New Problems, New Publics? Dewey and New Media

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This is a response to the article by Ethan Zuckerman "New Media, New Civics?" published in this issue of Policy & Internet (2014: vol. 6, issue 2). Dissatisfaction with existing governments, a broad shift to "post-representative democracy" and the rise of participatory media are leading towards the visibility of different forms of civic participation. Zuckerman's article offers a framework to describe participatory civics in terms of theories of change used and demands places on the participant, and examines some of the implications of the rise of participatory civics, including the challenges of deliberation in a diverse and competitive digital public sphere. Henry Farrell responds.

Introduction

Ethan Zuckerman's important essay (Zuckerman 2014) maps the relationship between new media and public engagement. Zuckerman argues that politically active young people are increasingly disinclined to engage with traditional politics. Instead, they gravitate towards new forms of activism, organizing themselves around new issues, and sometimes using new forms of online collaboration, such as crowdsourcing. Zuckerman disagrees with pessimists like Gladwell (2011) and Morozov (2011), arguing for a complex relationship between possibilities for voice and exit, and the value of "thin" as well as "thick" forms of participation. However, he is not sanguine about their long-term political consequences. In particular, he points to the difficult transition from new forms of engagement to real, long-lasting political coalitions.

Zuckerman challenges people at the intersection of research and civics to identify ways in which young people can "use digital tools to become participatory, passionate and effective civic actors." In this response, I argue that we can think about this usefully by bringing Zuckerman's arguments into conversation with the major claims of John Dewey's book, *The Public and Its Problems* (Dewey 2012).

Zuckerman mentions Dewey, but, like many modern readers, frames his contribution in terms of the Dewey–Lippmann debate over whether the public can

be sufficiently well informed by the media to resist elite manipulation. But Dewey's ideas go far beyond concerns about media, to identify how specific 'publics' can emerge around issues of common importance. Thinking about the circumstances under which publics emerge, and under which they can or cannot solve problems, allows us to think better about the *consequences* of new media for public engagement. Like many people working on these issues (Fung et al. 2013), Zuckerman emphasizes the technologies that he is interested in, rather than talking in detail about the political systems that these technologies are supposed to affect. Dewey's account of the public has a lot to say about democracy and politics but treats technology as a black box. Bringing Zuckerman and Dewey together forces us to think about both in concert.

Specifically, it pushes us to reorganize Zuckerman's concerns around two basic questions. First—what role can new media play in helping publics to self-organize? Second, what role do new media play in helping or hindering publics from addressing problems in efficacious ways? Finally, it allows us to think clearly about a particularly important set of problems for both Dewey and Zuckerman—how political activity works in the context of globalization.

Dewey's Account of Publics

Dewey's theory of the public is both unusual and striking. It starts from the position that human beings are not only socially connected with each other, but may reflect upon those connections, and in particular on the consequences that their actions might have for others. Dewey's distinction between the private and the public hinges upon the particular quality of those connections. When individuals are directly engaged with each other, so that their actions only have palpable consequences for each other and not for outside parties, then we may fairly say that these actions fall under the heading of private activity. When, in contrast, these actions reasonably seem to have perceptible and important consequences for others who are not so directly engaged, there is a public interest in those actions.

The public, then, for a particular kind of action, is composed of those who are "indirectly and seriously affected for good or for evil" by such actions (Dewey 2012, 35). Economists might think about these indirect effects as externalities. Political scientists would look to either pluralist or group based theories of politics to account for how and when externalities turn into active publics; the former argues that most interests in society can potentially find representation (Dahl 2005), while the latter, more skeptically, suggests that the politics of group formation inevitably mean that many, perhaps most potential interests remain unexpressed (Berger 1983).

In Dewey's account, processes of public formation are to a very great

extent a matter of knowledge formation. If the ever-changing boundaries of the public depend on an understanding of the indirect consequences of certain kinds of behavior, then the mapping out of these consequences will have formative consequences for the public. To discover and disseminate the knowledge that a certain kind of behavior has consequences for those who are not engaged in a transaction is to change the boundaries of a public, or perhaps even to create one. More broadly constituting a proper public means ensuring that it is well informed about the manifold and complex causal relationships that connect actions to their indirect (and sometimes likely unintended) consequences:

> "Opinions and beliefs concerning the public presuppose effective and organized inquiry. Unless there are methods for detecting the energies which are at work and tracing them through an intricate network of interactions to their consequences, what passes as public opinion will be "opinion" in its derogatory sense rather than truly public, no matter how widespread the opinion is." (Dewey 2012, 177)

This explains Dewey's interest in the political role of the media and social sciences. Both, ideally, should elucidate indirect relationships among people, so that potential publics (which do not know how they affect each other) can turn into actual ones.

A properly constituted public, which is aware of itself, may engage in actions that result in the creation of a State (where the State is not the end-goal of their actions, but rather an implication of certain forms of problem solving). States involve officials who are specially charged with resolving problems of broader fallout from actions. They are not needed in direct face-to-face relationships such as those in a family, or even in a small community, where custom and ad hoc accommodations can resolve most problems of indirect effects. They do not exist in situations where there is not sufficient shared interest to justify them. While Dewey is not entirely explicit on this, he seems to believe that entirely coercive arrangements (such as empires, where the only relationship between citizens and rulers involves levies of soldiers and resources) do not qualify as states, although he acknowledges that there is likely to be a spectrum of intermediate forms between such arrangements and states in the real world. States thus occupy the middle ground between purely local communities, and forms of association (such as the family of mankind) too abstract to have any real significance. They go hand-in-hand with publics, sets of people with shared problems of interdependence that cannot easily be resolved through pure face-to-face interaction.

More broadly, Dewey sees the forces that create indirect consequential relationships among people as largely impersonal ones—technological and

economic changes. Yet knowledge of the specific ways in which they rework human relationships can have a crucial impact:

> "What actually happens in consequence of industrial forces is dependent upon the presence or absence of perception and communication of consequences, upon foresight and its effect upon desire and endeavor. Economic agencies produce one result when they are left to work themselves out on the merely physical level, or on that level modified only as the knowledge, skill and technique which the community has accumulated are transmitted to its members unequally and by chance. They have a different outcome in the degree in which knowledge of consequences is equitably distributed, and action is animated by an informed and lively sense of a shared interest." (Dewey 2012, 156)

Also:

> "The same problem of where the line is to be drawn between affairs left to private consideration and those subject to political adjudication is formally a universal problem. But with respect to the actual content taken by the problem, the question is always a concrete one. That is, it is a question of specifying factual consequences, which are never inherently fixed nor subject to determination in terms of abstract theory." (Dewey 2012, 224)

For Dewey then, publics and states are closely intertwined. This carries the implication that there is no very obvious international public to whom actors could appeal. Dewey initially seems to claim that state boundaries reflect the limits beyond which there is no relevant degree of interdependence:

> "[T]here are social groups so separated by rivers, seas and mountains, by strange languages and gods, that what one of them does—save in war—has no appreciable consequence for another. There is therefore no common interest, no public, and no need nor possibility of an inclusive state. The plurality of states is such a universal and notorious phenomenon that it is taken for granted [...] only the theory which makes recognition of consequences the critical factor can find in the fact of many states a corroborating trait. Whatever is a barrier to the spread of the consequences of associated behavior by that very fact operates to set up political boundaries." (Dewey 2012, 42-43)

Dewey notes a gaping exception here—the possibility of war, which spreads consequences in the most decisive manner possible. When he discusses World

War I, he makes it quite clear that it involves "extensive, enduring, intricate and serious indirect consequences of the conjoint activity of a comparatively few persons" (128) for people across the globe. In his afterward, written twenty years later, Dewey points to the creation of the United Nations and the decline of isolationism as:

> "evidence that there is developing the sense that relations between nations are taking on the properties that constitute a public, and hence call for some measure of political organization. Just what the measure is to be, how far political authority is to extend, is a question still in dispute […] It is aside from the point here under consideration to discuss which party is right. The very fact that there are two parties, that there is an active dispute, is evidence that the question of the relations between nations which in the past have claimed and exercised singular sovereignty has now definitely entered the arena of political problems." (Dewey 2012, 224)

Here, any specific solution has to be justified in pragmatic terms. In short, for Dewey international problems, and most pointedly the problem of war, are in large part the result of disconnected publics. Because some publics are stillborn, because people are unaware of the causal relationships through which their actions impinge upon each other, they do not know how to regulate them. Indeed, they may not be aware of the existence of many consequential relationships that require regulation.

In summary, Dewey's account of publics and their formation addresses problems that are still relevant today. On the one side, he argues that new technologies and forms of economic organization are greatly complicating life, leading to new forms of indirect connection, in which people's actions affect others, whom they do not know in ways that are not immediately visible. This continues apace—the growth of the modern economy can be seen as a process of proliferating complex and computationally intractable relationships (Shalizi 2012). On the other, he highlights the importance of creating publics that can help highlight these indirect relationships, and suggests that in some contexts, such as international politics, it will be difficult. Some aspects of his arguments are surely undeveloped, while others seem utopian. A modern adaptation of Dewey should, in Dewey's own pragmatist tradition, skeptically interrogate his blind spots to figure out what is *practically useful* about his ideas under modern conditions.

Bringing together Dewey's arguments with Zuckerman's thoughts about new media prompts two basic questions. First—how, if at all, do new media contribute to the *formation* of new publics? Dewey argues that publics require some knowledge of their tacit interconnections if they are to be fully formed. New media will affect the formation of new publics insofar as they help, or hinder the

spread of this kind of knowledge. Second—how, if at all, do new media make publics *politically efficacious?* Dewey's arguments about the relationship between publics and the state are underdeveloped, and rely on an optimism about the "technical capacities of the state and its experts" that has mostly evaporated in the intervening decades (Fung 2002). Nonetheless, his broader agenda raises the question of whether publics need to work through the state, or whether they can build their own solutions (ibid), as some of the actors described by Zuckerman are trying to do.

Dewey's formulation of these questions resonates with Zuckerman's (2013) concern with the impact of new media on international affairs. Dewey reaches a point where his theory seems to break down—it either suggests that true publics are national in scope, or holds out the unrealistic hope that the United Nations and other such organizations represent an embryonic international public. Zuckerman is interested in whether new media will or will not help promote tangible cosmopolitanism, through which people might recognize the real benefits of solving problems together with others from different countries and cultures. If Dewey wants to come up with a theory of an international public, Zuckerman wants to figure out the practical steps through which individuals can build international publics from the ground up.

New Publics?

The modern world is more complex, and more self-evidently complex, than it was in Dewey's time. Modern economies involve a prodigious degree of complex interrelationships; while market mechanisms can support nearly miraculous levels of coordination without planning (Von Hayek 1937), they also have sharp limits, and create tacit and interconnected problems that they cannot themselves solve (Lindblom 2002). The world today is far more globalized than it was in Dewey's day, creating a far greater degree of interdependence (Keohane and Nye 2001) between states, which leads both to new political problems, as well as opportunities for the actors best able to leverage cross-national connections (AUTHOR). From Dewey's perspective, these interconnections certainly create many more potential publics. As people's indirect mutual connections increase, so does the likelihood that their actions affect each other in public ways. The difficult question is how or whether these latent publics can become active and fully formed.

Dewey's arguments highlight knowledge as a key condition for building fully-fledged publics.[1] How do new media affect public knowledge formation?

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[1] Of course, there are other problems that publics, or political groups in general, have to solve if they are to become properly organized, including collective action problems, discrimination (if their cause is politically unpopular, or displeasing to powerful actors)

One way is through providing data that can be used by social scientists to cast light on relationships that would otherwise be occulted. As Dewey himself emphasizes, pragmatic knowledge may help social scientists discover how people's actions impinge on each other. An optimistic pragmatist in the Deweyan tradition might argue that new media support new forms of data analysis, which will allow the social sciences to do this far more effectively than ever before. New media are creating massive data sets which new computational techniques can analyze, illustrating relationships that would otherwise remain unknown or entirely speculative (Freelon XXX; Lazer et al. XXX; Watts 2013). For example, it is now possible to track how individual phrases (which can be treated as proxies for, and carriers of 'memes') mutate and spread across new media (Leskovec et al. 2009). However, such optimists would have to contend with the problems of reliable causal inference (Shalizi and Thomas 2011), as well as the more pragmatic problem that that much of the truly valuable data is proprietary, and controlled by large firms such as Facebook. If new media represent a kind of apotheosis for social science network analysis (Healy 2009), they are, by the same token, not truly public. Even if we are all visible to Facebook's data centers, Facebook's data centers are largely invisible to us, and unlikely ever to be.

If the more subtle forms of data analysis are unavailable to the wider public, new media might still enable publics by publicizing problems of interdependence more visible that would otherwise go ignored or misunderstood. Social media can certainly play a quite useful role in the public organization of knowledge. Zuckerman's example of the DREAMers[2] shows how new media can help a public to articulate and understand itself. As (Beltrán 2013) argues, social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Tumblr have helped DREAM activists to create an "alternative public sphere." They have disseminated knowledge that helps young undocumented immigrants to realize that they share a common set of problems, which are amenable to political action. Since we cannot re-run history without the relevant technologies, it is impossible to demonstrate that new media was essential to the DREAMers' self organizing. It could be that they would have organized themselves without these media (as other groups have done in other periods of history). Even so, new media were at the least extremely helpful to the efforts of DREAM activists.

It's also possible that even very weak forms of knowledge provision can have significant consequences for the formation of publics. Kuran (1995) argues that 'preference revelation' can have important political consequences. Most of

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and so on. Focusing on knowledge to the exclusion of other considerations does not provide a complete theory, but instead explicates one (and only one) important set of mechanisms for group formation.

[2] Activists who are seeking a path to citizenship for the millions of undocumented young people brought to the US by their parents when they were children.

the citizens of a dictatorship may oppose the dictator; however, while everyone knows their individual, private preferences, few may realize that a majority of their fellow citizens share those preferences. This is especially so since dictatorial regimes devote a great deal of energy to ensuring that everyone, whether they privately support the regime or not, sends strong public signals of support (attendance at rallies; participation in sham elections; prominently placed pictures of the Beloved Leader in homes and shop windows). Even in democracies, people may be unwilling to reveal controversial beliefs, for fear of social sanction (Kuran 1995; Mutz 2002).

Under such circumstances, the provision of very basic knowledge about what other people do, or do not believe, may help to build new publics. When people are willing to express themselves, even through relatively cheap or costless forms of signaling (such as e.g. coloring the borders of their Facebook page), this can disseminate knowledge that, for example, a lot more people disagree with a country's ruler, or care about marriage equality than one might otherwise have suspected.[3] Contrary to skeptics, such knowledge can play a significant (if not determinative) role in helping turn latent publics into real ones. It is important to note, however, that this kind of signaling may also suppress people from revealing their true beliefs. For example, people who do not support gay rights may be less willing to reveal their true beliefs and form a public if most or all of their friends are using social media to advocate for these rights (just as supporters of gay rights might sometimes have had sound tactical reasons to cloak their beliefs in previous decades).[4] The processes that help form some publics may lead to the tacit suppression of others.

This point can be generalized—we have *no* sound empirical or theoretical reason to believe that new media are uniformly helpful to the formation of new publics. If we concentrate only on the success cases alone, we run a grave risk of 'selection bias.' It could conceivably be that groups such as the DREAMers are

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[3] However, see also Slee (2012).

[4] The question of whether people who oppose gay rights form an actual public, in the sense that they are in some sense materially affected by the actions of those who favor and enforce these rights, raises some thorny issues for pragmatist accounts. On the one hand, people with these beliefs clearly may be forced to make accommodations they do not want to (as in the United Kingdom, where there have been legal battles over e.g. bed-and-breakfast owners being barred from refusing service to gay couples). On the other, there are strong rights-based reasons for arguing that these requirements are appropriate and reasonable. Dewey's account, to the extent that it elides the clashing interests of different publics, presents an unduly starry-eyed vision of democracy. Pragmatist accounts in the Deweyan tradition are compatible with a more realistic understanding of democracy, provided that they incorporate the pragmatic benefits of continued dissension. See Knight and Johnson (2011).

the exceptions, and that many more groups that might otherwise have formed have not, thanks to under-examined but pernicious consequences of new media. Furthermore, new media can spread disinformation quite as easily as information (Ratkiewicz et al. 2011); some 'publics' on the web allow people with false, and even deranged, beliefs to reinforce each other's aberrations (AUTHOR).

To *really* understand the consequences of new media for the formation of publics, we would have to be able to observe unobservables. As well as studying the publics that did form, we would want to be able to study the publics that did not. Since this is impossible without godlike powers (or, at a pinch, far more sophisticated simulations than are currently possible), we need to turn to different strategies. One less ambitious strategy would be to look to new media, as best as we understand it and ask: given what we know about it, what kinds of groups will it tend to favor, and what kinds will it disfavor?

Even this more modest agenda may have problems. New media's most important effect might be to make the process of public formation more stochastic. Experiments in online 'culture markets' suggest that these markets may lead to very different outcomes depending on early perturbations and noise (Salganik and Watts 2008). If the formation of publics is similarly stochastic, it's possible that the success or failure of different potential publics in gaining public attention and support will be similarly difficult to predict. Alternatively, we can try to tentative lessons we can draw from empirical research. For example, Lotan (2012)'s detailed study of the evolution of #Kony2012 provides some initial hypotheses about how campaigns might succeed in gaining attention and building a public on social media. The #Kony2012 campaign combined a dense set of initial Twitter clusters focused around Christian high schoolers with deliberate efforts to amplify their reach, by asking widely followed celebrities to re-disseminate their tweets.

However, it is difficult to generalize from the specifics of this case, both because of selection effects (we do not know if there were many similar efforts that failed), and because the strategy may be self-limiting as soon as it is well understood (other groups trying similar tactics may exhaust the patience and interest of celebrities). Lotan's research does hint that nascent publics which have access to key resources on new media (such as, for example, the attention of powerful and influential figures) will have a much easier time in organizing and constituting themselves than publics with limited or no such resources. Furthermore, Watts argues elsewhere that true 'virality' is relatively rare, which suggests that the publics that succeed in organizing themselves and disseminating knowledge via new media will often have access to very large megaphones (REF). Of course, such processes are noisy. Many potential publics that enjoy such access will not take root, while some publics without this access may succeed. Yet it is at least plausible that the publics that successfully organize

themselves through new media will disproportionately be those that have better access to the relevant sources of power and influence.

As Zuckerman's (2013) previous work illustrates, there may be other systematic influences at work. Contrary to the hopes of many cosmopolitans, new media do not appear to make most people more likely to seek out new perspectives and build connections with others who are different to them. Instead, they tend to focus on those who are like them, or with whom they already have or had a relationship. On the one hand, this may mean that new media are at least as likely to encourage people to return to private activity as to turn toward the public. On the other, it suggests that new media tend to privilege some kinds of publics over others. They are more likely to favor publics developing at the local and national level than truly cosmopolitan and international publics. The technologies that underlie new media may simultaneously reinforce tendencies towards global interdependence while undermining the new publics that ought to form, in an ideal Deweyan world, around these tacit nexuses of interaction and shared fate.

Zuckerman emphasizes that the triumph of the local and private is not inevitable—neither new media, nor any other technology, fully determines the social contexts that develop around them. However, they are, very plausibly tendencies which need to be counteracted if civic activity (as Zuckerman would put it) or fully realized publics (as Dewey would put it) can address shared problems that will otherwise go unrecognized, and bedevil our efforts to deal with a more complex world.

Empowered publics?

Creating publics is one problem, empowering them another. Under what circumstances will publics be *politically efficacious*? Here, Dewey's writings are only of limited help, since they rest on an implicit model of government as a responsive solver of problems. Modern accounts are more jaundiced in their understanding of the relationship between publics and the state. Building on Zuckerman's arguments, one might look to at least four ways in which publics could use social media to good political effect. One, most simply is to make problems politically salient, by showing that there are large numbers of people who care (or, at least, say they care) about them. Another is to exert sufficient pressure on law makers or policy makers so that they change policy or law to address a problem. A third is to fundamentally challenge the political system. The fourth is to ignore traditional politics, and instead to seek to solve problems through various forms of self-organization.

The first of these is both the easiest to demonstrate and the most frequently mocked, as Zuckerman notes. Social science evidence tentatively supports skeptics' claims that there is a tradeoff between costless online solidarity and

actual activism, such that those who have displayed online solidarity are less likely to engage in more useful forms of activity. Lewis et al. (2014) study the online "Save Darfur" campaign and find that:

> "Considering the extraordinary size of this movement (1.2 million members), the influence and accessibility of the world's largest social medium (Facebook), and the moral urgency of the social issue at stake (genocide), the amount and quality of activism that resulted from the myriad online interactions among Cause members were remarkably modest. […] only a small percentage engaged in any "active and involved" participation beyond the act of nominal membership; ironically—given the premise of social media on the importance of social connection—in the case of Save Darfur, recruited online activists were the *least* active of all." Lewis et al. (2014, 4)

Yet as already noted, costless signals can have limited but real political consequences, by signaling to political actors and members of the public that a cause has some public support. The Save Darfur campaign made the Darfur issue more politically salient than other intra-national conflicts. Similarly, the Kony 2012 campaign very obviously failed to reach its explicit goal of having indicted war criminal Joseph Kony arrested before the end of 2012. However, it succeeded massively in raising awareness of a problem that had hitherto been at best of secondary importance to US policy makers and policy makers elsewhere.

Such awareness does not, in itself generate a solution. It may, however, increase incentives for policy makers to focus on this problem (perhaps to the exclusion of other problems, which may in principle be equally deserving of resources). Zuckerman's argument that increased awareness can change norms imply something like Kuran's arguments about preference revelation and falsification (REF). Social norms often don't rest on internalized standards of behavior, so much as perceptions of what *other people* view as the appropriate standards of behavior. To return to the example from the previous section, when people see others, for example, supporting marriage equality, they may themselves publically express support, either because they are expressing their true preferences (preference revelation) or because they believe that failure to support marriage equality will be disapproved of by their peers (preference falsification). Of course, both these mechanisms may reinforce each other, either to support norms that Zuckerman and I see as laudatory (such as marriage equality), or norms that we would see as offensive or actually vile (racial discrimination in the pre-Civil Rights South). There is little research about how social media supports obnoxious social norms, but there is *no reason whatsoever* to believe that it has a universal liberalizing effect.

Social media can also play a more directly political role in helping publics to not only increase the salience of a problem but to press democratic policy makers to take decisions that they otherwise would not have taken. For example, Sell (2013) finds that a "transnational coalition of Internet users" put pressure on US lawmakers to block two anti-piracy bills (SOPA and PIPA) that had previously been widely expected to pass. The US administration, and in particular the US Trade Representative's office, had a strong pro-intellectual property (IP) bias, as did prominent Democratic and Republican members of Congress, who received substantial financial support from IP-intensive industries such as movie production and pharmaceuticals. To the surprise of most observers, the pro-IP lobby was defeated by a social-media based campaign, which succeeded in jamming the inboxes and phone trees of members of Congress with communications strongly denouncing the proposed legislation. On January 18, 2012—the day that Wikipedia blacked out its website to protest the law—19 Senators withdrew their support for the Senate bill, leading to its rapid demise.

What are the enabling conditions for this kind of successful action? Again, problems of selection bias mean that any answers must necessarily be tentative. We do not have enough good comparative evidence to properly evaluate competing theories and hypotheses. This said, as Sell (2013) argues, we can draw some hypotheses from the pre-existing literature on social movements, which points to the importance of organizing technologies, of common 'frames' that package the movement's goals in broadly appealing ways, and to the need for specific and well defined goals, and pressure applied to target organizations that can achieve those goals.

In this context, Sell points to the anti-IP bill campaign's ability to use the Internet to lower the costs of organization and participation. Social media and websites spread the word; simple technologies allowed the campaign to put US citizens in direct contact with their Congress and Senate representatives' offices. Aaron Swartz, one of the main organizers of the protests, highlighted the importance of a single, simple frame, which brought together disparate groups with different interests so as to achieve the common goal of blocking the legislation.[5] Efforts to revive the anti-IP coalition after (and partly in memory of) Swartz's tragic death, so as to push back against the US surveillance state, were only modestly successful. One possible reason that they did not replicate former successes was that there was no simple and obvious goal that actors could agree on.

Social media can play a more fundamental role still, when it is used by publics not to change the minds of policy makers but to press for fundamental changes in the political system. A burgeoning academic literature argues over the

[5] Conversation with author.

role that social media played in precipitating the 2009 protests in Iran, and the so-called 'Arab Spring' of popular upheavals in North Africa and the Middle East.[6] Much of this literature wildly overstates its claims. The so-called 'Twitter revolution' in Iran was not only not a revolution, but did not plausibly involve much use of Twitter to organize protest, since only a very small number of Iranians were Twitter users (AUTHOR). However, there is some reason to believe that social media (and in particular Facebook) played an important role in spreading protest in Tunisia. Social media likely played some role in spreading protest across different countries during the Arab Spring, but was probably less important than older technologies such as satellite television (AUTHOR). There is very strong evidence indeed that social media (including Twitter) played a key role in spreading the Gezi/Taksim Square protests in Turkey (AUTHOR).

Some of these protests led to the fall of governments, while others did not. As Zuckerman and Tufekçi (REF) point out, even when protests are successful, there is mixed evidence that new media spurred social movements can replace old and corrupt political systems with new ones that work better. New media (together with other media and street organization) can bring together movements composed of disparate elements, focused on the common goal of getting rid of a disliked regime. However, they appear much less well suited to building a new pluralistic regime in its place. Similar concerns lead Faris and Etling (2008, 81) to predict that "the Internet will not be as effective in fostering the political reforms necessary to help build strong governance in weak democracies."

Assessing the truly pessimistic case—that because new media makes disorganized protest cheaper, it facilitates revolutions that cannot possibly succeed—would require sustained research. This research might, for example, compare earlier outcomes in countries with well organized dissident movements (such as X and Y?), with outcomes in the Arab Spring and elsewhere, asking if developed and extensive dissident movements are a necessary condition for successful political parties and party competition after the democratic transition. This presents challenges both for Deweyan approaches to pragmatism (which tend to share the early 20th century Progressive distaste for political parties) and academic research on new media and politics (which often has a similar disdain for traditional party politics).

Most interesting of all is the final possibility that Zuckerman identifies, that modern civic activism is taking place outside traditional politics. If this new model of civic activism works, then publics might be able to do without the State (or, alternatively, build their own micro-states). Zuckerman's arguments have a lot in common with Johnson's (2013) 'Peer Progressivism,' recognizing the limits of this emerging model of activism and giving, while also trying to defend it

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[6] See AUTHOR for a recent overview of this literature.

against pre-emptive strikes from reflexive skeptics.[7] Zuckerman cites examples like Kiva and Global Giving which "allow people to support an individual entrepreneur in the developing world," and Kickstarter.

This new model of civic activism strikes at the heart of Deweyan progressivism. It suggests that publics shouldn't look to the State, but instead should use their own resources to solve the problems that they have coalesced around. This shouldn't in itself be reason to reject them. There is much that is attractive about this model of civic voluntarism, both for liberals who aspire to better politics in a dysfunctional democracy, and libertarian-conservatives who dislike government intrusion. However, there is also a plausible case that this voluntaristic model has *systematically pernicious consequences* for democratic voice.

Consider Zuckerman's adaptation of Hirschman's (1970) arguments about exit and voice. As Zuckerman notes, simple voice is often a necessary condition for thicker forms of activism. People speak, and in speaking they find a new collective identity for themselves. This in turn allows them to act collectively to set a broader agenda. Yet Hirschman argues that exit and voice can cut against each other.[8] Bad school systems may be more difficult to reform if they allow easy exit. Those who care passionately about the quality of their schools don't have to fight difficult political battles to improve the system; instead they get out of it, and opt for a different education provider, leaving behind those who are less passionate—or, very often, less savvy about manipulating the system.

Zuckerman discusses how social-media fueled civic activism makes it easier for activists and funders to increase choice and control over, for example, which projects are funded (although sometimes, as with Kiva.org, this is partly illusory). Yet they also weaken voice by making exit easier. Websites such as Neighbor.ly, which "ask[s] individuals to fund projects that might once have been funded through tax revenues," replace political engagement with privatized publics. They pull people who care about the quality of a collective good away from democratic participation. Weaker democracy and online crowdsourcing would benefit local or particular publics that are well endowed with material resources (and hence able to support projects) while doing little or nothing for publics that do not.

While Zuckerman acknowledges that the new civic activism surely has its own problems, he doesn't really raise the possibility that it might have these

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[7] There are differences. Johnson emphasizes both non-state-centric organization *and* new technologies that make the state more responsive and effective.

[8] Hirschman argues that exit may undercut voice, by allowing those who would otherwise express voice to get out. However, he also allows that the *possibility* of exit may increase the bargaining power of those exercising voice, since they have a fallback option other than simply putting up with things the way they are.

systematically pernicious results. Yet, just this possibility is explicitly raised by Hirschman's theory, which suggests that limiting exit may increase voice, by obliging those who care about quality to work within the system rather than seeking private substitutes for it. Dewey's arguments are not nearly critical enough about the relationship between the public and the state. Zuckerman's arguments, in contrast, don't really address the possibility that privatized civic activism could, if it becomes generalized, systematically damage democracy.

A clearer distinction between privatized activism of the kind that Zuckerman emphasizes, and participatory activism (of the kind seen, for example, in participatory budgeting) would help to bring out the drawbacks and benefits of private activism and public voice. It would also help distinguish between forms of activism that might plausibly 'crowd out' democratic politics, and forms that might solve problems that democratic politics cannot address.

Again, Zuckerman's (2013) arguments about cosmopolitanism are relevant. We are no closer today than we were in Dewey's era to a responsive transnational state that international publics could reasonably try to influence. Indeed, by some measures, we may be further away. This suggests that internationally focused forms of participatory activism may be less problematic than domestic ones. While internationalized participatory activism might still fall prey to any of a host of problems, especially where it gets mixed up with traditional profit-oriented activity, it presents no danger of destabilizing international democratic institutions, since these institutions don't really exist. The problems of national democracies, where exit prevents a risk to democratic voice and hence to democratic publics, are quite different to those of international politics, where the creation of new publics around worrying problems is more likely to increase voice rather than undermine it.

Conclusions

This response brings Zuckerman's ideas about new media and activism into conversation with the arguments of John Dewey. Neither account is complete in itself, nor is the conversation between them exhaustive. Even so, the conversation is potentially *useful*. It doesn't identify explicit strategies for going forward, but it does highlight more clearly some of the contradictions and difficulties faced by new-media fueled civic activism. These difficulties are further clarified by results from an emerging research literature which is again, too voluminous to adequately summarize in a short essay.

Zuckerman's essay is a refreshing effort to start moving away from pointless arguments between cyber-optimists and cyber-skeptics. It is clear that Zuckerman would like new forms of activism to succeed; it's equally clear that he recognizes many of their limitations and flaws. We need more practical

experience and good research to provide good advice both about how to improve this activism, and when to avoid it in favor of other kinds of political action. Here, Zuckerman's small 'p' pragmatism and Dewey's philosophical pragmatism are entirely in agreement.

Yet if we're to properly understand the *consequences* of new-media fueled models of activism (and old forms of activism too), this is a beginning, not an end. In addition to talking about activism, we need to theorize the social and political forms that activism is supposed to affect. Specifically, we need some theoretic framework of the relationship between public and private activity, so as to understand the different consequences of activism for both. We also need to distinguish clearly between the domestic and international consequences of activism, since the two work according to very different principles. Scholars and practitioners of new technology pay remarkably little attention to these needs.

Dewey's account of the public and its problems allows us to begin thinking about the relationship between public and private spaces, and the role that different publics can play in politics. It can be extended to identify a different reading, for example of the relationship between voice and exit, than the one that Zuckerman provides. While its understanding of the relationship between domestic and international politics is underdeveloped, it highlights differences between the two realms that are relevant to Zuckerman's argument.

Dewey's account is imperfect—in the best pragmatist tradition, we should think of it not as a finished set of precepts, but as a work in progress. Yet because it makes explicit assumptions about the nature of public life, it is helpful in assessing possible consequences of the forms of activism that Zuckerman is interested in. Different understandings of democracy would, of course, generate different assessments of these consequences, which might perhaps be equally fruitful. It is long past time for serious engagement between democratic theorists (and political theorists more generally) and scholars and activists working on new technology. Both have a lot to learn from each other.

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