

Beyond Agenda Setting: The Role of Political Blogs as Sources in Newspaper Coverage of Government

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Abstract

This paper contributes to this literature on how “new media” is influencing “old media” by tracking references to an extensive list of high profile political blogs in stories run by four national print media outlets between January 1, 2004 and December 31, 2008. The findings presented here show that although journalists frequently rely on political bloggers to serve as sources in their coverage of politics, they only reference certain political blogs in certain ways on certain kinds of issues. To be more precise, journalists seem to turn to political blogs primarily during national election campaigns and this turn is frequently in the direction of a small number of liberal political blogs – who are referenced more often and more prominently than conservative blogs.

1. Introduction

The dramatic expansion in the size and popularity of the blogosphere over the last ten years has been accompanied by a surge in the amount of academic research into the political consequences of blogging. While researchers interested in e-government and e-democracy have produced a substantial literature on how blogging has shaped the relationships between representatives and constituents [3, 9,13,14,17], the dynamics of election campaigns [2,35,38,39] and the functioning of administrative agencies [26], scholarly assessments of the blogosphere’s impact on traditional media coverage have been particularly numerous. The bulk of this scholarly attention has been narrowly concentrated on how blogs can exert an agenda setting impact on media coverage. Attention to the blog agenda’s influence on the media agenda first emerged in response to the controversy surrounding Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott’s (R-MS) resignation in 2002. On December 5th, 2002, Lott shocked the audience at former “Dixiecrat” Strom Thurmond’s (R-SC) 100th birthday party by saying:

“I want to say this about my state: When

Strom Thurmond ran for president we voted for him. We’re proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead we wouldn’t have had all these problems over all of these years either” [7; p. 2].

Despite the fact that many members of the mainstream media were in attendance at the event, none of the prime time news shows airing that night mentioned Lott’s statement and none of the national newspapers included a story about the issue the following morning [7]. A number of prominent political bloggers, however, saw the quote in a story on ABC News’s daily on-line column, *The Note*, and began blogging about it immediately. Indeed, within 24 hours of Lott’s remarks being reported, popular liberal blogs, such as *Eschaton* and *Talking Points Memo*, and popular conservative blogs, such as *Instapundit*, had discussed the issue at length and had even provided links to previous statements on racial issues by both Thurmond and Lott [7]. Over the course of the next week, more bloggers began writing about the issue and the mainstream media began to take notice. On December 10th, the *New York Times* covered the story for the first time and each of the three nightly network news shows discussed Lott’s remarks. A number of these stories even discussed the role that bloggers played in attracting media attention to the story. In short, the mainstream media covered the Lott story only after bloggers had discussed it at length.

Since the Lott incident, researchers have scrambled to find evidence that journalists take their cues for what to cover from blogs. One popular method of illustrating the influence that bloggers have over media coverage of politics has been to ask reporters about the role that blogs play in their search for story ideas. A December 2004 survey, for example, found that 84% of journalists had visited a political blog in the past 12 months and approximately 30% of those reported visiting a political blog at least once a day on a regular basis [31]. Mirroring these findings more recently, a 2007 survey found that 84% of journalists said they would or already have used blogs as a primary or secondary source for their articles [25] and

a 2008 survey found that over 75% of reporters regularly check in with blogs to get story ideas, story angles and insight into the tone of an issue. More germane to my purposes here, Davis (2009) found that journalists were very familiar with a range of popular political blogs and frequently read them in the course of doing their reporting. When coupled with the fact that influential columnists, including Paul Krugman, Howard Fineman and Fareed Zakaria, have said that blogs form a critical part of their information-gathering activities [12,33], these surveys suggest that journalists are increasingly attuned to the discussions taking place in the blogosphere.

Not all of the research examining the influence of blogs on media coverage has relied solely on survey evidence. Indeed, a number of studies have married content analyses of news reports and blog discussion to show that blogs exert an agenda setting impact on media outlets. In a case study of the Downing Street memo, Schiffer (2006), for example, found that liberal blog discussion produced more mainstream media coverage. Similarly, Heim (2008) found that A-list political blog discussion exerted a significant impact on news stories about the Iraq War. Adopting a somewhat broader view, Wallsten (2007) tracked media coverage and blog discussion of 35 issues during the 2004 Presidential campaign. Using time series analysis, Wallsten found strong evidence that journalists discuss the issues that bloggers are blogging about. In short, multiple methods have illustrated that the political discourse occurring in the blogosphere can lead mainstream media outlets to cover issues they might otherwise ignore.

While these studies make a compelling case that mainstream media coverage follows discussions in the blogosphere, they leave many important questions about blog influence unanswered. Are journalists, for example, influenced by a large number of political blogs from all sides of the political spectrum or are there only a few key blogs that serve as their guides for whether a story is worth covering? Similarly, do political blogs influence media coverage on a wide array of important political issues or is their influence tightly constrained to a small set of peripheral concerns? On a somewhat different note, how do journalists incorporate the information they read on political blogs into their reporting on political events – through quoting the statements made by bloggers, through citing blogs as sources of the information being reported or through some other method? If bloggers are quote or cited, how prominently are these quotes and citations featured in news reports?

In order to answer these questions and, in the process, extend some of the previous research on the blogosphere's impact on traditional media, this study

uses a detailed content analysis of references to political blogs in the national print media. A particular focus of the content analysis that guides this study is how national print media outlets use political blogs as clearly referenced sources for the stories they run. In addition to providing more evidence that political blogs are important actors in determining which issues the traditional media chooses to cover, an analysis of the ways political blogs serve as media sources should reveal which political blogs are most influential, which events prompt journalists to reference political blogs and which issues political blogs are most likely guide media coverage on.

2. Measuring Media References to Political Bloggers

In order to explore how bloggers have influenced media coverage since the start of the “blogging explosion,” I selected the period from January 1, 2004 to December 31, 2008. Although selecting 2004 as a starting point is somewhat arbitrary given that blogs have been around since the early 1990's [6], 2004 was an important year in the history of blogging. In 2004, *Time* magazine announced its first “Blog of the Year” award, Merriam-Webster named “blog” its “word of the year,” bloggers were given their first press credentials at the Democratic and Republican National Conventions and the race between Bush and Kerry was hailed as the “first Presidential Election in the United States in which blogging played an important role” [1, p.1]. In other words, 2004 was the year blogs came of age as a social and political phenomenon. As a result, 2004 seems like the best place to start examining the extent to which political blogs serve as sources for traditional media outlets.

For the purposes of this study, I chose to focus my attention on three of the most prominent print media outlets that cover national politics – the *New York Times*, the *Washington Times*, the *Washington Post* – and the only nationally-oriented news wire service in the United States – *Associated Press*. Although these organizations are not representative of most newspaper outlets, there are compelling reasons to believe that a study of their coverage may provide an accurate sense of exactly how most of the American media uses blogs as sources. Most notably, these newspapers have some of the largest circulations in the United States and set the agenda on national political issues for other media outlets, including television newscasts and local and state newspapers [16].

A somewhat thornier methodological issue is how to identify newspaper articles that use political blogs as sources. The approach I adopted was to search

for references to popular political blogs in each of the print media outlets listed above. The first step in executing this approach was to come up with a list of popular political blogs to search for. Following the lead of many previous studies of popular political blogs [4,20,21,22,24,27,28,36,37], I used the rankings provided by *The Truth Laid Bear Ecosystem* (which measures blog popularity in terms of “hits” and number of incoming links)¹ since 2004 and Dave Karpf’s (2008a, 2008b) “Blogosphere Authority Index”² to create a list of the 50 most popular liberal blogs and the 50 most popular conservative blogs. I then searched the Lexis-Nexis archives of stories from the *New York Times*, the *Washington Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Associated Press* for each blog’s title, URL and the words “blog” and “website.”³ A complete list of the search terms used to track references to each political blog is available from the author upon request.⁴

This study, therefore, tracks references to an extensive list of high profile political blogs in stories run by four national print media outlets – the *New York Times*, the *Washington Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Associated Press* – during the five year period beginning on January 1, 2004 and ending on December 31, 2008. It is important to point out, however, that this approach is likely to significantly underestimate the true extent of blog influence over print media coverage. If newspapers are as likely to cite less popular political blogs as they are to cite popular political blogs, focusing exclusively on popular blogs will underestimate the overall influence of blogs. Similarly, if journalists pick up on material from a large number of blogs and reference only “what bloggers are saying” or “the buzz in the blogosphere” rather than specific blogs, searching only for the titles of high profile political blogs will leave us with the impression that blogs are less important than they actually are for media coverage. From a somewhat different angle, if other, more locally-oriented newspapers are more likely to draw on blogs in their

news coverage than the national outlets studied here, the focus on these papers will provide a skewed assessment of how much political blogs matter for media coverage. More generally, this approach will miss instances of blog influence where journalists take information from blogs without explicitly referencing them. As a number of recent incidents, such as Maureen Dowd’s plagiarism of *Talking Points Memo* and the *Anchorage Daily News*’s cribbing of jokes about Sarah Palin from *Daily Kos*, illustrate, journalists may frequently (and liberally) borrow from political blogs without citing them. The results presented here, in other words, should be taken as only one, very conservative estimate of the influence of blogs.

3. Results

Despite the conservative approach adopted here, there is strong evidence that blogs have had a significant impact on print media coverage of politics. Overall, political blogs were mentioned in 1072 unique stories in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Associated Press* during the five year period of this study. Consistent with the previous research that has suggested that political bloggers have exerted an increasingly strong influence on mainstream media coverage of political events as they have become more popular and permanent features of the political system, the number of stories making reference to at least one of the blogs listed in Appendix 1 increased significantly over time. As Figure 1 shows, political blogs were almost never discussed in early 2004 but were consistently mentioned throughout 2008.

As Figure 1 also shows, however, the number of mentions of blogs has fluctuated dramatically from month to month. A further look into the peaks and valleys illustrated in Figure 2 suggests that certain kinds of events trigger more discussion of political blogs. Elections appear to be a particularly important triggering event for media mentions of blogs. Newspaper discussions of blogs increased significantly in August, September, October and November of election years (2004, 2006 and 2008) and declined dramatically in the following the elections. Indeed, as Table 1 shows, the average number of stories mentioning at least one of the popular political blogs in every election since 2004 was significantly higher in the campaign months than during the pre- or post-election months. Journalists, it appears, are particularly likely to turn to the commentary found on blogs when national elections loom on the horizon.

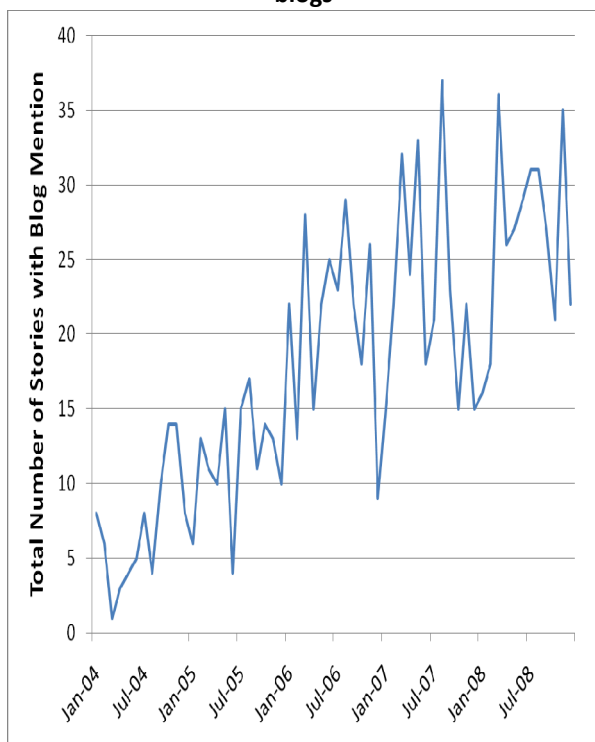
¹ *The Truth Laid Bear Ecosystem* was selected as the primary source for compiling the list of popular political blogs primarily because I have maintained an archive of the site’s rankings from the beginning of the period of study (2004). Other sites that maintain rankings of popularity, such as *Alexa.com* or *Quantcast.com*, do not provide measures of traffic dating back to 2004.

² This index is a particularly attractive system for ranking political blogs because it eschews a narrow focus on “hits” and, instead, assesses a blog’s prominence by combining measures of blog roll mentions, linkage patterns, community activity and traffic.

³ Using the name and the word “blog” or “website” probably leads to findings that understate the overall use of blogs as sources because journalists can talk about a blog by name without explicitly introducing it as a blog or a website.

⁴ I further limited the search to news articles by excluding articles in the “Editorial” and “Letters to the Editor” sections.

Figure 1. Print media references to popular political blogs



If political blogs are frequently referenced in media coverage, it is important to ask whether they are prominently placed sources that are mentioned at the very start of news reports or mere afterthoughts that are relegated to the final paragraphs of stories. Searching the Lexis-Nexis archives for blog references in the headline and lead paragraphs of the 1072 stories mentioning one of the blogs included in this study reveals that blogs typically take a back seat in coverage of politics. Specifically, less than 16% of stories mentioning political blogs made that mention in the headline or lead paragraphs. Although blogs are frequently referenced by journalists, therefore, it would be a mistake to conclude that they are always the most important actors in the stories they are mentioned in.

Table 1. Media references to blogs in election years

Year	Pre-Campaign (January-June)	Campaign (July-November)	Post Campaign (December)
2004	6	10	8
2006	20.8	23.6	9
2008	25.3	29	22

Entries are average number of stories per month.

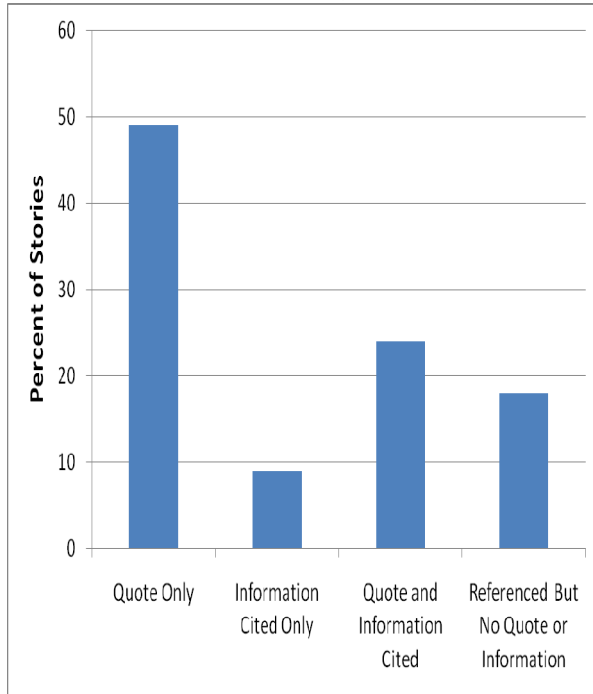
Unsurprisingly, not all blogs seem to be accorded the same status by journalists covering politics. What is surprising, however, is the extent of the disparities in mentions across blogs. As Appendix A shows, a very small number of political blogs are discussed in a large number of stories while the vast majority of political blogs are rarely mentioned or ignored altogether. To be exact, two of the political blogs included in the search of print media coverage (*Daily Kos* and *Huffington Post*) were mentioned in over 200 stories each while 62 of the political blogs were mentioned in fewer than five stories. The large number of mentions received by *Huffington Post* is particularly surprising given that it was launched on May 9, 2005 – years after many of the other blogs included in this study. It appears, therefore, that journalists are attentive to only a very select group of political blogs and either pay little attention to or are reluctant to discuss other sites in the blogosphere.

Partly due to the attention received by *Daily Kos* and *Huffington Post*, liberal blogs were vastly more likely to be mentioned in mainstream media coverage than conservative blogs. As Appendix A shows, liberal blogs were mentioned in over twice as many stories as conservative blogs during the five years of this study and seven of the ten most frequently discussed political blogs were liberal. The dominance of liberal blogs is so strong that even if references to *Daily Kos* and *Huffington Post* were entirely excluded from the data, liberal blogs would still have been mentioned in 29 more stories than conservative blogs. What's even more surprising is that liberal blogs are significantly more likely to be referenced in the headline or lead paragraphs of stories than conservative blogs. To be exact, nearly 17% of the stories that mentioned liberal blogs did so in the headline or lead paragraph of while less than 11% of the stories that mentioned conservative blogs did so in the headline or lead paragraph. Although a small number of conservative blogs, such as *Michelle Malkin*, *Instapundit* and *Red State*, were able to find their way into a significant number of news reports, the overwhelming tendency is for journalists to reference liberal rather than conservative political blogs in their coverage of politics and, more importantly, to reference them in early in the story.

In order to explore the specific nature of media references to blogs as well as the kinds of stories blogs are likely to be mentioned in, I randomly sampled 200 of the 1072 stories that mentioned one of the political blogs listed in Appendix 1. Each of the 200 randomly selected stories was then coded for whether one of the blogs was quoted, whether information from one of the blogs was cited or whether one of the blogs was referenced but no quote or

information was attributed to it. Because the same article may quote a blog and cite information from it, there are four possible categories that each article mentioning a political blog can fall into: (1) a story where one of the blogs is only quoted; (2) a story where information from one of the blogs is cited only; (3) a story where one of the blogs is quoted and information from one of the blogs is cited; (4) a story where one of the blogs was referenced but no quote or information was attributed to it.

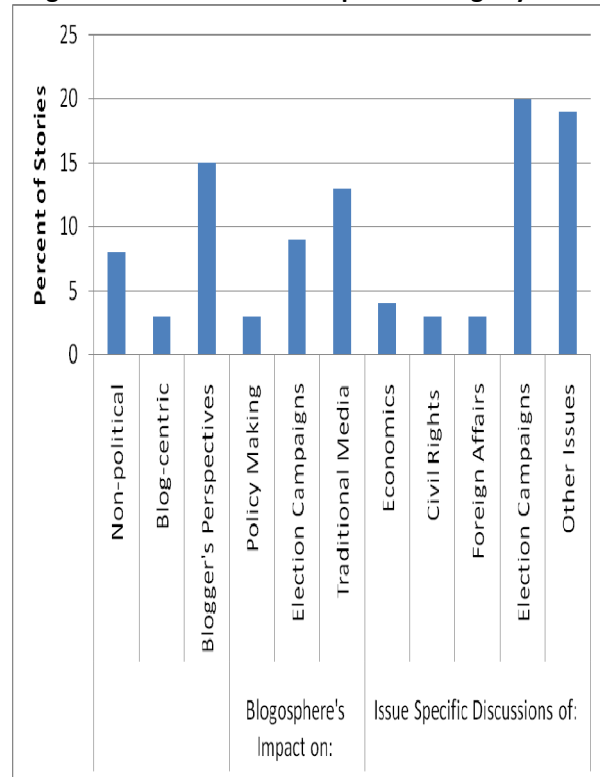
Figure 2. Print referneces to political blogs by type



To the extent that most newspaper articles fall into categories 1, 2 or 3, political blogs are serving as sources for media coverage of politics. As Figure 2 shows, political blogs are most frequently mentioned as sources in media coverage. To be precise, 49% of stories contained only a quote from one of the political blogs listed in Appendix 1, 9% contained only a citation of information from a political blog and 24% contained both a quote and information gleaned from a political blog. Passing references to political blogs (in which a blog is neither quoted nor mentioned as a source of a relevant piece of information) occurred in only approximately one out of every five stories. Interestingly, the percentage of stories quoting blogs and citing information remained fairly consistent across the five years of the study – indicating that journalists have not begun to use blogs differently in their coverage as blogs have solidified their position in the American political system. It appears, therefore,

that journalists see political blogs as primarily as sources and have held this view since the blogosphere came to prominence in 2004.

Figure 3. Print references to political blogs by issue



In addition to coding for how political blogs were mentioned, each of the 200 randomly sampled stories was coded for the primary issue it discussed. Figure 3 displays the results of the issue-based coding of news articles. As Figure 3 shows, unsurprisingly, a small percentage of stories captured by my procedure of identifying stories mentioning blogs were fundamentally non-political in nature. Even with a broad operational definition of “political,” three percent of the stories mentioning political blogs could only be described as “blog-centric” – meaning they centered on developments occurring within the blogosphere without making any reference whatsoever to the larger social or political implications of the developments – and eight percent of the stories mentioning political blogs focused exclusively on literature, entertainment or celebrity gossip.

Interestingly, the literature, entertainment and celebrity gossip stories were much less likely than stories focusing on political issues to quote blogs or cite information from them – with nearly 40% of these non-political stories making only passing reference to blogs. It is also important to point out that almost all of these non-political stories were captured by my search

procedure because they mentioned one of the two political blogs in my study that supplement their coverage of politics with hearty doses of non-political content: *Huffington Post* and *Wonkette*. There is evidence in this data, in other words, that blogs known primarily for their political discussions can also influence coverage of less overtly political issues.

A large percentage of the stories mentioning blogs were framed around the impact that the emergence and growth of the blogosphere was having on various aspects of political life. More specifically, three percent of stories concentrated on how blogs were playing a larger role in the policy making process, nine percent of stories focused on how bloggers were changing the dynamics of election campaign fundraising and messaging and 13% concentrated on how blogs were impacting the coverage and audience of traditional media outlets. Somewhat surprisingly, stories emphasizing the impact of blogs on so-called “old media” were much less likely to quote blogs than stories emphasizing the impact of blogs on policy and elections. Indeed, nearly 40% of stories on how the media landscape was changing as a result of the emergence of blogs made only passing reference to political blogs instead of directly quoting them or citing information from them.

Another major category of stories mentioning political blogs was stories that summarized the discussions taking place in the blogosphere. While some of these articles – with titles such as “Court Nominee In the Eye of the Blogger Swarm,” “Liberal bloggers disgruntled with Obama over Lieberman” and “Conservative bloggers attacks GOP leaders over committee appointment” – were ad hoc stories that focused on blog reactions to one specific issue, other articles appeared in periodic columns – such as the *Washington Times*’ features “Blogitics” and “Inside Politics” – that surveyed what important blogs were saying about the high profile issues of the week. Unsurprisingly given the nature of these articles, nearly 90% of stories in this category included direct quotes from at least one blog and most referenced blogs in the headline or lead paragraphs. Overall, as Figure 3 shows, stories summarizing discussions in the blogosphere made up 15% of my sample.

The remaining 49% of stories in my sample focused on different kinds of political issues. Rather than being framed exclusively around how blogs were reacting to an issue or set of issues, these stories were focused solely on the debate surrounding a particular issue and mentioned political blogs as only one of the many different actors who were relevant to how that debate was playing out. Although stories of this kind touched on a wide array of different policy issues – including civil rights, economics and foreign affairs –

most were centered on the dynamics of election campaigns. Indeed, as Figure 3 shows, 20% of all stories in my sample were stories about an election campaign that mentioned the role played by political blogs. It is important to point out, however, that political blogs were rarely prominently mentioned in issue stories – whether they were about an election campaign or not. Less than three percent of stories focusing on issues mentioned political blogs in the headline or lead paragraphs.

4. Discussion

Taken together, these findings suggest three conclusions about how political blogs are shaping print media coverage of politics. First, the perspectives of political bloggers seem to be a very important – though not dominant – part of print media coverage on a wide variety of issues. The political blogs included in this study were mentioned in an average of over four stories a week in the four major newspapers I studied and over 80% of these stories directly quoted political blogs or cited information contained in their posts. While a good number of these stories were centered on the blogosphere’s political impact, it would be misleading to suggest that political blogs are only serving as sources for stories that analyze the blogging enterprise itself. In fact, the political blogs included in this study were quoted and referenced in stories on nearly every major political issue of the last five years – ranging from the war in Iraq to Social Security. The *Washington Times* even ran a weekly column – entitled “Blogitics” – devoted entirely to quoting and citing blogs. Political blogs, in other words, have become a convenient place for reporters to go for printable perspectives on every political issue that may arise.

Second, while political blogs have influenced stories on nearly every major political issue, they have become particularly important for reporters covering national election campaigns. The number of stories mentioning political blogs increased greatly on the eve of the 2004, 2006 and 2008 elections, numerous stories across the five year period of this study discussed how political blogs are changing the way election campaigns play out and stories focusing on elections were the most common kinds of stories for political bloggers to be mentioned in. These findings are not particularly surprising given that the most frequently discussed examples of blog influence over media coverage – from “Rathergate” in 2004 to Obama’s “Bittergate” in 2008 – almost all occurred during the hurly burly of national election campaigns and high profile campaign events – ranging from debates to the YearlyKos/Netroots Nation conference – seem to always lead journalists to political blogs for

commentary and information. These findings do, however, provide the first systematic evidence that political blogs have become central figures in the dynamics of mainstream media election coverage.

Third, not all political blogs have the same power to influence the press. Consistent with the expectations produced by Davis's (2009) recent survey (which found that journalists were most likely to read popular liberal blogs), popular liberal blogs such as *Daily Kos* and *Huffington Post* were mentioned more frequently than other kinds of political blogs. In other words, there was a very clear liberal and a very clear popularity bias in the sourcing patterns demonstrated by journalists during the five year period of this study. Unfortunately, the data presented here cannot, by themselves, be used to explain the root causes behind these biases. In particular, the evidence provided here will not allow us to speculate on whether the citation patterns are a result of the behaviors of journalists, the behavior of bloggers or a combination of both. The main point, however, is that although a large number of political bloggers were referenced during the five years of this study, only a very small number – drawn primarily from the ranks of popular liberal blogs – became frequent additions to the media's coverage of political issues.

5. Conclusion

Previous research has demonstrated that journalists rely on bloggers to act as “diggers and aggregators of information” and “conduits of public opinion” [29, p. 44]. The findings presented here show that journalists also rely on bloggers to serve as sources in their coverage of politics. Indeed, over the last five years, there have been very few days where the *New York Times*, the *Washington Times*, the *Washington Post* or the *Associated Press* have failed to run a story referencing political blogs in some way. The findings presented here also show, however, that journalists only reference certain political blogs in certain ways on certain kinds of issues. To be precise, journalists seem to turn to political blogs primarily during national election campaigns and this turn is frequently in the direction of a small number of liberal political blogs – who are mentioned more often and more prominently than conservative blogs. These findings should make a contribution to the literature on media agenda building and the growing literature on the political impact of political blogs.

The findings presented here raise five questions that deserve future attention. First, are political bloggers influencing broadcast media in the same way they are influencing print media? There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that political bloggers

are read as frequently by broadcast journalists and that political bloggers are appearing as guest commentators on an increasingly large number of cable television and radio news programs. Indeed, political bloggers such as Andrew Sullivan, Michelle Malkin, Hugh Hewitt and Markos Moulitsas, have all frequently appeared on shows such as the Fox News's *O'Reilly Factor*, MSNBC's *Countdown with Keith Olbermann* and CNN's *The Situation Room*. There have been no systematic studies, however, of how political bloggers may influence and shape broadcast coverage. Future empirical research should address this question in order to more fully flesh out the relationship between political blogs and the mainstream media.

Second, why do journalists so frequently refer to the political blogs that they so frequently refer to? As pointed out above, liberal political blogs in general and *Daily Kos* and *Huffington Post* in particular were cited in a large number of stories. What factors may explain these tendencies on the part of journalists? A long list of plausible hypotheses immediately recommend themselves – that popularity drives mentions, that reporters are liberal and are likely to let their ideological preferences dictate their citation choices, that political blogs who do their own independent reporting are more likely to be discussed, that high quality writing attracts attention from journalists, that community blogs are more likely to be mentioned than single author blogs, that blogs on the left are more likely to be cited when the right is in power, that certain blogs are likely to be referenced only on certain kinds of political issues, that the personal characteristics of the blog's author is the determinative factor for whether a blog is frequently included in media coverage, etc. Time series analysis using data similar to that used in this study as a dependent variable should be employed to sort out exactly why some political blogs become popular with journalists while others do not.

Third, how has media coverage of political blogs helped create the popularity of certain political blogs and increase the prominence of the blogosphere on the whole? As previous research into news sources has suggested [15], media organizations bolster the legitimacy and notoriety of the individuals who they quote and reference in their discussions. Indeed, when high profile and widely respected media organizations such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Associated Press* frequently cite political blogs in their news coverage, it implicitly sends a message to readers that these blogs are legitimate players in the political game who deserve to have their perspectives heard. It is highly possible, therefore, that all of the attention given to blogs such as *Daily Kos* and *Huffington Post* has

played an important role in making these blogs two of the most popular on the Internet. More generally, it is possible that coverage by traditional media organizations may be a central factor in driving readers to political blogs – a tendency which may play a small part in undermining the financial viability of newspapers. Future work should, in other words, use the kinds of evidence presented in this paper as an independent variable in explaining the ebb and flow of popularity in the political blogosphere.

Fourth, how important are political blogs relative to other sources? This study has chosen to focus on how political blogs serve as sources rather than on the array of sources that appear in media coverage on a particular issue. In this respect, this study breaks with previous research into sourcing patterns [5,10,23,30] that codes the entire population of articles on a given issue within a defined period of time in order to assess the relative importance accorded to different kinds of sources. With the baseline created by the data presented here, future work may adopt this issue centric approach and begin assessing whether political blogs are usurping the positions of other political actors in news reports.

Finally, given that political blogs are having their voices heard in mainstream media coverage, are they actually saying anything new? A consistent concern in the literature on media sources is that journalists are relying on too narrow a range of elite (usually government) sources in their news coverage and that these sourcing decisions are leading to a dangerous winnowing of the perspectives heard by the public. The recent entrance of political blogs into the population of sources that are likely to be referenced by journalists has the potential to diversify the points of view that media organizations choose to amplify. This potential, however, may go unrealized if political blogs do not actually say things that are different from what traditional elites offer or if journalists pick and choose to quote only those political blogs that reinforce what government officials, party leaders and candidates for office are already saying. For those interested in using empirical evidence to evaluate whether political blogs democratize political discourse in the ways that their proponents have suggested, studying the perspectives offered by political blogs in media coverage is an obvious place to start.

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Appendix A. Newspaper mentions by blog

Conservative Blogs		Liberal Blogs	
Blog Name	Number	Blog Name	Number
Michelle Malkin	71	Daily Kos	295
Instapundit	58	Huffington Post	240
Redstate	50	Wonkette	116
Townhall	32	Talking Points Memo	47
Newsbusters	27	Buzz Machine	43
Outside the Beltway	24	MyDD	42
Hot Air	22	FireDogLake	31
Little Green Footballs	21	Think Progress	23
Volokh	19	Washington Monthly	22
Hugh Hewitt	18	America Blog	21
The Daily Dish, Ace of Spades HQ	13	Open Left	20
Powerline Blog, Ann Althouse	8	Atrios	17
Ross Douthat	7	Glenn Greenwald	14
InDC Journal, American Realpolitik	6	Crooks and Liars, Pandagon	13
Right Wing News, Patterico's			
Pontifications, Lileks, Jawa Report	5	Juan Cole, Sadly, No!, Yglesias, Talk Left	7
Professor Bainbridge, Lashawn Barber,			
Gateway Pundit, Atlas Shrugs, Allah			
Pundit	4	Feministing, Ezra Klein	6
Mudville Gazette, Jihad Watch, American			
Thinker	3	FiveThirtyEight, Kaus Files	5
Wizbang Blog, Vodka Pundit,			
Unconventional Wisdom, Tim Blair,			
Protein Wisdom, Daniel Drezner, Betsy's			
Page, Ankle Biting Pundits	2	Brad DeLong, Burnt Orange Report	4
The Corner, The Agitator, Sister Toldjah,			
IMAO	1	Taylor Marsh, The Carpetbagger Report	3
USS Clueless, Right Wing Nuthouse,			
Iowahawk, Indepundit, Dean Esmay, Daily			
Pundit, Captain's Quarters, Belmont Club,			
Anti-Idiotarian Rottweiler	0	Crooked Timber, Left Coaster, James	
		Wolcott, Swing State Project	2
		Digby's Blog, Balloon Juice, Brad Blog,	
		Liberal Oasis, The Moderate Voice, Calitics,	
		Polipundit, Truthdig	1
		Rude Pundit, Shakespeares Sister, Corrente	
		Wire, Daily Howler, Oliver Willis, Jesus'	
		General, Square State, Tbog, Young Turks,	
		Winds of Change, Angry Bear	0
Total	472		1038