EFFECTS OF INTERNET USE ON ACTUAL AND SELF-PERCEIVED POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE, ISSUE CERTAINTY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

BY

LIVIU GAJORA

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Approved By
Marina Krcmar, Ph.D., Advisor
William Gordon, Ph.D.
Allan Louden, Ph.D.
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Abstract

Current research on political knowledge focuses to a large extent on differences between Internet users and non-users. As Internet use is shown to constantly increase, more complex questions arise related to the impact of Internet on citizens’ political involvement. This thesis takes a deeper look at how differences in online content (just facts or analysis in addition to facts) and interaction levels (the ability to comment or the lack of that ability) affects factual and self-perceived political knowledge, issue certainty and desire to engage in politics offline.

I propose a 2 (analysis, no analysis) X 2 (comments, no comments) experimental design in which participants read articles related to current political events for three consecutive days and then answer a survey that tests both their perception of what they know and their ability to recall factual information about what they have read. The results of this study suggest that increased online interaction in the form of being able to post comments leads to lower levels of self-perceived knowledge, but also to lower levels of political participation intention. Offline political discussions and past political behavior are also significant indicators of political participation intention.
Chapter One: Introduction

Barack Obama’s presidential campaign was the first to integrate the virtual medium in its strategy not merely as one more communication channel, but as one of the central channels, prompting some to say that he would not even be president “were it not for the Internet” (Miller, 2008). Yet much of how the Web actually affects voters is unknown, raising questions as to how – or even if – the online medium fosters more active, knowledgeable and critical voters. Is participation in online political discussions indicative of political knowledge and engagement?

The U.S. electoral campaigns in the past decade have been associated with Internet more than with any other medium. Ever since the 1996 elections, the Internet appears to have had a small but significant effect on political activity (Katz & Rice, 2002). Internet use has been since associated with increased political awareness and offline political activity. Bimber and Davis (2003) argue that 2000 was the year in which “campaigning through the Internet became de rigueur” (p. 3) and that it represented a significant increase in the degree of “effort, money, and innovation” candidates brought to their campaigning over the Internet. Significant increases were also signaled with the electorate, as 2000 became the first election year in which Internet users represented more than half of the American adults (p. 4).

While there is support to show that Internet use is related to increased political participation in real life (Shah, Cho, Nah, Gotlieb, Hwang, Lee, Scholl and McLeod,
2007), the exact nature of this correlation is yet to be clarified, as some suggest that it is political participation that leads to Internet use and not the other way around (Xenos & Moy, 2007). Regardless of the causality, Internet users and politically active citizens often overlap. The accessibility and reach of the online medium encourage people to identify their own voice and broadcast it, at the same time making it easier for people to identify others with similar views and behaviors. The Internet is quickly turning into a complete medium, where participants can not only read news, but also talk about it, thus reducing information uncertainty (Xenos & Moy, 2007) and ultimately feeling more at ease with engaging in participatory behavior (Hardy & Scheufele, 2005).

Previous research has shown that active (both in terms of intensity and variation) Internet users reported strong feelings of self-efficacy (Kaye & Johnson, 2002), suggesting that people who go online for political information and interaction perceive themselves as more knowledgeable than those who use traditional media. There is, however, little correlation between the perception of self-efficacy or perceived knowledge and actual knowledge, which is one of the relations this study tackles. Moreover, the level of factual knowledge may not be the only indicator of political participation. Lau and Redlawsk (2006) also found that political sophistication, a concept which includes measures of political knowledge, seems to have a small but significant positive correlation with more rational decision-making.

Online news in particular has taken on a strong role, as it appears to slowly become the leading news source. In 2008, 40% of the respondents of a Pew Project survey said they
got most of their national and international news from the Internet, while only 35% percent cited print newspapers as the main source. The gap was five percentage points in favor of the Internet, whereas just two years before the gap had been seventeen percentage points in favor of print news (Pew Research Center, 2008). According to the most recent Pew Research Center survey (2011), Internet is rivaled only by television as a main source for political information, with 66% of respondents referring to TV as their main information source and 41% citing Internet. Among people aged 18-29, however, the Internet has already taken over, with 65% of respondents citing the Internet as the most important source, compared to only 52% citing television. A recent study (Hargrove, Miller, Stempel & Stempel III, 2009) also found that Web media managed to inform people better than newspapers and network television about political campaign issues.

And while some researchers (Neuman, 1986; Holland, 1995) have argued that the average voter has a rather low level of political knowledge, more recent studies (De Zúñiga et al., 2009) seem to suggest that increased online presence corresponds to increased political knowledge and participation.

In what way is political activity on the web related to political knowledge and political engagement? One possibility is that engagement in online reading and discussions on political topics prompts people to become more interested in the topics but also in voicing out their opinions on the topics, and thus makes them more susceptible of getting involved in political activity offline. The other possibility is that people who are already
interested and active in politics outside of the Internet want to become even more involved and turn to Internet as another medium in which to exert their power.

I posit that although Internet activity does increase political knowledge, even for individuals who are not interested in politics, it ultimately has little effect on the individuals’ intent to furthermore engage politically outside of the Internet. To observe the relation between online activity political knowledge and a desire for offline involvement in the political process, I conducted an experiment involving the study of four groups during the course of three days. The first group read news articles concerning current recent political events. The second group read articles that contained both news and opinions related to recent political events. The third group was able to read the news articles and also to post and read other users’ comments. The fourth group was able to read both news and analysis and also to post comments related to what they read.

The experiment measured four dependent variables in order to analyze the connection between online activity and political knowledge: (1) factual political knowledge (2) self-perceived political knowledge, (3) certainty level surrounding opinion on political topics and (4) political participation intent.
The underlying theory of this study is that increased online activity leads to increased political knowledge, increased self-perceived knowledge, increased issue certainty, and increased political participation intent. Potential explanations of the mechanism behind this theory deal with priming (Jo & Berkowitz, 1994) and priming-related effects, where increased online activity means individuals are forced to recall and use the acquired information more often, and thus are more likely to remember the information better than others. This would translate into a linear relation between online activity and political knowledge.

Another mechanism that accounts for the proposed relation is that of group interaction and pluralism (Neuman, 1986), whereby expressing opinions in front of others forces individuals to reassess their knowledge and their certainty of that knowledge. By becoming familiar with other points of view and exchanging opinions with others, individuals will have to either come up with very good reasoning behind their opinions and interpretation of facts, or adapt and refine their opinions. In the end, they will be more confident that the opinion they have reached is one that they feel comfortable with, because it has been tested. This will be shown by higher levels of self-perceived knowledge and of issue certainty for individuals who are exposed to a multitude of opinions, and not just facts. A combination of priming and pluralism effects would also account for why individuals who spend more time online might be more inclined to
assess themselves as more interested in politics, and consequently express intent to remain engaged in politics offline.

High levels of self-perceived knowledge could also contribute to a feeling of political expertise and power, and determine a desire to engage politics both online and offline. If true, this will translate in higher levels of political participation intent for individuals who are more actively involved in the online activity.

Factual knowledge

The study of political knowledge is, as Neuman (1986) contends, unique. Unlike most other dimensions of the political life, such as “citizen’s level of ideological awareness or the importance of political issues in voting decisions”, political knowledge deals with facts, which allows for “veridical measurement”. It consists of “discrete bits of information such as names, dates, and facts” (Park, 2001) and is thus easy to measure. The problem, though, is that political knowledge has been tested mostly in survey environments, where researchers usually avoid asking factually oriented questions because they want to maintain a positive rapport with respondents. A series of questions to which the respondent might not know the answer to may create discomfort and even embarrassment for both parties (Neuman, 1986, p. 15). In their 1992 study, Delli Carpini and Keeter measured factual knowledge alongside three dimensions: political institutions and processes, contemporary officeholders and party alignments, and policies and issues of the day (p. 22). The present study focuses on just the last of those dimensions, namely policies and issues of the day.
Political knowledge understood as factual knowledge often times does not give a complete picture. Mondak (1995) warns that voters who can recall factual information most completely may not necessarily possess the deepest understanding of political affairs. A more complex instrument is available, named “political sophistication,” which alongside political knowledge also includes political salience, defined as interest, concern, and attentiveness towards politics, and political conceptualization, defined as cognitive organization and the active use of political knowledge (Neuman, 1986, pp. 52-53). Still, even when “political sophistication” is used as an instrument (Lau & Erber, 1986; Neuman, 1986; Luskin, 1987; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1993), political knowledge is at the core of the measurements.

The definition of factual knowledge as the ability to recall discrete bits of information resembles that of memory as proposed by Ashcraft (1989): “the mental process of retaining information for later use and retrieving such information” (pp. 9-10). Within the field of memory study, authors often distinguish between recall and recognition (Murdock, 1974; Brown, 1976; Ashcraft, 1989). The difference between recall and recognition is that recall requires individuals to generate a piece of information, while recognition presents a list of pieces of information and asks individuals to identify the one they have seen before, and is usually based on a series of decisions involving ratings, rankings and subjective probabilities (Brown, 1976). Another difference between recall and recognition is the order of decisions necessary to generate a required piece of
information. In recall, that order is decided by the subject, whereas in recognition the order is imposed by the experimenter (Brown, 1976).

Both recall and recognition, however, can serve as a particular internal process for the other. For instance, when an individual is asked to recognize the author of a quote out of four possible candidates, he or she may find it easier to simply try and recall the author based on their own correlations. On the other hand, Murdock (1974) argues that recognition tests already offer a pool of choices, whereas in recall the individual has to come up with a list of potential alternatives from which to choose the most probable answer. Use of everyday memory when it comes to politics can employ both instances of recall (e.g.: trying to remember who the vice-president of a party is) and recognition (e.g.: trying to remember which of four party members cited in a news article proposed a new piece of legislation).

What makes Internet different from other media? We may take into account two possible phenomena. One is Zaller's (1992) reception axiom, which posits that “the greater a person's level of cognitive engagement with an issue, the more likely he or she is to be exposed and comprehend - in a word, to receive - political messages concerning that issue.” Thus, if the Internet is in general a more engaging medium, frequent users will be more likely to process the information and to master it better. As engagement levels increase, so does the ability to accurately comprehend, and consequently retain the information. Also, the more an individual will read on the topic, the more likely it is that the basic facts will become clearer in order to allow for details to be added.
The other possible explanation has to do with group activity and the theory of pluralism, according to which “group participation has reinforcing effects which may increase the level of political sophistication” (Neuman, 1986), by means of discussion and repeated exposure to political issues. Group participation has, according to this theory, a reinforcing value for at least three dimensions: feelings of efficacy concerning involvement in political activities, the breadth of political thinking, and the depth of political thinking.

Thus, when interacting with others, individuals have the opportunity to test their opinions and develop better arguments. The more they interact with others, the more likely it will be that their opinions will be the result of thorough testing. The Internet is all about networking, creating groups and enhancing group dialogue. It seems only natural that frequent Internet users – especially those who engage in dialogue over online platforms – will display higher levels of political knowledge than individuals who are not frequent users or who do not engage in opinion exchange (all other factors being equal). Active users are more often required to remember specific pieces of information and infer opinions from that data and so they are more likely do develop arguments that are more solid and more believable to others. Thus, the more an individual spends time engaging in dialogue in their online activity, the higher the levels of their political knowledge.

Considering these two possible explanations together will yield the first hypothesis:
H1 (a): People who read news-and-analysis articles will have higher score of political knowledge than those who read news-only articles.

H1 (b): People who post comments related to the read articles will have higher scores of political knowledge than those who do not post comments.

Self-perceived knowledge

Self-perceived knowledge usually refers to “one's self-assessment or feeling of knowing” of a particular piece of information (Gentner and Collins, 1981). It has been shown (Holland, 1995) that the “feeling of knowing” has only a moderate positive relationship with actual knowledge, i.e. that “feeling knowledgeable does not necessarily imply any concrete knowledge” (Park, 2001). This is not to say that self-perceived knowledge and actual knowledge never coincide, but that “they do not necessarily do so” (Park, Gardner & Thukral, 1988). Overall, actual and perceived knowledge rarely overlap completely, and in most cases there is a gap between what a person actually knows and what that person thinks they know about a certain subject.

The gap between self-perceived and actual knowledge of a particular subject is defined as the “illusion of knowing” (Park, 2001). Some studies (Holland, 1995; Mondak, 1995) showed that exposure to media does not enhance political knowledge, but that it does yield a stronger correlation with self-perceived political knowledge (Park, 2001). Although these studies focused on newspapers and television, it is safe to assume that the more media a person consumes, the higher their self-perceived knowledge levels will be.
Self-perceived knowledge can be understood as a particular instance of metacognition, a concept which refers to “an awareness and monitoring of one’s own cognitive state or condition” (Ashcraft, 1989, p. 77). As with previously cited research, metacognition is not necessarily an accurate reflection of factual knowledge, and can be influenced by phenomena such as pluralism. It is very likely, then, that the levels of self-perceived knowledge will be higher for those individuals who have access to repeated information (news and analysis) and to instances of dialogue that foster pluralism (post comments).

H2 (a): People who read news-and-analysis articles will have higher scores of self-perceived political knowledge than those who read news-only articles.

H2 (b): People who post comments will have higher scores of self-perceived political knowledge than those who read do not post comments.

By comparing the results of the experiment for H1 and H2 I will be able to observe and highlight the presence of an illusion of knowing, i.e. a significant difference between levels of actual and perceived knowledge in the case of the people who are able to post.

Issue certainty

The concepts of certainty and uncertainty are indebted to the field of interpersonal communication (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), and thus much of the literature deals with
relation uncertainty – in various forms –, rather then with fact or issue uncertainty. Still, many of the observations can be adapted and applied to this research.

Uncertainty has generally been defined as “imperfect and incomplete information” (Alvarez & Franklin, 1994), or more specifically as “a state that exists when an individual defines himself as engaging in directed behavior based upon less than complete knowledge” of the environment (Downey & Slocum, 1975), or as “an individual's perceived inability to predict something accurately” (Milliken, 1987). For the purposes of this paper, uncertainty can be understood as of combination of these definitions, i.e., a state where the individual cannot predict something accurately due to imperfect and/or incomplete information. A straight-forward example of how to measure uncertainty is that provided by Alvarez and Franklin (1994), who tested individuals' uncertainty simply by asking them how certain they feel about their own preferences and the positions of political figures.

One of Berger and Calabrese's (1975) uncertainty reduction axioms posits that “high levels of uncertainty cause increases in information seeking behavior”, which is one of the reasons why Internet users engage and indulge in online dialogue. Their first axiom also suggests that “as the amount of verbal communication between strangers increases, the level of uncertainty for each interactant in the relationship will decrease.” In translating this observation in the context of Internet use and issue uncertainty, one may conclude that individuals reduce their issue uncertainty by engaging in dialogue with
other Internet users and that there is a direct and positive relation between dialogue time and the level of certainty on a particular issue.

Neuman’s (1986) concept of opinion holding is also closely related to that of issue certainty, in that it is measured as an “additive index of the number of political opinion items in which the respondent chooses to express an opinion rather than opt for a no-opinion or don’t-know response” (p. 58). Issue certainty also bears resemblance to the concept of “confidence judgment,” which measures the degree of confidence with which an individual gives an answer (Murdock, 1974, p. 51). Yet another helpful concept is that of attitude intensity (Ippolito, Walker & Kolson, 1976), which describes attitudes, alongside direction, inclusiveness and centrality. Thus, if individuals are inclined towards supporting a certain policy, they can have various degrees to which they support that policy. For instance, an individual who opposes opening the borders may support current immigration policies, or may be in favor of stricter immigration policies.

Drawing from the previous observations, the hypotheses concerning issue uncertainty are that:

H3 (a): People who read news-and-analysis articles will have higher levels of certainty concerning their position on a political subject than those who read news-only articles.

H3 (b): People who post comments will have higher levels of certainty concerning their position on a political subject than those who do not post comments.
Political participation intent

Political participation is usually assessed by asking participants in a study if they had ever engaged in activities such as working or donating money to a party, displaying a button, yard sign or bumper sticker, participated in a protest or rally, contacted an elected official or voted in the presidential election.

Kaye and Johnson (2002) reveal that, in general, Internet users “report high levels of self-efficacy, the belief that one has the power to manage prospective situations” and suggest that the Internet acts as an alternative to offline political participation. Recent analysis (De Zúñiga et. al, 2009) also reveals a correlation between web use and civic engagement, increased volunteerism and increased news consumption.

Smith (1989) suggests that people who pay more attention to politics are interested in learning more about politics and are more likely to use the media to help them in their information acquisition process. And while the literature offers a lively debate on the exact causal direction of Internet use and political participation (Anduiza et. all, 2009), there is at least general agreement on the correlation of Internet use and increased political participation.

Questions in this study will assess both previous past political participation, and the political participation intent of the participants. In agreement with previous findings, the hypotheses posit that:
H4 (a): People who read news-and-analysis articles will display a more positive attitude towards engaging in political participation offline than people who read news-only articles.

H4 (b): People who post comments will display a more positive attitude towards engaging in political participation offline than people who do not post comments.
Chapter Three: Methodology

The study took place online over the course of four days. In this experiment participants read a news story that followed a 2 (analysis, no analysis) X 2 (ability to post comments, no ability to post comments) factorial design. Thus, the intersection of these two factors yields four possible experimental groups: (Condition 1) participants who read a news-only article and did not have the ability to post comments, (Condition 2) participants who read a news-and-analysis article and did not have the ability to post comments (Condition 3) participants who read a news-only article and had the ability to post comments, and (Condition 4) participants who read a news-and-analysis article, and had the ability post comments.

Pilot test

A pilot test was run with 20 graduate students to test the reliability of the analysis condition. The pilot was based on an early version one of the articles used in the actual experiment and mirrored the four conditions of the study. Half of the participants had to read a news-only article and the other half had to read a news-and-analysis version of the same article. The results showed no significant difference in the participants’ perception of the level of opinion in the article. The news-and-analysis articles were subsequently modified to include more first-person pronouns and explicit opinion and analysis language for the actual experiment (e.g.: “in the opinion of this newspaper,” “in analyzing the situation,” “we think that,” “while we may not agree” etc.)
Participants

Participants (N = 104) were selected as a convenience sample from the undergraduate population of a Southern University and a Northeastern University. A total of 114 students were initially part of the study. After the completion of the survey there were 104 valid responses. The retention rate of the participants was 91.2%. There were 38 male participants (36.5%), 64 female participants (61.5%), and 1 participant who did not specify sex (1%). The sample was 76.9% Caucasian, 7.7% Asian, 6.7% African-American, 3.8% Hispanic and 4.8% unspecified. The mean age was 20.4 years old (SD = 1.2). When asked about their socioeconomic status, 1% of participants identified themselves as lower class, 3.8% as lower middle class, 22.1% as middle class, 54.8% as upper middle class and 18.3% as upper class.

Procedure

The students were initially recruited through e-mails sent by their course instructors informing them about the study. The e-mails contained information about the type of activities involved in the study, the duration of the study, the fact that participants were to receive extra credit for the class they were in, as well as contact data of the study coordinator. Following the model of Sohn and Lockenby’s study (2007), participants were subsequently contacted individually by e-mail and given more details on the study and ensured that their anonymity would be preserved throughout the study. The e-mails also included an URL to the study site and a randomly assigned username and password.
Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions: (1) read news-only articles and do not have the option to post comments, (2) read news-and-analysis and do not have the option to post comments, (3) read news-only and have the option to post comments and (4) read news-and-analysis and have the option to post comments. The sample was divided into numerically equivalent groups, and each group was directed to a different Website (Sohn & Lockenby, 2007), identical in nature except for the content (included or did not include analysis) and communication structure (allowed or did not allow for posting comments). Once published, a comment was visible to everyone else, allowing for others to respond either directly to the article or to other comments.

Participants in all conditions were assigned random user names and passwords that allowed them to log on to the website. Participants in the sections that did not show comments were instructed to comment “Done” after reading the article. Participants in the sections that showed comments were instructed to leave a short comment (at least one sentence) after reading the article in which to express their opinion about the article. There was no maximum length limit. Participants in all conditions were told that comments were for participation tracking alone and that the content of the comments would not be taken into account as part of the study.

For three consecutive days, participants visited the website, read the content of the page they had been assigned to, and in two of the four groups posted responses to what they had read. Each of the three days featured a different article related to the current immigration debate in the US. Participants in one group were unaware of the activities
that took place in the other three groups. After the initial three days, the participants were asked to complete an online survey and were informed that they could skip any number of questions in the survey. At the end of the experiment, participants were debriefed via e-mail on the actual purpose of the study.

Stimulus material

The reading material consisted of three articles (one for each day), each of them having two versions: one for the news-only conditions and one for the news-and-analysis conditions. All three articles were based on existing articles that had appeared in the previous two months in sources such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. The articles centered on the immigration debate, in particular on topics such as the passing of the DREAM Act, the judicial fight over the Arizona immigration bill, or the birthright citizenship debate. The news-only versions of the articles made no explicit argument for or against any of the issues, while the news and analysis versions contained explicit taking of position on the topic at hand and made use of the first person pronoun. A sample comparison from one of the articles is provided below for clarification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News-only article</th>
<th>News and analysis article</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On July 28, one day before the law was to take effect, Judge Bolton in Phoenix blocked the state from enforcing its most controversial provisions, including sections that called for officers to check a person's</td>
<td>On July 28, one day before the law was to take effect, Judge Bolton in Phoenix blocked the state from enforcing its most controversial provisions, including sections that called for officers to check a person's</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We think that, for the most part, Judge Bolton’s ruling makes sense. After all, there is a substantial likelihood that officers will wrongfully arrest legal resident aliens, and foreign tourists could also be wrongly detained.

Figure 1 – Comparative sample of news-only and news and analysis articles

Measures

All four dependent variables (factual and self-perceived political knowledge, issue uncertainty and behavioral intent) were measured and compared across the four groups.

Factual political knowledge was measured using ten items that reflected the recently covered issues in the articles at the time of the experiment (Eveland, 2002). Half of the items were phrased in the form of multiple choice questions (to test for recognition), and the other half were open questions (to test for recall). Each answer was scored as either correct or incorrect and there was provided no “don’t know” option, as this strategy has been shown to increase the number of correct responses (Prior & Lupia, 2008). Examples of items include questions such as “The Arizona immigration bill was meant to provide
increased security of the borders against undocumented immigrants. Which of the following is NOT a provision of that bill?” (for the recognition items) and “How many undocumented immigrants are currently estimated to be in the US (millions)?” (for the recall items). Results were recoded as either 1 (correct answer) or 0 (incorrect answer) and summed up for all four conditions: news-only, no comment ($M = 3.333$, $SD = .372$), news-and-analysis, no comment ($M = 3.750$, $SD = .395$), news-only, comment ($M = 3.556$, $SD = .372$), and news-and-analysis, comment ($M = 3.538$, $SD = .379$). This scale was not expected to have high intercorrelations and was used as a “grade.” Answers to the ten items simply tested participants’ memory and had no pattern or consistency to conform to.

*Self-perceived political knowledge* ($\alpha = .88$) was measured by asking participants to indicate on a 7-point bipolar scale how much they felt they knew about the topics they had read about (Park, 2001) and summing up the answers. There were five items corresponding to the major topics dealt with in the three articles: the DREAM Act, the Arizona immigration bill, the birthright citizenship debate, the position of the Democratic Party on immigration related issues and the position of the Republican Party on immigration related issues. Participants answered questions such as “How much would you say you know about the position of the Democratic Party on immigration related issues?” on a scale from 1 to 7, (where 1 is “Nothing at all” and 7 is “Everything”). Results were summed up for each condition: news-only, no comment ($M = 18.518$, $SD = 4.709$), news-and-analysis, no comment ($M = 14.565$, $SD = 5.517$), news-only, comment ($M = 18.148$, $SD = 5.230$), and news-and-analysis, comment ($M = 16.440$, $SD = 5.300$).
**Issue certainty.** In order to avoid priming participants about the purpose of the study, Clatterbuck’s CLUE7 scale (Clatterbuck, 1979) was abandoned in favor of a more subtle manipulation check. Thus, participants indicated their agreement/disagreement on a 7-point bipolar scale (where 1 is “strongly disagree” and 7 is “strongly agree”) with items such as “Children of undocumented immigrants should be given citizenship by the United States Federal Government if they meet certain conditions, such as those proposed in the DREAM Act.” Their responses were then recoded on a scale from 1 to 4 for all four conditions, with initial responses that indicated strong feelings being rated higher than initial responses that indicated more ambivalent feelings ($M = 7.703$, $SD = 2.108$; $M = 7.750$, $SD = 2.026$; $M = 7.185$, $SD = 2.527$; $M = 7.583$, $SD = 1.639$). The recoded scale represents the level of issue certainty. Reliability was not a concern for this instrument, and the three component items were taken as separate variables.

**Political participation intent** ($\alpha = .84$) was measured with the help of four items measuring responses on a likely-unlikely 7-point scale (Shepherd, 1987), where 7 is “highly likely” and 1 is “highly unlikely” ($M = 17.769$, $SD = 5.784$; $M = 15.347$, $SD = 5.364$; $M = 19.400$, $SD = 5.477$; $M = 16.038$, $SD = 5.667$). Items included questions such as “How likely are you to contact a public official?” or “How likely are you to attend a public forum about a certain political issue?” The original survey included five questions, but the question regarding voting intentions was discarded in order to have a better mirroring of the past political participation measure.
In addition to the four dependent variables, four other variables that might have exerted an influence on the results (Hardy & Scheufele, 2005) were controlled for.

*Media consumption* \((\alpha = .44)\) was measured using four items that assessed participants’ use of media on a regular basis. Participants were asked how much time they spend on an average day reading print press, listening to radio, watching TV or using the Internet. Items were measured on a 7-point scale \((1 = ‘0-30 minutes’, 2 = ‘30 minutes - 1 hour’, 3 = ‘1-2 hours’, 4 = ‘3-4 hours’, 5 = ‘5-6 hours’, 6 = ‘7-10 hours’, 7 = ‘more than 10 hours’)\) across all four conditions \((M = 9.444, SD = .436; M = 8.958, SD = .462; M = 8.889, SD = .436; M = 9.360, SD = .453)\). Due to the low reliability of this instrument, print consumption, radio consumption, television consumption and Internet consumption were treated as separate variables.

*Political news consumption* \((\alpha = .83)\) was measured by asking participants to indicate on a 7-point scale \((1 = ‘Never’, 7 = ‘All the time’)\) how often they read, listened to or watched politics related news \((M = 12.259, SD = 4.950; M = 12.250, SD = 4.892; M = 14.222, SD = 4.627; M = 11.800, SD = 3.464)\).

*Political discussions* \((\alpha = .87)\) measured the extent to which participants had been talking about politics offline \((M = 10.703, SD = 3.484; M = 10.583, SD = 4.063; M = 12.923, SD = 3.676; M = 11.398, SD = 3.676)\) and included questions such as “In the past 6 months, how often have you talked about politics with your classmates?” This instrument was
based on 3 items that recorded answers on a 7-point scale (1 = ‘Never’, 7 = ‘All the time’).

*Past political participation* ($\alpha = .82$) was measured using four items which recorded responses on a 7-point scale, where 1 is “Never” and 7 is “Very often” across all four conditions ($M = 7.807, SD = 4.543$; $M = 6.625, SD = 3.254$; $M = 9.240, SD = 5.052$; $M = 7.269, SD = 3.955$). Items included questions such as “How often have you attended a speech/rally for a political candidate?” or “How often have you to attend a public forum about a certain political issue?” The initial survey included five items, but the question regarding past voting was discarded due to the age of the participants.

Additionally, participants were asked to assess to what extent the articles they read were based on news and to what extent they were based on *analysis/opinion* ($\alpha = .79$). This was done with the help of three items, measured on a 7-point scale (1 – “Based entirely on facts”, 2 – “Based mostly on facts,” 3 – “Based on facts more than opinions,” 4 – “Based equally on facts and opinions,” 5 – “Based on opinions more than facts,” 6 – “Based mostly on opinions,” and 7 – “Based entirely on opinions”). The difference between conditions with news-only articles ($M = 3.58, SD = 1.14$) and conditions with news-and-analysis articles ($M = 3.73, SD = .94$) was not significant, $F(1, 102) = .70, p = .40$. 
Chapter Four: Results

Preliminary analysis was based on a correlation matrix that included dependent variables (factual knowledge, self-perceived knowledge, issue certainty and political participation intent), independent variables (comments condition and analysis condition), potential covariates (media consumption, political news consumption, political discussion and past political participation), and demographics (age, sex, race, and socioeconomic status).

The analysis revealed that none of the demographic variables had any correlation with any of the dependent variables. Of the potential covariates, none of the media consumption items had any correlation with any of the dependent variables, except for print consumption, which was positively correlated with political participation intent, $r(99) = .22$, $p < .05$. Political news consumption was positively correlated with self-perceived knowledge, $r(100) = .45$, $p < .01$, and political participation intent, $r(98) = .40$, $p < .01$. Political discussion was also positively correlated with both perceived knowledge, $r(99) = .47$, $p < .01$, and political participation intent, $r(98) = .51$, $p < .01$. Past political participation was significantly correlated with self-perceived knowledge, $r(98) = .53$, $p < .01$, and political participation intent, $r(99) = .56$, $p < .01$. 
Table 1 – Descriptive statistics and correlations for the primary variables in the main analysis (N = 104)

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**. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).
To further narrow down the relevant variables I ran a MANOVA with factual knowledge, self-perceived knowledge, the issue certainty items, and political participation intent as dependent variables, comments condition and analysis condition as independent variables, and political news consumption, political discussion, past political participation, and print media consumption as covariates.

Political news consumption had no significant effect on the dependent variables, $F(6, 94) = 1.26, p = .29$. Print media consumption also had no significant effect on the dependent variables, $F(6, 94) = .46, p = .84$. Past political participation had a significant impact, $F(6, 94) = 4.15, p < .01$, although political discussion did not, $F(6, 94) = 1.96, p = .08$. Neither of the condition variables was shown to have a significant effect, with comment condition $F(6, 94) = 1.43, p = .21$ and analysis condition $F(6, 94) = 1.40, p = .23$. For further analysis I retained as covariates past political participation and political discussion (the latter for approaching significance).

Subsequently I ran four ANCOVAs, one for each of the four dependent variables (factual knowledge, self-perceived knowledge, issue certainty and political participation intent), holding comment condition and analysis condition as independent variables and political discussion and past political participation as covariates.

Hypothesis one predicted that people who read news and analysis would have higher score of political knowledge than those who read only news and that people who post comments related to the read articles would have higher scores of political knowledge.
than those who do not post comments. To test hypothesis one I ran an ANCOVA with factual knowledge as the dependent variable, comment condition and analysis condition as independent variables, and political discussions and past political participation as covariates.

Neither the independent variables (being able to post comments or not and reading analysis in addition to news or not), nor the covariates had any effect on the levels of factual knowledge. Being able to post comments was not significant, $F(1, 99) = 0, p = .96$, and neither was having access to analysis, $F(1,99) = .01, p = .91$. The two covariates were also not significant, political discussion with $F(1,99) = 1.65, p = .20$, and past political participation with $F(1,99) = .75, p = .39$.

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Table 2 – Condition effects on factual knowledge (descriptive statistics)
Hypothesis two predicted that people who read news and analysis would have higher scores of self-perceived political knowledge than those who read only news and that people who post comments related to the read articles would have higher scores of self-perceived political knowledge than those who do not post comments. To test hypothesis two I ran an ANCOVA with self-perceived political knowledge as the dependent variable, comment condition and analysis condition as independent variables, and political discussions and past political participation as covariates.

Being able to post comments was close to approaching significance values after controlling for political discussion and past political participation. The political discussion covariate was significantly related to participants’ level of self-perceived knowledge, such that participants who had higher levels of political discussion also have higher levels of self-perceived knowledge, $F(1, 98) = 7.15, p < .01$. Participants who scored higher on the past political participation scale also had higher levels of self-perceived knowledge, $F(1, 98) = 15.00, p < .01$. Participants who were able to comment ($M = 15.54, SD = 5.43$) scored lower on the self-perceived knowledge scale than participants who were not able to comment ($M = 18.44, SD = 4.98$), after controlling for political discussions and past political participation, $F(1, 98) = 3.77, p = .06$. Having access to analysis in addition to news had no significant impact on the levels of self-perceived knowledge, $F(1, 98) = .20, p = .66$. 


Table 3 – Condition effects on self-perceived knowledge (descriptive statistics)

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\(^a\) – Approaching significant difference at p = .06

Hypothesis three predicted that people who read news and analysis will have higher levels of certainty concerning their position on a political subject than those who only read news and that people who post comments will have higher levels of certainty concerning their position on a political subject than those who do not post comments. To test hypothesis three I ran three ANCOVAs for each of the issue certainty items, with the certainty items as the dependent variable in each case, comment condition and analysis condition as independent variables, and political discussions and past political participation as covariates.

Posting comments and reading analysis were not related significantly to the first issue certainty item. After controlling for past political participation and political discussion,
being able to post comments was found to have no effect on issue certainty, $F(1, 100) = .03, p = .87$. Being able to read analysis had no effect either, $F(1, 100) = 2.09, p = .15$. Political discussion did not have a significant effect on the first item of issue certainty, $F(1, 100) = 1.30, p = .26$, and neither did past political participation, $F(1, 100) = .08, p = .79$.

Table 4 – Condition effects on issue certainty item 1 (descriptive statistics)

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Posting comments and reading analysis were not related significantly to the second issue certainty item. After controlling for past political participation and political discussion, being able to post comments was found to have no significant effect on issue certainty, $F(1, 98) = 1.14, p = .29$. Being able to read analysis had no significant effect either, $F(1, 98) = 1.16, p = .28$. Political discussion did not have a significant effect on the second item of issue certainty, $F(1, 98) = 2.96, p = .09$, and neither did past political participation, $F(1, 98) = .27, p = .61$. 

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Table 5 – Condition effects on issue certainty item 2 (descriptive statistics)

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</tbody>
</table>

Posting comments and reading analysis were not significantly related to the third issue certainty item, after controlling for past political participation and political discussion. Being able to post comments was not found to have an effect on issue certainty, F(1, 100) = .05, p = .82. Being able to read analysis had an effect approaching significance, F(1, 100) = 3.21, p = .07, such that people who read news-and-analysis articles had lower issue certainty scores (M = 2.44, SD = .97) than people who read news-only articles (M = 2.74, SD = .99). Past political participation did not have a significant effect on the third item of issue certainty, F(1, 100) = 1.21, p = .27. Political discussion was the only variable that had a significant effect, such that people with higher political discussion scores also scored higher on the certainty scale, F(1, 100) = 3.82, p = .05.
Table 6 – Condition effects on issue certainty item 3 (descriptive statistics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No comments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No analysis</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>24</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No analysis</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis four predicted that people who read news and analysis will display a more positive attitude towards engaging in political participation offline than people who only read news and that people who post comments will display a more positive attitude towards engaging in political participation offline than people who do not post comments. To test hypothesis four I ran an ANCOVA with political participation intent as the dependent variable, comment condition and analysis condition as independent variables, and political discussions and past political participation as covariates.

Posting comments had a significant negative effect on political participation intent, even after controlling for political discussion and past political participation. People who were able to post comments scored lower \((M = 3.14, SD = 1.10)\) in political participation intent than those who did not post comments \((M = 3.75, SD = 1.11)\), \(F(1, 99) = 4.32, p < .05\).
Political discussion had a significant positive effect on political participation intent, $F(1, 99) = 9.28, p < .01$. Past political participation had a significant positive effect, $F(1, 99) = 14.75, p < .01$. Reading analysis in addition to news had no significant effect on political participation intent, $F(1, 99) = .28, p = .87$.

Table 7 – Condition effects on political participation intent (descriptive statistics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No comments</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No analysis</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No analysis</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ – Significant difference at $p < .05$
Chapter Five: Discussion

Throughout the last decade the Internet has gained increasing popularity and is quickly becoming the main source of information for US citizens. For the youth population, it has already become the most important source, as it surpassed TV last year. It is only natural that social science research is also focusing more and more on the impact of Internet news consumption on political knowledge and political participation. One of the main challenges of such research is avoiding circular explanations based around correlations with no clear causal direction.

The present study proposes a solution in the form of increased experimental control. By providing participants with specific political information that they would not otherwise encounter, a clear temporal succession was ensured. At the same time, the experiment was set up to mimic an environment in which individuals read news articles related to current political events on a day to day basis.

Summary of findings

Differences in both the type of article that was read (news-only or news-and-analysis) and the type of interaction that was available (no comment or comment) had no significant effect on the level of factual political knowledge. This result suggests that increased online activity does not lead to increased factual knowledge, contrary to the expectations from the first proposed hypothesis. A possible explanation comes from Bimber (2003), who argues that citizens who are exposed to more information are not
necessarily able to make use of it, since newly acquired information will more often than not be made to confirm preexisting biases (p. 207).

If there is no significant difference for levels of factual political knowledge among Internet users, regardless of their level of involvement, what can be inferred about the difference between regular Internet users and non-users? Existing studies linking Internet to political knowledge show either non-causal correlations (Kenski & Stroud, 2006; Du, 2008; Stromback & Shehata, 2010), or extremely small effects (Gronlund, 2007), or no effect at all (Nisbet & Scheufele, 2004). Moreover, Bae, Kwak and Campbell (2010) found that while offline political discussions had a positive effect on factual political knowledge, online political discussion was negatively associated with factual knowledge. This negative effect may be explained by the fact that individuals are prone to visit pages which reflect their own opinions and values (Brundidge, 2010). While individuals may not actively and systematically avoid differing opinions, current data supports the assumption that they do not engage opposing viewpoints when confronted with them (Garrett, 2009).

Thus, if individuals are used to actively or passively block out information that is not consistent with existing one, providing additional information (in this case analysis) or the exchange of information (the ability to comment) will not exert a significant influence on participants’ ability to acquire new information. The association of Internet use and increased factual political knowledge seems to favor, thus, the theory that increased interest in politics is a source of increased Internet use, and not the other way around.
The comment condition (ability or lack of ability to comment) did have a significant, but negative effect on participants’ self-perceived knowledge, after controlling for offline political discussions and past political behavior. Offline political discussions also had a significant effect, although a positive one. The explanation for this effect may be that in offline political discussions participants had a larger control over the degree of dissent between their own opinions and those of others (family, friends, colleagues), while in the case of the experiment they had no control over the character and quality of expressed opinions.

Another possible explanation deals with the concept of retroactive inhibition, which is defined by Murdock (1974) as the effect generated by items occurring after the presentation of the to-be-remembered item (p. 12). Newly acquired data (comments with dissenting opinions) that is conflicting with the original data (facts and opinions in the article) leads to a deterioration of memory and individuals take longer to identify the correct answer because they now have to deal with competing answers.

Increased self-perceived knowledge can be a catalyst for political engagement, but it is not necessarily an accurate reflection of factual political knowledge. This theory fits with Bimber’s (2003) claim that citizens can have access to more information and become more engaged in politics, without, at the same time, using the newly acquired information or becoming more sophisticated (pp. 200-201). The results of this study suggest that the illusion of knowing is greater for people who do not get to “test out” their ideas and be
confronted with potentially differing viewpoints. The larger implication is that Internet use is more likely to give its participants an illusion of knowing than actual improved knowing. And while Du (2008) attributes higher levels of factual political knowledge to Internet’s interactive character, Chung (2008) reveals that the interactive features of online newspapers are among the least frequently used by visitors.

Offline political discussion was the only variable that had a significant effect on the level of issue certainty. This result appears to reinforce the assumption that individuals seek opinions that are similar to their own (offline) and that they do not engage dissimilar opinions (online). It is possible that issue certainty would stay the same, even with increased factual knowledge. Neuman (1986), for instance, found no link between the level of political sophistication and the stability of opinion-holding. This is consistent with more recent findings which show that when a majority supports an argument the confidence in which the argument is held by those exposed to it is greater than when the argument is supported by a minority (Horcajo, Petty, & Brinol, 2010). If individuals are already exposing themselves to an environment where the majority of opinions are similar to theirs, encountering diverging opinions online will not change the direction of their opinion or the intensity of it.

Previous political participation and offline political discussions were positively associated with high levels of political participation intent. Both past engagement and political discussions are likely to reinforce feelings of self-efficacy and increase the intention to maintain these feelings by further engaging in political activities.
After controlling for past political participation and political discussion, the comment condition had a significant negative effect on political participation intent. Participants who were able to post comments were less inclined to engage in offline political activities in the future than participants who were not able to post comments. This result contradicts previous findings by Nisbet & Scheufele (2004), Kenski & Stroud (2006), and Bae, Kwak, & Campbell (2010).

Two possible explanations can frame this finding. One is that encountering opposing viewpoints decreases levels of self-perceived knowledge, and with it, feelings of self-efficacy. This in turn leads to less confidence in the ability to effect change through political participation. The other explanation is that commenting in itself is perceived as political participation. There is less of an incentive to participate in offline politics since feelings of self-efficacy have already found an outlet in online activity.

Limitations and future research

Although this experiment has provided a useful alternative to survey-based studies in assessing the effects of Internet use on political knowledge and political participation, it falls short on several counts. More research is needed not just about differences between Internet users and non-users, but also about differences among Internet users with varying degrees of activity.
One obvious limitation of this study was the demographic. The convenience sample included only 114 participants aged 18 to 23. More than three thirds of the sample identified themselves as Caucasian and almost three thirds of the sample identified themselves as belonging to the upper-middle class or the upper class. This provided no opportunity for a real comparison based on age, race or socioeconomic status. Whereas race does not appear to be a significant predictor of Internet use (Buente & Robbin, 2008), both socioeconomic status (Du, 2008) and age (Buente & Robbin, 2008) are significant predictors of Internet use. It would be interesting, therefore, to study effects of Internet use on political knowledge and participation for demographics that are usually not associated with frequent Internet use.

Another important limitation was related to the distinction between news-only articles and news-and-analysis articles. The fact that participants found no significant distinction between the two types of articles poses validity issues for the present study, but also raises questions related to perceptions of bias. The most intriguing aspect of this result is that participants assessed the news-only articles as being “based equally on facts and opinions,” although these articles contained no first-person pronouns and included no explicit agreement or disagreement with the facts that were presented.

While none of the differences registered between the two conditions (news-only and news-and-analysis) were significant, it is worth noting that participants in the news-and-analysis condition perceived slightly more opinion than those in the news-only condition for the two articles in which the analysis part seemed to favor a more lenient approach to
immigration legislation. For the article in which the analysis part favored a stricter approach to immigration legislation, the news-and-analysis condition perceived slightly less opinion than the news-only condition. It is possible then that a stricter experimental control over the news and analysis distinction (and potentially involving journalism experts or focus groups in the development of the stimulus material) could prove insightful with regards to the public’s perception of what constitutes bias.

Future research should also take into account the manipulation of the quality and variety of comments made by participants. McClurg (2006) has found that political expertise plays a strong role in influencing political attitudes and that the probability of participation is increased when participants have access to “politically sophisticated” conversation partners. He also found that increased political sophistication has a significant positive correlation with reducing issue uncertainty.

Wojcieszak and Mutz (2009) found that political discussions occurring within nonpolitical contexts tend to involve a higher number of dissenting opinions than political discussions occurring within contexts that are specifically political. This may be due to the fact that individuals are more prone to selecting like-minded sources and networks when they look for political information, but they are less prone to do so when they do not think they will discuss politics. Thus, it would be useful to include in future studies conditions in which discussions about political topics are introduced by researchers in networks that are not specifically centered on politics.
Last but not least, new studies should focus on a more integrated approach to political knowledge. Even though factual political knowledge is a core element of political sophistication, other factors such as political concern, political ideology or political awareness can account for the level of political engagement and the political behavior of individuals. Garrett’s (2009) study suggests that ideology can play a small, but significant part, in influencing behavior related to opinion challenging and attitude changing. In his study on the 2004 elections he found that Kerry supporters were slightly more likely to pay attention to opinions that challenged their own. He also suggests that Kerry supporters were slightly more aware of the rationales for supporting their candidate. These results should be taken cautiously, but they do make a valid point for the integration of ideology, interest and awareness alongside factual knowledge in future research.
References


Du, Y. R. (2008). The role of Internet in political campaigns: Replacement, displacement, or supplement of traditional news media? *Paper presented at the annual meeting*


Appendix A – Research Stimuli

Article 1, News-only

In his year-end news conference last year, Obama said his biggest regret about the recent session of Congress was the defeat of the DREAM Act that would offer a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants brought to the country as children.

The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors, or DREAM Act, offers a new means of obtaining citizenship to the children of illegal immigrants brought to the U.S. before the age of 16. They would have to have lived in the U.S. for at least five years, have a diploma (or the equivalent) from an American high school and enter either an institution of higher learning or the military.

The DREAM Act passed the House of Representatives in early December, but stopped in Senate later that month, when the Senate fell five votes short of the 60 votes needed to bring the bill to the floor for a vote.

Congressional Republicans said in interviews Thursday that their concerns about the measure remain strong, and both House and Senate GOP leaders said they would fight any attempt to legalize any of the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the country before the administration secured the nation’s southern border with Mexico. During the recent contentious congressional debate over the act, Republicans said the measure would
reward violators of the country’s immigration laws and encourage new waves of illegal immigration.

In an interview, Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa), the ranking Republican on the House immigration subcommittee, accused Obama of playing politics with immigration and toying with Latino voters. He said that “It is extraordinarily unlikely that any version of comprehensive immigration reform that includes amnesty will go through the House of Representatives.”
In his year-end news conference last year, Obama said his biggest regret about the recent session of Congress was the defeat of the DREAM Act that would offer a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants brought to the country as children.

We can more easily analyze the situation if we think that such immigrants often realize they are without legal status only when they try to go to college or join the military. Our kids, classmates of our children, are suddenly under this shadow of fear through no fault of their own. They didn’t break the law – they are just kids.

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any attempt to legalize any of the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the country before the administration secured the nation’s southern border with Mexico.

During the recent contentious congressional debate over the act, Republicans said the measure would reward violators of the country’s immigration laws and encourage new waves of illegal immigration.

In the opinion of this newspaper, it is possible to understand the opposing viewpoint too. There is always the concern that this new piece of legislation will provide a pathway to citizenship for individuals who entered the United States illegally. This deliberate shortcut may very well seem unjust to the thousands of individuals who wait in line for years to legally enter the United States.

In an interview, Rep. Steve King (R-Iowa), the ranking Republican on the House immigration subcommittee, accused Obama of playing politics with immigration and toying with Latino voters. He voiced his opinion by saying that “It is extraordinarily unlikely that any version of comprehensive immigration reform that includes amnesty will go through the House of Representatives.”

In analyzing their position, however, Republicans should not assume that Latino and immigrant voters will forget about the whole affair. Hispanics make up 15 percent of the American population and, roughly, 10 percent of the voting public. That’s an awful lot of votes. And no one can count votes like a politician. Moreover, Hispanics have shown
over time that their votes cannot be taken for granted by either party. Latino and immigrant voters will not forget. If they start to, Democratic politicians will remind them, again and again.
In April 2010, Arizona adopted the nation's toughest law on illegal immigration, provoking a nationwide debate and a Justice Department lawsuit.

The law, known locally as SB1070, was aimed at discouraging illegal immigrants from entering or remaining in the state.

The law requires police officers, "when practicable," to detain people they reasonably suspect are in the country without authorization and to verify their status with federal officials, unless doing so would hinder an investigation or emergency medical treatment. The law also makes it a state crime - a misdemeanor - to not carry immigration papers. In addition, it allows people to sue local government or agencies if they believe federal or state immigration law is not being enforced.

On July 28, one day before the law was to take effect, Judge Bolton in Phoenix blocked the state from enforcing its most controversial provisions, including sections that called for officers to check a person's immigration status while enforcing other laws and that required immigrants to carry their papers at all times.

But last week Gov. Jan Brewer (R) filed a countersuit against the federal government, accusing it of failing to secure the southwest border against a tide of illegal immigrants.
The lawsuit, or counterclaim, was filed as part of the same case in which the Justice Department is seeking to have the Arizona law declared unconstitutional.

Legal experts say Arizona has little chance of winning the lawsuit, which seeks a judgment declaring the government in violation of its obligation to secure the border and compensation for Arizona's costs for detaining illegal immigrants.

Lawsuits against the federal government are barred in most circumstances under a doctrine known as "sovereign immunity," and Arizona lost a similar lawsuit it filed over federal immigration enforcement in the mid-1990s.
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The law, known locally as SB1070, was aimed at discouraging illegal immigrants from entering or remaining in the state.

In analyzing the situation, it is worth noting that the passing of the law coincided with economic anxiety and followed a number of high-profile crimes attributed to illegal immigrants and smuggling. We should also mention that that federal data suggest that crime is falling in Arizona, as it is nationally, despite a rise in immigration.

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for officers to check a person's immigration status while enforcing other laws and that required immigrants to carry their papers at all times.

We think that, for the most part, Judge Bolton’s ruling makes sense. After all, there is a substantial likelihood that officers will wrongfully arrest legal resident aliens, and foreign tourists could also be wrongly detained.

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While we may not agree that this lawsuit is the best way to increase border security, we can definitely see the danger posed by the current influx of illegal immigrants who are
narcotics traffickers and have committed other crimes. Border states require more protection, and the federal government should recognize that.
Sens. David Vitter (R-La.) and Rand Paul (R-Ky.) recently introduced a proposal to amend the Constitution "so that children born in the United States are only considered automatic citizens if one parent is a U.S. citizen, one parent is a legal immigrant, or one parent is an active member of the Armed Forces."

Proponents of repealing birthright citizenship argue that scores of illegal immigrants come here to have babies (to whom they refer as "anchor babies"), who can then help their parents establish citizenship.

Immigration studies by the Pew Hispanic Center and Douglas Massey of the Mexican Migration Project suggest, however, that the drivers for immigration are jobs and family reunification. Roughly 80 percent of immigrant mothers in 2008-2009 had been in the U.S. since 2005, and 90-95 percent were here over a year before having a child. Moreover, a child cannot under federal immigration law help a parent attain citizenship until that child is 21 years old.

Moreover, from a legal point of view, the law would actually increase the size of the unauthorized population. According to estimations from the Migration Policy Institute, if the Constitution were altered, by 2050 there would be 16 million unauthorized immigrants in the US (a 50% increase from now).
Opponents of the measure also bring forward a moral issue. The children who would fall under the provisions of the new amendment had no influence over their parents’ decision-making or their parents’ legal-status.
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But there is a widespread opinion arguing that when a constitutional amendment is proposed -- for example, repealing prohibition or securing voting rights for newly freed slaves -- there is some agreement that there is a problem of such magnitude that the Constitution should be altered. Here, the amendment is offered in search of a problem.

Immigration studies by the Pew Hispanic Center and Douglas Massey of the Mexican Migration Project suggest, however, that the drivers for immigration are jobs and family reunification. Roughly 80 percent of immigrant mothers in 2008-2009 had been in the U.S. since 2005, and 90-95 percent were here over a year before having a child. Moreover, a child cannot under federal immigration law help a parent attain citizenship until that child is 21 years old.
Moreover, from a legal point of view, the law would actually increase the size of the unauthorized population. According to estimations from the Migration Policy Institute, if the Constitution were altered, by 2050 there would be 16 million unauthorized immigrants in the US (close to 50% bigger than now).

In further analyzing the proposal, we should also take note of other complications. Presumably, the grandchild of an "anchor" baby would be an illegal immigrant under the new provision. So far the birthright immigration doctrine has served our nation well. We make sure that we don't have second and third generation, marginalized immigrants, as Germany does.

Opponents of the measure also bring forward a moral issue. The children who would fall under the provisions of the new amendment had no influence over their parents’ decision-making or their parents’ legal-status.

We believe that it is safe to assume that the repeal of birthright citizenship will not happen very soon, given the paucity of evidence that birthright immigration is a significant issue, the hurdle of enacting a constitutional amendment, and the negative consequences that would follow from it. The discussion, however, is here to stay.
Appendix B – Survey

Thank you for agreeing to take this questionnaire. Please answer the questions as honestly as you can.

Remember that once you have answered a question, you will not be able to change your answer.

Also remember that you can skip any questions you do not want to answer.

1. What sex are you?
   1  [ ] Male
   2  [ ] Female

2. What is your age?
   1  [ ] Under 18
   2  [ ] 18
   3  [ ] 19
   4  [ ] 20
   5  [ ] 21
   6  [ ] 22
   7  [ ] 23 or older

3. What is your race/ethnicity?
   1  [ ] African American
   2  [ ] American Indian or Alaska Native
   3  [ ] Asian
   4  [ ] Caucasian
   5  [ ] Hispanic or Latino
   6  [ ] Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
   7  [ ] Other

4. How would you describe your family’s socioeconomic status?
   1  [ ] Upper class
   2  [ ] Upper middle class
   3  [ ] Middle class
   4  [ ] Lower middle class
   5  [ ] Lower class

The following items ask you about your use of mass-media.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much time do you spend on an average day...</th>
<th>0-30 minutes</th>
<th>30 minutes - 1 hour</th>
<th>1-2 hours</th>
<th>3-4 hours</th>
<th>5-6 hours</th>
<th>7-10 hours</th>
<th>More than 10 hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
The following items ask you about your interest in political news.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Very rarely</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Very often</th>
<th>All the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>read news about national government and politics?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>listen to political news on the radio?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>watch political news on television?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>read political news on the Internet?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following items ask you about how often you discuss politics with others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>In the past 6 months, how often have you ...</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Very rarely</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Very often</th>
<th>All the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Talked about politics with classmates?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Talked about politics with friends?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Talked about politics with family?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following items ask about your position on a series of political issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>How much do you agree/disagree with the following statements?</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly disagree</th>
<th>Neither disagree nor agree</th>
<th>Slightly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Children of undocumented immigrants should be given citizenship by the United States Federal Government if they meet certain conditions, such as those proposed in the DREAM Act.</td>
<td>1  2  3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Arizona and other border states should be allowed to adopt strict laws, such as the recent Arizona immigration bill, to help them protect themselves against undocumented immigrants.</td>
<td>1  2  3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Birthright citizenship (anyone born on US territory automatically receives citizenship) should not be</td>
<td>1  2  3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following items ask you how much you think you know about the current immigration debate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How much do you agree/disagree with the following statements?</th>
<th>Nothing at all</th>
<th>Very little</th>
<th>More than a little</th>
<th>Some</th>
<th>Quite a lot</th>
<th>A lot</th>
<th>Everything</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19. the DREAM Act?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. the Arizona immigration bill?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. the birthright citizenship debate?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. the position of the Democratic Party on immigration related issues?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. the position of the Republican Party on immigration related issues?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following items ask you about specific information concerning the articles you have read. Please answer to the best of your abilities, based on what you can recall from memory.

Indicate the correct answer for each of the following questions (there is only one correct answer for each question):

24. The DREAM Act offers children of undocumented immigrants a path to citizenship if they fulfill certain conditions. Which of the following is NOT a condition from the DREAM Act?
   - having been brought to the US before the age of 16
   - having lived in the US for at least ten years
   - having a diploma (or the equivalent) from an American high school
   - entering either an institution of higher learning or the military

25. Last year the DREAM Act failed in the US Senate. How many votes were in favor of the DREAM Act?
26. The Arizona immigration bill was meant to provide increased security of the borders against undocumented immigrants. Which of the following is NOT a provision of that bill?
   - Law officers can detain people without any justification or reason to suspect unauthorized presence
   - Law officers can verify the status of an individual with federal officials
   - It is a state crime to not carry immigration papers
   - People can sue local government if they believe federal or state immigration law is not being enforced

27. Senators David Vitter and Rand Paul have recently proposed an amendment to the Constitution that would repel “birthright citizenship”. If the proposition were to be passed, which of the following situations would still ensure citizenship for a child born on US soil?
   - One parent is an immigrant
   - One parent has been born on US soil
   - One parent has applied for citizenship
   - One parent is an active member of the Armed Forces

28. According to studies by the Pew Hispanic Center, the majority of immigrant mothers in 2008-2009 had been in the US since as early as 2005. What is the exact percentage?
   - 80
   - 85
   - 90
   - 95

Give a short answer to each of the following questions:

29. How many undocumented immigrants are currently estimated to be in the US (millions)?

30. In what month and year was the Arizona immigration bill adopted?

31. What is the name of the doctrine according to which lawsuits against the federal government are barred in most circumstances?

32. According to data from the Migration Policy, if the Constitution was modified to repeal birthright citizenship, the percentage of undocumented immigrants would increase greatly. By what percentage would it increase by 2050 according to the estimations?
33. Starting at what age can a child who is an US citizen help a parent attain citizenship under the current federal immigration law?

The following items ask about your political participation in the past

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often have you…</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Very rarely</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Very often</th>
<th>All the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34. Voted in national or local elections?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. Attended a speech/rally for a candidate?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>36. Contacted a local public official?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. Circulated a petition for a candidate or issue?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. Attended a public forum about a certain political issue?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The following items ask about your intent to get involved in politics in the future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How likely are you to…</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Very rarely</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Very often</th>
<th>All the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39. Vote in national or local elections?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>40. Attend a speech/rally for a candidate?</td>
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<tr>
<td>41. Contact a local public official?</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>42. Circulate a petition for a candidate or issue?</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Attend a public forum about a certain political issue?</td>
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<td>43.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Scholastic Vita – Liviu Gajora

Wake Forest University

212 Carswell Hall Winston-Salem, NC 27106

(336)391-0012 gajol9@wfu.edu

Education

- Wake Forest University (M.A., 2011); Communication
- Universitatea “Al. I. Cuza” Iasi (B.A., 2008); Communication and Public Relations

Conference Presentations and Participation


Teaching Experience

- COMM110: Public Speaking, Assistant, with Dr. Dee Oseroff-Varnell, Fall 2009, Spring 2010, Spring 2011
- COMM102: Debate and Advocacy, Assistant, with Dr. Robert Jarrod Atchison, Fall 2010

Professional Organization Memberships

- National Communication Association, 2010-present

Community and Academic Professional Service

- Organizer, Wake Forest University 13th Biennial Argumentation Conference, an international conference on research in the field of argumentation, March, 2010.