Blogger Attitudes toward Current Events

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1 Overview

We surveyed a random sample of over 700 political bloggers. This white paper reports bloggers’ attitudes towards current events.

Main conclusions:

• Bloggers overwhelmingly believe that the US is headed in the wrong direction.

• Bloggers tend to believe that the economy is the biggest problem facing the country.

• Bloggers tend to believe that the economy was somewhat better in 2011 than in 2010.

• Bloggers rarely strongly approve of President Obama—somewhat approve and strongly disapprove were the most popular answers.

• Bloggers overwhelmingly strongly disapprove of Congress.

*This report is part of a series of whitepapers on online political speech and participation. OPSP is the online political speech project, an academic project conducted in connection with dissertation research at the University of Michigan. Please visit http://www.umich.edu/~opsp for more information. Additional whitepapers are available at http://www.umich.edu/~opsp/reports.
Bloggers strongly approve of President Obama’s handling of some policies such as race relations and strongly disapprove of his handling of others such as taxes.

2 Detailed results

2.1 State of the Nation

Bloggers were first asked “Do you feel things in this country are going in the right direction, or are headed down the wrong track?” Over 70 percent of bloggers said that they felt this country was on the wrong track.

When asked which problem bloggers believed to be the most important facing the country today, two issues received a large proportion of the vote: more than 20 percent of respondents believed the federal budget deficit was the most serious problem, and over 30 percent said that the economy was the greatest challenge. No other single concern broke five percent.
The biggest problem facing the country today is:

- Economy
- Deficit
- Other
- Education
- Healthcare
- Environment
- Poverty
- Morality
- Afghanistan
- Immigration
- Terrorism
- Crime
- Iraq

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35

The fact that the poor economy was important to bloggers is reflected in their responses to questions about the state of the country relative to the previous year, and what they expected from the future.

When asked about the state of the economy relative to the previous year, most bloggers said that it was “about the same” or some degree of “worse,” though over 30 percent said “better,” making that response the most common.

The pattern of responses was almost identical when bloggers were asked what they expected the economy to be like in the coming year.
2.2 Government Approval Ratings

The president seems to inspire polarized responses: most bloggers feel strongly one way or the other about him. That should not be surprising given that many bloggers have partisan loyalties that likely condition their attitudes towards the president. Given their partisanship, Republicans are probably more likely to disapprove of his performance and Democrats are probably more likely to approve.

When asked to rate President Obama’s performance, “somewhat approve” and “strongly disapprove” were the most popular answers. About 15 percent “strongly approved”, and a slightly smaller share “slightly disapproved.”
The approval rating of Congress among bloggers was significantly worse than that of President Obama. When asked about Congress’s performance, over 70 percent chose “disapprove” or “strongly disapprove.” Less than five percent “strongly approve” of the performance of Congress.

Very few bloggers hold more than mild approval of the Supreme Court, though many more tepidly approve of the Court than of the Congress. Approval of the Supreme Court was evenly shared at approximately 25 percent for each “somewhat approve,” “somewhat disapprove,” and “strongly disapprove.”
2.3 Reaction to Specific Issues

Bloggers then answered a series of questions about different aspects of the president’s performance. The summary is below:

- Sentiment about his handling of the economy were split with approximately 35 percent for each “approve” and “strongly disapprove” and most of the remainder disapproving moderately.

- A plurality of bloggers (about 45 percent) moderately approved of his handling of Iraq, but the share of bloggers who disapproved exceeded those who approve by a small margin.

- A question about healthcare prompted symmetrical responses: the share of bloggers who approved of Obama’s healthcare initiative was nearly matched by the share who strongly disapproved, while the smaller share who strongly approved matched the share of those who disapproved.

- Very few bloggers strongly supported the president’s take on taxes; the sample was about evenly split among those who approved, disapproved, and strongly disapproved.

- On education policy, bloggers were almost evenly split between approve and disapprove, though they rarely strongly approved.

- A large majority of bloggers approved of his handling of race relations.

- As with many other policies, very few bloggers strongly approved of his handling of the environment, but “approve” was the most chosen category.

- More bloggers disapproved of his Afghanistan policy than approved, and the same was true of energy policy.

Overall, bloggers tended to avoid responding with strong support for any of the president’s policies. The low response rates for strong support likely reflect the fact that conservatives are unlikely to strongly approve of any Democratic supported initiatives, while liberal bloggers may take issue with policies they do not believe go far enough.
The next series of questions asked bloggers their opinions about several prominent pieces of legislation.

- Most bloggers supported the stimulus package, though “strongly oppose” was the most selected answer by a small margin. The law seems to have been quite divisive.

- The move to renew SCHIP was widely supported in the blogging community.

- A majority of bloggers favored the Clean Energy and Security Act, though “strongly oppose” had nearly as many respondents as each of the options to support the law.

- A majority favored the healthcare reform bill, though “strongly oppose” was the second-most popular response.

- Financial reform was less divisive; a large majority supported it.
• Repealing Don’t Ask Don’t Tell was even more popular: it was the only piece of legislation that a majority (in this case, a 60 percent supermajority) strongly supported.

• The FISA warrantless wiretapping law provoked wide opposition, though “support” was the most-chosen response.

• The law authorizing federal funding for stem cell research received strong support from almost half of respondents, and only a small percentage of bloggers opposed it.

![Graph: How did you feel about bills considered in Congress this year?]

3 Data and methodology

Data for this report come from a survey of 605 political bloggers in May 2011. To conduct this survey, we drew a stratified random sample from a census of active, English-language political blogs. Bloggers were contacted by email, with a response rate of just under 30%. To the best of our knowledge, this is
the only existing survey of the political blogosphere based on a representative sampling strategy.

Note that results reported here are based on unweighted responses. Therefore, they may be slanted somewhat by the sampling frame and uneven response rates among bloggers. In future reports, we plan to use appropriate statistical techniques to correct for these issues. In the meantime, please contact Abe Gong (agong@umich.edu) with questions or suggestions.