

## People often talk about politics on blogs geared toward other topics

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A full 25 percent of blog posts about politics occur on sites that are primarily about something else, according to a new study by researchers at the University of Michigan School of Information. And when authors post about politics, their readers reply and engage with the political content of the posts.

The researchers say they have uncovered a significant [repository](#) of political discourse that is largely being ignored. They will present their findings July 19 at the International Conference on Weblogs and Social Media in Barcelona.

[Doctoral student](#) Sean Munson and professor Paul Resnick examined 6,691 posts from a random sample of more than 8,600 blogs on Blogger.com. While most of these blogs were personal diaries or covered topics such as sports, celebrities or hobbies, about 5 percent were devoted to politics. The researchers found that the authors of many non-political blogs occasionally post about politics. These intermittent commentaries add up—so much so that they accounted for a quarter of all political posts in this large study.

"A lot of the commentary about political polarization on the Internet has focused on political websites," said Munson, who is the lead author. "That's kind of like going to a political rally and looking for diverse views. You aren't going to find them there. But you might find them at the local diner."

The authors argue that non-political blogs and other online spaces that are not focused on [politics](#) should be studied more in the future, in order to better understand how these spaces contribute to [political discourse](#).

"The political discussions Americans have in non-political spaces add up to something big quantitatively, and that should be honored as civic participation just as much as participation in dedicated political forums," Munson said. "Non-political spaces need to be on the research agenda for scholars of political communication."

The researchers were surprised to find that when blog readers encounter political posts in non-political blogs, the subject is not taboo. Readers reply to and engage the political contents of the post. In fact, political posts on non-political blogs actually generated slightly more comments from readers than posts about the blogs' main topics.

The study also found some diversity of opinions expressed by readers of these posts. Commenters agreed with the author 41 percent of the time, disagreed 14 percent of the time, and did not take sides 45 percent of the time.

"Political discussion in spaces where people gather for other reasons may be the antidote to polarization," Resnick said. "When you have a relationship to maintain, you have to be a bit more civil."

Provided by University of Michigan

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