] Coleman, Stephen, and Peter Shane. *Connecting Democracy: Online Consultation and the Flow of Political Communication*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012); Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus;* Eva Anduiza, Michael Jensen and Laia Jorba, *Digital Media and Political Engagement Worldwide: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[5] Yannis Theocharis, "The Conceptualization of Digitally Networked Political Participation," Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES, 2014).

[6] Alvarez, R. Michael, and Thad Hall. *Electronic Elections: The Perils and Promises of Digital Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[7] Smith et al. "The Internet and Civic Engagement"; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*, ch. 16. The Pew report on the 2012 survey echoed these same points: Aaron

Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age" Pew Center for Internet and American Life.http://www.pewinternet.org/~/media//Files/Reports/2013/PIP_CivicEngagementintheDigital Age.pdf.

[8] Marta Cantijoch, David Cutts, and Rachel Gibson, "Moving Slowly up the Ladder of Political Engagement: A 'Spill-over' Model of Internet Participation," *British Journal of Politics & International Relations,* (2015); also see Corinna Di Gennaro and William Dutton, "The Internet and the Public: Online and Offline Political Participation in the United Kingdom," *Parliamentary Affairs* (2006): 299-313.

[9] Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*, ch. 16

[10] B. Loader, A. Vromen, and M. Xenos. *The Networked Young Citizen: Social Media, Political Participation and Civic Engagement* (New York: Routledge 2014); Fadi Hirzalla, and Liesbet Van Zoonen, "Beyond the Online/Offline Divide: How Youth's Online and Offline Civic Activities Converge," *Social Science Computer Review* 29 (2010): 481–498.

[11] Smith et al. "The Internet and Civic Engagement."

[12] Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age."

[13] An even richer form of online activity involves online networks among political activists and social media as a tool of mass mobilization; but this runs beyond the limits of our methods and survey data. See E. Anduiza, Michael Jensen, and L. Jorba, *Digital Media and Political Engagement Worldwide: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[14] Bruce Bimber et al. "Digital Media and Political Participation," *Social Science Computer Review* 33 (2015): 22.

[15] Individuals without online access were initially treated as missing data by Pew; these cases have been recoded to no online activity. The implication of this decision is discussed in the appendix to this paper.

[16] Rachel Gibson and Marta Cantijoch, "Conceptualizing and Measuring Participation in the Age of the Internet: Is Online Political Engagement Really Different to Offline?" *Journal of Politics*, 75 (2013): 701–716. Their items partially overlap with the Pew questions. Also J. Oser, Marc Hooghe, and S. Marien, "Is Online Participation Distinct from Offline Participation? A Latent Class Analysis of Participation Types and Their Stratification," *Political Research Quarterly* 66 (2013), 91–101.

[17] Sidney Verba, Kay Schlozman and Henry Brady, *Voice and Equality*: *Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995)

[18] Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*, ch. 16; Smith, "Civic Engagement in the Digital Age"; Pippa Norris, *Digital Divide: Civic Engagement, Information Poverty, and the Internet Worldwide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[19] Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*, ch. 16

[20] The question asked: "Overall, how much impact do you think people like you can have in making your community a better place to live – a big impact, a moderate impact, a small impact or no impact at all?"

[21] Loader, Vromen, and Xenos. *The Networked Young Citizen*; Hirzalla, and Van Zoonen, "Beyond the Online/Offline Divide," *Social Science Computer Review* 29 (2010): 481–498.

[22] We have, in fact, run the analyses both ways, and tables 2 and 3 excluding non-users are available from the author upon request. The results for 2012 are presented in the appendix to this paper.

[23] Russell Dalton, *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation is Transforming American Politics*, 2nd edition (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2015), ch. 4.

[24] For example, the combined levels of offline/online activity from the Pew surveys is greater than participation expressed in comparable General Social Survey questions phrased without the two options.

[25] Dalton, *The Good Citizen*, pp. 72-73.

[26] Norbert Kersting, "Online or Offline Participation? Citizens' evaluation of direct and deliberative participatory instruments," paper prepared for conference "Democracy: A Citizen Perspective," Åbo (Turku), Finland, May 2015.