

APRIL 25, 2013

Civic Engagement in the Digital Age

The well-educated and the well-off are more likely than others to participate in civic life online – just as those groups have always been more likely to be active in politics and community affairs offline. Political activity in social networking spaces shows a somewhat more moderate version of that trend.

Aaron Smith
Senior Researcher, Pew Research Center

<http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2013/Civic-Engagement.aspx>

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project
1615 L St., N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20036

Media Inquiries:
202.419.4500

Summary of Findings

This study examines online and offline political engagement and pays special attention to the role of social networking sites in people's political activities.¹ There are several major findings:

- Class differences, especially those related to educational attainment, are prominent in political engagement of all kinds, whether that activity takes place offline, online, or within the specific context of social networking sites (SNS), though the trend is somewhat more moderate in SNS.
- There has been major growth in political activity on SNS between 2008 and this survey in 2012. The number of social networking site users has grown from 33% of the online population in 2008 to 69% of the online population in 2012. And there have been major jumps in the proportion of SNS users who post political news, who friend or follow candidates, and who joined an SNS group organized around political or social issues. In addition, notable shares of SNS users say their activity on the sites has prompted them to learn more about social or political issues and to take action around those issues.
- For most politically active SNS users, social networking sites are not a separate realm of political activity. They are frequently active in other aspects of civic life.
- Even as online platforms have grown more prominent in political affairs, Americans' day-to-day political conversations mostly occur offline.

The four ways we measured civic engagement

First, 48% of adults directly take part in a civic group or activity.

In this survey, the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project measured several broad categories of civic activity that Americans might engage in. The first finding is that half (48%) of American adults directly took part in a civic group or activity in the 12 months preceding our August 2012 survey. This includes anyone who did one or more of the following six activities:

- 35% of American adults have recently worked with fellow citizens to solve a problem in their community
- 22% have attended a political meeting on local, town, or school affairs
- 13% have been an active member of a group that tries to influence the public or government
- 10% have attended a political rally or speech
- 7% have worked or volunteered for a political party or candidate
- 6% have attended an organized protest

¹ This work expands a study that we conducted in 2008: "The Internet and Civic Engagement." September, 2009. Available at <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/15--The-Internet-and-Civic-Engagement.aspx>

Second, 39% of adults recently contacted a government official or spoke out in a public forum via offline methods. Third, 34% did those things via online methods.

In the second category of public engagement, we found that 39% of American adults have recently *contacted a government official or spoken out in a public forum* about an issue that is important to them via offline means. In the third category, we found that 34% have done so via online methods. This includes anyone who did one or more of the following activities that might take place in either online or offline spaces:

- 22% of American adults have recently signed a paper petition; 17% have signed a petition online.
- 21% of American adults have recently contacted a government official about an issue that is important to them in person, by phone, or by letter; 18% have done so online, by email, or by text message.
- 7% of American adults have recently called into a live radio or TV show to express an opinion about a political or social issue; 18% have commented on an online news story or blog post about this type of issue.
- 3% of American adults have sent a letter to the editor to a newspaper or magazine by regular mail; 4% have done so online, by email, or by text message.

Fourth, 39% of adults do political or civic activities on social networking sites.

In the fourth category, 39% of American adults *took part in some sort of political activity in the context of a social networking site* such as Facebook or Twitter in the 12 months preceding our survey. This includes anyone who did one or more of the following eight activities listed in the table below:

Political engagement on social networking sites

60% of American adults use social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter; these are some of the civic behaviors they have taken part in on these sites:

	% of SNS users who have done this	% of all adults who have done this
“Like” or promote material related to political/social issues that others have posted	38%	23%
Encourage other people to vote	35	21
Post your own thoughts/comments on political or social issues	34	20
Repost content related to political/social issues	33	19
Encourage others to take action on political/social issues that are important to you	31	19
Post links to political stories or articles for others to read	28	17
Belong to a group that is involved in political/social issues, or working to advance a cause	21	12
Follow elected officials, candidates for office or other public figures	20	12
Total who said yes to any of the activities listed above	66%	39%

In total, nearly three-quarters (72%) of all American adults did at least one of the activities that we measured in those four broad categories of civic and political engagement.

Traditional political activities are most common among the well-educated and financially well-off, regardless of whether they take place online or offline. On social networking sites, income-related differences are more modest — but civic engagement in these spaces is still most prevalent among those with higher educational levels.

Those who live in higher income households and those with higher levels of education (specifically, those who have attended or graduated from college) are consistently more likely than those with lower income or education levels to take part in many of the online and offline civic behaviors we measured in this study. This gap is especially pronounced for the following specific activities:

- Working with fellow citizens to solve a problem in one’s community
- Attending a political meeting on local, town, or school affairs
- Being an active member of a group that tries to influence public policy or government
- Attending a political rally or speech
- Working or volunteering for a political party or candidate
- Contacting a government official about an issue that is important to you (both online and offline)
- Signing a petition (both digitally and on paper)
- Commenting on a news story or blog post online

On the other hand, when it comes to the 60% of American adults who use social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter, political participation is more balanced between lower and higher income Americans. Among social networking site users, political participation is identical for those who live in the lowest earning households (annual household income of less than \$10,000) and highest earning households (annual household income of \$150,000 or more).

Higher income Americans are more likely to use social networking sites in the first place, so income-related differences are evident when the base measurement applies to all adults – not just SNS users. But even on an “all adults” basis, the gap in political participation between the lowest and highest income groups is generally smaller on social networking sites than it is for other types of political engagement.

At the same time, even as differences in social networking engagement are less pronounced with respect to income, the college-educated are significantly more likely than those with a high school education to take part in nearly every SNS-related behavior we measured in our survey. And in contrast to income (where SNS users in the lowest and highest categories were equally likely to use these sites for political reasons) these educational differences persist even when we account for different levels of adoption between those with lower and higher education levels.

In other words, even as the impact of income on political participation is more modest in the context of

social networking sites, socio-economic distinctions related to education still play a prominent role in these spaces.

More broadly, those at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum are generally less involved with the day-to-day outreach, chatter, and discussion around political issues — regardless of whether those discussions take place in physical or digital spaces. Compared with the well-educated and financially well-off, they are much less likely to receive political communications through a variety of channels, or to have conversations about political or social issues with others in either online or offline venues. Ultimately, political issues, political activity, and political discussion are less present in the lives of these Americans than they are for those at the upper end of the socio-economic scale.

Younger adults are just as likely as older adults to be engaged in many political activities, and are much more likely to be politically active on social networking sites.

Most types of political engagement are equally commonplace among Americans of different generations. There are only modest age-related differences when it comes to getting involved in political groups or in-person activities, speaking out publicly in online spaces, or speaking out publicly in offline spaces.²

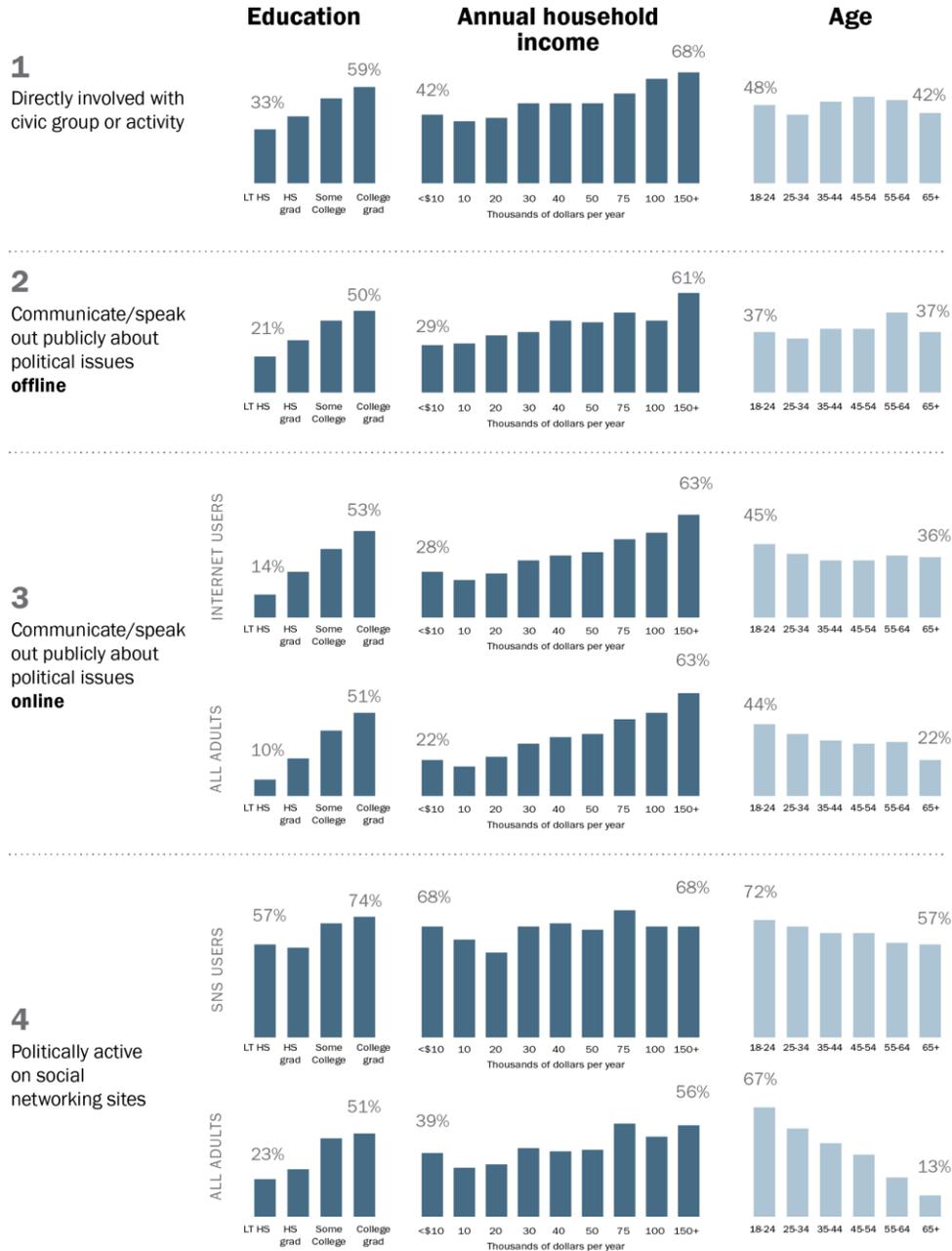
Social networking sites (SNS) stand in contrast to these other venues. Political engagement on social networking sites is especially commonplace among the youngest Americans, as two-thirds (67%) of all 18-24 year olds (and nearly three quarters of those young adults who use social networking sites) engaged in some sort of social network-related political activity in the 12 months preceding our survey. Older adults tend to be fairly politically active on social networking sites to the extent that they use them, but are relatively unlikely to use these sites in the first place. So, although nearly six in ten SNS-using seniors are politically active on these sites, that works out to just 13% of all Americans in the 65+ age group.

Indeed, the youngest American adults are more likely to engage in political behaviors on social networking sites than in any other venue. And the typical (median) 18-29 year old took part in three of the eight SNS-oriented political behaviors measured in this survey. The general youth of the “political SNS user” group also helps to explain the balance between high- and low-income users when it comes to political activity in these spaces, since many of these younger adults are only beginning their careers and have not fully maximized their earning potential.

² As was the case in our 2008 survey on this subject, it is important to note that this survey was conducted during a presidential election campaign featuring significant campaign outreach to younger adults. It may be the case that younger Americans were more engaged than average during the period this survey was fielded, and that these age differences between young and old would be more pronounced had the survey been conducted during a non-presidential campaign or outside of campaign season entirely.

Online traditional political activities are most popular among the well-educated and the financially well-off

Education and income, more so than age, influence people's civic involvement.
Percent involvement by each group



There has been major growth in political activity on social networking sites since 2008, and discussions on social networking sites can lead to further engagement with political issues.

The structure of political activity on social networking sites has grown in importance in recent years. The number of social networking site users has grown from 33% of the online population in 2008³ to 69% of the online population in 2012. And as the overall SNS user population has grown, more of these users are engaging in one way or another with political or social issues on these sites, compared with 2008 when we asked a similar set of questions about this subject. Here are some of the key areas of growth:

- In 2008, 11% of social networking site users said that they used these sites to post political news for others to read — at the time that worked out to just 3% of all adults. In 2012, 28% of SNS users (representing 17% of all adults) said they posted links to political stories or articles and 33% (representing 19% of all adults) said they posted other types of political content on these sites.
- In 2008, 12% of social networking site users (representing 3% of all adults) said they had friended a political candidate on these sites. In 2012, 20% of users (representing 12% of all adults) said they have friended or followed a candidate or similar political figure.
- In 2008, 13% of users (representing 3% of all adults) said they had started or joined a group on a social networking site organized around political or social issues. By 2012, the proportion of social networking site users who do this had risen to 21% (12% of all adults).

We also asked directly about the impact of social networking site discussions on users' political behaviors and found that:

- 43% of social networking site users say they have decided to learn more about a political or social issue because of something they read about on a social networking site.
- 18% of social networking site users say they have decided to take action involving a political or social issue because of something they read on those sites.

In each instance, users were evenly split between those who found out about the issue in question from someone they know personally, and those who found out about it from someone they don't know personally, such as an organization or public figure. Younger SNS users are especially likely to engage in deeper investigations of issues based on discussions within those sites, as are those with a college degree.

³ As noted above, 39% of all adults took part in some kind of political activity in 2012. This means that more Americans used social networking sites for political purposes in 2012 than *used them at all* as recently as the 2008 campaign.

The world of politics on social networking sites is — for most users — not a separate domain of political activity. “Political social networking site users” are frequently (but not universally) active in other aspects of civic life.

Many discussions about the impact of the internet on political and civic life assume that the people who take part in political activities on social networking sites are separate and distinct from those who take part in political activities outside social networking sites. In fact, the typical politically active American is active in a range of venues — online, offline, and in social networking spaces — and those who get involved politically on social networking sites tend to take part in a wide range of behaviors that occur outside the boundaries of sites like Facebook or Twitter.

As noted above, 39% of Americans performed some sort of political activity on a social networking site in the 12 months preceding our survey. We refer to them throughout this report as “political social networking site (SNS) users,” and these users tend to be active in many other areas of political or civic life:

- 63% of political SNS users have recently gotten involved in a political activity or group, such as attending a political meeting or working with fellow citizens to solve a problem in their community. The national average is 48%.
- 60% have expressed their opinion about a political or social issue via *online* channels — for example, by sending an email to a government official, or signing an online petition. The national average is 34%.
- 53% have expressed their opinion about a political or social issue via offline channels, for example, by sending a letter to a government official, or signing a paper petition. The national average is 39%.
- 20% have made a political contribution of some kind. This is statistically similar to the 16% rate within the population as a whole.

Adding these four categories together, some 83% of political SNS users also get involved in political or social issues in one way or another outside the bounds of social networking sites themselves.⁴

Of course, this also means that 17% of political SNS users — representing 8% of the total adult population — engage in political activity on social networking sites but in no other online or offline venues. Demographically, this “politically active on social networking sites but not elsewhere” group tends to be younger, less affluent, and less well-educated than the larger group that participates politically on social networking spaces and also other venues. They also have less overall exposure to political communications and outreach, and are less likely to take part in interpersonal political “chatter.” In other words, even as they interact with political issues on social networking sites, they tend to get involved with those issues with only modest intensity.

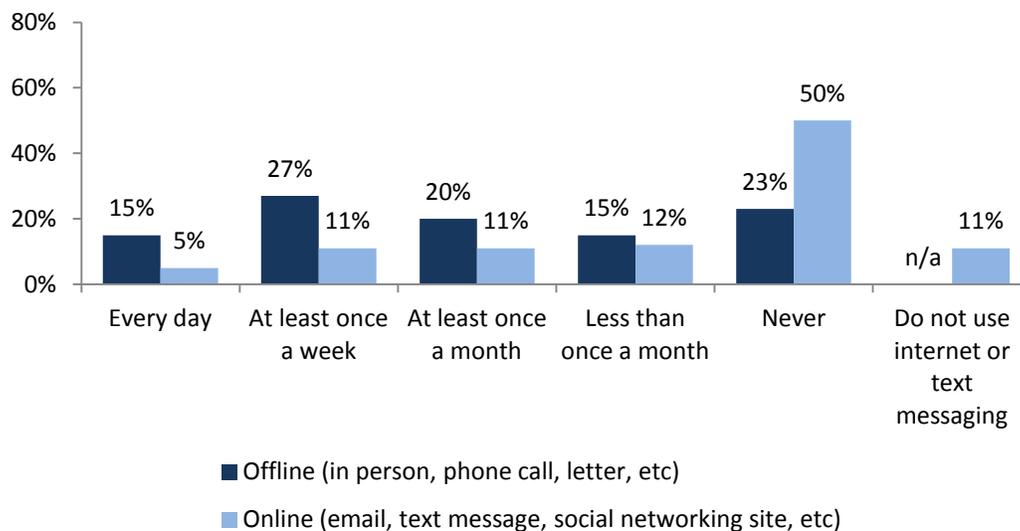
⁴ This correlation between online and offline political activity is also true more generally. Individuals who are politically active on social networking sites are also highly active in offline spaces, and those who are politically active offline tend to have relatively high rates of engagement in social networking spaces. But this report is especially interested in how new technologies are used by people as they engage in the political process, and as a result we are focusing our analysis on trends in social networking engagement rather than those in other areas.

Even as online platforms have grown more prominent in recent years, Americans’ day-to-day political conversations — and political contributions — are still more likely to take place offline.

Despite the increased prominence of online platforms when it comes to Americans’ political activity, much of the day-to-day conversation around these issues takes place in traditional (offline) channels. On an “every day” level, Americans are three times as likely to discuss politics or public affairs with others through offline channels (in person, by phone call, or by letter) as they are through online channels. Even the most tech-savvy users — such as young adults, college graduates, or those with high incomes— discuss politics with greater frequency offline than online.

How Americans discuss politics and public affairs with others

How frequently Americans discuss politics or public affairs with others...(all figures based on all adults)

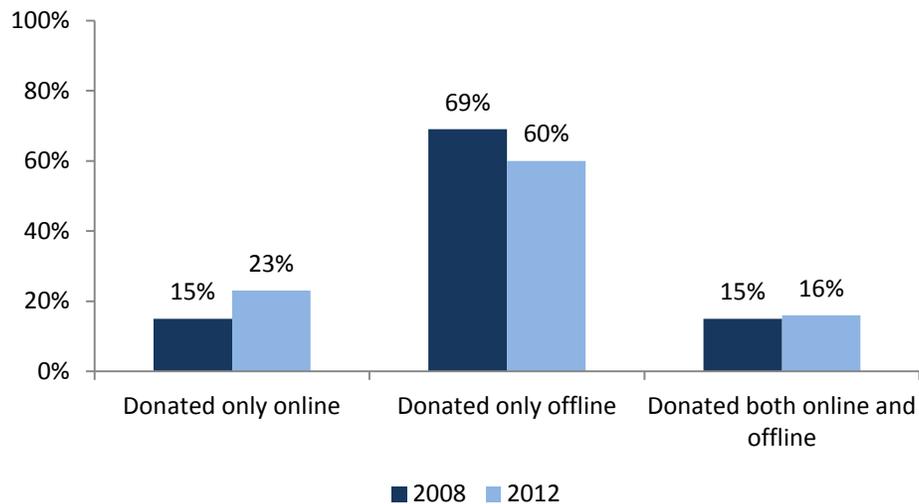


Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent’s cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Similarly, the bulk of political campaign contributions happen offline, even as online donations have grown more prominent in recent years. Some 23% of political donors made *only* online contributions in 2012, yet the substantial majority of political donors (60%) make contributions only via offline methods (that is, in person, over the telephone, or via regular mail).

Online political contributions have grown more common since 2008, but most donations still occur offline

How donors to political candidates, parties, or organizations made their contributions



Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Margin of error is +/-5.4 percentage points based on political donors (n=453).

Mobilization and Outreach: Email and social network users are frequently contacted and asked to take part in civic activities within those online spaces.

Although online tools play a secondary role in Americans' day-to-day political discussions with others, they have more prominence when it comes to outreach by groups or organizations looking to encourage political action (such as donating money, contacting a public official, or working for a candidate or cause). Email is particularly notable in this regard: 21% of email users regularly get asked on email to take some action around a political or social issue — that works out to 18% of all Americans who regularly receive mobilization messages via email. Social network users also tend to receive relatively frequent calls to action within the context of these sites, as 13% of SNS users (representing 8% of all adults) regularly receive outreach messages on these sites.

Taking all of these communications modes together, some 65% of Americans are contacted at least occasionally by groups or individuals asking them to take some sort of civic or political action, with 33% saying they are contacted for this reason on a regular basis (once a week or more frequently). As with many of the civic behaviors discussed here, these contacts are reported more frequently by those with relatively high income and education levels, and those who receive frequent political communications tend to be highly active in various online and offline venues.

How Americans are asked to take part in civic actions

% of American adults who are asked to do things like work for a candidate, go to a meeting, give money to a cause, or get in touch with a public official by...

	Total	Regularly (daily, every few days, once a week)
Print letter	43%	12%
Phone call	35	12
Email	31	18
Asked in person	23	3
Asked on social networking site	16	8
Text message	5	2
Asked on Twitter	2	1

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

There are also some partisan differences among the different types of outreach. Conservatives and Republicans are more likely than liberals and Democrats to receive political "calls to action" in the mail, while liberals and Democrats are more likely than conservatives and Republicans to receive these messages on social networking sites.

Those who have been affected by the recent economic downturn are actively involved with political and social issues across a range of platforms.

Overall, some 56% of the population has experienced one or more of the following impacts in the preceding year as a result of the recent economic slowdown:

- 46% have cut back on the amount or quality of food they purchase
- 38% have put off medical or dental treatment
- 25% have delayed making a rent or house payment

Members of this "economically affected" group tend to have relatively low incomes compared with those who have not experienced these impacts, but are also relatively young and well-educated as a group. Moreover, the economically affected are fairly active when it comes to expressing themselves about the issues of the day in various online and offline venues. Compared with the 44% of Americans who have not experienced any of these impacts:

- The "economically affected" are no less likely to own a cell phone, to use the internet, or to use social networking sites.
- They are equally likely to directly take part in an in-person political group or activity. Indeed, they are slightly *more* likely to have recently attended an organized protest or a local political

meeting.

- They are equally likely to receive political outreach messages across a range of platforms.
- They are equally likely to publicly speak out about issues that are important to them in online forums, and a bit more likely (by a 41%-36% margin) to do so in offline forums.
- They are equally likely to take part in political actions or discussions on social networking sites, and are in fact a bit more likely (by a 35%-27% margin) to encourage others to take action about issues that are important to them on these spaces.

Campaign donations are one of the few areas where the “affected” stand out from the rest of the population. Some 13% have made a campaign contribution in the year preceding our survey (compared with 20% of those who have not experienced any of these impacts).

About this survey

This report is based on the findings of a survey on Americans' use of the Internet. The results in this report are based on data from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International from July 16 to August 7, 2012, among a sample of 2,253 adults, age 18 and older. Telephone interviews were conducted in English and Spanish by landline (1,353) and cell phone (900, including 469 without a landline phone). For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 2.3 percentage points. For results based Internet users (n=1,873), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry Brady for generously contributing their time and expertise to the development of surveys of civic engagement in both 2008 and 2012.

Part 1: Online and offline civic engagement in America

Involvement with political issues can take many forms — such as joining or volunteering for a politically motivated group, petitioning the government about policy issues, donating money to an organization or cause, or simply talking about important issues around the dinner table or office water cooler. In this survey we asked about a number of different political activities — including direct involvement with political activities or groups; speaking out publicly or petitioning government officials through online and offline channels; and political behaviors on social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter — and found that 72% of American adults have taken part in at least one of those actions or behaviors.⁵ In this chapter of the report, we examine some of these specific behaviors and activities, with a particular focus on people who are especially active in political or social issues.

Half of all U.S. adults have gotten personally involved in a civic group or event in the preceding year.

Half of the adult U.S. population (48%) has been directly involved in a civic group, or has taken part in some kind of “in person” activity around a political or social issue in the 12 months preceding our August 2012 survey. We came to this figure by asking about six different political activities that people might take part in (see the table below for a full list) and found that 48% of Americans have done at least one of them (with that group being evenly split between those who did a single activity out of the six we measured and those who took part in multiple activities).

Direct involvement in civic activities/groups

% of U.S. adults who have done the following in the last 12 months

Worked with fellow citizens to solve a problem in your community	35%
Attended a political meeting on local, town, or school affairs	22
Been an active member of a group that tries to influence public policy or gov't, not including a political party	13
Attended a political rally or speech	10
Worked or volunteered for a political party or candidate	7
Attended an organized protest	6
Total (“yes” to any of the activities listed above)	48%

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent’s cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

⁵ This figure includes 6 questions involving direct involvement with a political activity or group; 4 involving offline communications about political or social issues; 4 involving online communications about political or social issues; and 8 involving political behaviors on social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter.

We asked a similar set of questions in August 2008, and overall there has been little change in these behaviors over the four years between 2008 and 2012. The proportion of adults who have recently worked with fellow citizens to solve a problem in their community increased from 28% in August 2008 to 35% at a similar point in 2012, but otherwise these behaviors were equally prevalent in 2008 and 2012.

In addition, a key finding of our 2008 research was that Americans with high levels of income and educational attainment are much more likely than the less educated and less well-off to take part in groups or events organized around advancing political or social issues. That tendency is as true today as it was four years ago, as this type of political involvement remains heavily associated with both household income and educational attainment.

Direct involvement in civic groups/activities (gender/age/race)

% of adults in each group who have personally participated in a civic event, activity, or group in the preceding 12 months

All adults age 18+		48%
Gender		
a	Men (n=1055)	50
b	Women (n=1198)	46
Age		
a	18-24 (n=232)	48
b	25-34 (n=267)	42
c	35-44 (n=258)	50
d	45-54 (n=392)	53 ^{bf}
e	55-64 (n=439)	51 ^{bf}
f	65+ (n=627)	42
Race/ethnicity		
a	White, Non-Hispanic (n=1627)	50 ^c
b	Black, Non-Hispanic (n=266)	48 ^c
c	Hispanic (n=230)	36

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Note: Columns marked with a superscript letter (^a) or another letter indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each demographic trait.

Direct involvement in civic groups/activities (income/education)

% of adults in each group who have personally participated in a civic event, activity, or group in the preceding 12 months

All adults age 18+		48%
Household income		
a	Less than \$10,000/yr (n=201)	42
b	\$10,000-\$19,999 (n=265)	38
c	\$20,000-\$29,999 (n=218)	40
d	\$30,000-\$39,999 (n=208)	49 ^b
e	\$40,000-\$49,999 (n=195)	48 ^b
f	\$50,000-\$74,999 (n=309)	49 ^b
g	\$75,000-\$99,999 (n=171)	55 ^{abc}
h	\$100,000-\$149,999 (n=209)	63 ^{abcdef}
i	\$150,000+ (n=131)	68 ^{abcdefg}
Educational attainment		
a	No high school diploma (n=231)	33
b	High school grad (n=718)	41
c	Some College (n=568)	52 ^{ab}
d	College + (n=726)	59 ^{abc}

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Note: Columns marked with a superscript letter (^a) or another letter indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each demographic trait.

In terms of political affiliation and ideology, liberal Democrats take part in political groups or activities at relatively high rates compared to other Democrats and to moderate or conservative Republicans (these liberal Democrats are especially likely to attend a political meeting on local, town, or school affairs; to be an active member of a political group; and to attend an organized protest).

Additionally, Democrats in general are more likely than Republicans to have recently attended an organized protest, and liberals in general are more likely to do this than conservatives and moderates. Otherwise, there are relatively few differences on this subject related to party identification or political ideology.

Direct involvement in civic groups/activities (party/ideology)

% of adults in each group who have personally participated in a civic event, activity, or group in the preceding 12 months

All adults ages 18+		48%
Party identification		
a	Republican (n=534)	48
b	Democrat (n=740)	50
c	Independent (n=777)	50
Political ideology		
a	Conservative (n=857)	50
b	Moderate (n=730)	49
c	Liberal (n=482)	51
Party + Ideology		
a	Conservative Rep (n=388)	51
b	Moderate/Liberal Rep (n=129)	45
c	Moderate/Conservative Dem (n=400)	48
d	Liberal Dem (n=296)	57 ^{bc}

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent’s cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Note: Columns marked with a superscript letter (^a) or another letter indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each demographic trait.

39% of all U.S. adults have used offline methods to contact a government official or speak out in a media channel about an issue that is important to them, and one third have done so using online methods.

In addition to asking about their direct involvement in civic events or activities, we also asked our survey respondents whether they have spoken out recently about political or social issues in various spaces or public forums. As we did in our 2008 study on this subject, we asked about four separate types of civic communication, each having an online and an offline component:

Offline version	Online version
Sign a paper petition	Sign a petition online
Contact a government official in person, by phone, or by letter about an issue that is important to you	Contact a government official online, by email, or by text message about an issue that is important to you
Call into a live radio or TV show to express an opinion	Comment on an online news story or blog post to express an opinion about a political or social issue
Send a “letter to the editor” by regular mail to a newspaper or magazine	Send a “letter to the editor” to a newspaper or magazine online, by email, or by text message

In total, 39% of U.S. adults have recently taken part in at least one of the four offline activities that we asked about:

- 22% of U.S. adults have signed a paper petition
- 21% of U.S. adults have contacted a national, state, or local government official in person, by phone, or by letter about an issue that is important to them
- 7% have called into a live radio or TV show to express an opinion
- 3% have sent a “letter to the editor” to a newspaper or magazine by regular mail

As with the “personal/group engagement” activities discussed above, the well-educated and financially well-off are especially likely to speak out about political or social issues in this way, and whites are more likely to do so than non-whites.

Offline civic communications (gender/age/race)

% of adults in each group who have signed a petition, contacted a gov't official, called a radio/TV show, or sent a letter to the editor offline in the preceding 12 months

All adults ages 18+		39%
Gender		
a	Men (n=1055)	39
b	Women (n=1198)	39
Age		
a	18-24 (n=232)	37
b	25-34 (n=267)	33
c	35-44 (n=258)	39
d	45-54 (n=392)	39
e	55-64 (n=439)	49 ^{abcd}
f	65+ (n=627)	37
Race/ethnicity		
a	White, Non-Hispanic (n=1627)	43 ^{bc}
b	Black, Non-Hispanic (n=266)	31
c	Hispanic (n=230)	26

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent’s cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Note: Columns marked with a superscript letter (^a) or another letter indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each demographic trait.

Offline civic communications (income/education)

% of adults in each group who have signed a petition, contacted a gov't official, called a radio/TV show, or sent a letter to the editor offline in the preceding 12 months

All adults ages 18+		39%
Household income		
a	Less than \$10,000/yr (n=201)	29
b	\$10,000-\$19,999 (n=265)	30
c	\$20,000-\$29,999 (n=218)	35
d	\$30,000-\$39,999 (n=208)	37
e	\$40,000-\$49,999 (n=195)	44 ^{ab}
f	\$50,000-\$74,999 (n=309)	43 ^{ab}
g	\$75,000-\$99,999 (n=171)	49 ^{abcd}
h	\$100,000-\$149,999 (n=209)	44 ^{ab}
i	\$150,000+ (n=131)	61 ^{abcdeh}
Education attainment		
a	No high school diploma (n=231)	21
b	High school grad (n=718)	32 ^a
c	Some College (n=568)	44 ^{ab}
d	College + (n=726)	50 ^{ab}

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Note: Columns marked with a superscript letter (^a) or another letter indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each demographic trait.

When it comes to partisanship and political ideology, conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats are more likely than moderate/liberal Republicans or moderate/conservative Democrats to have done at least one of the four offline activities we asked about in our survey. In terms of specific activities, political liberals and liberal Democrats are especially likely to have recently signed a paper petition, while conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats are especially likely to have recently contacted a government official using offline means.

Offline civic communications (party/ideology)

% of adults in each group who have signed a petition, contacted a gov't official, called a radio/TV show, or sent a letter to the editor offline in the preceding 12 months

All adults ages 18+		39%
Party identification		
a	Republican (n=534)	43
b	Democrat (n=740)	43
c	Independent (n=777)	38
Political ideology		
a	Conservative (n=857)	41
b	Moderate (n=730)	37
c	Liberal (n=482)	43
Party + Ideology		
a	Conservative Rep (n=388)	46 ^c
b	Moderate/Liberal Rep (n=129)	40
c	Moderate/Conservative Dem (n=400)	36
d	Liberal Dem (n=296)	53 ^{bc}

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Note: Columns marked with a superscript letter (^a) or another letter indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each demographic trait.

Looking at the online versions of our "civic communications" behaviors:

- 21% of internet users have commented on an online news story or blog post to express an opinion about a political or social issue
- 20% of internet users have signed a petition online
- 20% of internet or text message users have contacted a national, state, or local government official online, by email, or by text message about an issue that is important to them.
- 5% of internet or text message users have sent a "letter to the editor" to a newspaper or magazine online, by email, or by text message

Taken together, 38% of Americans who use the internet or text messaging (representing 34% of all U.S. adults) have done at least one of these activities in the last year. Again, the well-educated and financially better off are significantly more likely than those with lower levels of education or income to speak out about civic issues via digital channels (whites are also more likely to do so than non-whites).

Online civic communications (gender/age/race)

% of adults in each group who have signed a petition, contacted a gov't official, sent a letter to the editor, or commented on a news story or blog post online or by text message in the preceding 12 months

All adults ages 18+		34%
Gender		
a	Men (n=1055)	34
b	Women (n=1198)	33
Age		
a	18-24 (n=232)	44 ^{cdef}
b	25-34 (n=267)	38 ^f
c	35-44 (n=258)	34 ^f
d	45-54 (n=392)	32 ^f
e	55-64 (n=439)	33 ^f
f	65+ (n=627)	22
Race/ethnicity		
a	White, Non-Hispanic (n=1627)	38 ^{bc}
b	Black, Non-Hispanic (n=266)	23
c	Hispanic (n=230)	17

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Note: Columns marked with a superscript letter (^a) or another letter indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each demographic trait.

Online civic communications (income/education)

% of adults in each group who have signed a petition, contacted a gov't official, sent a letter to the editor, or commented on a news story or blog post online or by text message in the preceding 12 months

All adults ages 18+		34%
Household income		
a	Less than \$10,000/yr (n=201)	22
b	\$10,000-\$19,999 (n=265)	18
c	\$20,000-\$29,999 (n=218)	24
d	\$30,000-\$39,999 (n=208)	32 ^{ab}
e	\$40,000-\$49,999 (n=195)	36 ^{abc}
f	\$50,000-\$74,999 (n=309)	38 ^{abc}
g	\$75,000-\$99,999 (n=171)	47 ^{abcd}
h	\$100,000-\$149,999 (n=209)	51 ^{abcdef}
i	\$150,000+ (n=131)	63 ^{abcdefg}
Education attainment		
a	No high school diploma (n=231)	10
b	High school grad (n=718)	23 ^a
c	Some College (n=568)	40 ^{ab}
d	College + (n=726)	51 ^{abc}

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Note: Columns marked with a superscript letter (^a) or another letter indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each demographic trait.

Self-identified liberals who use the internet or text messaging are a bit more likely than conservatives or moderates to engage in at least one of the four modes of online outreach that we measured in our survey. Liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans also stand out on this issue, especially when it comes to contacting a government official online or signing an online petition.

Online civic communications (party/ideology)

% of adults in each group who have signed a petition, contacted a gov't official, sent a letter to the editor, or commented on a news story or blog post online or by text message in the preceding 12 months

All adults ages 18+		34%
Party identification		
a	Republican (n=534)	37
b	Democrat (n=740)	33
c	Independent (n=777)	35
Political ideology		
a	Conservative (n=857)	33
b	Moderate (n=730)	34
c	Liberal (n=482)	41 ^{ab}
Party + Ideology		
a	Conservative Rep (n=388)	40 ^c
b	Moderate/Liberal Rep (n=129)	35 ^c
c	Moderate/Conservative Dem (n=400)	25
d	Liberal Dem (n=296)	47 ^{bc}

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Note: Columns marked with a superscript letter (^a) or another letter indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each demographic trait.

In total, half (50%) of American adults engaged in at least one of these eight online or offline communications behaviors in the year preceding our survey — and of this group, 42% did one of these activities while 58% took part in multiple activities. In particular, the college educated stand out as taking part in a large number of these political communications.

Other types of “digital-only” civic communications

Along with the four “matched pair” civic communications listed above, we also asked two additional questions pertaining specifically to digital interaction that do not correlate directly to offline behaviors:

- 11% of internet users have *posted pictures or video online* related to political or social issues
- 18% of text messaging users have *exchanged texts* with others about political or social issues

Demographically, younger adults stand out for their use of multimedia and texting around political or social issues, and the college-educated are more likely than those with lower levels of education to share texts about these issues. When it comes to ideological identification, self-identified liberals who use the internet or text messaging are more likely than similar conservatives to post political pictures or

videos online (15% vs. 9%) and to share text messages with others about political topics (22% vs. 15%).

Other digital communications

% in each group who have done the following in the preceding 12 months

		Post pictures or videos online related to political/social issues (based on internet users, n=1,873)	Send text messages about political or social issues (based on text messaging users, n=1,409)
Total		11%	18%
Gender			
a	Men	11	18
b	Women	11	17
Age			
a	18-24	21 ^{bcdef}	29 ^{bcdef}
b	25-34	14 ^{def}	15
c	35-44	12 ^{def}	17
d	45-54	7	15
e	55-64	6	13
f	65+	5	17
Race/ethnicity			
a	White, Non-Hispanic	11	19 ^c
b	Black, Non-Hispanic	10	16
c	Hispanic	9	12
Household income			
a	Less than \$10,000/yr	16 ^f	18
b	\$10,000-\$19,999	10	18
c	\$20,000-\$29,999	10	13
d	\$30,000-\$39,999	11	17
e	\$40,000-\$49,999	15 ^f	23
f	\$50,000-\$74,999	8	19
g	\$75,000-\$99,999	11	17
h	\$100,000-\$149,999	11	18
i	\$150,000+	13	26 ^c
Education attainment			
a	No high school diploma	8	12
b	High school grad	9	14
c	Some College	11	21 ^{ab}
d	College +	13 ^b	20 ^{ab}

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Note: Columns marked with a superscript letter (^a) or another letter indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each demographic trait.

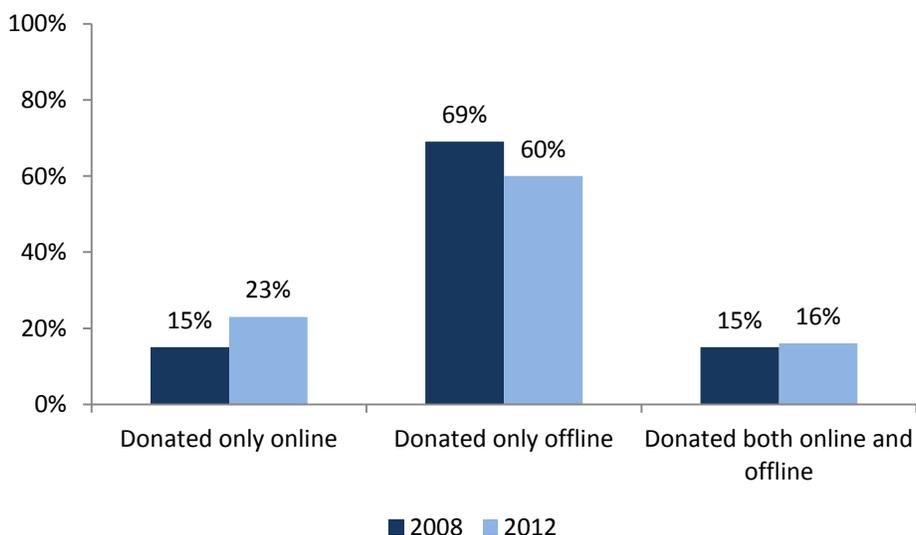
Online political contributions have grown more common since 2008, although offline contributions still dominate.

Some 16% of Americans have made a monetary contribution to a political candidate, party, or other political organization in the 12 months preceding our survey, similar to the 18% of Americans who had done so when we asked this question at a similar point in 2008.

Over that time period, online donations have become more common. Some 23% of political donors in 2012 said they made their contributions *only* online, compared with 15% who said this in 2008. However, the bulk of political contributors rely primarily on traditional methods of giving (i.e. in person, over the telephone, or via regular mail); some 60% of political donors made only offline contributions in 2012.

Online political contributions have grown more common since 2008, but most donations still occur offline

16% of Americans made a monetary contribution to a political candidate, party, or organization in the preceding 12 months; this is how they made those contributions



Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Margin of error is +/-5.4 percentage points based on political donors (n=453).

Demographically, contributions to political causes, candidates, or groups are most common among older adults and those with relatively high levels of income and education. Some 28% of college graduates have made political contributions in the preceding year, as have 29% of those with a household income of \$75,000 or more per year and 27% of those 65 and older.

Although older adults are more likely to make a political donation in the first place, within the donor population itself, younger donors are more likely than their elders to contribute online — some 36% of political donors ages 18-49 contributed *only* online, compared with just 8% of donors ages 65 and older who made only online contributions. Online donations are also popular among the more affluent and

well-educated cohort of political donors.

And as we have seen with our [other research](#) on political campaign contributions, Democrats and Republicans (as well as liberals and conservatives) are equally likely to make contributions in the first place — but Democratic/liberal donors tend to lean toward online contributions, while Republican/conservative donors tend to make their contributions offline, in person, or over the telephone.

Online contributions are more common among the young and the upper income/education

Who makes political donations, and how those donors make their contributions

		% who have made a political contribution	% of donors (n=453) who contributed...		
			Online only	Offline only	Online and offline
Age					
a	18-49 (n=925)	12	36 ^{bc}	47	16
b	50-64 (n=663)	19	20 ^c	60 ^a	19 ^c
c	65+ (n=627)	27 ^{ab}	8	81 ^{ab}	11
Household Income					
a	Less than \$50,000 (n=1087)	11	14	76 ^b	10
b	\$50,000 or more (n=820)	23 ^a	31 ^a	49	20 ^a
Education					
a	High school grad or less (n=949)	9	9	85 ^{bc}	5
b	Some college (n=568)	16 ^a	21 ^a	59	18 ^a
c	College grad (n=726)	28 ^{ab}	31 ^a	48	20 ^a

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

As was the case when we asked this question in 2008, online and offline donors contributed similar amounts of money in 2012 to the candidates and causes they support:

- 56% of online donors (and 58% of offline donors) contributed \$100 or less this year to political candidates and campaigns.
- 32% of online donors (and 24% of offline donors) contributed \$101-\$500.
- 8% of online donors (and 7% of offline donors) contributed more than \$500.

Total contributions by online/offline political donors

How much donors have contributed to political candidates and campaigns in the preceding 12 months

	2008	2012
% of <u>online</u> donors who contributed...	(n=130)	(n=147)
\$50 or less	35	29
\$51 to \$100	26	27
\$101 to \$250	24	22
\$251 to \$500	6	10
\$501 to \$1000	2	5
\$1001 to \$2500	0	3
More than \$2500	1	0
% of <u>offline</u> donors who contributed...	(n=429)	(n=371)
\$50 or less	35	37
\$51 to \$100	27	21
\$101 to \$250	17	16
\$251 to \$500	5	8
\$501 to \$1000	4	3
\$1001 to \$2500	2	2
More than \$2500	2	2

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

Email and social network users are frequently asked to take part in civic activities within those online spaces.

When questioned about how they get asked by organizations (or other individuals) to take part in political activities — such as donating money, working for a candidate, attending political meetings, or contacting a public official — Americans point toward a wide range of channels through which they receive these requests.

Overall, print letters sent through the regular mail are the most common way by which Americans receive requests to take civic actions (some 43% of Americans receive these requests in the mail at least occasionally), followed closely by email and telephone calls. Requests that occur in the context of social networking sites and in-person interactions are the next most common ways in which people are asked to get involved, followed by requests via Twitter and text message.

However, email is the frontrunner when it comes to “regular” communication (defined here as requests that are received “daily”, “every few days”, or “once a week”). Some 21% of email users regularly get asked on email to take some action around political or social issues (that works out to 18% of all adults), with 6% of email users saying they receive these communications daily. Print letters, phone calls, and requests on social networking sites are also common ways in which Americans are asked to take part in

political activities.

How Americans are asked to take part in civic actions

% of American adults who are asked to do things like work for a candidate, go to a meeting, give money to a cause, or get in touch with a public official by...

	Total	Regularly (daily, every few days, once a week)
Print letter	43%	12%
Phone call	35	12
Email	31	18
Asked in person	23	3
Asked on social networking site	16	8
Text message	5	2
Asked on Twitter	2	1

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Taking all of these communications modes together, some 65% of Americans are contacted at least occasionally by groups or individuals asking them to take some sort of civic action, with 33% saying they receive these requests on a regular basis. As with many of the civic behaviors discussed here, this type of contact is reported more frequently by those with relatively high income and education levels. Some 81% of college graduates report being contacted at least occasionally by others seeking their involvement in political issues (compared with 34% of those who lack a high school diploma), as do 82% of those with an annual household income of \$75,000 or more per year (compared with 50% of those earning less than \$30,000 per year). And as one might expect from a group with this demographic profile, Americans who receive political mobilization or outreach messages are more likely to take part in a range of political or civic behaviors compared with those with less exposure to these messages.

Looking at the specific types of outreach we measured, conservatives and Republicans were more likely than liberals and Democrats to say they have received political "calls to action" in the mail, while the opposite is true for outreach on social networking sites. Some 52% of Republicans (vs. 43% of Democrats), 50% of conservatives (vs. 40% of liberals), and 60% of conservative Republicans receive political outreach messages via regular mail at least occasionally. On the other hand, liberals and Democrats were more likely than conservatives and Republicans to receive these messages on social networking sites. Some 32% of SNS-using Democrats (vs. 21% of Republicans), 34% of SNS-using liberals (vs. 23% of conservatives), and 41% of liberal Democrats who use these sites have received outreach or mobilization messages within the context of online social networks. Overall, liberals and conservatives are equally likely to say that they receive political communications in one venue or another at least occasionally, while Republicans are slightly more likely (by a 73% to 67% margin) to receive such messages than Democrats.

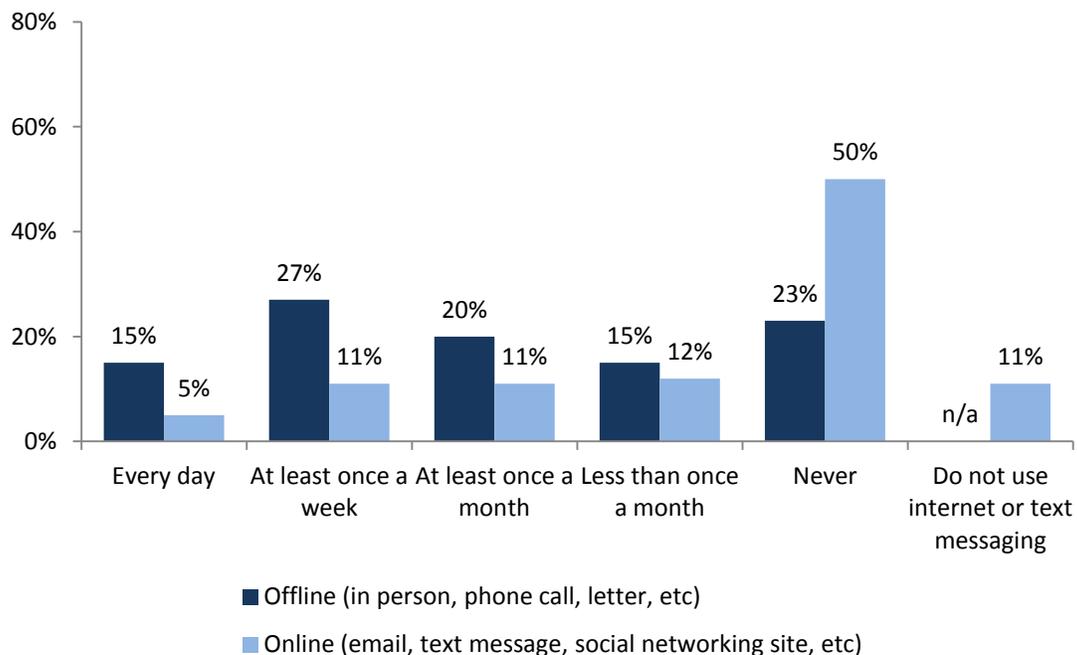
Americans are more likely to chat with friends about political issues offline than online.

When it comes to more general political “chatter,” eight in ten Americans say they have discussions about politics or public affairs at least occasionally in any venue or locale. And the bulk of those conversations take place in offline spaces such as in-person chats or telephone conversations.

Fully 76% of Americans say they ever discuss politics or public affairs with others in person, by telephone, or by print letter, with 15% of Americans saying they have political discussions in these venues on a daily basis. By way of comparison, some 44% of Americans who use the internet or text messaging say they discuss political issues with others online (such as by email, text message, or on social networking sites), with just 5% saying they have these digital discussions on a daily basis. Indeed, more than half of the entire adult population never has interpersonal discussions around political issues in online or digital spaces — 50% use these platforms but say that they never use them to engage in discussions around politics or public affairs, while an additional 11% do not use any digital communication platforms in the first place.

How Americans discuss politics and public affairs with others

How frequently Americans discuss politics or public affairs with others...(based on all adults)



Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent’s cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

In a continuation of the themes established throughout this report, the tendency to engage in political discussions tends to rise with one’s income and education level — regardless of whether those discussions occur in physical or digital spaces.

Demographics of political discussions

% within each group who ever discuss politics or public affairs with others online/offline

		Discuss <u>offline</u> – in person, by phone, by letter, etc (Based on all adults)	Discuss <u>online</u> – by email, by text message, by SNS, etc (Based on internet / text msg users)
Total		76%	44%
a	Men	78	43
b	Women	74	45
Age			
a	18-24	79 ^f	54 ^{def}
b	25-34	77 ^f	46
c	35-44	80 ^f	46
d	45-54	78 ^f	38
e	55-64	74 ^f	38
f	65+	68	41
Race/ethnicity			
a	White, Non-Hispanic)	78 ^c	46 ^{bc}
b	Black, Non-Hispanic	77 ^c	36
c	Hispanic	68	36
Household income			
a	Less than \$10,000/yr	64	39
b	\$10,000-\$19,999	61	35
c	\$20,000-\$29,999	72 ^b	36
d	\$30,000-\$39,999	78 ^{ab}	46
e	\$40,000-\$49,999	80 ^{ab}	44
f	\$50,000-\$74,999	82 ^{abc}	45 ^b
g	\$75,000-\$99,999	87 ^{abcd}	51 ^{abc}
h	\$100,000-\$149,999	90 ^{abcdef}	51 ^{abc}
i	\$150,000+	89 ^{abcde}	63 ^{abcdefgh}
Education attainment			
a	No high school diploma	56	34
b	High school grad	69 ^a	34
c	Some College	81 ^{ab}	46 ^{ab}
d	College +	89 ^{abc}	56 ^{abc}

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Note: Columns marked with a superscript letter (^a) or another letter indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each demographic trait.

Part 2: Political engagement on social networking sites

The digital landscape is significantly different in 2012 from what it was even as recently as 2008 — and the dramatic growth in the use of social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter over that time period is a big part of the story. When we conducted our first survey of online civic engagement in 2008, some 33% of online adults used social networking sites such as Facebook, and just 6% said they used Twitter or similar microblogging services. Four years later, 69% of online adults say they use social networking sites such as Facebook and 16% use Twitter, which means that 60% of *all U.S. adults* now use some sort of social networking platform.

As social networking sites have become more common, users now engage in a range of activities around political or social issues within these online spaces — from encouraging their friends to vote or suggesting political content to others, to joining issue-oriented groups or following the posts of politicians or other public figures. In our 2012 survey we asked about eight different politically oriented behaviors that users might take part in on social networking sites, and some 66% of SNS users said that they had done at least one of them in the past year. We refer to this group as “political social networking site users,” and they comprise 39% of the total U.S. adult population.

Political activity on social networking sites

60% of American adults use social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter. These are some of the civic activities they engage in on these sites.

	% of SNS users who have done this	% of all adults who have done this
“Like” or promote material related to political/social issues that others have posted	38%	23%
Encourage other people to vote	35	21
Post your own thoughts/comments on political or social issues	34	20
Repost content related to political/social issues	33	19
Encourage others to take action on political/social issues that are important to you	31	19
Post links to political stories or articles for others to read	28	17
Belong to a group that is involved in political/social issues, or working to advance a cause	21	12
Follow elected officials, candidates for office, or other public figures	20	12
Total have done at least one of these	66%	39%

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent’s cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Some 24% of political social networking site users did just one of these eight activities, while the remaining 76% did multiple activities. The median political SNS user engaged in three of the eight activities outlined above.

Because social networking sites were a modest component of our 2008 study, we do not have trend data available for all of these activities over the full four-year period. However, we did ask similar questions about a subset of these behaviors that illustrate the growing importance of social networking sites as a place for activism and discussion about social or political activities:

- In 2008, 11% of social networking site users said they used these sites to post political news for others to read. In 2012, 28% of users said they posted links to political stories or articles and 33% said they reposted other types of political content on these sites.
- In 2008, 12% of social networking site users said they had friended a political candidate on these sites. In 2012, 20% of users said they have friended or followed a candidate or similar political figure.
- In 2008, 13% of users said they had started or joined a group on a social networking site organized around political or social issues. By 2012, the proportion of social networking site users who do this had risen to 21%.

Demographics of political engagement on social networking sites

Among Americans who use social networking sites, political activity on online social networks is common across a wide range of subgroups. Indeed, a majority of social networking site users in every demographic group — including seniors, those who have not attended college, or those with low household incomes — use these sites to engage in political activities or discussions. However, these behaviors are especially prevalent among the youngest users and those who have attended college.

When looking at political engagement on social networking sites across the entire population, certain differences are more pronounced because some groups are more likely to use social networking sites in the first place. For example, young adults are far more likely to be social network users than seniors — 93% of all 18-24 year olds use social networking sites, compared with 23% of those 65 and older. So although 57% of social networking site users in the 65+ age group engage in political activity on these sites, that means that just 13% of all people ages 65 and older are politically active on these sites. By contrast, two-thirds of all 18-24 year olds are politically active in social networking spaces.

Demographics of social networking engagement

		% of SNS users in each group who are politically active on social networking sites (n=1,209)	% of all adults in each group who are politically active on social networking sites (n=2,253)
Total		66%	39%
a	Men	65	36
b	Women	66	42 ^a
Age			
a	18-24	72 ^{ef}	67 ^{bcdef}
b	25-34	68 ^{ef}	54 ^{def}
c	35-44	64	45 ^{ef}
d	45-54	64	37 ^{ef}
e	55-64	58	24 ^f
f	65+	57	13
Race/ethnicity			
a	White, Non-Hispanic	69 ^c	40 ^c
b	Black, Non-Hispanic	62	37
c	Hispanic	53	31
Household income			
a	Less than \$10,000/yr	68 ^c	39
b	\$10,000-\$19,999	60	30
c	\$20,000-\$29,999	52	32
d	\$30,000-\$39,999	68 ^c	42 ^b
e	\$40,000-\$49,999	70 ^c	40 ^b
f	\$50,000-\$74,999	66 ^c	41 ^b
g	\$75,000-\$99,999	78 ^{bcd}	57 ^{abcdef}
h	\$100,000-\$149,999	68 ^c	49 ^{bc}
i	\$150,000+	68 ^c	56 ^{abcdef}
Education attainment			
a	Less than high school	57	23
b	High school grad	55	29
c	Some College	70 ^{ab}	48 ^{ab}
d	College +	74 ^{ab}	51 ^{ab}

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Note: Columns marked with a superscript letter (^a) or another letter indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each demographic trait.

When it comes to party identification, Republicans and Democrats are equally likely to use social networking sites for political activity (this is true both whether comparing users to users, or comparing

the prevalence of this behavior within the overall population of Democrats and Republicans). However, liberals are a bit more likely than conservatives to take part in political behaviors on these sites. And among SNS users, conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats tend to be more active on these sites than less ideologically affiliated users (moderate/liberal Republicans and moderate/conservative Democrats).

Political SNS usage by party/ideology

		% of SNS users in each group who are politically active on social networking sites (n=1,209)	% of all adults in each group who are politically active on social networking sites (n=2,253)
Total		66%	39%
Party identification			
a	Republican	67	38
b	Democrat	67	40
c	Independent	67	42
Political ideology			
a	Conservative	66	35
b	Moderate	64	40 ^a
c	Liberal	74 ^{ab}	52 ^{ab}
Party + Ideology			
a	Conservative Rep	73 ^c	38
b	Moderate/Liberal Rep	60	42 ^c
c	Moderate/Conservative Dem	56	31
d	Liberal Dem	82 ^{bc}	56 ^{abc}

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

Note: Columns marked with a superscript letter (^a) or another letter indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each demographic trait.

Social media conversations can spur deeper interest and involvement in political/civic issues.

Discussions of political or social issues on social networking sites can spur users to get more involved or learn more about those issues. These actions can be encouraged by discussions among friends, as well as from posts made by organizations or public figures.

Some 43% of social networking site users say they have decided to learn more about a political or social issue because of something they read about on a social networking site. This group is evenly split between those who were first introduced to the particular issue by people they know personally, and those who were first introduced to the issue by someone outside their immediate friend circle:

- 12% of users said they decided to learn more about an issue because of something they heard

from *someone they know personally*.

- 7% of users decided to learn more about an issue because of something they heard from someone they *don't know personally* such as a public figure or organization.
- 22% of users said they decided to learn more about an issue after hearing about it from *both* people they know personally *and* people they do not know personally.
- 2% decided to learn more about an issue because of something they read on a social networking site, but could not remember who they first found out about the issue from.

The remaining social networking site users (representing 56% of the total) say they have never decided to learn more about an issue based on things they read on these sites.

A smaller but still notable number of social networking site users — 18% — say that in the last year they decided to take action involving a political or social issue because of something they read on those sites. This group was also evenly divided between actions taken at the behest of personal friends and actions taken at the urging of organizations or public figures:

- 5% of users said they decided to take action on an issue because of posts by someone they know personally.
- 4% decided to take action because of posts by someone they don't know personally, such as a public figure or organization.
- 8% decided to take action because of posts from people they know personally *and* people who are not part of their immediate friend circle.
- 1% could not remember who they first found out about the issue from.

The remaining social networking site users (representing 82% of the total) say they have never decided to take action on a political or social issue because of something they read on these sites.

Generally speaking, SNS users who say that social network conversations have directly inspired them to learn more about an issue or take some kind of political action tend to be highly engaged in many aspects of the political process. Compared with SNS users who have not been directly inspired in this way, they are more likely to be registered to vote; more likely to take part in political activities outside of social networking spaces; more likely to talk about politics with others; more likely to make political contributions; and more likely to receive frequent political communications or mobilization messages.

Demographically, age and educational attainment are the primary dividing lines when it comes to learning more about political or social issues based on social network chatter. Just under half of social network users ages 18-49 say they have decided to learn more about an issue due to information they encountered on a social networking site, compared with around one in three users ages 50 and older. Similarly, some 52% of college graduates who use social networking sites have done this, significantly higher than the 38% of high school graduates and 41% of those with some college experience (but not a degree) who have done so.

Similarly, when it comes to taking action on a political or social issue, those with higher levels of education (college graduates and those with some college experience) again stand out from the less well-educated. However, social network users of all ages are equally likely to say they have taken action because of things they have read or heard on these sites.

Social media chatter can lead to further involvement with political issues

% of SNS users in each group who have...

		Decided to learn more about a political/social issue because of what they read on SNS	Decided to take action on a political/social issue because of what they read on SNS
Total for SNS users (n=1,209)		43%	18%
a	Men (n=525)	44	17
b	Women (n=684)	43	18
Age			
a	18-29 (n=323)	48 ^{cd}	19
b	30-49 (n=388)	47 ^{cd}	17
c	50-64 (n=323)	35	18
d	65+ (n=167)	30	15
Race/ethnicity			
a	White, Non-Hispanic (n=847)	46 ^c	20 ^{bc}
b	Black, Non-Hispanic (n=143)	38	12
c	Hispanic (n=136)	34	11
Household income			
a	Less than \$30,000 (n=326)	39	15
b	\$30,000-\$49,999 (n=216)	43	23 ^{ac}
c	\$50,000-\$74,999 (n=175)	46	14
d	\$75,000+ (n=355)	52 ^a	21 ^a
Educational attainment			
a	No high school degree (n=79)	35	12
b	High school grad (n=325)	38	13
c	Some College (n=346)	41	19 ^b
d	College + (n=458)	52 ^{abc}	23 ^{ab}

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

Note: Columns marked with a superscript letter (^a) or another letter indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each demographic trait.

Democratic and Republican SNS users (as well as liberal and conservative users) are equally likely to say they have decided to learn more or to take action on a political issue based on something they read on a social networking site. SNS users who are conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats are especially likely to have taken action on a political issue based on something they saw on a social networking site compared with moderate/liberal Republicans or moderate/conservative Democrats (21% of SNS-using conservative Republicans and 27% of SNS-using liberal Democrats have done this).

Social media chatter can lead to further involvement with political issues

% of SNS users in each group who have...

		Decided to <u>learn more</u> about a political/social issue because of what they read on SNS	Decided to <u>take action</u> on a political/social issue because of what they read on SNS
Total for SNS users (n=1,209)		43%	18%
Party identification			
a	Republican (n=271)	45	17
b	Democrat (n=394)	46	17
c	Independent (n=446)	43	20
Political ideology			
a	Conservative (n=406)	42	18
b	Moderate (n=422)	43	17
c	Liberal (n=310)	49	21
Party + ideology			
a	Conservative Rep (n=185)	46	21 ^c
b	Moderate/Liberal Rep (n=81)	42	11
c	Moderate/Conservative Dem (n=198)	39	10
b	Liberal Dem (n=185)	56 ^c	27 ^{bc}

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent’s cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

Note: Columns marked with a superscript letter (^a) or another letter indicate a statistically significant difference between that row and the row designated by that superscript letter. Statistical significance is determined inside the specific section covering each demographic trait.

Politically active social network users are frequently – but not universally – engaged with other aspects of civic life.

Political social networking site users (that is, the 39% of Americans who have recently done one of the eight general SNS-and-politics-related activities we asked about in this study) are also likely to be engaged in other forms of political and civic activity that occur somewhere other than social networking sites:

- 63% of political SNS users have recently taken some kind of “real world” action around political or social issues, such as attending a political meeting or working with fellow citizens to solve a problem in their community (48% of all adults have done so)
- 60% have expressed their opinion about a political or social issue via online channels (for example, by sending an email to a government official, or signing an online petition). This compares with 34% for the population as a whole.
- 53% have expressed their opinion about a political or social issue via offline channels (for example, by sending a letter to a government official, or signing a paper petition). This compares with 39% for the population as a whole.
- 20% have made a political contribution of some kind, whether online or offline. This is similar to

the 16% of all adults who have done so.

Taking all of these together, some 83% of “political SNS users” also got involved in political or social issues in one way or another outside the bounds of social networking sites themselves. And compared with people who use social networking sites but do not get involved in political discussions within these spaces — or to those who do not use social networking sites at all — these politically active social network users stand out as being highly active in nearly all facets of their civic lives. They are significantly more likely to regularly talk about politics with others offline; to speak out about political subjects both online and offline; to get involved in political activities or groups; and to be regularly contacted by political parties or other organizations.

In discussing these differences, it is important to note that we cannot say for certain that this greater involvement in civic actions and behaviors is *directly caused* by people’s experiences or interactions on social networking sites. Indeed, the causal mechanism may in fact work in the opposite direction, such that people who are already active or engaged in political/social causes make use of social networking sites as another outlet for their existing interests.

What we can say is that a clear correlation exists between the use of social networking sites for political activity and engagement in a wide range of civic behaviors — in both the online and offline realms. The political actions that people take on social networking spaces have significant overlap with the political actions they take in other aspects of their lives.

Indeed, this correlation between online and offline political activity is true more generally. Individuals who are politically active on social networking sites are also highly active in offline spaces, and those who are politically active offline tend to have relatively high rates of engagement in social networking spaces. But this report is especially interested in how new technologies are used by people as they engage in the political process, and as a result we are focusing our analysis on trends in social networking engagement rather than those in other areas.

Political action on social networking sites is correlated with other civic/political behaviors

% within each group who have done the following recently...

	% of Political SNS users who...	% of those who use SNS but not for politics who...	% of non-SNS users who...
	a	b	c
Get directly involved in political activities or groups	63%	34%	40%
Speak out on political issues (sign petitions, contact gov't officials, etc) <i>online</i>	60 ^{bc}	20	15
Regularly talk politics/public affairs with others in person, by phone, or by letter	53 ^{bc}	27	37 ^b
Speak out on political issues (sign petitions, contact gov't officials, etc) <i>offline</i>	53 ^{bc}	24	33 ^b
Regularly contacted by groups or individuals to get involved in political issues	46 ^{bc}	24	26
Donate money to political causes or candidates	20 ^c	7	17 ^b

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. n=779 for political SNS users (column a); n=430 for those who use SNS but are not politically active on those sites (column b); n=1,044 for non-SNS users (column c).

Note: Columns marked with a superscript letter (^a) or another letter indicate a statistically significant difference between that column and the column designated by that superscript letter.

Those whose political activity occurs only in the context of social networking sites look very different from other political SNS users.

As noted above, 83% of "political social networking site users" take part in actions related to political or social issues in other venues (either online or offline). Of course, this means that 17% of these political SNS users (representing 8% of the total population) *do not* engage in any of the other behaviors we asked about and take part in political actions *only* within the context of social networking sites. In the final section of this chapter, we examine the unique characteristics of this particular group.

Compared to those who extend their political involvement into realms other than social networking sites, these "SNS-only" users differ in a number of important ways. Demographically, they are significantly younger and have lower levels of income and educational attainment than those who take part in political actions on social networking sites as well as other venues. They are also significantly less likely to talk about political issues in other online spaces, and to receive political communications from other people or organizations (although both groups are equally likely to talk about politics with others in *offline* spaces).

“SNS only” political users vs. “SNS plus” political users

Comparison of different types of political SNS users as a percentage within each demographic group

	Do political activity on SNS, nowhere else (n=114)	Do political activity on SNS plus other venue(s) (n=665)
	a	b
Age profile		
18-29	57% ^b	32%
30-49	24	41 ^a
50-64	15	21
65+	3	6
Educational profile		
HS grad or less	45 ^b	30
Some college, college grad	55	70 ^a
Income profile		
Less than \$50,000	63 ^b	43
\$50,000 or more	26	49 ^a
Political communications		
Ever talk politics with others offline	84	90
Ever talk politics with others online	50	72 ^a
Ever receive political communications	46	85 ^a

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent’s cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Note: Columns marked with a superscript letter (^a) or another letter indicate a statistically significant difference between that column and the column designated by that superscript letter.

In terms of their political beliefs and partisan leanings, “SNS-only” political users are a bit of a mixed bag. They are similar to political SNS users who branch out into other forms of political behavior in terms of their ideological leanings; and while they are a bit less likely to describe themselves as Republican, they are also more likely to say that they do not identify strongly with any party in particular (some 22% of these “SNS-only” users do not lean towards either party, compared with 12% of the “SNS-plus” group). Interestingly, they are more likely than their “SNS-plus” counterparts (by a 16%-5% margin) to strongly agree with the statement that “most elected officials care about what people like me think.” But overall, there are no clear partisan or attitudinal trends within this group.

Part 3: Do online channels bring new voices or attitudes into the political debate?

One key goal of this research was to identify whether or not online channels of political engagement (social networking sites in particular) may be bringing “new voices” into the political process.

Accordingly, our 2012 survey included a series of questions measuring people’s political beliefs and attitudes, in an effort to determine whether different venues for civic behavior may bring a different set of political attitudes into the public sphere. Our goal in doing so was to see if different types of political engagement over-represent (or under-represent) not just particular demographic groups but particular points of view about important issues of note.

In the final analysis, the answer in many ways is “no” — the people who engage politically in online venues have many of the same characteristics, behavioral patterns, and attitudes toward the issues of the day as those who take part in other (offline) types of political activity. Indeed, as we have seen in the preceding analysis, the “online” and “offline” cohorts of politically engaged Americans are in many cases the same set of individuals engaging with political issues across a range of venues or platforms.

In the analysis that follows, we will be comparing four different types of politically active Americans and assessing their attitudes toward various issues. Notably, many people fall into multiple groups because they have performed political activities or communications in online and offline circumstances. In other words, the groups are not mutually exclusive:

- **Traditional activists** – This group includes anyone who has recently attended a political rally, speech, protest, or local political meeting; worked or volunteered for a political candidate or party; been an active member of a politically oriented group; or worked with fellow citizens to solve a community problem. It represents 48% of the adult population. The college-educated and those with relatively high household incomes are especially likely to fall into this group.
- **Offline political communicators** – This group includes anyone who has recently contacted a government official in person, by phone, or by letter; signed a paper petition; sent a “letter to the editor” through the regular mail; or called into a live radio or TV show to express an opinion. It represents 39% of the adult population. Whites, the college-educated, and those with relatively high household incomes are especially likely to do this.
- **Online political communicators** – This group includes anyone who has recently contacted a government official online, by email, or by text message; signed a petition online; sent a “letter to the editor” online, by email, or by text message; or commented on an online news story or blog post to express an opinion about a political or social issue. It represents 34% of the adult population. Demographically, this group looks similar to the offline communicator cohort.
- **Political social network users** – This group includes anyone who has recently taken part in political activities on social networking sites such as Facebook or Twitter, such as joining a group involved with political or social issues; following political figures; posting thoughts, comments, or links to stories about political/social issues; encouraging friends to take action on an issue or to vote; or liking or promoting material that others have posted. It represents 39% of the adult population. This type of political activity is especially popular with young adults, the college

educated, liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans.

Some 28% of Americans fell outside any of these four groups because they had not performed any kind of political activity or engaged in any of the civic-related communications we asked about in our survey. This analysis does not cover these non-political actors.

Attitudes toward social issues

Both the “political SNS user” and “online communicator” groups have somewhat more positive attitudes toward gay marriage than are present in the general population. By a nearly 2-1 margin, each of these groups favor allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry (among all adults, same-sex marriage is favored by a narrower 48%-42% margin). On the other hand, the traditional activist and offline communicator groups largely mirror the general population in their attitudes toward gay marriage. These differences are more muted when it comes to attitudes toward abortion.

Attitudes toward gay marriage and abortion

% who favor/oppose

Allowing gay/lesbian couples to legally marry...	% Favor	% Oppose
All adults (n=2,253)	48%	42%
Traditional activists (n=1,113)	50	41
Political SNS users (n=779)	60	33
Offline political communicators (n=931)	53	40
Online political communicators (n=752)	60	34
Abortion should be...	% Legal	% Illegal
All adults (n=2,253)	54%	40%
Traditional activists	56	39
Political SNS users	59	37
Offline communicators	57	38
Online communicators	61	35

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent’s cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Personal economic setbacks

Despite some differences in their demographic composition, each of these four groups has been affected by the recent recession and poor economy in ways that are similar to their fellow Americans in the population at large. Generally speaking, these groups are no more or less likely than average to have recently needed to put off medical or dental treatment, delay a mortgage or rent payment, or cut back on food. Their rates of health insurance coverage are also nearly identical to that of the general population.

Economic impacts

% in each group who have experienced the following

Have put off medical or dental treatment in last 12 months	
All adults (n=2,253)	38%
Traditional activists (n=1,113)	41
Political SNS users (n=779)	40
Offline communicators (n=931)	45
Online communicators (n=752)	41
Have delayed paying rent or house payment in last 12 months	
All adults	25%
Traditional activists	26
Political SNS users	26
Offline communicators	24
Online communicators	21
Have cut back on amount or quality of food in last 12 months	
All adults	46%
Traditional activists	47
Political SNS users	46
Offline communicators	47
Online communicators	42
Currently covered by some form of health insurance	
All adults	81%
Traditional activists	82
Political SNS users	82
Offline communicators	84
Online communicators	84

Source: Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent's cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Overall, some 56% of the population experienced at least one of three economic impacts we asked about (putting off medical or dental treatment, delaying a rent or house payment, cutting back on amount or quality of food) in the 12 months preceding our survey. And when we directly compare the economically "affected" (i.e. those who have experienced one or more of those impacts) to the rest of the population that has not experienced these impacts, we find that:

- The "affected" are no less likely to own a cell phone, to use the internet, or to use social networking sites. However, they are less likely to own a tablet computer.
- They engage in political discussions at similar rates, both online and offline.
- They are equally likely to directly take part in an in-person political group or activity. Indeed, the

“affected” are slightly more likely to have recently attended an organized protest or a local political meeting.

- They are equally likely to receive political outreach messages across a range of platforms.
- They are less likely to make a campaign contribution, although 13% have done so in the last year (compared with 20% of those who have not experienced any of these impacts).
- They are equally likely to publicly speak out about issues that are important to them in online forums, and a bit more likely (by a 41%-36% margin) to do so in offline forums.
- They are equally likely to take part in political actions or discussions on social networking sites, and are in fact a bit more likely (by a 35%-27% margin) to encourage others to take action about issues that are important to them on these spaces.

It may seem counter-intuitive that the “affected” group is so politically active given the great importance of socio-economic factors when it comes to political engagement. But while this group does have lower incomes relative to those who have not been impacted significantly by the recent recession, nearly half (48%) have at least some post-high school education (indeed, one in five has a college or post-graduate degree) and they are also younger than those who have experienced fewer economic impacts. In other words, their age and education levels place them in a relatively “high activity” category, even as their income levels might indicate a lower degree of political engagement. Ultimately, the recession and its aftermath have had a broad impact on the population, but was in many ways especially impactful on younger Americans — even those with relatively high levels of formal education.

Political attitudes

When it comes to their opinions of the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street movements, each of the various politically active cohorts studied here are generally more “opinionated” than the population at large. That is, they contain a higher proportion of people who agree with these movements, *and also* a higher proportion of people who disagree with them.

Attitudes toward the Occupy and Tea Party movements

Opinion of Tea Party	% Agree	% Disagree	% No Opinion
All adults	15%	24%	54%
Traditional activists	19	32	45
Political SNS users	19	30	45
Offline communicators	21	34	41
Online communicators	24	37	34
Opinion of Occupy Wall Street	% Agree	% Disagree	% No Opinion
All adults	14%	25%	55%
Traditional activists	19	30	46
Political SNS users	19	29	47
Offline communicators	21	31	42
Online communicators	24	35	37

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent’s cell phone. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Despite being more likely to have opinions about the Tea Party or Occupy Wall Street movements, all four of the groups have nearly identical attitudes when it comes to their general opinions about the role government should play in promoting economic growth and reducing inequality.

Attitudes toward government

% who agree “strongly” or “somewhat” with the following statements

“The government should see to it that everybody who wants to work can find a job”	
All adults	72%
Traditional activists	69
Political SNS users	72
Offline communicators	69
Online communicators	68
“Most elected officials care about what people like me think”	
All adults	41%
Traditional activists	40
Political SNS users	43
Offline communicators	37
Online communicators	38
“There is plenty of opportunity for hardworking people to get ahead in America”	
All adults	66%
Traditional activists	67
Political SNS users	70
Offline communicators	65
Online communicators	68
“The government should work to substantially reduce the income gap between rich and poor”	
All adults	66%
Traditional activists	64
Political SNS users	68
Offline communicators	65
Online communicators	62
“The economy works best when the government stays out of the way and lets people get ahead on their own”	
All adults	62%
Traditional activists	62
Political SNS users	59
Offline communicators	61
Online communicators	61

Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, July 16-August 7, 2012 Tracking survey. N=2,253 adults ages 18 and older, including 900 interviews conducted on respondent’s cell phone. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Margin of error is +/-2.4 percentage points based on all adults.

Survey Questions

Civic Engagement Tracking Survey 2012

Final Topline

08/14/2012

Data for July 16–August 7, 2012

Princeton Survey Research Associates International for
the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project

Sample: n=2,253 national adults, age 18 and older, including 900 cell phone interviews
Interviewing dates: 07.16.2012 – 08.07.2012

Margin of error is plus or minus 2 percentage points for results based on Total [n=2,253]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on internet users [n=1,873]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on cell phone owners [n=2,032]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on cell phone owners who text message
[n=1,409]

Margin of error is plus or minus 3 percentage points for results based on SNS or Twitter users [n=1,209]

Q1 Overall, how would you rate your community as a place to live? Would you say it is excellent, good, only fair or poor?

	CURRENT		JANUARY 2011	DECEMBER 2010	KNIGHT 2002	KNIGHT 1999
%	39	Excellent	38	38	37	36
	43	Good	43	45	47	46
	13	Only fair	14	13	13	15
	4	Poor	4	4	3	3
	*	Don't know	*	1	*	*
	*	Refused	1	*	--	--

Q2 How much impact do you think people like you can have in making your community a better place to live — a big impact, a moderate impact, a small impact, or no impact at all?

	CURRENT		JANUARY 2011	DECEMBER 2010	AUGUST 2008	KNIGHT 2002	KNIGHT 1999
%	32	Big	31	30	29	33	28
	43	Moderate	41	34	39	40	46
	16	Small	18	22	19	19	18
	7	No impact at all	7	10	10	5	7
	2	Don't know	2	2	3	3	2
	1	Refused	1	1	--	--	--

REG These days, many people are so busy they can't find time to register to vote, or move around so often they don't get a chance to re-register... Are you NOW registered to vote in your precinct or election district, or haven't you been able to register so far?

	YES, REGISTERED	NO, NOT REGISTERED	(VOL.) DON'T NEED TO REGISTER	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
Current	75	24	*	*	*
Nov 2010	79	20	*	*	*
Nov 2008	85	15	0	*	*
August 2008	80	19	1	1	*
May 2008	79	19	n/a	1	*
Nov 2006	78	22	*	1	--
Nov 2004	82	18	n/a	1	--
July 2004	81	18	*	1	--
June 2004	76	23	n/a	1	--
March 2004	75	23	n/a	2	--
Nov 2002	76	24	n/a	*	--
Oct 2002	75	23	n/a	1	--
Nov 2000	78	19	n/a	2	--

Vote01 If the 2012 presidential election were being held TODAY and the candidates were [ROTATE: (Barack Obama, the Democrat,) and (Mitt Romney, the Republican,)] who would you vote for?

Based on registered voters [N=1,826]

		CURRENT
%	45	Obama, the Democrat
	33	Romney, the Republican
	1	Other candidate (VOL.)
	6	Would not vote/Neither (VOL.)
	9	Don't know
	6	Refused

Q3 Now I am going to read you a series of statements that will help us understand how you feel about a number of things. For each statement, please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree. (First/Next), [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]. [READ FOR FIRST ITEM THEN IF NECESSARY: Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree?]

	STRONGLY AGREE	SOME- WHAT AGREE	SOME- WHAT DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	(VOL.) NO OPINION	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
a. The government should see to it that everybody who wants to work can find a job.	48	24	13	13	*	1	1
b. Most elected officials care about what people like me think.	9	33	26	30	1	1	1
c. There is plenty of opportunity for hardworking people to get ahead in America.	33	33	18	14	*	*	1
d. The government should work to substantially reduce the income gap between rich and poor.	42	24	13	17	1	1	2
e. The economy works best when the government stays out of the way and lets people get ahead on their own.	32	30	19	13	2	2	1

Q4a Some people think that the government should provide fewer services, even in areas such as health care and education, in order to reduce spending. Others feel that it is important to provide more services even if it means increases in spending. What do you think? Should the government... [READ 1-3; READ CATEGORIES IN REVERSE ORDER FOR HALF THE SAMPLE]

<u>CURRENT</u>		
%	34	Reduce spending, even if it means fewer services
	24	Keep spending at current levels
	36	Provide more services, even if it means increased spending
	3	(VOL.) Don't know
	3	(VOL.) Refused

Q5 Do you think abortion should be [READ 1-4; READ CATEGORIES IN REVERSE ORDER FOR HALF THE SAMPLE]?

<u>CURRENT</u>		
%	22	Legal in all cases
	31	Legal in most cases
	23	Illegal in most cases
	17	Illegal in all cases
	3	(VOL.) Don't know
	4	(VOL.) Refused

Q6 Do you strongly favor, favor, oppose, or strongly oppose allowing gay and lesbian couples to marry legally?

	<u>CURRENT</u>	
%	26	Strongly favor
	22	Favor
	18	Oppose
	25	Strongly oppose
	5	Don't know
	4	Refused

Q14 How often do you discuss politics and public affairs with others in person, by phone call, or by letter? Would you say every day, at least once a week, at least once a month, less than once a month, or never?

	<u>CURRENT</u>		<u>AUGUST 2008</u>
%	15	Every day	19
	27	At least once a week	36
	20	At least once a month	13
	15	Less than once a month	11
	23	Never	20
	*	Don't know	*
	1	Refused	*

Q15 How often do you discuss politics and public affairs with others ONLINE – such as by e-mail, on a social networking site or by text message? Would you say every day, at least once a week, at least once a month, less than once a month, or never?

Based on all internet users or cell phone owners who text message

	<u>CURRENT</u>		<u>AUGUST 2008</u>
%	5	Every day	4
	13	At least once a week	13
	12	At least once a month	8
	14	Less than once a month	10
	56	Never	65
	0	Don't know	0
	*	Refused	*
	[n=1,937]		[n=1,655]

Q16 Here's a list of activities some people might do. For each, please tell me if you have done this in the past 12 months or not. (First,) In the past 12 months, have you...
[INSERT ITEMS IN ORDER]?

	YES, HAVE DONE THIS	NO, HAVE NOT DONE THIS	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
a. Attended a political rally or speech				
Current	10	90	*	*
August 2008	12	88	*	*
b. Attended an organized protest of any kind				
Current	6	94	0	*
August 2008	4	96	*	*
c. Attended a political meeting on local, town or school affairs				
Current	22	78	*	*
August 2008	24	76	*	*
d. Worked or volunteered for a political party or candidate				
Current	7	93	*	0
August 2008	8	92	*	*
e. Been an active member of any group that tries to influence public policy or government, not including a political party				
Current	13	86	*	*
August 2008	15	85	*	*
f. Worked with fellow citizens to solve a problem in your community				
Current	35	65	*	*
August 2008	28	71	*	*

Q17 We're interested in the different ways you may have been contacted by groups or individuals asking you to do things like work for a candidate, give money to a cause, go to a meeting, or get in touch with a public official. Do you ever [INSERT ITEMS IN ORDER] to get involved in a political activity? [IF YES: Would you say that happens daily, every few days, about once a week, or less often?]

	YES, DAILY	YES, EVERY FEW DAYS	YES, ONCE A WEEK	YES, LESS OFTEN	NO, NEVER	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
<i>Item A: Based on all internet users</i>							
a. Receive email asking you...							
Current [N=1,873]	6	6	9	15	63	1	*
August 2008 [N=1,580]	5	7	9	21	57	1	*
b. Receive a phone call asking you...							
Current	2	4	7	23	65	*	*
August 2008	1	3	7	29	59	1	1
c. Receive a letter in the mail asking you...							
Current	1	4	7	30	56	1	*
August 2008	1	3	7	30	57	1	1
<i>Item D: Based on cell phone owners who text message</i>							
d. Receive a text message asking you...							
Current [N=1,409]	*	1	1	4	93	*	0
e. Get asked in person...							
Current	*	1	2	19	77	*	*
August 2008	1	1	3	20	74	1	1
<i>Item F: Based on SNS users</i>							
f. Get asked on a social networking site...							
Current [N=1,196]	3	4	7	13	73	*	0
<i>Item G: Based on Twitter users</i>							
g. Get asked on Twitter...							
Current [N=256]	1	*	6	8	85	0	0

Q18 Have you contributed money to a political candidate or party, or any other political organization or cause in the past 12 months, or have you not done this?

	<u>CURRENT</u>		<u>AUGUST 2008</u>
%	16	Yes, have done this	18
	84	No, have not done this	81
	*	Don't know	*
	*	Refused	*

Q19 Thinking about the political contributions you have made in the past 12 months... Did you make those contributions ONLINE... or did you make those contributions OFFLINE, say, in person, by phone call or through the mail... or have you made contributions both online and offline?

Based on those who contributed money to a political candidate, party, organization or cause in the past 12 months

	<u>CURRENT</u>		<u>AUGUST 2008</u>
%	23	Online	15
	60	Offline	69
	16	Both ways	15
	1	Don't know	*
	0	Refused	*
	[n=453]		[n=499]

Q20 In the last 12 months, about how much have you contributed to political candidates and campaigns ONLINE? Was it... [READ] [IF NECESSARY: Just your best guess is fine.]

Based on those who contributed money ONLINE to a political candidate, party, organization or cause in the past 12 months

	<u>CURRENT</u>		<u>AUGUST 2008</u>
%	29	\$50 or less	35
	27	\$51 to \$100	26
	22	\$101 to \$250	24
	10	\$251 to \$500	6
	5	\$501 to \$1,000	2
	3	\$1,001 to \$2,500	0
	0	\$2,501 to \$5,000	1
	0	More than \$5,000	--
	2	(VOL.) Don't know	2
	2	(VOL.) Refused	5
	[n=147]		[n=130]

Q21 And in the last 12 months, about how much have you contributed to political candidates

and campaigns OFFLINE, say in person, by phone call or through the mail? Was it...[READ] [IF NECESSARY: Just your best guess is fine.]

Based on those who contributed money OFFLINE to a political candidate, party, organization or cause in the past 12 months

	<u>CURRENT</u>		<u>AUGUST 2008</u>
%	37	\$50 or less	35
	21	\$51 to \$100	27
	16	\$101 to \$250	17
	8	\$251 to \$500	5
	3	\$501 to \$1,000	4
	2	\$1,001 to \$2,500	2
	1	\$2,501 to \$5,000	2
	1	More than \$5,000	--
	4	(VOL.) Don't know	3
	7	(VOL.) Refused	6
	[n=371]		[n=429]

Q22 Now, here is another list of activities some people do and others do not. For each, please tell me if you have done this in the past 12 months or not. (First,) In the past 12 months, have you... [INSERT ITEMS IN ORDER]?

	<u>YES, DID THIS</u>	<u>NO, DID NOT</u>	<u>DON'T KNOW</u>	<u>REFUSED</u>
a. Contacted a national, state or local government official in person, by phone call or by letter about an issue that is important to you				
Current	21	78	*	0
August 2008	24	75	*	*
<i>Item B: Based on all internet users or cell phone owners who text message</i>				
b. Contacted a national, state or local government official ONLINE, by email or by text message about an issue that is important to you				
Current [N=1,937]	20	80	*	*
August 2008 [N=1,580]	25	75	*	*
c. Signed a paper petition				
Current	22	77	*	0
August 2008	25	75	1	*

Q22 continued...

Q22 continued...

	YES, DID THIS	NO, DID NOT	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
<i>Item D: Based on all internet users</i>				
d. Signed a petition ONLINE				
Current [N=1,873]	20	80	*	0
August 2008 [N=1,655]	19	80	*	*
e. Sent a "letter to the editor" by regular mail to a newspaper or magazine				
Current	3	97	0	*
August 2008	5	95	*	*
<i>Item F: Based on all internet users or cell phone owners who text message</i>				
f. Sent a "letter to the editor" to a newspaper or magazine ONLINE, by email or by text message				
Current	5	95	0	*
August 2008	10	90	0	*
g. Called into a live radio or TV show to express an opinion				
Current	7	93	*	*
August 2008	8	92	*	*
<i>Item H: Based on all internet users</i>				
h. Commented on an online news story or blog post to express an opinion about a political or social issue				
Current	21	79	*	0
<i>Item I: Based on all internet users</i>				
i. Posted PICTURES or VIDEO online related to a political or social issue				
Current	11	89	*	0
<i>Item J: Based on cell phone owners who text message</i>				
j. Sent text messages to others about a political or social issue				
Current [N=1,409]	18	82	*	0

[READ TO ALL SNS OR TWITTER USERS:] Now thinking about how you use Twitter, or social networking sites such as Facebook and Google Plus...

SNS1 Do you currently [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]?

Based on SNS or Twitter users [N=1,209]

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
a. Belong to a group on a social networking site that is involved in political or social issues, or that is working to advance a cause	21	79	*	*
b. Follow any elected officials, candidates for office or other political figures on a social networking site or on Twitter	20	80	0	0

SNS2 Do you ever use social networking sites or Twitter to... [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]? (Next,) do you ever use social networking sites or Twitter to...[INSERT ITEM]?

Based on SNS or Twitter users [N=1,209]

	YES	NO	DON'T KNOW	REFUSED
a. Post links to political stories or articles for others to read	28	72	*	0
b. Post your own thoughts or comments on political or social issues	34	66	0	*
c. Encourage other people to take action on a political or social issue that is important to you	31	69	0	*
d. Encourage other people to vote	35	65	0	0
e. Repost content related to political or social issues that was originally posted by someone else	33	67	*	*
f. "Like" or promote material related to political or social issues that others have posted	38	61	*	*

SNS3a In the last 12 months, has there been a time when you decided to LEARN MORE about a political or social issue because of something you read on a social networking site or Twitter? [IF YES: Did you find out about that issue from someone you know personally, from someone you don't know personally — like a public figure or organization, or both?]

Based on SNS or Twitter users [N=1,209]

	<u>CURRENT</u>	
%	12	Yes, someone know personally
	7	Yes, public figure or organization
	22	Yes, both
	2	Yes, can't remember source or refused to tell source (VOL.)
	56	No
	1	Don't know
	*	Refused

SNS3b And in the last 12 months, has there been a time when you decided to TAKE ACTION involving a political or social issue because of something you read on these sites? [IF YES: Were you encouraged to take action by someone you know personally, from someone you don't know personally — like a public figure or organization, or both?]

Based on SNS or Twitter users [N=1,209]

	<u>CURRENT</u>	
%	5	Yes, someone know personally
	4	Yes, public figure or organization
	8	Yes, both
	1	Yes, can't remember source or refused to tell source (VOL.)
	82	No
	*	Don't know
	*	Refused

Q24 These days, many people have been feeling a financial strain. Over the last 12 months, have you or anyone in your household had to [INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE] to make ends meet?

	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>DON'T KNOW</u>	<u>REFUSED</u>
a. Put off medical or dental treatment	38	62	*	*
b. Delay paying your rent or making a house payment	25	75	*	*
c. Cut back on the amount or quality of food you purchase	46	53	*	*

PARTY In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat or Independent?

	<u>CURRENT</u>	
%	22	Republican
	32	Democrat
	37	Independent
	6	No party/No preference/Not interested in politics (VOL.)
	1	Other party (VOL.)
	2	Don't know
	2	Refused

IDEO In general, would you describe your political views as very conservative, conservative, moderate, liberal or very liberal?

	<u>CURRENT</u>	
%	7	Very conservative
	28	Conservative
	33	Moderate
	17	Liberal
	6	Very liberal
	6	Don't know
	3	Refused

TP From what you know, do you agree or disagree with the Tea Party movement, or don't you have an opinion either way?

	<u>CURRENT</u>	
%	15	Agree
	24	Disagree
	54	No opinion either way
	3	Haven't heard of (VOL.)
	2	Don't know
	2	Refused

OWS From what you know, do you agree or disagree with the Occupy Wall Street movement, or don't you have an opinion either way?

	<u>CURRENT</u>	
%	14	Agree
	25	Disagree
	55	No opinion either way
	3	Haven't heard of (VOL.)
	2	Don't know
	1	Refused

Methodology

This report is based on the findings of a survey on Americans' use of the Internet. The results in this report are based on data from telephone interviews conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International from July 16 to August 7, 2012, among a sample of 2,253 adults, age 18 and older.

Telephone interviews were conducted in English and Spanish by landline (1,353) and cell phone (900, including 469 without a landline phone). For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling is plus or minus 2.3 percentage points. For results based on Internet users (n=1,873), the margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting telephone surveys may introduce some error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

A combination of landline and cellular random digit dial (RDD) samples was used to represent all adults in the United States who have access to either a landline or cellular telephone. Both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International, LLC (SSI) according to PSRAI specifications. Numbers for the landline sample were selected with probabilities in proportion to their share of listed telephone households from active blocks (area code + exchange + two-digit block number) that contained three or more residential directory listings. The cellular sample was not list-assisted, but was drawn through a systematic sampling from dedicated wireless 100-blocks and shared service 100-blocks with no directory-listed landline numbers.

New sample was released daily and was kept in the field for at least five days. The sample was released in replicates, which are representative subsamples of the larger population. This ensures that complete call procedures were followed for the entire sample. At least 7 attempts were made to complete an interview at a sampled telephone number. The calls were staggered over times of day and days of the week to maximize the chances of making contact with a potential respondent. Each number received at least one daytime call in an attempt to find someone available. For the landline sample, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult male or female currently at home based on a random rotation. If no male/female was available, interviewers asked to speak with the youngest adult of the other gender. For the cellular sample, interviews were conducted with the person who answered the phone. Interviewers verified that the person was an adult and in a safe place before administering the survey. Cellular sample respondents were offered a post-paid cash incentive for their participation. All interviews completed on any given day were considered to be the final sample for that day.

Weighting is generally used in survey analysis to compensate for sample designs and patterns of non-response that might bias results. A two-stage weighting procedure was used to weight this dual-frame sample. The first-stage corrected for different probabilities of selection associated with the number of adults in each household and each respondent's telephone usage patterns. This weighting also adjusts for the overlapping landline and cell sample frames and the relative sizes of each frame and each sample.

The second stage of weighting balances sample demographics to population parameters. The sample is balanced to match national population parameters for sex, age, education, race, Hispanic origin, region (U.S. Census definitions), population density, and telephone usage. The Hispanic origin was split out based on nativity: U.S. born and non-U.S. born. The White, non-Hispanic subgroup is also balanced on age, education and region. The basic weighting parameters came from a special analysis of the Census Bureau's 2011 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (ASEC) that included all households in the United States. The population density parameter was derived from Census 2000 data. The cell phone usage parameter came from an analysis of the July-December 2011 National Health Interview Survey.

Following is the full disposition of all sampled telephone numbers:

Sample Disposition		
Landline	Cell	
33,411	22,498	Total Numbers Dialed
1,226	341	Non-residential
1,269	51	Computer/Fax
2	---	Cell phone
16,637	8,624	Other not working
2,714	317	Additional projected not working
11,563	13,166	Working numbers
34.6%	58.5%	Working Rate
905	106	No Answer / Busy
2,548	4,225	Voice Mail
54	15	Other Non-Contact
8,056	8,820	Contacted numbers
69.7%	67.0%	Contact Rate
499	1,392	Callback
6,091	5,953	Refusal
1,466	1,475	Cooperating numbers
18.2%	16.7%	Cooperation Rate
59	55	Language Barrier
---	500	Screen-out - Child's cell phone
1,407	920	Eligible numbers
96.0%	62.4%	Eligibility Rate
54	20	Break-off
1,353	900	Completes
96.2%	97.8%	Completion Rate
12.2%	11.0%	Response Rate

The disposition reports all of the sampled telephone numbers ever dialed from the original telephone number samples. The response rate estimates the fraction of all eligible respondents in the sample that were ultimately interviewed. At PSRAI it is calculated by taking the product of three component rates:

- Contact rate – the proportion of working numbers where a request for interview was made
- Cooperation rate – the proportion of contacted numbers where a consent for interview was at least initially obtained, versus those refused
- Completion rate – the proportion of initially cooperating and eligible interviews that were completed

Thus the response rate for the landline sample was 12 percent. The response rate for the cellular sample was 11 percent.