



# **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN ELECTIONS**

**THE WASHINGTON POST  
THE MONKEY CAGE**

**SCHOLARS STRATEGY NETWORK  
WORKING GROUP ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

**ORIGINALLY FEATURED ON THE MONKEY CAGE  
NOVEMBER 24, 2014-DECEMBER 28, 2014**

## **CONTENTS:**

<a href="#"><u>HOW DO CITIZENS PARTICIPATE IN POLITICS BETWEEN ELECTIONS?</u></a>	1
<i>LINA STEPICK</i>	
NOVEMBER 24, 2014	
<a href="#"><u>HOW BUSINESS FUNDED THE ANTI-SODA TAX COALITION</u></a>	3
<i>ED WALKER</i>	
NOVEMBER 24, 2014	
<a href="#"><u>ENGAGING VOTERS CAN KICKSTART COMMUNITY ACTIVISM</u></a>	7
<i>HAHRIE HAN &amp; ELIZABETH MCKENNA</i>	
NOVEMBER 25, 2014	
<a href="#"><u>SOCIAL MEDIA HASN'T BOOSTED YOUNG VOTER TURNOUT</u></a>	11
<i>PETER LEVINE</i>	
DECEMBER 1, 2014	
<a href="#"><u>THE REASON WHY YOUR INBOX IS FLOODED WITH POLITICAL EMAIL</u></a>	15
<i>DAVID KARP</i>	
DECEMBER 2, 2014	
<a href="#"><u>NEW TECHNOLOGIES ENCOURAGE WOMEN BUT NOT POOR PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN POLITICS</u></a>	19
<i>JENNY OSER, MARC HOOGHE, &amp; SOFIE MARIEN</i>	
DECEMBER 6, 2014	
<a href="#"><u>PROTESTS SHAPE POLICY BY SHAPING PROTESTERS</u></a>	21
<i>JENNIFER HADDEN</i>	
DECEMBER 11, 2014	
<a href="#"><u>IMMIGRATION ACTIVISTS ARE EMPOWERED WHEN THEY DON'T FEAR ARREST</u></a>	24
<i>MELISSA MICHELSON</i>	
DECEMBER 19, 2014	
<a href="#"><u>TWO YEARS AFTER SANDY HOOK, THE GUN CONTROL MOVEMENT HAS NEW ENERGY</u></a>	27
<i>KRISTIN GOSS</i>	
DECEMBER 16, 2014	
<a href="#"><u>HOW ALEC HELPED UNDERMINE PUBLIC UNIONS</u></a>	31
<i>ALEX HERTEL-FERNANDEZ</i>	
DECEMBER 17, 2014	
<a href="#"><u>WHY WHITE EVANGELICALS RULE THE MIDTERMS</u></a>	34
<i>LYDIA BEAN</i>	
DECEMBER 19, 2014	
<a href="#"><u>PEOPLE WHO PARTICIPATE BEYOND VOTING ARE DIFFERENT</u></a>	38
<i>JENNY OSER, JAN E. LEIGHLEY, &amp; KEN WINNEG</i>	
DECEMBER 28, 2014	

Monkey Cage

# How do citizens participate in politics between elections?

By Lina Stepick November 24, 2014

Journalists pay much more attention to [predictions](#), [turnout](#) and [results](#) of midterm elections than to the ways that citizens participate in politics between elections. For the 60 million Americans who report being involved in voluntary associations, elections are only one way in which they advocate for issues, hold elected officials accountable and build constituencies. How do these individuals as well as business groups and advocacy organizations influence changing patterns in non-electoral civic participation?

Over the next two weeks, the Monkey Cage will post responses to this question from members of the [Scholars Strategy Network Civic Engagement Working Group](#). They will address the causes and consequences of non-electoral civic participation. Can this participation be harnessed for electoral turnout as well as for ongoing base building for advocacy organizations? Does business involvement in grass-roots mobilization and advocacy make participation less equal? Do new technologies mitigate possible inequalities? What do patterns of participation and advocacy look like around specific issues? Civic participation between elections has implications for American politics that extends beyond the outcome of any single election. The series will examine how the long-term

strategies of movements and advocacy groups on both the right and the left extend beyond elections and significantly shape policy landscapes and outcomes.

*Lina Stepick is a PhD student in Sociology at the University of California, Los Angeles, and coordinates the Scholars Strategy Network Civic Engagement Working Group.*

---

Monkey Cage

# How business funded the anti-soda tax coalition

By Edward Walker November 24, 2014

Elections help Americans to focus on their political priorities. One of those priorities has to do with the appropriate role of business in politics and society. The 2014 midterms again called our attention to the dark money “social welfare” organizations that attempt to sway the outcomes of races through independent expenditures, heavily funded by corporations and wealthy individuals. And yet, business influence doesn’t just involve election-related expenditures and conventional lobbying. As my academic research shows, business also has real consequences for civic engagement and political participation, both during elections and in the arguably more important moments between them.

I’ve spent the last few years studying the field of “grassroots for hire” consultants who help to encourage political participation on behalf of business interests and other advocacy causes, the results of which are [reported in my recent book](#). I found that the field is remarkably well developed, featuring hundreds of consulting shops across the U.S. that work for a diverse range of clients on public issues ranging from immigration reform to intellectual property laws. And their work is large-scale, with the leading campaign by an average public affairs consulting firm targeting over 750,000 Americans for participation, in turn facilitating the participation of millions of Americans every year.

This is not the kind of participation that proponents of deliberative democracy might

envision. Instead, it's short-term and transactional. In many ways it's changing the face of civic engagement across the U.S.

There's a reason for this: consultants are being paid by their clients to win public policy battles, not to strengthen democracy and generate the long term relationships that integrate local community members and build bridges across social divides. As rational actors, consultants target those most likely to say "yes" to their requests, and they usually ask their targets to take a short-term action: write their member of Congress, sign a petition, join a protest, or attend a lobby day. They are much less likely to engage in meaningful organization building. It's civic engagement from the perspective of the war room.

Take the recent "soda tax" battles in San Francisco and Berkeley. The Nov. 4 ballots in both of these Bay Area cities had propositions asking voters whether they wanted new taxes on sugary drinks within their municipalities. The unsuccessful San Francisco proposition ([Prop. E](#)), which required a two-thirds majority vote to win, would have imposed a tax of \$.02/ounce of sugary beverages, increasing the price of a can of soda by approximately a quarter in the city. The successful Berkeley proposal ([Measure D](#)), which required only a majority vote, was slightly less onerous, imposing a tax of a penny per ounce on sugary drinks.

The beverage industry and its associated interests fiercely resisted these proposals. But the battle over soda taxes galvanized short term actions, not long-term organizing efforts that would enhance the capacity of communities.

The beverage industry, with the support of consultants worked through a front group called the Coalition for an Affordable City (CAC). CACs' civic-sounding name implied that Bay Area residents were coming together to organize around issues like housing, gentrification, public transit, and related issues of concern to low- and moderate-income communities. However, the coalition was focused on one (and only one) issue: shooting

down soda taxes. While the American Beverage Association’s sponsorship of the group was [disclosed plainly](#), an [ABC Nightline report](#) found evidence that protesters were being recruited for pay on Craigslist, and many local businesses listed as supporters of the campaign were unaware of their supposed involvement. The campaign made relatively little effort to improve the Bay Area’s civic capacity.

Cases like this - other examples involve the regulation of [for-profit colleges](#), [telecom firms](#), and “[sharing economy](#)” [companies like AirBnb](#) – see business trying to win on specific issues. The result is that civic participation is more and more ‘transactional.’ New data-driven targeting strategies only make this worse.

To be sure, some campaigns organized with the help of grassroots lobbying consultants do help to build civic infrastructure and generate meaningful ties among citizens. For example, some consultants discussed in my research have backgrounds in grassroots community organizing, and they have continued in that tradition in their consulting work, only with more resources and better data. Others have helped progressive causes ranging from the LGBT “It Gets Better” campaign to capacity-building efforts for the Partnership for Working Families. And consultants on the right have worked to build civic capacity in their grassroots outreach to conservative groups such as churches, tea party groups, hunting clubs, and other associations.

But these are the exceptions. Public affairs consultants, unsurprisingly, tend to focus on winning specific campaigns on specific issues for their paying clients, many of which are firms and industry groups. This means that much civic engagement today serves the strategic interests of business and is less likely to build long-term ties among participants.

Moreover, because those likely-to-participate citizens that consultants target are already over-represented in the political system – those with a history of political activism, the highly partisan, and the more educated – business strategies to mobilize civic engagement tend to make participation even more unequal, by getting those who are already involved

in politics to participate more, rather than drawing in people who are less engaged with the political system.

*Edward Walker is Associate Professor and Vice Chair in the Department of Sociology at UCLA. He is author of “Grassroots for Hire: Public Affairs Consultants in American Democracy” (2014, Cambridge University Press) and co-editor of “Democratizing Inequalities: Dilemmas of the New Public Participation” (2015, NYU Press).*

*This post is part of the [Scholars Strategy Network](#) series on civic engagement between elections*

---



Monkey Cage

# Engaging voters can kickstart community activism

By Hahrie Han and Elizabeth McKenna November 25, 2014

In a recent [Vox article](#), political scientists [David Brookman](#) and [Joshua Kalla](#) provocatively asked why campaigns invest so little in high-quality field operations. Years of research have taught us that high-quality field operations can be more effective than the billions of dollars spent on television advertising. Yet campaign leaders continue to starve their field programs, often creating lower-quality, less effective programs. How can campaigns and organizations build more effective ground games?

A small group of organizations have responded by developing what's called an "integrated voter engagement" (IVE) program, blending the electoral work of political campaigns with the issue-based organizing that civic and advocacy organizations do year-round. Unlike traditional ground campaigns that parachute in for the two to three months before an election and — win or lose — leave when the election is over, IVE programs are integrated strategically into the ongoing base-building work.

Because IVE programs seek to build long-term civic power, they create incentives for organizations and campaigns to do the work it takes to build a high-quality ground campaign. When the election ends, they are asking not only whether they won the election, but also whether they built power that can be leveraged for future fights. The longer-time horizon incentivizes them to invest both in having deeper conversations with voters and in building the capacity of local leaders from the community.

In the 2014 election, for instance, the Ohio Organizing Collaborative (OOC) undertook a nonpartisan IVE program that sought not only to turn voters out for the 2014 election but also to build OOC's base for its many issue campaigns. In knocking on doors and talking to voters, they asked people not only about the candidates, but also about the other issues people cared about in their community. In doing so, they identified more than 8,000 new people interested in their issue-based work while having the kinds of in-depth conversations [that are shown](#) to be more effective in achieving voter turnout.

In addition, because IVE programs try to build long-term power, they can draw volunteers and staff from the community. Although much of the "[science of voter turnout](#)" examines how field programs influence voters, campaigns affect the communities in which they work in other ways, as well. Because OOC's overall work focuses particularly on low-propensity voters who, statistically speaking, are more likely to be lower-income people of color, they recruited paid and volunteer canvassers who mirrored the constituency they were targeting. Fully 97 percent of their canvassers were African American, and 20 percent of them had never been involved in any kind of organized political activity in the past. Before joining OOC, many of the canvassers had never voted before. The OOC engaged these constituents as canvassers in the lead-up to the midterms but also plans to develop their capacity to participate in other forms of activism beyond the election.

Although it is too early to tell how the OOC's IVE work will affect canvassers and their communities, we can learn from other campaigns that have integrated base-building with electoral work. Much ink has been spilled analyzing the 2008 and 2012 Obama campaigns, but, as we write in [our forthcoming book](#), one undervalued aspect of the campaign was the extent to which Obama's ground game strategy depended on building a base of empowered volunteer leaders. As Alex Steele, a deputy field director in Colorado for Obama in 2012, said, "We're organizing to win an election, but at the end of the day, you...want to leave behind stronger people and stronger communities than when you got there."

To build this base, the 2008 and 2012 Obama campaigns focused heavily on developing leadership among its volunteer teams. Where most campaigns would task their staff with generating as much voter contact as possible before an election, the Obama campaign held staff accountable for different metrics: holding one-on-one meetings with supporters, recruiting volunteers to be neighborhood team leaders, and cultivating interdependent “neighborhood teams.” In August 2008, for example, Jeremy Bird, who was then general election director in Ohio and eventually went on to be the national field director of Obama for America 2012, held his nearly 500 organizers accountable for only two daily metrics: house meetings and the number of volunteer team leaders they confirmed. Bird wanted to give them incentives to focus less on canvassing persuadable voters, and more on turning volunteers into leaders.

If you had drawn a graph of voter contact over time in the Obama campaign, like many IVE programs, it would have looked more like a hockey stick than a steadily increasing line. This pattern could have caused alarm in a campaign that was not invested in base-building. The line was almost flat in the first few months of the campaign when the focus was on building local teams, and then grew exponentially as OFA unleashed the capacity they had built in the early phases.

The assumption behind IVE programs is that base-building and voter contact are, in the end, symbiotic: Investing in building the capacity of communities and volunteer leaders should lead to a higher-quality electoral program. Indeed, the Obama campaigns inspired higher levels of voluntarism than any other campaign that preceded them. By their [own count](#), they engaged 2.2 million volunteers in the 2012 election who were organized into 10,000 neighborhood teams run by 30,000 volunteer leaders.

Organizations in [Ohio, Florida, California](#), and elsewhere have thus begun to integrate electoral mobilizing into their year-round base-building efforts, bringing community organizing together with electioneering. As both Democrats and Republicans spar over who has the superior ground game, we can ask which campaigns and organizations, if any,

will embrace the opportunity to incentivize ground games that not only win elections but also build durable infrastructure for ongoing power.

*Hahrie Han is an associate professor of political science at Wellesley College and author of “[How Organizations Develop Activists](#).” Elizabeth McKenna is a doctoral student in sociology at the University of California, Berkeley. They are co-authors of a forthcoming book, “[Groundbreakers: How Obama’s 2.2 Million Volunteers Transformed Campaigns in America](#).”*

*This post is part of the [Scholars Strategy Network](#) series on civic engagement between elections.*

---

## Monkey Cage

# Social media hasn't boosted young voter turnout

By Peter Levine December 1, 2014

Almost all young adults use social media tools, such as Facebook and Twitter, and some use these tools for politics. During campaign season, they follow candidates and issues and influence other voters. After Election Day, some still use social media for political purposes, changing norms and values, and influencing corporations, universities and media outlets.

In 2012, Cathy J. Cohen of the University of Chicago, Joseph Kahne of Mills College, and their colleagues [found](#) that 41 percent of Americans between the ages of 15 and 25 had engaged in at least one act of “participatory politics,” such as forwarding a political video or starting an online group focused on an issue. The ones who engaged in these ways were also considerably more likely to vote.

People following politics and using social media, probably see plenty of online discussion of elections. The Pew Research Center [recently found](#) that 41 percent of adults (of all ages) who are “very interested” in politics saw *mostly* political content in their Twitter feeds in 2014.

But social media can also be apolitical. The Pew study found that more than a third of adult Twitter users who are *uninterested* in politics saw no political content at all on Twitter. If you rely on social media, it is possible to completely miss a political event as

important as a national election.

This may be one reason why the rapid rise of social media has not boosted youth voter turnout. Based on the National Exit Polls' demographic data (which are the best data we have at this point), CIRCLE [calculates](#) that about 21.5 percent of young adults voted in 2014. Since 1994, when comparable exit polls were first conducted, that proportion has never risen above 24 percent, nor fallen below 20 percent. This year's turnout was almost precisely at the 20-year average.

This flat line is actually quite remarkable. The media have seen major change since 1994, moving from print newspapers and cable TV to Twitter and BuzzFeed. Meanwhile, young people's demographics have shifted rapidly (40 percent of 18-29s are [now people of color](#)); and the political system, issues, and voting laws have all changed markedly. Yet turnout has hardly budged.

What remains constant is the basic class divide. Young people who are on track to economic success are much more likely to participate politically than those who are struggling. That was true for past generations, and it remains the case today. For instance, young adults who have attained a BA often vote [at three times the rate](#) of their contemporaries who have not completed high school.

Young people without college educations use social media, but Cohen, Kahne, and their colleagues found them largely missing from political circles. Although half of current college students used social media for an act of "participatory politics" in 2012, that was true of just 20 percent of high school dropouts.

It appears that social media do not dramatically improve youth voter turnout or help a great many disadvantaged young people engage in other forms of politics. But the new media do enable effective activism. Young people circulate commentary, music, images, and even jokes that change attitudes and ultimately laws.

For example, the DREAMers — mostly undocumented immigrants who have no right to vote in the United States and good reasons to fear “coming out” — have used social media tools to change the debate about immigration.

The rapid rise of gay marriage also seems hard to explain without the impact of participatory politics. And although the DREAMers and advocates of marriage equality are both generally seen as liberal, the same tools are also available to conservative youth.

But even if participatory politics is common, growing, and sometimes effective, some important questions remain open.

First, can the new media engage young people who start without an interest in politics, confidence, or skills? There is little sign that large numbers of formerly apolitical young people are being recruited into politics online, even if we define “politics” broadly to include consumer and cultural activism.

Second, we can point to impressive examples of videos, slogans, and images that “go viral” and make their creators famous and influential. But for every such case, there are many that go nowhere, being seen only by the maker and perhaps a few friends. What is the impact of being *unsuccessful* in a competitive online arena? Is repeated failure discouraging, especially when the rare successes are so widely trumpeted?

Third, the removal of “gatekeepers” (such as newspaper editors, TV anchors, and party elders) has made information freer. Anyone can create and share a video without permission. But the task of sorting reliable from blatantly false information has become harder. How will young people — and older people, too — learn to separate the wheat from the chaff?

Finally, can online social movements be sustained in the face of adversity? The ALS Challenge (in which people dump water on their heads to raise money for amyotrophic

lateral sclerosis), has raised \$115 million. There have been [10 billion views](#) of the Challenge videos. That was an impressive burst of activity that probably far exceeded the goals of the organizers. But the Challenge faces no organized opposition and need not continue to achieve its purposes.

In contrast, the Arab Spring, also powered by social media, faltered when it encountered disciplined resistance. The events of Ferguson, Mo. in the summer have prompted much online organizing (some from the right as well as the left), but that attention may also fade. To make a difference on a complex and contentious issue requires lasting effort. Whether the new participatory politics can sustain political engagement remains an open question.

*Peter Levine is Associate Dean for Research and Lincoln Filene Professor of Citizenship & Public Affairs at Tufts University*

*This post is part of the [Scholars Strategy Network](#) series on civic engagement between elections.*

---



## Monkey Cage

# The reason why your inbox is flooded with political e-mail

By David Karpf December 2, 2014

The election is over. We all now get to enjoy a break from the relentless campaign commercials, the phone calls, the mail pieces, and the yard signs. But the e-mails? The e-mails won't stop. In the 2014 election, [inboxes were flooded like never before](#). In 2015, the messages will just keep coming.

However, e-mail plays a different role outside election season. During elections, [e-mail is almost exclusively a fundraising tool](#). The parties and electoral advocacy groups raise money from supporters, then funnel that money into broadcast television advertisements, which their supporters dutifully skip past with their TiVo or DVR. In between elections, advocacy organizations still use e-mail for fundraising, but they also use it for *passive democratic feedback*, which they use to help determine priorities.

For all the talk about Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and YouTube, e-mail is still the single most important communication tool for political campaigns and advocacy organizations. That's primarily because e-mail is a "push" medium, while the others are all "pull" media. An advocacy organization can send an e-mail to every one of its supporters and be confident that it will appear in their inbox. Tweets and posts on social media offer no such guarantee.

The other important thing about e-mail is that organizations can use analytics to track

supporter responses. Which headlines actually get supporters to read the e-mail? Which subjects actually prompt supporters to take action? Which issue areas lead them to unsubscribe from the list? By monitoring these “open rates,” “action rates,” and “unsubscribe rates,” groups can form a rapid impression of public opinion among their supporter base. Combining this passive democratic feedback monitoring with quick weekly online member surveys gives advocacy organizations an ongoing snapshot of what their members want them to do. It’s a lightweight listening technique.

In my 2012 book, [“The MoveOn Effect,”](#) I describe how these digital listening tools allow organizations like MoveOn.org to quickly gauge member opinion as they roll out campaigns to influence public policy around issues like net neutrality, war in Syria, and health care reform. It is part of a broader change in “membership regimes” among advocacy organizations and broader civil society groups. It used to be that you decided to join an organization. In 2014, if you are on an advocacy organization’s e-mail list, then (congratulations!) you are a member.

This may come as a surprise. No one told you that, by signing that e-petition last month, you were joining Americans for Prosperity or MoveOn.org. And membership used to require a lot more than just an e-mail address. Membership in advocacy organizations is a vanishingly thin relationship today. But it’s also a nimble, active relationship.

Organizations can use analytics to “listen” to their members more effectively than they could when membership was maintained through the mail.

It wasn’t always this way. [The civic organizations of a bygone era built deep, thick associational ties with their members.](#) Participating in the Rotary Club, the American Legion or the Sierra Club meant showing up to a lot of in-person meetings and events. Membership took a lot of time, and it also yielded a lot of social rewards. Members formed friendships and developed leadership skills. Civic associations served as “laboratories of democracy.” They also provided the basis for the large-scale social movements of their day. There was a lot of power in the relationships those civic

associations built with their members. But they were also time-consuming and demanded a lot of resources.

The in-person membership model wasn't replaced by the Internet; it was replaced by direct mail. Beginning around the early 1970s, many advocacy groups began defining the membership relationship around direct mail and canvassing. For Public Citizen or Greenpeace, membership is defined by the act of donating. (We used to deride these types of members as "armchair activists," just as today we call online members "clicktivists.") The direct mail member was a reliable source of cash, and those reliable dollars helped create an infrastructure of lobbyists, researchers, and policy experts representing their issue publics in the nation's capital. But the direct mail member was also divorced from the day-to-day operations of their civic association. And direct mail members didn't develop the shared identity and leadership skills that comes through interactions with fellow members. Civil society organizations and their members have been mostly out-of-touch for over 40 years.

Now, with the shift to Internet-based membership, organizations are starting to develop new ways of listening to their supporters. Communicating through the postal service is costly. Communicating through e-mail is cheap. And even though that cheap communication unleashes the unending torrent of messages into your inbox, it also puts organized advocacy groups in a position to measure supporter sentiment and take the will of their membership seriously once again.

Outside of election season, digitally-enabled advocacy organizations are launching campaigns to influence public policy and change our political culture. E-mail has replaced direct mail as the bedrock of their membership model. And they use that e-mail to listen more frequently to their members. But it is still a relationship between the organization and members, not a relationship between members and each other. The question still remains whether 21<sup>st</sup> century advocacy groups can augment these thin online interactions with the types of deep, participatory engagement that characterized membership

associations from decades' past.

So during this pause between election seasons, take a look at your inbox and think about which organizations are speaking to you. Unsubscribe from the ones you don't care about, and respond a little more to the ones you do.

*Dave Karpf is an assistant professor in the George Washington University School of Media and Public Affairs. He is the author of [The MoveOn Effect: The Unexpected Transformation of American Political Advocacy](#) (Oxford University Press, 2012).*

*This post is part of the [Scholars Strategy Network](#) series on civic engagement between elections.*

---

## Monkey Cage

# New technologies encourage women, but not poor people, to participate in politics

By Jenny Oser, Marc Hooghe and Sofie Marien December 6, 2014

Every recent election cycle has seen news stories about online activism, suggestion that new technologies might engage people who have historically been less engaged in offline politics – particularly young people, women, and people with less education and income. If this were true, these technologies could substantially change U.S. politics. Today, one in three eligible adults skips voting in presidential elections, and one in three skips voting in midterms.

However, there's a more pessimistic possible interpretation. What if online activism mainly offers ways for citizens who are politically active offline to amplify their already loud voices? In that case, online political opportunities may simply reinforce existing political inequalities.

We set out to test the opposing “new mobilization” and “reinforcement” ideas. The prevalence of online and offline political acts in the U.S. in 2008 is displayed below.

To begin, we tested whether there is a distinct type of “online political participants”, a group of people who are highly engaged in online political acts, but less involved offline. Second, we analyzed whether the background characteristics of online activists differ in important ways from other types of political participants.

For the first step, we analyzed U.S. data from 2008 using a novel statistical technique for this field of study (latent class analysis). The findings indicate that there are four distinct types of political participants (Figure 1). We found a relatively small group of “online specialists” (in red) who are particularly active in online political opportunities, and make up about 8 percent of the population. Two additional groups of politically active citizens are identified: an “offline specialist” group (in blue, 9 percent of the population), and a “contact specialist” group (in green, 10 percent of the population) that is particularly active in contacting activities, both online and offline. The rest of the population belongs to the disengaged group (in black, 73 percent of the population) which is unlikely to be involved in any political activity, online or offline.

## Figure 1 – Four groups of participants

In the second step, we found some room for optimism for those concerned about participatory equality. Although

research since the 1960s indicates that older men tend to be the most politically active, in our 2008 data we found that women are as active as men, and that young people are highly active in online political activity.

Our findings are much less optimistic, however, when it comes to socio-economic inequalities in participation. We found no evidence to support the claim that online activism has an equalizing effect on socio-economic inequalities in political participation. Instead, our analysis shows that online political opportunities in the U.S. in 2008 did nothing to change the long-standing pattern that those with higher education and income are much more likely to be politically active than those who are less advantaged.

These findings are just a snapshot in time – but they do not paint an altogether pretty picture. Online political activism is likely to evolve more swiftly in the years ahead than offline activism. But anyone who is hoping that the Internet will engage millions of previously unengaged Americans in the political process should be warned, based on these findings from 2008 data (a year noted for record participation levels). Although online activists are younger and more likely to be women than traditional political activists, they still tend to be wealthier and better educated than the rest of the population.

*Jennifer Oser is an Assistant Professor at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel; Marc Hooghe is a Professor of Political Science at the University of Leuven; Sofie Marien is an Assistant Professor at the University of Amsterdam. This article is based on findings from Jennifer Oser, Marc Hooghe, and Sofie Marien. 2013. [Is Online Participation Distinct from Offline Participation? A Latent Class Analysis of Participation Types and Their Stratification.](#)*

*This post is part of the [Scholars Strategy Network](#) series on civic engagement between elections.*

## Monkey Cage

# Protests shape policy by shaping protesters

By Jennifer Hadden December 11, 2014

Protests are a visible and important way for citizens to express grievances and hold officials to account outside the electoral season. Many climate change activists seem to think that protests can have big consequences. For example, organizer Bill McKibben suggested that the massive [People's Climate March](#) in September had helped cause the [US-China climate announcement](#) of a few weeks ago. He tweeted, "First reaction to US China climate news: We should do more of these big protest-type things, they seem useful."

But did the People's Climate March actually *cause* these policy outcomes? Maybe. The truth is that it's really difficult to assess the causal impact of protests. Many of the same things that drive people out to the streets also influence politicians to take actions in support of the movement's cause. When the tide of public opinion shifts to support a movement, for example, we can expect to see both more protest and more favorable policy outcomes. So are the protests themselves influential, or are they simply a visible manifestation of a process of change that was already underway?

Researchers have tried to solve this puzzle for years. In a recent [paper](#), Madestam, Shoag, Veuger and Yanagizawa-Drott examine the effect of the 2009 Tea Party Tax Day Rallies. Employing a clever research design, the authors found that the Tea Party was able to shape policy more in areas where they had previously had bigger initial rallies. In another

[paper](#) examining environmental protests since the 1960s, Agnone suggests that more pro-environmental legislation was passed when protest made pro-environmental public opinion more relevant to legislators.

These papers suggest that protests do not simply *reflect* pre-existing shifts in public opinion. They help to *build* and *intensify* individual policy preferences. This is clear from examining activism on climate change. Protests can sometimes serve as a threat: as when activists engage in confrontational [protests on the Keystone XL Pipeline](#) to try to garner direct policy concessions from politicians. But protests can also build movements and reshape public opinion around issues, feeding back into the policy process indirectly.

The People's Climate March is plausibly an example of this second kind of organizing. Officially, the the protest set out to influence world leaders visiting New York for the [UN Climate Summit](#) by making the strength of public support for climate action visible in the streets. But the most consequential part of the march was what happened before the protests: the outreach and organizing that diversified the movement and connected climate change to other issues that individuals already feel passionate about.

As I document in my [forthcoming book](#), climate activists have been trying to broaden and diversify their movement over the past several years by talking more about climate change as a “justice” issue than an “environmental” issue. In doing so, they’ve been able to mobilize a more [diverse set of participants](#), including religious leaders, labor union members, students, indigenous peoples, and frontline communities most affected by climate change. This strategy of change emphasizes building power from the ground-up instead of just focusing on policy outcomes. As one organizer from Friends of the Earth explained it to me in 2013:

“A lot of NGOs were working for a long time with a frame that was very technical and demotivating for a lot of people. And it was really based on a theory of change that “if we change our governments, we can change the



system.” Climate justice is much bigger than that. Climate justice helps us build the movement.”

The language of climate justice broadened the movement and helped it grow much larger, culminating in the turnout of over 300,000 people at the march in September.

What does examining this case tell us about how protest might influence policy? One thing the People’s Climate March illustrates is that changes in public opinion can be *constructed* by organizers in order to expand and broaden participation. The way we talk about issues affects who participates and how much they participate. Because being in the streets with others is often a powerful experience, social movement participation can make individual preferences stronger, create new kinds of collective identities, and [shape the course of people’s lives](#).

It may be harder to track how these kinds of organizational and individual-level changes might ultimately shape policy. But understanding how bringing people to the streets can support broader movement-building objectives helps us to grasp why many organizers continue to believe in the power of protest and why we’re likely to see continued reliance on this strategy of social change.

*Jennifer Hadden is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Government and Politics at the University of Maryland. Her research concerns social movements, climate change, and international relations. Her book *Networks in Contention: The Divisive Politics of Climate Change* is forthcoming at Cambridge University Press.*

*This post is part of the [Scholars Strategy Network](#) series on civic engagement between elections.*

Monkey Cage

# Immigration activists are empowered when they don't fear arrest

By **Melissa Michelson** December 19, 2014

President Obama's dramatic executive action on immigration provided some relief to undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. as children. His decision was preceded by a long period of activism. In some areas of the country, immigrants of various generations and status, and their friends and families, have worked for decades to build community and political pressure for reform. Political actions have included marches, occupations, and other forms of mobilization and civil disobedience. This organizing has developed the civic engagement and social capital of activists, including the ability to use [online and mobile platforms](#) to communicate with tens of thousands of group members. [Activists](#) have used these tools to spread the message to a much wider audience and have the power to make change. [Walter J. Nicholls](#) claims the fight for immigration reform has trained young activists how to organize and how to be politically effective.

But that training only occurs in some environments, and not others. In Los Angeles, Calif., and in Austin, Tex., undocumented youth can be, to use the movement's slogan, [undocumented and unafraid](#). In contrast, in Southern Texas, or Eastern Washington, they keep their heads down. In the spring of 2006, massive [immigration marches](#) were held in cities around the country. But in [Hidalgo County](#) in Southern Texas, an area that is 90

percent Hispanic and home to a large undocumented population, the streets were quiet. These differences in levels of civic engagement reflect local political contexts.

Professors [Maria Chavez](#) and [Jessica Lavariega Monforti](#) and I recently completed [a book](#) for which we interviewed 101 undocumented Latino youth. Some live in the heavily Latino and heavily immigrant neighborhoods of Southern Texas and California, while others are from the Pacific Northwest, communities that not only have far fewer Latino immigrants but also very different political cultures.

The interviews we conducted in Texas took place in the southern tip of the state, in the Rio Grande Valley. The context of this geographic location differs from that where our other interviews were conducted in that it is included in the U.S. Border Patrol's system of internal checkpoints. This means that undocumented immigrants in the area face the constant threat of detection and deportation, even if they do not attempt to cross the border into Mexico. Undocumented residents of the valley cannot easily travel within the state, even to go up north to cities such as Austin or Houston. This context is reflected in their levels of political engagement and participation.

We asked individuals whether they had engaged in any marches or other action on behalf of immigration reform. Those from Texas were very unlikely to have done so, and noted fears of arrest or deportation. Activity by those in the Pacific Northwest was also minimal; respondents noted the fear of deportation and also the lack of a community with which to take action. Many of our respondents from Oregon and Washington said they instead focus on making others aware of the existence of undocumented immigrants in their schools and neighborhoods.

In contrast, activism was widespread and extensive among our California respondents. Only one of our California respondents reported never having participated in a march or other action; others who had participated in just one or a few marches seemed almost apologetic, as if they felt their involvement was below par. Most reported extensive

activism, including not just marches but lobbying, mock graduations, and even hunger strikes. This regional variation in protest activity is reflected in the size and location of the [2006 immigration marches](#).

People do not become politically socialized in a vacuum; they are influenced by [local social and political circumstances](#). Latinos in California and Texas experience day-to-day life very differently than do Latinos living in the Pacific Northwest; this inevitably affects their feelings of belonging, political empowerment, and Latino identity.

*Melissa R. Michelson is Professor of Political Science at Menlo College, and co-author of the award-winning book [Mobilizing Inclusion](#) (Yale University Press, 2012) and [Living the Dream](#) (Paradigm Press, 2014).*

*This post is part of the [Scholars Strategy Network](#) series on civic engagement between elections.*

Monkey Cage

# Two years after Sandy Hook, the gun control movement has new energy

By Kristin Goss December 16, 2014

Washington State voters last month defied the gun lobby and approved a measure extending firearm background checks private transfers. For the gun reform movement, the victory was not only a policy success but also potentially a strategic one, offering [a roadmap](#) for activism to come.

That gun reformers see a path forward is significant, because for at least two decades they have lost much ground to their better-funded and better-organized opponents. Firearms laws at the national level and in many states [have loosened](#); the public has grown [more supportive of guns in the home](#) and [more skeptical about gun regulation](#); grassroots cadres have arisen to normalize firearms in public life; and [political partisans have hardened](#) in a way that makes compromise on the issue very difficult.

Against these strong headwinds, the gun control movement struggled to keep moving. But after a spate of mass shootings — Virginia Tech, Tucson, Aurora, and Sandy Hook, among others — pro-reform groups are mobilizing on a scale not seen in more than a decade and doing so with resources and tools that their predecessors lacked.

As the mighty gun lobby meets a resurgent gun control movement, now is a good time to take stock of the seismic pro-gun shift that happened largely under the radar in every

branch of government and at every level – and how gun reformers are taking lessons from their opponents in how to change laws and culture.

Most Americans know that gun rights advocates are a force at the polls: They turn out their voters and [occasionally swing tight races](#). But perhaps more important, gun rights groups have capitalized on their electoral advantages to secure policy gains *between elections*. Besides advancing gun rights, these measures have hobbled gun control advocates by shutting them out of policy arenas where they might have had influence or drawn support.

First, consider the federal bureaucracy. In the 1980s and early 1990s, public health researchers at the federal Centers for Disease Control sought to apply public health research and interventions to the problem of gun injury and death. The National Rifle Association (NRA) feared that these efforts would make the case for stronger gun laws and persuaded its Congressional allies to strip the funding. A similar dynamic played out in the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, which Congress for several years barred from publicly sharing aggregate data about the origins of guns used in crime.

Gun reform groups have taken back some of this lost ground — for example, some gun-trace data sharing is now allowed, and after Sandy Hook President Obama [directed the CDC](#) to conduct or sponsor gun-violence research. But [these and other data-suppression efforts](#) hindered gun reformers’ ability to answer basic policy-relevant questions (does a gun in the home make it safer, or less safe?), to formulate evidence-based policy, and to forge alliances with potential institutional allies.

Consider another venue: the courts. Guns are exempt from federal consumer-safety laws, and many guns used in crime appear to come from a few “bad apple” dealers. In response gun control advocates filed or supported lawsuits on behalf of cities and individuals affected by gun violence. Pro-gun activists fought back, and 33 states quickly enacted laws banning such lawsuits. In 2005 Congress pulled the plug nationally by providing

immunity to gun manufacturers and dealers (with some important exceptions).

This slammed the courthouse doors shut for gun control advocates. Indeed, the 2005 law probably had a bigger impact on the gun control movement than did the Supreme Court's landmark 2008 ruling that the Constitution protects an individual right to a gun for self-protection.

Perhaps the most important focus of the gun lobby's between-elections activism has been state legislatures. Responding to strategic campaigns led by the NRA and its affiliates, most legislatures over the past several decades have stripped law enforcement authorities of their discretion to decide who may carry a concealed weapon and have eliminated or severely restricted the authority of localities to regulate firearms. These laws deprive gun control advocates of opportunities to organize and shape policy in urban areas, where gun violence is most severe and where citizens' voices are loudest.

Looking at gun control activism in the late 1990s and early 2000s, I termed it a [“missing movement.”](#) That period turned out to be, in retrospect, a relatively organized and active period compared to the decade to come. With some important exceptions, including a 2007 federal law that incentivizes states to provide records to the national background check system, the gun reform movement lost ground during the Bush and first Obama administrations.

But the gun reform movement that coalesced after Sandy Hook looks very different than the struggling movement I first studied 15 years ago. For one, today's movement has a steady source of significant funds. Bloomberg pledged to spend [\\$50-million](#) on the cause this year alone, mostly through his [Everytown for Gun Safety](#) lobbying organization and related campaign spending group. [Americans for Responsible Solutions](#), founded by former Rep. Gabby Giffords, spent at least \$23-million this election cycle.

Under the banner of [Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America](#), self-styled “[badass](#)

[moms](#)” are using social-media tools not available to their foremothers to facilitate old-time grassroots activism – testifying, phone banking, petitioning, campaigning, demonstrating, and boycotting. Survivors and family members, working through groups such as Everytown and [Sandy Hook Promise](#), are assuming a high-profile advocacy role in numbers unprecedented in the gun control movement. Social media are helping these geographically dispersed advocates to create the shared identity, common language, camaraderie, and mutual accountability so vital to sustaining collective action.

Gun control activists will still have a hard time undoing the gun lobby’s progress, in part because the country has shifted in the pro-gun direction over the past two decades. They face the challenge of maintaining their current momentum over more than a few years — something that the earlier movement struggled to do.

*Kristin Goss is an associate professor of public policy and political science at the Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University. She is the author of [Disarmed: The Missing Movement for Gun Control in America](#) and co-author (with Philip J. Cook) of [The Gun Debate: What Everyone Needs to Know](#); [kgoss@duke.edu](mailto:kgoss@duke.edu)*

*This post is part of the [Scholars Strategy Network](#) series on civic engagement between elections.*



## Monkey Cage

# How ALEC helped undermine public unions

By Alexander Hertel-Fernandez December 17, 2014

After the elections held earlier this month, Republicans will be in [control](#) of 23 state governments. That is likely to bode very poorly for labor unions, especially those operating in the public sector, which have become a target of conservative state lawmakers in the past few years. In the wake of the Great Recession, state legislators introduced hundreds of bills to curtail the right of public-sector unions to collectively bargain and participate in politics, and Republican [governors](#) succeeded in scaling back the organizing ability of public workers in several states. These conservative advances are significant because the public sector remains one of the last [strongholds](#) of union strength in the United States.

Despite the recent victories that conservatives have enjoyed against public unions, it would be a mistake to assume that this is a new offensive by the right. As I show in my [research](#), the conservative movement has long targeted public-sector labor unions. Indeed, it was fear of a rapidly growing public-sector labor movement in the 1970s and 1980s that motivated some conservative leaders to invest in developing new organizations that could match the power and influence that public unions – especially those representing public school teachers – were perceived as having in state politics.

There is a broader lesson from this example that is instructive for understanding the dynamics of civic participation. Successful political movements, whether on the left or the

right, require long-term investments in organizations that can develop and promote policy ideas over many decades. Moreover, such movements must continue to operate in between election cycles, and change the structure of government policy in durable ways that benefit a movement's allies and disadvantage its opponents.

One group that exemplifies such strategies is the American Legislative Exchange Council, or [ALEC](#), a group of state legislators and companies that drafts and promotes conservative, pro-business model legislation across the states. ALEC is one group that was formed as a response to the rise of public union strength in the states in the 1970s. As one of ALEC's early leaders warned fellow conservatives, "liberals understood the importance of the states some time ago ... liberal state legislators are supported by a vast array of special interest groups ... and the group that is gaining ... at the fastest rate is ... the radically liberal National Education Association." ALEC was thus formed to offer an infrastructure that could change state policy over time, regardless of the results of any one given election. It continues to operate today with great success. The group can claim a membership of several thousand legislators (or about a fourth of all state lawmakers), as well as several hundred private-sector members, including many Fortune 500 companies. (In an earlier Monkey Cage [post](#) and academic [paper](#), I explored the states where ALEC has been most successful at enacting its policy ideas.)

Many of the bills promoted by ALEC have taken aim at public-sector unions, which represent both an important political adversary of the group's conservative leaders, as well as an economic opponent to many of the group's corporate members. An ongoing component of my dissertation examines whether these bills promoted by ALEC's members across the states have in fact succeeded in weakening public sector

Building on research I am conducting with [Konstantin Kashin](#), I used text analysis of ALEC's model legislation, along with all state legislation introduced and enacted since the mid-1990s, to identify instances when state governments enacted ALEC-authored bills related to public unions. (In all, I counted twelve enactments of ALEC reform bills across

eight states.) These bills generally followed several common patterns, such as provisions making it more challenging for labor unions to automatically collect dues from workers, and making it easier for states to contract out services that were previously performed by public workers. Importantly, not all of the bills were enacted in the wake of the Great Recession; a number were signed into law a decade earlier.

Next, I estimated the effect that the enactment of these bills had on public-sector union density, and found that the success of ALEC-derived labor bills resulted in lower public union density beginning three to four years after those bills became law. On average, state public-sector union density fell by about three percentage points per year, or nearly 10 percent of the current level of public-sector union density in the country as a whole. My results were similar even when I looked at variation within, rather than across, different states, and when I accounted for partisan control of government, existing private-sector union density, and secular trends in public union density within each state.

These results suggest that state business lobbies like ALEC have indeed achieved one of their founding goals established some four decades ago. There is a deep historical irony to this reversal of fortune: ALEC was initially concerned with the fact that liberals were dominating state politics, yet now it is progressives who are [lamenting](#) the fact that they lack any counterweight to ALEC in the states (and have only recently [announced](#) the creation of a group that might plausibly serve as a foil to state business lobbies). ALEC has succeeded in no small part because of its ability to play the long game, changing state policy in durable ways that benefit its members while hampering its rivals. Whether liberals will learn this lesson remains to be seen.

*Alex Hertel-Fernandez is a PhD student at Harvard University in government and social policy.*

*This post is part of the [Scholars Strategy Network](#) series on civic engagement between elections.*

## Monkey Cage

# Why white evangelicals rule the midterms

By Lydia Bean December 19, 2014

One of the reasons that Republicans won the midterm elections is because white evangelicals turned out, while Democratic-leaning groups stayed home. For good and for ill, white evangelicals are one of the most effectively organized groups in American politics, and they reliably vote Republican. We should all be asking what we can learn from conservative evangelicals about how to energize voters in midterms.

Back in October, pollster Robert Jones argued that [white evangelicals were declining as a percentage of the population](#), even in the South. This could have been bad news for Republicans, who counted on loyal support from white evangelicals. Jones predicted that by November 2014, evangelical decline would start tipping close races to Democrats in Bible Belt states like Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, and North Carolina.

But on Nov. 4 of 2014, white evangelicals handed Republicans a decisive victory in Senate races across the country. White evangelicals may be declining as a percentage of the population. But as Sarah Posner reported in Religion Dispatches, [they still rule the midterms](#) because they turn out to vote in such high numbers for Republicans.

In my new book, "[The Politics of Evangelical Identity](#)," I explain how white evangelicals became so closely tied to conservative politics in the United States, but not Canada. What can we all learn from the midterm enthusiasm of white evangelicals? In my fieldwork in

evangelical churches, I discovered that their turnout power is built *between* elections, long before the campaign season starts.

Many outsiders assume that evangelical mobilization is a rather top-down affair: pastors and national elites tell evangelicals to get out and vote for conservatives. But I discovered that a much broader set of volunteer or “lay” religious leaders play a key role in weaving politics into local religious life. The Sunday School teacher who makes off-handed derogatory remarks about “liberals.” The small group host with the portrait of George W. Bush on her fridge. The pro-life friend at church who reminds you to get out and vote this November—and to remember that the Democrats are for abortion, Republicans are for life.

These local opinion leaders translate national conservative messages into the everyday social worlds of evangelical churches. I call [them “captains” in the Culture War](#), because they are embedded in the everyday lives of their followers. By contrast, James Dobson, Glenn Beck, or Mike Huckabee are “generals” in the Culture War over issues like abortion and same-sex marriage. Culture War captains are the people in your life who model what it means to be a good Christian, who help you map your political identity against out-groups like “liberals,” “feminists,” and “gay rights activists.”

When election season rolls around, evangelicals are already primed with a shared narrative about American national identity, which blames the country’s moral decline on activist “liberals” trying to limit the religious freedom of Christians. This narrative is promoted by Christian Right interest groups, but it is also promoted by media sources and organizations that are not perceived as “political” by rank-and-file evangelicals. For example, most evangelicals in my study saw Focus on the Family as a resource for parenting and personal devotion, not as a partisan operation. Likewise, pro-life activists whom I interviewed did not see themselves as “political” leaders. For them, the pro-life movement was a thoroughly religious movement; indeed, most of their activities with pro-life groups involved prayer and Bible study, not protest and advocacy.

So when Republican candidates invoke Culture War narrative in campaigns, their claims resonate with language that is continuously reinforced by ostensibly non-political, spiritual practices. Conservative frames resonate with evangelicals in election years, because they are reinforced in their everyday religious lives by local leaders who model a conservative political identity.

So what does this mean for movements who want to mobilize very different populations? From observing evangelicals, I learned that GOTV (getting out the vote) should be just the tip of the iceberg of a much longer-term process of base-building. GOTV is most powerful when it builds onto a solid set of relationships and identity-work that have been put into place long before campaign season. Knocking on doors and making phone calls is just the last step.

Campaigns only remind evangelicals what they have already learned from their religious community: that voting Republican is a natural extension of what it means to be a good Christian. This message is not just reinforced from the top-down during campaign season, by Christian Right interest groups and campaign ads. It is also reinforced from the bottom-up by trusted local leaders who are part of people's everyday lives.

If we want to increase midterm voting among groups who stayed home, we need to ask who the local opinion leaders might be to reach low-propensity voters. What local settings could play the role of an evangelical small group or Bible study? Where do people learn that voting is expected of them, to be a good member of their network, in a context of personal accountability? And what is the organizational vehicle that will identify and develop these local leaders, who will engage a much larger set of low-propensity voters in year-round base-building? You've got to hand it to conservative evangelicals: they really have all of this down.

*Dr. Lydia Bean is Senior Consultant to the [PICO National Network](#), now building a new faith-rooted organizing effort in Texas. Her first book, [The Politics of Evangelical](#)*

*[Identity: Local Congregations and Partisan Divides in the United States in Canada](#) was published in 2014 by Princeton University Press.*

*This post is part of the [Scholars Strategy Network](#) series on civic engagement between elections.*

---

## Monkey Cage

# People who participate ‘beyond voting’ are different

By Jenny Oser, Jan E. Leighley and Ken Winneg December 28, 2014

Although only 50 to 60 percent of Americans vote in presidential elections, and only 35 to 40 percent vote in midterm elections, voting is still the most common form of political participation. This is why most research on the connection between participation and policy outcomes focuses on voting. Research shows that voting does make a difference in several policy areas, including welfare-benefit levels, federal grant awards and senator roll-call votes.

But does becoming more involved in ways that don’t involve voting affect policy choices? Voting has been stable or has declined in the past few decades, but there are new opportunities for participation beyond the vote. Not only petitioning and protesting, but new forms of involvement via social media have allowed citizens to become more politically active.

In a recent study, we looked at one aspect of this participation-policy connection by asking whether people who participate in these new or different ways have different policy preferences than those who participate more traditionally. Our evidence speaks to a prominent explanation for why voting may affect policy outcomes: Because voters are likely to also be politically active “beyond voting,” they are able to convey their policy preferences to decision-makers through several avenues at once.

This “communication hypothesis” assumes that all voters have similar policy preferences, so that voters who are also politically active in additional ways can be thought of as the representative communicators of these preferences. For example, a politically active voter favoring an immigration policy that calls for protecting the borders represents the voices of non-active voters. If this were true, then more opportunities for citizen engagement wouldn’t change things very much. If, in contrast, people who engage in new kinds of participation have different preferences than people who don’t, then new kinds of participation are going to reveal *different* preferences over policy to decision-makers. We used a new statistical technique (latent class analysis) to assess how citizens combine the act of voting with other kinds of offline and online political engagement. Once we identified distinctive types of participators, we then assessed whether their policy preferences differed in meaningful ways from those who “only” vote.

Our study identifies four types of voters (Figure 1):



(1)“All-around activists” (5 percent of voters), who are highly active in all participatory opportunities.

(2)“Traditional campaigners” (8 percent of voters), who are particularly active in traditional offline campaign activity.

(3)“Persuaders” (12 percent of voters), who are highly engaged in online means to communicate directly to representatives.

(4)“Low engaged” (76 percent of voters), who are unlikely to be politically active beyond voting.

We then compared the policy preferences of non-voters to the preferences of these four types of participators on key campaign issues in the 2008 election, namely tax policy, health-care regulation, environmental protection and abortion (Figure 2). Our evidence suggests that there is little difference between the preferences of nonvoters and those who vote but do little else. However, we did find meaningful differences among the different types of voting participators in their views on important policy issues in the 2008 campaign. Policy-relevant findings include three main points:

- All-around activists consistently report different policy views from those who vote but do little else.
- The “traditional campaigners” (with an offline focus) and the “persuaders” (with an online focus) are different from low-engaged voters on the environment and abortion issues.
- We see the greatest difference in policy preferences between the different types of participators (Figure 2a) on tax policy, the most salient policy issue in the 2008 campaign.

Our study shows that we can’t assume that high-communicating voters represent the policy concerns of all voters. Differences between voters who engage in different ways will become more relevant as more online forms of political engagement emerge. Our work also suggests that elected officials hear different messages from people participating in different ways, with potential consequences for politics. Citizens appear to specialize in different types of participation and, as a result, convey different policy positions to government officials. Without understanding the mix of the messages conveyed to elected officials, we are unsure how effective the vote, or any other sort of political activity, is in democratic politics in the country today.

*Jennifer Oser is an assistant professor of politics and government at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel; Jan E. Leighley is a professor of government at American University; Kenneth M. Winneg is the managing director of survey research at the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.*

*This post is part of the [Scholars Strategy Network](#) series on civic engagement between elections.*

---