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What is This?

Centralized and Decentralized Gatekeeping in an Open Online Collective

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Abstract

This paper presents a study of gatekeeping in the U.S. political blog "Daily Kos." Open online collectives like Daily Kos use relational mechanisms, such as gatekeeping, to manage organizational boundaries and filter the contributions of participants. However, neither prior theories of gatekeeping nor the existing analyses of open online collectives account for the character or implications of gatekeeping in the Daily Kos community. Using qualitative evidence as well as statistical analysis of a large sample of comment threads on the site from 2008, I argue that gatekeeping on Daily Kos takes centralized and decentralized forms, and that both modes depend critically on relational boundary work among site participants. Centralized gatekeeping proceeds through actions by high-status members of the community. Decentralized gatekeeping, by contrast, consists of more numerous and small-scale interactions between community members, who filter and moderate each other's participation. Both forms of gatekeeping enhance the ability of site leaders and incumbent community members to regulate access to privileges and agenda-setting responsibilities on the site. These findings imply that the egalitarian ethos of open online collectives exists in tension with the mechanisms through which participation and status inequalities emerge among participants. How collectives engaged in mobilization and discursive production resolve this tension will shape the long-term impact of online participation and blogs on the political and public spheres.

Keywords

politics, Internet, gatekeeping, organizations, social movements

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Introduction

Online modes of political participation have spurred overlapping debates about the Internet's potential to transform political engagement and the public sphere. Some observers herald the democratizing potential and egalitarian character of large-scale online communities and collaborative platforms, such as political blogs or social network sites (SNS).[1] Others have questioned the idea that networked communication over the Internet has altered or overcome underlying social inequalities that ultimately determine who gets to participate in the public and political spheres.[2] In these debates, the institutional and organizational dynamics internal to online communities engaged in political action have not received sustained analytical attention. The extensive body of existing research on democratic engagement, media, and the public sphere has demonstrated that such organizational and institutional dynamics play a central role in determining both the success or failure of movements as well as the sociopolitical implications of particular forms of organization.[3] The relationship between democratic movements, digital media, and online modes of organization requires further consideration.

In this paper, I conduct a mixed-methods analysis of the dynamics of interaction and inequality within a large-scale open political community online. Specifically, I focus on practices of gatekeeping in the U.S. political blog, Daily Kos.[4] Arguably the largest and most prominent participatory political blog in the United States, Daily Kos embodies several core aspects of the practices of online engagement and participation occurring in the blogosphere.[5] The massive scale of participation on Daily Kos creates a set of coordination and information filtering problems, which the site, as a community organization, "solves" through a distributed system of content moderation and filtering. In contrast with earlier modes of media production and with more hierarchical, exclusive forms of blogging, this system does not rely exclusively on the actions of individual elites in key choke-points of bureaucratic authority to perform centralized gatekeeping roles. Rather, Daily Kos also relies on the collective wisdom of its community of participants to filter the content contributed by their peers. In this sense, Daily Kos relies on formal, organizational hierarchies as well as less formal inequalities that emerge through discursive persuasion.

The key organizational dynamic of Daily Kos's system of distributed filtering and moderation emerges as a pattern of decentralized gatekeeping, whereby practices of boundary work and social closure take on a more collective aspect than in previous forms of media production and political organization. In contrast with "traditional," centralized gatekeeping, which proceeds through actions by elite members of a collective or organization, decentralized gatekeeping consists of more diffuse, small-scale interactions between community members. Once aggregated, these small-scale interactions feed back into the status hierarchy of participants, enhancing the ability of high-status and more experienced members of the community to regulate access to privileges and agenda-setting responsibilities on the site. At the same time, decentralized

gatekeeping also functions as a means by which regular members of the community can assume limited authority and legitimately contest norms. In both kinds of gatekeeping, site participants tend to negotiate status and influence on a relational, discursive basis, rather than on the basis of bureaucratic hierarchy or formal organizational structure alone. As a result, not only content, but also people become the targets of gatekeeping. In this way, decentralized gatekeeping practices contribute to the reproduction and contestation of status inequalities within Daily Kos that reinforce the site's mechanisms of information filtering and mobilization.

Such patterns of organization and gatekeeping behavior matter for two reasons. First, the surge in online modes of political engagement and tools suggests that Daily Kos and other formally open, online-centered movements represent new "laboratories of democracy" in the Tocquevillian sense. As an increasing number of social movement organizations, political parties, and private firms adopt online tools for collaboration and collective action, the dynamics of online collectives become more relevant for the study and practice of public engagement. If the adoption of these tools brings with them novel organizational governance practices or disciplinary mechanisms, these phenomena portend a broader transformation of the organizational basis of democratic politics. They also shed light on other, offline environments—such as political parties or social movement organization meetings—in which relational, discursive mechanisms play a role in determining hierarchies of status and influence as a collective seeks to mobilize consensus around a common objective.

The second reason why online gatekeeping matters has to do with the character of the sort of partisan movement organization—engaged in media production, mobilization, and information dissemination—that Daily Kos exemplifies. The flow of attention, influence, and status in these new media organizations will shape the networked public sphere as well as the future of democratic politics. As the blogosphere has grown and become a stable part of the political ecosystem in the United States over the past five years, the processes by which ideas and individuals achieve visibility within blogs and related online movements remain opaque. This study examines gatekeeping processes within one of the largest, most dynamic political blogs with the objective of contributing to a wider debate about the politics of news and information production in the contemporary era.

The U.S. political blogosphere emerged during the 2004 presidential campaign. Since that time, the landscape of political blogs has undergone several dramatic shifts as well as a series of somewhat more subtle evolutionary changes. The most significant, ongoing transformation has been the formalization and professionalization of the most prominent individuals and organizations involved in political blogging. As part of this process, the political blogosphere has become integrated into the loose organizational networks of the press, political parties, nonprofits, consulting firms, and political action committees that make up the wider sphere of American politics.[6] As an organizational field, the blogosphere has stabilized to a large degree; however, important differences characterize elite blogs on the left and right, corresponding to distinct models of democratic political organization and discursive production.

The first political blogs were highly amateur affairs, and usually consisted of the writings of a well-informed, outspoken political outsider with passionate views. Some blogs, especially MyDD and Daily Kos on the left, made an effort to incorporate multiple contributors and voices into the conversation, but these were the exception rather than the rule.[7] This began to change around the time of the 2004 presidential campaign as the blogosphere emerged as a viable medium of opinion-generation, news diffusion, muckraking, and mobilization.[8] On the left, bloggers played a crucial role driving the Howard Dean campaign in the Democratic primaries and upending South Carolina Senator Trent Lott in response to a racist remark at a fundraiser.[9] On the right, bloggers helped reveal that CBS News and Dan Rather had used fraudulent documents about George W. Bush's record in the Texas Air National Guard, resulting in a subsequent investigation and hastening Rather's retirement.[10] In each of these cases, "A-list" bloggers proved themselves at least equal to journalists in more traditional formats and organizations. In general, they benefited from the speed of publication and transparency norms that characterized the blogosphere from its earliest days. Without the burdens of hierarchical organizations or editorial oversight, the bloggers framed issues and pursued stories in a provocative way that many print, radio, and television journalists were simply unprepared or unwilling to do. As a result the bloggers accrued credibility as well as the attention of the public, the media, and political elites.

During these early years, political bloggers were derided as pajama-clad voices from the political wilderness.[11] However, the elite bloggers resembled their peers in the media and political institutions in terms of educational credentials, class, race, and gender.[12] Furthermore, in the years between 2004 and 2008, numerous "first-wave" political bloggers received book deals or were hired as columnists by national publications looking to build online traffic and advertising revenue.[13] Over time, more A-list bloggers could be found on Sunday morning political talk shows or authoring op-eds in major news outlets. As the bloggers professionalized, substantive differences between them and news producers in partisan broadcast print or television media became less salient.

Blogging organizations also became more formal during this time. Most of the early blogs used off-the-shelf blogging software and were authored by individuals. For example, of the fourteen unique sites counted as top blogs in 2004 by Drezner and Farrell, only four were either (part of) an incorporated organization or had a formal organizational hierarchy.[14] Of those same fourteen blogs and bloggers, all of them are now either independent corporate entities or part of incorporated organizations. This pattern holds across a larger sample of top blogs as well. Data collected by Shaw and Benkler in summer 2008 show that at that time, 93 out of 155 (60 percent) of top political blogs were either (part of) an incorporated entity or involved a formal organizational hierarchy.[15]

Bloggers and blog communities have also integrated themselves into the broader field of established political organizations, networks, and actors. While this process has followed an uneven pace, a number of bloggers on the left and right have become prominent figures within mobilizations and campaigns, signaling their growing role as

power brokers and agenda setters. On the right, bloggers at first integrated into existing organizations or movements by working with major partisan media outlets (e.g., the *National Review* and Fox News), or by forming new media strategy and campaign consultancies.[16] As a result, the right political blogosphere did not claim leadership of a clearly defined grassroots movement or constituency, but some of its members became an active force in shaping the voice and agenda of conservative politics. In contrast, the left blogosphere elites have more aggressively sought to transform the landscape of political mobilization through the creation of new organizations and constituencies under the banner of a "netroots" movement. These efforts have proceeded by means of conferences, fundraising campaigns, and new advocacy organizations agitating for change within the Democratic Party.[17]

The processes of professionalization, formalization, and political integration that occurred in the blogosphere between 2004 and 2008 did not follow an even trajectory across all blogs, but they nevertheless resulted in an overall stabilization and institutionalization of the field.[18] Many of the elite blogs established consistent styles and regular communities of reader-participants despite the cyclical ebb and flow of attention around national elections. This pattern of stabilization has also manifested in the distribution of attention across the blogosphere as a whole. Using secondary data gathered by Karpf, a comparison of the mean monthly rank of top fifty left and right blogs along several metrics of authority and attention from June 2009 through January 2011, shows the distribution of ranks across left and right blogs to be stable, despite some turnover within the two groups.[19] Correlations between blog rankings for all sites on all measures in the first and last months of Karpf's data collection are likewise positive and significant.[20] The ecosystem of blogs, while still new and innovative relative to the wider field of political organizations, may not be as volatile as casual observers would believe.

Nonetheless, important differences have emerged between the left and right of the blogosphere. Most significantly, cross-ideological variation in the adoption of participatory blogging platforms has resulted in "two blogospheres" characterized by distinct democratic affordances.[21] Similarly, as implied above, the elite bloggers on the two major sides of the political spectrum have taken divergent approaches when it comes to integrating their discursive production into broader projects of mobilization and movement building. The significance of these cross-ideological differences hinges on whether they facilitate distinct pathways of influence and engagement, as well as the extent to which they do or do not become institutionalized over time.

Dynamics of Control In Open (Online) Collectives

Those who claim that blogs and networked movements hold the potential to democratize political discourse and participation ground their arguments in the view that online collectives do not simply reproduce existing, offline inequalities, but rather enable new publics to coalesce and mobilize in a more egalitarian fashion than was historically feasible.[22] Counterarguments have underscored the persistence of socioeconomic and other sociostructural inequalities as predictors of participation.[23]

Scholars have also criticized the design of technical systems that algorithmically reproduce preexisting inequalities of attention and prestige.[24] However, the fact that online tools might make enhanced collaboration and participation possible does not determine their effects. The question of what sorts of mechanisms of influence and control prevail within online collectives remains unresolved in these debates. Likewise, even if the mechanisms driving selection into participatory, collaborative online movements tend to reproduce offline inequalities of access or attention, that does not foreclose the possibility that those online movements could still embrace a more open and democratic character than their predecessors. Answering these concerns more precisely requires closer investigation of the internal dynamics of control within online collectives.

In organizational terms, Daily Kos and participatory blogs have a great deal in common with other "open" network and community organizations.[25] Some research has analyzed dimensions of control within these organizational types in the context of online collectives such as the groups that produce free and open source software.[26] However, most explanations of how these online communities work draw primarily on institutional and transaction cost economics as well as social psychological theories of motivation. Specifically, Benkler, Lerner, and Tirole, as well as Weber have all argued that distinct features of digitally networked information production enable large-scale, "nonmarket" systems to overcome the obstacles to collective action, public goods creation, and sharing identified by classical economic theory.[27] These claims originated as rejoinders to longstanding debates on "the tragedy of the commons" and collective action failures in the context of public goods creation.[28] As such, their authors view the fundamental puzzle of commons-based production online as a twofold question: Why do individuals make contributions to online collective goods in the absence of financial incentives and how do large numbers of individuals coordinate and sustain their contributions in the absence of either formal organizational structures or markets? Their answers to these questions emphasize relatively static sets of norms, incentives, and motivational profiles. As a result, they overlook the importance of both the structural dynamics within online communities as well as the interactions between community members.

Dynamics of social reproduction, governance, and institutionalization within online collectives all entail a complex set of relational processes that emerge through the interactions of community members, who actively manage organizational boundaries. For example, the work of O'Mahony and Ferraro shows that, over time, the growth of the Debian Linux community has led the community members to negotiate and implement a steadily more and more complex boundary-management process, leading to increasingly formalized and hierarchical governance structures.[29] Somewhat paradoxically, these formal and exclusionary structures are combined with direct democratic institutions that work to preserve the project's formal openness. The preservation of certain kinds of direct democracy thus appears to support the cultivation of formal organizational structure. The pattern adheres loosely to Michels' "Iron Law of Oligarchy" and reproduces a similar sort of emergent hierarchy to that identified in

Freeman's critique of the tyrannical "structurelessness" of the 1970s U.S. feminist movement.[30]

Such questions of organizational governance and democracy reconnect this line of research with analyses of online social movement organizations and democratic political mobilization. Several previous studies have argued over whether the emergence of networked, politically engaged collectives collaborating over the Internet have transformed the structure and dynamics of the public and political spheres.[31] However, among this body of research, only Karpf offers a typology of networked political organizations or a theoretical framework for thinking about the evolution of such communities in relation to existing political movement organizations.[32] For Karpf, political organizations with strong online organizing components hold much in common with their pre-Internet counterparts, but the lower communication costs enabled by digital technologies have facilitated less hierarchical intra-organizational structures. The transformation of infrastructure has in turn brought about a generational shift as new advocacy organizations on the U.S. left have embraced these possibilities.

The literature on movement organizations' use of networked technologies and strategies has a blind spot when it comes to providing more general accounts of how these supposedly "new" practices of less hierarchical mobilization proceed. For example, Karpf theorizes about the "phases" of growth that the new generation of Internet-savvy organizations pass through, but he does not analyze this process in much depth, nor does he explain the relationship of the organizations' internal dynamics to their apparent "product": a complex social system that generates and disseminates a vast amount of information. Online collectives engaged in political mobilization constitute novel sorts of institutions, movement organizations, and fields of power with characteristics that resemble their purely "offline" predecessors.[33] Closer consideration of the microsocial dynamics of networked movement organizations and communities can therefore speak to the mechanisms of influence and agenda setting in these environments as well as the means by which open online collectives function as efficient information processing systems.

Gatekeeping and Boundary Work in the Networked Public Sphere

Gatekeeping represents one particularly salient mechanism that has not received adequate attention in the context of online collectives engaged in (political) discursive production. Along with Google and sites that sort and filter information by means of algorithms, Daily Kos embodies a key aspect of the broader shift toward distributed, social information processing online. This shift, in addition to altering the terrain of social movements and political mobilization, has also transformed the structure and dynamics of the public sphere.[34] In a context where attention becomes a scarce resource subject to intense competitive pressures, social mechanisms of agenda setting and influence acquire enhanced importance. Explaining how social processes such as gatekeeping may or may not undergo transformations in online movements

and news organizations can clarify what the rise of networked communication means in relation to the organizational and informational dynamics that characterized the mass-mediated public sphere.

Early studies of gatekeeping focused on individuals who held extraordinary control over flows of goods, ideas, and attention within families, groups, or society as a whole.[35] Over time, gatekeeping research turned to the role of elites within newspapers, television, and other information-producing professions. Practices of gatekeeping by editorial staff inside news-making organizations have historically drawn special attention as the quintessential examples of how institutional, cultural, and organizational dynamics influence what in fact becomes "news" in the first place.[36]

More recent gatekeeping research has likewise focused on journalism and media production, but has shifted to consider the role of institutions, processes, and the structural dimensions of social relations in driving the movement of information and access to resources.[37] A few studies have specifically examined gatekeeping in the context of online collectives and communities.[38] In addition, several studies have explored analogous processes to gatekeeping that structure the dissemination of information in networked environments. Boczkowski's ethnography of networked newsrooms in Argentina illustrates how the adoption of online publication, content aggregators, and the intensified competition for reader attention in a flooded information marketplace have transformed the organizational practice of newspaper production, resulting in less diverse content.[39] Hindman's analysis of "Googlearchy" argues that the combined effects of power laws of attention together with many Internet users' increasing reliance on algorithmic information filtering produces an extremely small elite capable of dominating the networked information ecosystem.[40] In contrast, Benkler and collaborators have argued that the presence of such power laws do not eliminate the possibility that the Internet could be used to democratize political communication, but that the actually existing conditions of online discursive production require further study.[41]

From a theoretical perspective, none of the existing research has explained the ways gatekeeping or related processes form part of the diffuse dynamics of contention and negotiation that go into managing open online collectives. In these environments, the struggle for attention and influence among the numerous participants means that gatekeeping is as much about inequalities in the attention and influence that accrue to particular people as well as to particular types of content. In other words, gatekeeping in open collectives becomes a means of constructing normative boundaries around legitimate discourse and action, and restricting the voice of those who do not adhere to the norms. In this aspect, gatekeeping constitutes a specific form of relational boundary work in the service of elite "status closure."[42] Such relational work encompasses the diverse repertoire of practices through which individuals and groups define, imitate, contest, and reconstruct social categories. These practices also serve as the everyday mechanisms through which categorical inequalities, social movements, and economic exchanges cohere into larger structures.[43] As part of a broader repertoire of organizational governance practices, relational boundary work among the participants

in online collectives simultaneously drives the emergence of formal hierarchy at the same time that it enables the preservation of open, democratic institutions.

At its core, decentralized gatekeeping consists of numerous, microlevel interactions between individuals engaged in a particular collective endeavor. Through the aggregation of distributed, relational exchanges that draw on existing rhetorics, norms, and codes of behavior, these individuals participate in the stabilization and reproduction of larger scale social dynamics. Over time, this process results in wider patterns of path dependency and creates institutionalized impediments to sudden shifts in the social order. Thus, with or without the central points of control through which traditional practices of gatekeeping proceed, organizations or communities constituted through distributed social interaction have a tendency to generate the sorts of deeply entrenched hierarchies and structures identified in earlier work on democratic, open, or "structureless" organizations.[44]

The dynamics of coordination and organization in large-scale online communities that generate, filter, and disseminate information on a massive scale offer a compelling arena for research into networked gatekeeping. Despite the growing number of sites on the Internet that fit this description—examples include Daily Kos, Reddit, Digg, and Slashdot—only a few studies have attempted to characterize the social dynamics of information filtering within these sorts of networked communities.[45] My work on Daily Kos contributes to this body of research by extending theories of centralized, elite-level gatekeeping to incorporate an analysis of the decentralized, relational practices of social information filtering and production pursued in large networked communities. A relational perspective focused on diffuse microlevel interactions expands existing theories of gatekeeping beyond the traditional focus on central choke points of control.[46] The central points within organizational hierarchies or networks traditionally identified as the locus of gatekeeping activities remain significant, but (in the context of open or network organizations) gatekeeping practices also occur throughout a collective. In this sense, some kinds of gatekeeping may function as a distributed form of social control rather than a form of top-down coercion.

Research Design and Methods

In order to analyze the gatekeeping practices in Daily Kos, this study combines qualitative observation with a statistical analysis of a large sample of comment threads on the site from 2008. The next section of the paper introduces the site and presents an overview of some of the formal rules and technologies that govern interactions between participants. This section establishes a baseline understanding of the system of community governance that operates throughout the site as well as a sense of the site history and its prevailing culture. In particular, I focus on the mechanisms by which the community engages in distributed content moderation and filtering, an activity that accounts for a large proportion of user-to-user interactions on the site.

From the overview, I use qualitative evidence to build the case that gatekeeping happens through centralized and decentralized mechanisms on Daily Kos. I conducted six months of qualitative observation of the Daily Kos site between March and November, 2008. During this time, I maintained a user account that I used to access posts and comment threads. I also contributed several posts of my own, comments, and diary recommendations. At regular intervals on almost every day during this period, I logged into the site, read the most recent front page stories, skimmed user comments and recommendations, and reviewed several of the recent and recommended user diaries. Field notes provided the basis of a preliminary analysis, which I later refined and corroborated through the use of the site's searchable archive. From this data, I analyze a series of events surrounding the 2008 Democratic Party presidential primary elections. During this period, the divide between supporters of Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama within the Democratic Party as a whole gave rise to numerous arguments and conflicts among Daily Kos participants. Such an intense period of contentious debate thus provided an ideal opportunity to observe how the community enforced norms and constructed boundaries. In several ways, these events illustrate that gatekeeping practices emerge through everyday user-to-user interactions, giving rise to inequalities and hierarchies among the participants.

Following the inductive elaboration of the idea of decentralized and centralized gatekeeping, I construct a statistical test for relationships between measures of commenting and recommendation behavior that would signal the presence of decentralized gatekeeping. The data consist of a large sample of comment threads and recommendations taken from a subset of posts on the site, a daily political humor series called "Cheers & Jeers" (or C & J, henceforth). C & J represents one of the most stable and well-established subcommunities within Daily Kos. Therefore, although it is not necessarily representative of the site as a whole, it occupies a privileged position within the community culture and provides a window into the sorts of norms and values that prevail among an exceptionally active group of Daily Kos participants.[47] I use the full set of C & J user comments and recommendations from 2008. I collected this data in April 2010 using a script that parsed and stored records from the site archives via the built-in search functionality.[48] The resulting data set allows me to describe the network created by the recommendations between users and to examine whether or not relational boundary work among Daily Kos community members produces systematic gatekeeping effects.

Overall, the research question that drives the quantitative analysis asks whether or not the system of distributed moderation and filtering used on Daily Kos functions by means of decentralized gatekeeping. For the purposes of this analysis, I define gatekeeping as the systematic reproduction of an unequal and regular flow of valued resources—especially influence—to an incumbent group or organization and take decentralized gatekeeping to entail the production of inequalities along these lines by means of distributed, collective behavior.[49] Through a series of hypothesis tests, I test whether large-scale patterns of status accumulation consistent with decentralized gatekeeping exist.

My definition of gatekeeping hinges on the identity and role of "incumbent" groups or individuals. In the context of a large online community focused on the production of political information and mobilization, the possession of privilege, status, or power may lead to comparative advantages in terms of articulating a perspective, having that perspective heard, and eliciting some sort of response or action from other members of the community.[50] For the purposes of this analysis, I focus on two overlapping forms of incumbency: elite status and expertise. The test of gatekeeping effects is therefore a test of whether or not elite status or expertise associate with increased reputational returns to comments.[51] I break this down into three specific hypotheses, each of which operationalizes a distinct component of incumbency:

> *Hypothesis 1a: More experienced users will receive more recommendations per comment.*
> *Hypothesis 1b: More active users will receive more recommendations per comment.*
> *Hypothesis 1c: Formal elite users will receive more recommendations per comment.*

The fact that comment recommendations between Daily Kos users form a directed graph in which practices of reciprocity may drive the flow of attention and status (and thereby generate gatekeeping effects) among community members also suggests a secondary hypothesis:

> *Hypothesis 2: Users who give more recommendations will receive more recommendations per comment.*

If I find support for hypotheses 1a-c and 2, I could conclude that comment recommendation practices among Daily Kos participants contain patterns of behavior consistent with the presence of decentralized gatekeeping that reinforce the privileges of incumbent users of the site. Support for some subset of hypotheses would still imply the presence of behavior consistent with decentralized gatekeeping, but would also suggest that certain forms of incumbency associate with status advantages whereas others do not. In contrast, a result that failed to reject the null hypothesis of no effects for all four hypotheses would indicate that comment recommendation does not follow a pattern consistent with any of the forms of decentralized gatekeeping described here.

A Brief Overview of Daily Kos

Markos Moulitsas Zúñiga founded Daily Kos as a solo-authored weblog on May 26, 2002. Since then, Daily Kos has become one of the most heavily trafficked, collaborative political blogs on the Internet. Currently, the site attracts roughly 10 million page views from more than 600,000 unique visitors in the United States per month, placing at the top of the political blogosphere and on the same plane as other large

participatory websites like slashdot.com.[52] Sometimes characterized as radically left-wing, the site has become the preeminent symbol of the so-called netroots movement.[53] While many online-only news and discussion sites can match the quantity of traffic on Daily Kos, few have harnessed user participation and content to a comparable degree.[54]

Between 2003 and 2006, the Daily Kos website underwent several transformations. First, in October 2003, Moulitsas implemented a technical migration to a software platform designed to incorporate more dynamic forms of participation and interaction among users of the site.[55] The new platform incorporated reader contributions on a larger scale. In addition, during 2004, Moulitsas formalized a system of contributing editors who shared posting responsibilities with him. As a result of these technical and organizational changes, the density of content and participation on the site exploded during the 2004 presidential election cycle, contributing to the insurgent Howard Dean campaign.[56] As a result, Daily Kos became a symbol of a new kind of networked political movement on the American left.

Between 2006 and 2011, the Daily Kos site and community assumed a relatively stable form.[57] The volume of participation, influence, and attention of Daily Kos has made the site a benchmark by which other large-scale political discussion sites are measured. As of April 2010, the site had more than 200,000 registered users, out of which several thousand actively participated on the site every day.[58] The extensive technical and social system by which users filter and moderate each other's contributions to the site represents a massive proportion of activity on the site as well as a large-scale system of distributed community governance.

Distributed Content Filtering and Moderation

Within the Daily Kos community, the practice of distributed content filtering and moderation provides a basis for evaluating and prioritizing certain kinds of information over others. To facilitate this process, the software platform that makes up the site delimits four categories of content and four tiers of participants. The content categories are front-page stories; user diaries; comments; and ratings. The participant tiers are site elites; trusted users; registered users; and readers. In general, the platform incentivizes content contributions that earn the approval of other users.

The program provides all registered users with the ability to construct a public identity tied to a unique username. Once registered and logged in, users can comment, post diary entries, and customize a personal page. They do this with the knowledge that their work will be visible to any site visitor and (potentially) rated by other users. The multiple forms of user-generated content then serve as a foundation for other key social features on Daily Kos: content rating and reputation building. Together, these features make up the institutional landscape within which the site's participants interact. They also provide the means for community members to manage norms and rules. Every step in this process entails interactions between users.

Site elites on Daily Kos are a relatively small group of individuals with formal positions, status, and extraordinary privileges as identified on the site's masthead page.[59] These include Markos Moulitsas himself as well as the technical staff and editors of the site. The site elites are distinguished from other participants by their ability to post front-page stories and perform other managerial operations on the site as a whole. Daily Kos's formal organizational structure manifests itself through the presence and roles of the site elites. Moulitsas directly selected the earliest site elites. More recently, a clearer organizational hierarchy has been created whereby some elites are listed on the masthead as holding specific editorial responsibilities.

The procedures by which new site elites are chosen remain opaque, but Moulitsas and others have made statements on the topic that suggest that he and the other editors manage a system of semi-informal selection.[60] Given the site's status as a prominent movement premised on advancing Democratic Party interests, it is noteworthy that the positions are not determined through any sort of site-wide electoral process. At the same time, site elites make it clear in public statements on the site that they view themselves as ultimately accountable to and dependent on the readership for their continued legitimacy as community leaders.[61] Whether or not these statements are reliable accounts of elite community members' status matters less than the fact that the elites justify their presence on such populist terms. This sort of justificatory logic signals the elites' ideologically informed desire to understand themselves as part of a (small "d") democratic movement, even though their positions are not acquired or preserved through any sort of well-defined democratic process.[62]

Front-page stories appear as the primary content on the site's main URL and are therefore the most visible and accessible content on the site. The site's editors and elites usually write the front-page stories, but they are also sometimes user diaries that the elites have "promoted" to the front page. Through front-page stories, site elites thus anchor the community's textual production in a steady stream of reporting and analysis that meet high-quality standards. As a result, diary promotion to the front page confers prestige as well as formal reputation gains to diary authors.

Diaries are personal blogs that any registered user of the site may write and post. They vary widely in terms of length, quality, and content. In general, they mimic the tone and length of front-page stories while attempting to contribute original evidence or insights on an issue of interest to the site's participants. Formal and informal guidelines for writing the diaries exist, but many actual diaries deviate from these norms.

Immediately after posting, every diary authored by a registered user who is not a site elite appears in a Recent Diaries sidebar along the front page, increasing its visibility among other users of the site for a brief period. Other registered users can recommend user diaries, and the number of recommendations appears together with the diary title in the Recent Diaries sidebar. If a diary accumulates a large number of recommendations, it may automatically appear in the more prominently placed Recommended Diaries sidebar on the front page. Placement in the Recommended

Diaries sidebar persists longer than in the Recent Diaries sidebar and signals that a diary has achieved an exceptional amount of popularity among the site's users.

Comments are the most ubiquitous and varied category of content on the site. Any registered user can comment on any story or diary. The comments on each story and diary appear as a threaded discussion below the story or diary in question. In general, front-page stories attract a few hundred comments each. Comments function as one of the primary vehicles through which Daily Kos participants negotiate their views and engage in sustained interactions with other users of the site.

Ratings, like comments, are ubiquitous on Daily Kos. With the exception of front-page posts, all content submitted to the site immediately becomes subject to user ratings, through which any registered user can contribute feedback. This user feedback is then used to facilitate the reading and filtering of information on the site. In the case of diaries, the accumulation of positive ratings (recommendations) from numerous and/or prominent users results in advantageous placement and more widespread dissemination on the site through the Recommended Diaries sidebar. With comments, the accumulation of positive ratings adds to the reputation score of the user who posted the comment. As a result, ratings often become a mechanism of social exchange, whereby users will engage in reciprocal support of one another's contributions. Registered users who accumulate many recommendations from their peers acquire "trusted user" status. Trusted user status provides access to additional recommending features on the site platform. Registered users that have not achieved trusted status are only capable of submitting positive ratings (also known as recommendations). Trusted users can provide negative or "troll" ratings as well. Any comment that receives a sufficiently low sum of ratings is hidden from untrusted registered users of the site and from readers. By convention, users tend to contribute only positive ratings of each other's comments; however, in the case of spam or inappropriate contributions, negative ratings may be used by the "trusted" members of the community to collaboratively remove content.

The boundary that separates trusted from untrusted users is very porous and is managed technically in an automated fashion by the site's platform.[63] A registered user may shift between trusted and untrusted status, depending on the regularity and extent to which their contributions to the site receive recommendations from other users. Maintaining trusted status is a largely symbolic achievement with relatively narrow material benefits. At the same time, the process of becoming trusted on the site offers participants an avenue to enhanced forms of commitment, and those users who are trusted sometimes refer to their status as an indication of their commitment to the community.

The interactions of individual users of the site produce a dynamic flow of information, reputation, attention, and influence. The accumulation of comments and positive ratings contribute to the visibility of diaries or front-page stories, as well as to the reputations of users. Users with strong reputation scores acquire additional privileges on the site and, if they continue to attract positive attention through recommendations and

comments on their content, the potential to acquire enhanced influence among the other members of the site. At the same time, contributions that are uninteresting or otherwise inconsistent with the standards, norms, and views of a sufficient proportion of the site's participants fall from public view. In this way, the technical and social application of the moderation and filtering system takes advantage of the fact that readers can quickly process information to identify whether something is relevant to their interests or not. By relying on the aggregation of numerous judgments about other's contributions, the site's users collectively categorize and identify interesting, relevant, or controversial content. Over time, the content that rises to the top acquires status and becomes more likely to attract further attention.

The Daily Kos platform was designed to accommodate extensive interactions among users and to facilitate a process by which certain contributions acquire heightened visibility and impact over others. In this way, the system accommodates varying levels of commitment and activity, and it also aims to harness the unequal distribution of popularity and influence among users to promote content and discussion deemed interesting by the larger pool of participants.

It is important to underscore that although Moulitsas and the administrators of the site retain control over the precise metrics used by the site's reputation algorithm, this is not the same as directly determining users' reputations or their patterns of adopting the site's features. In this sense, the architectural choices that Moulitsas made in selecting the platform and customizing it should be understood in the context of the norms and interactive practices through which the community of Daily Kos participants has brought the site's technologies "to life."

Two Varieties of Gatekeeping on Daily Kos

The foregoing overview suggests that gatekeeping practices on Daily Kos can proceed through several different mechanisms. The site offers a range of tools and venues through which participants contribute content to the site, evaluate each others' contributions, and engage in formal as well as informal processes of rule or norm enforcement. In addition, the different tiers of user roles that are built into the Scoop software platform presume a hierarchy of privileges and status. The result is a system in which more and less formalized as well as more and less centralized processes of gatekeeping take place. This gatekeeping can apply to participants as well as to content, both of which may be classified as undesirable.

I distinguish between two kinds of gatekeeping—centralized and decentralized—both of which reproduce structural advantages of elites or incumbents. Centralized gatekeeping occurs at high-status positions within the community by site administrators or elite users. Decentralized gatekeeping, on the other hand, entails more diffuse processes that require the participation of numerous site users. In both cases, the effects are comparable: site elites and incumbent users (those who are more experienced, active, or comparatively empowered) play a privileged role establishing, interpreting, and enforcing the ground rules, norms, and frameworks within which

Table 1. Types of Gatekeeping on Daily Kos

Centralized	Decentralized
Formal rule & policy-making	Emergent social norms
User-training (FAQs)	Norm dissemination (user-to-user)
Rule enforcement (site elites)	Norm enforcement (user-to-user)
Status closure (site elites)	Status closure (incumbent users)
Agenda setting (front page)	Agenda setting (diaries/comments)

discursive production and political mobilization occur on the site. Table 1 shows a side-by-side comparison of examples of the two types.

Compared to previous types of gatekeeping, the key distinction of decentralized gatekeeping concerns the extent to which the gatekeeping not only entails the active participation of "the gated," but also the way distributed actions by the members of a collective can generate similar effects to the concerted efforts of a single individual.[64] Below I introduce examples of both kinds of behavior.

Centralized Gatekeeping in the Clinton Supporters' Strike

Overall, centralized gatekeeping on Daily Kos emerges as a byproduct of the social position and status of site elites. Consistent with the role of news editors in the print media and other professions, these elites utilize their status and position within the Daily Kos community to reproduce their own authority and restrict access to privileges.[65] As a result, visible mechanisms of centralized gatekeeping on Daily Kos tend to be more formalized than mechanisms of decentralized gatekeeping. Site elites—and in particular Markos Moulitsas—possess the resources to convert their perspectives into formal elements of site governance system more than any other members of the site community. Some of the ways they exercise these privileges therefore become very visible and very public, while others less so.

The period around the Democratic Party presidential primaries of 2008 provided numerous example of centralized gatekeeping in response to some contentious conflicts within the community. During the lead up to "Super Tuesday" (February 4, 2008) the polarization between supporters of Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama on the site grew increasingly tense. Moulitsas and the site's editors had not endorsed Obama by that point, but some of them opposed some of the strategies pursued by Clinton's campaign as she sought to divide the party after losing momentum in the popular vote.[66] The conflict bled over into the comments and diaries, where Obama and Clinton supporters clashed. Resentful of the widespread pro-Obama sentiment among their peers, many Clinton advocates claimed to be the victims of unfair treatment. On March 14, "Allegra," one of the Clinton supporters and a prominent diarist, proclaimed a "Writer's Strike," urging Hillary supporters and their sympathizers to immediately cease visiting, reading, and contributing to the site:

I've been posting at DailyKos for nearly 4 years now and started writing diaries in support of Hillary Clinton back in June of last year. Over the past few months I've noticed that things have become progressively more abusive toward my candidate and her supporters.

I've put up with the abuse and anger because I've always believed in what our online community has tried to accomplish in this world. No more. DailyKos is not the site it once was thanks to the abusive nature of certain members of our community.

I've decided to go on "strike" and will refrain from posting here as long as the administrators allow the more disruptive members of our community to trash Hillary Clinton and distort her record without any fear of consequence or retribution. I will not be posting at DailyKos effective immediately. I will not help drive up traffic or page-hits as long as my candidate—a good and fine DEMOCRAT—is attacked in such a horrid and sexist manner not only by other diarists, but by several of those posting to the front page.[67]

Responses to the so-called strike were mixed. However, Moulitsas and some of the other senior members of the community took an aggressive stance against the strikers, mocking them and arguing that they had no right to expect consensus on the site, especially given that Clinton opposed some of the central tenets of the community. Three days after Allegra's post, Moulitsas responded directly, arguing that Clinton's willingness to split the Democrat's super-delegate vote against the popular vote would lead to a civil war within the party:

Clinton knows this, it's her only path to victory, and she doesn't care. She is willing—nay, eager to split the party apart in her mad pursuit of power.

If the situations were reversed, and Obama was lagging in the delegates, popular vote, states won, money raised, and every other reasonable measure, then I'd feel the same way about Obama. (I pulled the plug early on Dean in 2004.) But that's not the case.

It is Clinton, with no reasonable chance of victory, who is fomenting civil war in order to overturn the will of the Democratic electorate. As such, as far as I'm concerned, she doesn't deserve "fairness" on this site. All sexist attacks will be dealt with—those will never be acceptable. But otherwise, Clinton has set an inevitably divisive course and must be dealt with appropriately.[68]

Moulitsas situates his critique of Clinton and the strikers in reference to the founding ideals of the site, reiterating his authority on the blog and underscoring the distinction between formal community rules (e.g., "sexist attacks...will never be acceptable") and the political vision behind his creation of the site. He shows no sympathy for those who disagree with his perspective.

The example demonstrates how Moulitsas uses his position and status as leader to affirm and reinforce community standards in the wake of important conflicts. These actions contribute to centralized gatekeeping on the site insofar as they reinscribe boundaries of acceptable behavior and political beliefs. Moulitsas can, in theory, kick out any users whose beliefs he disagreed with, but such actions could undermine his (and the community's) claims to enact democratic values and discourse.[69] Instead, he tends to engage in moral, political, and intellectual persuasion of the site's users, arguing for a particular vision of Democratic party empowerment and electoral strategy. In casting the Clinton supporters as misguided and worthy of mockery, Moulitsas symbolically sets the boundaries of what he sees as a legitimate political position and classifies a subset of the community as beyond the pale.

The episode illustrates most of the mechanisms of centralized gatekeeping identified in Table 1. Moulitsas draws on his capacity as site founder to make and enforce formal rules; lay down guidelines about acceptable behavior; and set the community political agenda of the site through his own posts (all of which appear on the front page).

Whatever his status or administrative privileges, Moulitsas cannot mandate the views of the site's user community by fiat. His agenda-setting and norm-enacting capacity hinges, in part, on the fact that he engages other site elites and experienced users in such discussions and seems to only take drastic action (like banning or publicly denouncing users' views) under extraordinary circumstances. In this way, his actions also contribute to an overall process of status closure, whereby he exercises influence over the selection process of new site elites and the privileges entailed by elite status.

"Everyday" and Decentralized Gatekeeping

The distinct aspects of decentralized gatekeeping boil down to particulars of scale, context, and scope. First, decentralized gatekeeping happens on a larger scale than centralized gatekeeping. It incorporates a wider range of individuals and consists of activities that are far more diffuse and numerous. Second, the contexts in which decentralized gatekeeping takes place are more widely accessible and less reliant on formal status divisions. In practice, this means that decentralized gatekeeping "happens everywhere," in contrast with centralized gatekeeping that necessarily occurs in settings and situations where site elites engage in the activities described above. In many cases, behaviors that contribute to decentralized gatekeeping are more banal than their centralized counterparts. Finally, the scope of decentralized gatekeeping tends to be narrower than that of centralized gatekeeping. This does not mean that decentralized gatekeeping behavior or its effects have less significant implications for the site than centralized gatekeeping, but merely that decentralized gatekeeping rarely entails the sort of claims to formalized authority and responsibility for the site as a whole that characterize centralized gatekeeping in many cases.

Despite these differences, the mechanisms of decentralized gatekeeping parallel those of centralized gatekeeping. In both cases, Daily Kos community members perform relational work to establish, negotiate, enforce, and adapt boundaries, norms, and standards that constitute the site. In the process of both, incumbent community members tend to reproduce their own access, privileges, and status. In other words, the effects of decentralized gatekeeping are also broadly consistent with those of centralized gatekeeping: the reproduction of social structure, authority, and privilege in a manner consistent with the participatory design of the Daily Kos community.

In May 2008, less than one month after the Clinton supporters' strike, two conflicts occurred in a "Cheers & Jeers" comment thread that illustrate how everyday community governance on Daily Kos contributes to an overall pattern of decentralized gatekeeping.[70] Cheers & Jeers, or "C & J," is written by Bill Harnsberger, who is known by his username, "Bill in Portland Maine." C & J began as a normal user diary, but its popularity led Markos Moulitsas to invite Bill in Portland Maine to make it a biweekly feature on the site in April 2005.[71] Since then, the column has become a mainstay and a source for many of the inside jokes on the site. It appears every weekday at approximately 9 a.m. Eastern Time, and typically attracts more comments than other posts. Every C & J post follows a predictable format and aesthetic, including satirical "cheers" and "jeers" from Harnsberger that incorporate light political commentary and pop-culture references. Many of the comments come from regular readers who greet Bill in Portland Maine directly or post their own "cheers and jeers" for the day. The threads focus more on sociable and friendly interactions than on contentious political debate.

In response to one of the first C & J comments on May 13, 2008, a long-time member of the site called "joan reports" posted a comment linking to an offsite blog about the Democratic presidential primaries in West Virginia.[72] A little further down the thread, joan reports also submitted an identical comment and within a few minutes, a particularly active C & J contributor called "Phil N DeBlanc" responded to joan reports' first comment by asking her to "quit spamming C & J." Beneath her second comment, other users posted comments mocking it as spam. In response, joan reports apologized on both subthreads. The apology earned joan reports a number of recommendations and positive comments from other users, one of whom remarked, "She's cool—First time I ever saw someone apologize for spamming."

Almost two hours later in the same thread, another user, "2Nurselady," wrote: **"CHEERS TO HILLARY CLINTON For fighting for the rights of ALL of the voters in this country to have their voices heard, including Florida and Michigan!"** (original capitalization and emphasis). In the wake of the writers' strike and amidst the amicable atmosphere of C & J, 2Nurselady's contribution looked like an intentional provocation, and thus met with immediate condemnation, drawing a number of negative ("troll") ratings. Bill in Portland Maine jumped to 2Nurselady's defense, arguing, "[The comment] Seems like an honest statement of opinion. No profanity. No name-calling. You may disagree with how Hillary wants to 'fight' for the as-yet-unseated delegates in FL and MI, but the statement isn't inflammatory."

In response, some of the most frequent commentators on C & J, including one user called "homogenius," responded to Bill in Portland Maine, supporting the negative ratings of 2Nurselady's comments (which would make them invisible to untrusted participants):

Uhhhh Bill,

Sweetie? Honey Pie?

This isn't about site rules or the FAQ. It's about community norms in C & J. A significant number of us feel that candidate shit violates the spirit and intent of C & J. It doesn't matter whether he or she is inflammatory, insulting, or profane.

I yield to the sense of the community on this, but that's my impression. But I'm sure as fuck not gonna hang out here if we're gonna be subjected to the same shit as the rest of this site for the duration of the primary season.

However, I'm guessing that this nurse person isn't a [Trusted User] and can't see our comments once he or she gets [troll]'d so I would suggest we leave one unhidden for that purpose.

What saith [sic] the rest of the rabble—do we open up C & J to unlimited candidate shit or do we maintain our oasis of insanity to titillate the snark gland and soothe the savage beast?

Bill in Portland Maine and homogenius went back and forth several times on the issue, but the negative ratings of many other users had effectively hidden 2Nurselady's comment in the meantime. Less than ten minutes after her first comment, 2Nurselady posted again:

JEERS TO THE DAILY KOS For removing my posts because they were pro-Hillary Clinton. I actually complimented The Daily Kos yesterday for allowing variant points of view and now, because I commented in a positive way about Hillary Clinton this morning, you've removed those posts??? Is this CNN???

2Nurselady's response illustrates that she does not understand the site's comment filtering system. At this point, the participants responded by recommending her original post to ensure that it remained visible, and homogenius explained the situation:

Dear Nurselady,

We have unhidden this comment in case you are not a trusted user and can't read our responses to your comments which have been hidden.

In any other diary, your comments would not have received hide ratings (aka "donuts"). They would have been derided for being in bold face with too much in all caps (both are seen as shouting in cyberspace).

However, Cheers and Jeers is generally a place of respite from the candidate wars and other trials and psychoses of daily life and Daily Kos. Bill in Portland Maine's proprietorship of C & J is supported directly by contributions from Kossacks. So, in addition to Mr. Kos's rules and regulations, we have some traditions and boundaries unique to C & J. I'm only one small contributor, so I defer to community sentiment...but I believe this is substantially correct.

If you continue to post candidate comments in C & J, you will likely find them hidden. If you continue to post in bold face and overuse caps, you will be soundly (and justifiably) jeered.

I hope this was helpful. Please feel free to ask for clarification from the community.

2Nurselady thanked homogenius for the information and never returned to comment in C & J again.

These interactions demonstrate some of the ways that participants who do not hold formal elite status on Daily Kos undertake gatekeeping roles in order to moderate and filter content on the site. In the case of joan reports' comments, site participants applied a set of standards without the intervention of site elites or the use of troll ratings. They used a combination of mockery, sympathy, and direct criticism, eliciting a public apology for behavior that broke with the unwritten rules of the C & J sub-culture.

In the 2Nurselady incident, site participants once again coordinated in response to a violation of the C & J community norms, but one of the site elites as well as the Scoop rating system also played an important role in shaping the interactions. Looking at 2Nurselady's user page, a number of users quickly recognized a pattern of behavior that was inconsistent with the standards of written communication on the site as a whole and C & J in particular. Several of them then negotiated with a site elite (Bill in Portland Maine) over the proper course of action. When 2Nurselady returned and demonstrated that she did not understand the informal boundaries of conversations on C & J, one user (homogenius) explicitly clarified the normative logic at work. Although 2Nurselady went on to amend her conversational tactics in subsequent comments and diaries, she ceased participating five days later.

In both cases, two well-known contributors to the C & J conversations, homogenius and Phil N DeBlanc, drew on their authority to speak on behalf of "the community" of C & J participants. Other experienced users joined as well, giving weight to the categorization of joan reports' and 2Nurselady's comments as unacceptable. In doing so, they utilized the site's technical infrastructure and drew upon existing institutions in

Table 2. Summary Data: Cheers & Jeers, April 13, 2008

	total	unique users	mode	median	mean	max
comments made	772	146	1	2	5.3	73
recommendations received	9516	146	9	31	65.2	537
recommendations given	9516	179	1	7	53.2	700

order to preserve the flow of information they recognized as legitimate (in this case, casual socializing and political humor).

These examples demonstrate that the interactions between Daily Kos participants involve more than just discussion. The interactions also entail identifying and categorizing behavior in accordance with formal and informal standards. Hierarchies of status and identity become operationalized in these acts of categorization, which in turn reproduce boundaries of legitimate discourse and practice.

The application of these emergent norms contribute to both centralized and decentralized gatekeeping as site participants use them simultaneously to acquire and to signal "in-group" membership within experienced and visible subcommunities on Daily Kos. They also feed into the production of status inequalities between those site members who can successfully navigate and appropriate in-group codes and those who cannot. The practice of policing the boundary between trusted and untrusted users through comment rating thus functions as a form of status closure, whereby trusted users regulate access of untrusted users to privileges.

It is possible to quantify and visualize the relationship between comments and recommendations within the April 13, 2008 C & J thread involving joan reports and 2Nurselady. Table 2 contains a descriptive summary of all the comments and recommendations in that thread.

Note that the distributions of all the variables are extremely skewed. Figure 1 presents a scatterplot of comments made (log scale) against recommendations received (log scale) for all participants in the thread. Each point is also scaled to represent the (log) number of recommendations given.

Not surprisingly, the graph demonstrates a positive relationship between the number of comments made and the number of recommendations received. It also seems to show a positive relationship between comments, recommendations received, and recommendations given (thus the growing size of points along both the X and Y axes).

Table 3 contains summary data for each of the key participants discussed above. Here, the positive association between the different types of gatekeeping behavior depicted earlier and authority within the site's reputation system becomes transparent.

These examples show an association between status, gatekeeping behavior, and participation in a single comment thread. The visualization also illustrates that the centralized gatekeeping practices performed by high-status individuals like homogenius and Phil N DeBlanc also possess a collective, decentralized aspect insofar as their individual judgments are reinforced by dozens of other individuals who chose to recommend the comments in question or not.
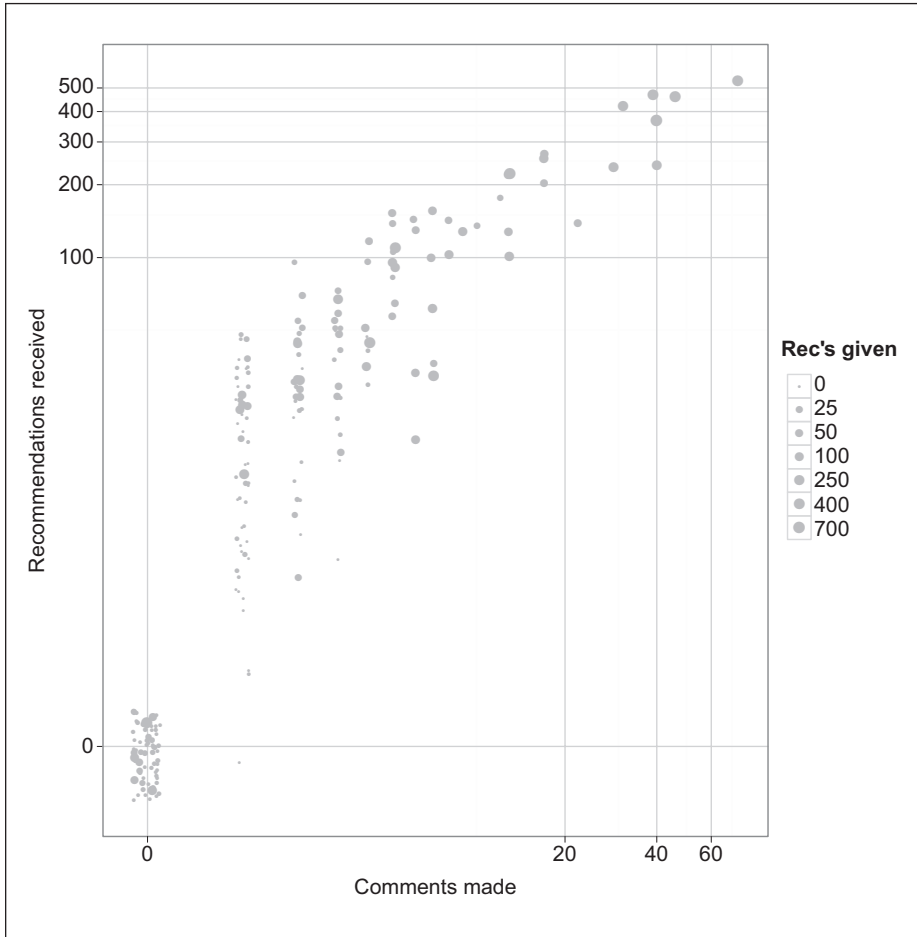
Figure 1. Summary Scatterplot: Cheers & Jeers, April 13, 2008

Table 3. Key Participants, Cheers & Jeers, April 13, 2008

	comments	recommendations received	recommendations given
Phil N DeBlanc	46	459	500
Bill in Portland Maine	13	219	103
homogenius	22	138	46
joan reports	4	47	0
2Nurselady	3	5	0

Patterns of Decentralized Gatekeeping

In order to evaluate whether the relational work that happens in C & J comment threads produces decentralized gatekeeping at an aggregate level, I require more data and different methods. The evidence from the single comment thread discussed in the previous section suggests an effective means of testing for the presence of aggregated patterns of decentralized gatekeeping behavior. That example showed how site participants utilize the system of comments and recommendations to negotiate status relations, rewarding desirable forms of participation, experience, and commitment with higher numbers of recommendations. In this section, I extend this finding and test whether these associations persist at a much larger scale, using a sample of more than 5,000 site participants and their behavior in several hundred comment threads within "Cheers & Jeers" during all of 2008. First, I present a descriptive analysis of the users, comments, and recommendations in my sample, including attributes of the network created by user comment recommendations. Then, using the same data, I construct a deductive test of the hypothesis that the relational work of recommending comments among Daily Kos users produces an aggregate pattern of decentralized gatekeeping.

Data and Methods

The data set I use to conduct this analysis contains all of the comments and recommendations from Cheers & Jeers in 2008. As a frame for drawing a purposive sample of users, comments, and recommendations, C & J captures a very prominent and culturally significant subset of the Daily Kos population. It also makes for a strong test of decentralized gatekeeping, as participants in C & J threads tend to be, if anything, more experienced and more active than a random sample of site members would be. As a result, if decentralized gatekeeping occurs in C & J, that would suggest that it is also very likely to be present across the rest of the site, where experienced or elite users are even more likely to encounter and interact with new users less familiar with the norms and rules of the community.

As discussed above in the Research Design and Methods section, the outcome of interest in this analysis is the reputational status of individual participants in the C & J comment threads measured by the number of recommendations their comments receive. I operationalize this as two distinct dependent variables. First, for the purposes of hypothesis testing and modeling the relationship between incumbency and reputational status, I divide each individual's total number of recommendations received by their total number of comments made. The resulting variable is thus the individual user's average recommendations per comment in 2008. This measure approximates what Daily Kos users experience and see in the context of comment threads, where each comment appears alongside the number of recommendations it has received. Second, for the purposes of describing and analyzing the network formed by site users (vertices) and their recommendations of comments (directed edges),

Table 4. Summary of activity on Cheers & Jeers, 2008

	total	unique users
stories	237	–
comments made	172920	4660
recommendations received	1973303	4165
recommendations given	1973303	4595

I calculate the Bonacich centrality score of each user within the 2008 comment-recommendation network.[73]

I include several independent variables in my analysis as measurements of distinct dimensions of user incumbency and controls. To measure experience, I use a count of the number of months elapsed between the month in which the user created his or her account and January 2008. I also include an indicator of whether or not the user appeared on the site's masthead and was thus formally a site elite. Another variable, "activity", consists of a count of the number of C & J comment threads in which the user participated in 2008 by either posting a comment or recommending someone else's comment. Finally, I also measure the total number of recommendations made by the user in C & J comment threads during 2008 (outdegree within the recommendation network).

My analysis proceeds in two steps. First, I describe the user-comment-recommendation network using a series of summary statistics as well as graph-level indices. For some of these indices, I conduct nonparametric tests to determine whether or not the network is more centralized or consists of more reciprocal ties than would be predicted by chance given its particular density and size.[74]

In the second stage of my analysis, I use ordinary least squares regression (OLS) and quantile regression models to test for evidence of an association between user incumbency and reputational status.[75] The rationale behind my use of quantile regression derives from the extremely skewed distribution of the dependent variable—recommendations received per comment per user. Given the extreme inequalities across the distribution, I have reason to expect that the processes driving status acquisition may vary across the distribution of the outcome. By dividing the distribution of this outcome into quantiles and then calculating coefficients for each quantile, I am able to estimate more precisely the relationship between each of the independent variables and my outcome measure. Following Koenker, I also calculate bootstrapped standard errors and *p*-values for each of these coefficients.

Results

Table 4 presents summary data about the sample of comments, recommendations given, and recommendations received among Cheers & Jeers users in 2008. Descriptive statistics for all of the variables, including pairwise correlations, are provided in Table 5.

Table 5. Summary Statistics, Cheers & Jeers, 2008

	Summary Values				Pairwise Correlations					
	min	median	mean	max	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) comments made	0	2	29.93	11347						
(2) recommendations received	0	3	341.52	77751	0.76*					
(3) recommendations received per comment	0	1	7.65	7248	0.00	0.09*				
(4) Bonacich centrality score	0	0.01	0.14	31.83	0.00	0.01	0.00			
(5) recommendations given	0	17	341.52	76136	0.94*	0.78*	0.01	0.00		
(6) active stories	1	2	8.95	237	0.52*	0.63*	0.08*	0.01	0.64*	
(7) months of experience†	0	21	20.21	51	0.03*	0.02	−0.01	0.08*	0.05*	0.08*

†Interval scale with January, 2008 = 0
*p-value ≤0.05

Table 6. Network Variables and Graph Level Indices, Cheers & Jeers, 2008

Measure	Value
vertices (active users)	5778
edges (recommendations)	1973303
mutual edges (dyads)	47698
asymmetric edges (dyads)	180070
null edges (dyads)	16461985
network density	0.01
edgewise reciprocity	0.35
log-odds reciprocity ratio†	3.74

†Calculated against the baseline probability of an edge within any graph with the same number of nodes and edges.

As is typical for measures of traffic, recommendation, and attention in online communities, all of the different measures of reputational status follow extremely skewed distributions, with median values close to zero. Indeed, plotting and fitting curves to the distribution of user recommendations received, Bonacich centrality, and recommendations-per-comment reveals that they all follow a "parabolic fractal" distribution, one of several "power law" distributions that recur frequently in natural and social phenomena.[76] Given such extreme distributions, I use the natural logarithm for reputational status measures as well as activity and recommendations given in the correlation tables below as well as all subsequent models.

Table 6 includes descriptive and graph-level analyses of the comment recommendation network. Overall, these results reveal a fairly centralized graph in which the

Table 7. Regression Results, Daily Kos Cheers & Jeers, 2008
Dependent Variable: Recommendations Received per Comment[†]

	OLS	Quantile Regression					
		0.1	0.25	0.5	0.75	0.9	0.95
(Intercept)	.202***	−.123***	−.305***	−.523***	.265***	1.212***	1.913***
Recommendations given[†]	−.110***	0	0	0	−.078***	−.157***	−.244***
Active stories[†]	.733***	.179***	.441***	−.757***	.865***	.962***	.997***
Months' experience	.003***	0	0	0	.006***	.008***	.011***
Elite user	−.083	.001	−.001	0	−.047	−.031	−.352

$N = 4655$
Adjusted $R^2 = 0.330$
†Indicates logged variable. Dependent variable is also logged.
***p-value ≤0.01

vast majority of dyads contain mutual ties and where reciprocal ties are much more likely than would be predicted by chance.

Given that the graph is relatively sparse, with only a moderate portion of the total possible dyadic ties between users realized, the nonparametric calculation of the log-odds ratio of reciprocity (LRR) is noteworthy. This measure uses the size and density of the network to calculate the probability that any tie in the graph is reciprocated given the underlying probability of an edge existing in the first place. The relatively high odds of a reciprocal tie suggest that C & J users who were active as both commenters and recommenders during 2008 were likely to engage in reciprocal recommendations.

The results of the models, presented in Table 7, show evidence of a complex, differential relationship between users' experience, activity, and reputational status.[77] Overall, the results suggest a significant, positive association between user activity and the number of recommendations-received-per-comment. The association varies depending on the outcome, growing steadily through the fiftieth percentile of the distribution before stabilizing around a maximum level.

In addition, I find a significant, positive association between user experience and the number of recommendations-received-per-comment. This association follows a distinct pattern of growth across the different quantiles of the dependent variable, remaining relatively insignificant below the fiftieth percentile and then growing rapidly over the rest of the distribution.

A significant, negative relationship between recommendations-given and recommendations-received-per-comment also emerges at the fiftieth percentile of the dependent variable, dropping steeply across the rest of the distribution. I find no evidence of a significant relationship between elite user status and recommendations-per-comment.

Discussion: Gatekeeping and Reputational Status

Returning to the hypotheses listed earlier, the results suggest that experience and activity level have a significant association with recommendations-received-per-comment (supporting *H1a* and *H1b*). At the same time I find no evidence of an association between elite status and recommendations-received-per-comment (failing to reject the null for *H1c*), as well as a significant negative association between recommendations-given and recommendations-received-per-comment (reversing the expected relationship from *H2*).

There appear to be strong associations between reputational status and experience and activity within C & J comment threads. Overall, these findings support the idea that patterns of decentralized gatekeeping emerge in the data. Users' relative experience and activity levels within comment threads associate with reputational payoffs. At the same time, as the negative association of recommendation-giving and comment-receiving illustrates, not all forms of activity associate with the same kinds of reputational outcomes. User incumbency predicts reputational status more effectively depending on the sort of activity users tend to pursue.

These findings have several important limitations, the most important of which stems from potential for endogeneity in the models. The analysis I have presented here cannot distinguish between situations where Daily Kos users participate on the site longer because they receive more recommendations versus situations where Daily Kos users receive more recommendations because they have participated on the site longer. Nevertheless, the possibility of reverse causality along these lines does not undermine the validity of my finding that "experience pays" for Daily Kos users insofar as peer-generated status measures on the site are concerned. The strong association between experience and status implies that decentralized gatekeeping effects—the systematic accrual or retention of privileges by incumbent individuals within the community—occur irrespective of the direction of the causal processes involved. Indeed, I would argue that it is likely that a process of self-selection unfolds whereby the community members who decide to return to the site over the course of many weeks, months, and years may do so both because they receive positive reinforcement and because they seek to acquire greater standing among their peers. In concluding that more experience is associated with greater reputational status, it is not necessary to separate the one story from the other. As I argued earlier, decentralized gatekeeping, unlike its centralized variants, need not be the product of self-conscious filtering procedures or acts of exclusion. Instead, decentralized gatekeeping effects encompass the range of mechanisms by which both self-selection and exclusion give rise to and reinforce incumbent advantages within information-generating systems. Longitudinal analysis of the same data could not reasonably distinguish between these competing causal storylines either, as there is no meaningful way to control for the (presumably variable) differences in intrinsic quality of comments or commenters. This is a critical limitation because without such controls, no statistical test can separate users who stay on the site longer because they accrue greater status from those who accrue greater

status because they stay on the site longer. Future research should design more nuanced tests that can disentangle these respective explanations of my findings.

Given the culturally significant role of C & J within the Daily Kos site as a whole, as well as the relatively egalitarian social norms that prevail among C & J participants, I conclude that similar patterns of behavior are likely present across the rest of the site, although they may be more difficult to observe or measure in a valid way.

Strong benefits to experience and influence make intuitive sense—indeed, such patterns are exactly what the existing empirical and theoretical literature on online informational production and exchange that I reviewed above would predict. However, the evidence that Daily Kos participants' highly unequal levels of experience, activity, and reputation associate so strongly suggests that the dynamics of social reproduction among the site's users are quite stable. In this sense, the case illustrates Tilly's notion of the relational foundations of inequality:

> In a relational view, inequality emerges from asymmetrical social interactions in which advantages accumulate on one side or the other, fortified by the construction of social categories that justify and sustain unequal advantage. As a rough analogy, consider a conversation involving initially equal partners in the course of which (through wit, guile, knowledge, or loudness) one conversationalist gradually gains the upper hand.[78]

Tilly's "rough analogy" of relational work to a conversation helps map this claim onto the context of Daily Kos. Among Daily Kos participants, stable, extreme inequalities of status and participation have emerged in a number of distinct arenas. In general, site participants who are more active contributors and have a greater amount of experience tend to accrue greater status. This association between experience, participation level, and status suggests that the interactions among site participants play an important role in generating and sustaining social hierarchies.

Conclusions

The results presented here suggest the presence of two kinds of gatekeeping on Daily Kos, both of which may have contradictory effects on the site. Collective action in a large and "open" online community entails more than the boundary work traditionally conceived as centralized gatekeeping by site elites and administrators: it also relies on participants' decentralized interactions, which give rise to decentralized gatekeeping and status inequalities of their own. These inequalities, in turn, feed back into the complex of norms, practices, and standards that prevail among site users, contributing to the community's overall political activities as well as its social dynamics.

Gatekeeping practices by participants on Daily Kos thereby contribute to the negotiation and reproduction of inequalities on the site. My examples illustrate how high-status contributors to Cheers & Jeers performed boundary work in moderating the comment threads. Sometimes—as with 2NurseLady—they did so through disagreement

with site elites like Bill in Portland Maine; however, the aggregated evidence taken from the entire archive of 2008 C & J comment threads suggests that the effects also reproduce diffuse status inequalities across the user population as a whole. On the basis of this qualitative and quantitative evidence, future research should pursue more precise identification strategies, which can test for the presence or effects of decentralized gatekeeping.

In the incidents involving joan reports and 2NurseLady, the ability of community members to moderate successfully depended, in part, on their ability to draw on and deploy appropriate codes of behavior established on the site. In deploying these codes, they enacted informal community norms that validated contributions consistent with the overarching goals articulated by Moulitsas, Harnsberger, and other site elites elsewhere. When necessary, they also adapted existing standards to suit the needs of particular situations.

Across these examples, the distinction between centralized and decentralized gatekeeping is porous, and there are many ways in which Moulitsas' and other site elites' actions influence the patterns of gatekeeping that prevail across the rest of the community. The effects of decentralized gatekeeping are, in some sense, the cumulative result of many small-scale examples of relational boundary work, each instance of which involves much smaller numbers of people in specific interactions. Among the site elites and leaders, the tendency toward social closure and exclusion must continually be balanced against the ideological and organizational exigencies to egalitarian and democratic ideals. As 2Nurselady demonstrated, appeals to such ideals—even when made by an outsider who neither understands nor has a long-term commitment to the site—are taken seriously.

The mechanisms of gatekeeping described here only reflect a snapshot of a single dimension of participation (commenting) on the Daily Kos site during a specific period of time. Patterns of decentralized gatekeeping and path dependency reinforced through comment recommendation are not likely to determine the social structure among the site's community as a whole. Making comments and receiving recommendations is far from the only means by which members of the site might participate and acquire status in the eyes of their peers. There are also user-blogs (diaries); participation in offline and advocacy events (such as the annual Netroots Nation Conference or unaffiliated social events); as well as work within the formal Daily Kos organization or other organizations that make up the netroots political movement. In other words, the practices of comment recommendation and the corresponding patterns of path dependency that go along with these practices only constitute a single dimension of the multiplex social processes through which status hierarchies may emerge, rise, and fall within Daily Kos as a whole. Reputational gains through commenting thus do not guarantee that a given user of the site will become well known or achieve broader influence, although they are an index of a certain kind of reputational standing. Status achieved or measured through comments is not determinative of other sorts of status within the community. However, comment recommendations do provide a visible and objective indicator of one dimension of the community's status relations. More fine-grained

longitudinal analyses of the patterns of comment posting and recommendation in relation to other modes of status acquisition would be necessary to establish the precise mechanisms by which Daily Kos participants become more or less influential members of the community overall. Also, further analysis will be necessary to establish whether or not the oligarchic tendencies revealed by this analysis persist across these other forms of behavior.

To the extent that the patterns of decentralized gatekeeping through comment recommendation analyzed here constitute a path dependent system of status relations, they imply several conclusions relevant to theories of gatekeeping, democratic organizations, and the networked public sphere. First of all, the presence of decentralized gatekeeping complicates the "myth of digital democracy" perspective, elaborated by Hindman and others, which views the online public sphere as nothing more than a new setting in which old elites can exert their influence. Just as traditional social movement organizations cannot be defined in reference to the identities of their leaders alone, it does not make sense to characterize Daily Kos as an extension of the personality traits of Markos Moulitsas. In moments of conflict, Moulitsas may draw on his monopolistic control over the site infrastructure as a rhetorical justification for the legitimacy of his perspectives, but both he and the other site elites ultimately rely on the persuasiveness of their rhetoric and their ability to build discursive consensus. In this sense, the processes and practices of decentralized gatekeeping reinforce the democratic basis of the site—only the best contributions and the most compelling contributors receive broad support—at the same time as they serve the interests of those who already possess status and influence within the community.

Indirectly, decentralized gatekeeping dynamics partially reinforce Hindman's view that hierarchies, status, and social reproduction emerge through the network dynamics of communication and participation in the open and nonbureaucratic organizations of the blogosphere. In this sense, even though Daily Kos may be unique in terms of its scale and recognition in the political blogosphere, the site exemplifies patterns of attention, influence, and participation found within open source software development communities, Wikipedia, networked social movement organizations, and other sorts of open collective action projects. If decentralized gatekeeping prevails across these other kinds of environments, the putative link between openness and egalitarian outcomes is indeed a myth. Decentralized gatekeeping may represent yet another pathway toward inequality production within the larger sphere of democratic and online participation, while at the same time introducing a means for a new elite to achieve prominence within particular sites or movement organizations.[79]

This analysis of gatekeeping in Daily Kos also reveals some of the variations that characterize gatekeeping in networked environments in contrast with their offline counterparts. Previous studies of offline gatekeeping have focused on bureaucratic settings with fairly clear boundaries. These settings have given rise to modes of gatekeeping behavior largely consistent with the organizational affordances and constraints particular to each environment. For example, newspaper editors exercise individual and collective authority over what sort of news makes the front page.

Likewise, tenured faculty at research universities review grant proposals to determine which projects will receive funding and institutional support. In both cases, incumbents or elites establish and enforce norms that enable them to manage the boundaries of a particular field. In addition, the gatekeeping might proceed at either an individual or a collective level. A single editor makes choices about articles that go into her particular section and newspaper, and she also attends conferences and social events where fellow editors discuss industry-wide standards.

Gatekeeping mechanisms in online collectives like Daily Kos have similar dimensions to offline settings. Moulitsas, the other site elites, and some of the well-recognized incumbent users may hold the authority to directly shape and enforce the sorts of behavior that are considered legitimate on the site. In particular, Moulitsas' unique role as the site's figurehead as well as his absolute authority over the site's infrastructure provide him with broad dictatorial powers, although he seems to avoid using them to their full extent.[80] At the same time, the collective gatekeeping practices also take on a more decentralized character as the practice of deploying categories of behavior and enforcing norms is distributed more widely across the community. Although this study has characterized these decentralized gatekeeping effects and found quantitative evidence of their presence on an aggregate scale, my findings cannot speak to the effects of decentralized gatekeeping on either the character of political discourse or political engagement. Other studies have addressed these issues,[81] but more research will be necessary to evaluate whether and how such transformations matter for the future of political engagement, news production, and collective action.

A theoretical and empirical account of decentralized gatekeeping thus represents a useful counterpoint to previous work emphasizing the salience of participatory affordances within the networked public sphere in general and the political blogosphere in particular.[82] Institutionalized status inequalities within open online communities contradict some of the radical egalitarian ideals that make these sites attractive to many people at the same time as they facilitate long-term movement-building goals and the continued commitment of community insiders.

The establishment and preservation of an elite minority within open online collectives may serve an analogous purpose to the stabilization of management structure and roles in more traditional organizational forms. Elite community members can provide continuity as well as a baseline of contributions to the site at the same time as they play an agenda-setting role relative to their peers. They can also incorporate less-experienced peers into the community through the transmission of norms and training.[83] In the context of building an effective movement organization, this kind of leadership can promote long-term movement survival, the achievement of advocacy goals, and other forms of success. In open online collectives, gatekeeping and similar practices may therefore be necessary for the success and survival of the community as they allow for the cultivation of a high signal-to-noise ratio in what would otherwise be a cacophonous, chaotic environment. According to such a view, the exclusion of certain people and perspectives could serve a productive function inasmuch as it allows for the site to achieve growth and coherence and the leaders to achieve their objectives. This would imply a networked corollary to Michel's "Iron Law of Oligarchy." As findings from a

single case do not provide an empirical foundation for settling such debates, however, future work should elaborate these claims and test their applicability to a wider range of open online collectives and network organizations.

In terms of the field of U.S. politics and political organizations, the patterns of intra-blog stabilization exemplified by Daily Kos coupled with the stabilization of the organizational field of political blogs discussed earlier suggest that the initial period of disruptive innovation that characterized the blogosphere between 2004 and 2008 may already have ended. This does not mean that the influence of the political blogosphere and associated movements such as the netroots is waning or diminished, but rather that the place of blogs within the field of U.S. politics and the networked public sphere may no longer be as volatile as it initially seemed. Blogs are now an established piece of the political information and movement ecosystem and it makes intuitive sense that their internal dynamics would likewise assume a relatively stable form. Within the Daily Kos community, the stabilization of a set of norms, hierarchies, and elites imply that the community has, in some sense, solved a core problem of movement-building and social reproduction. At the same time, this opens up related questions about the mechanisms of organizational transformation. The dynamics of path dependency discussed here already are playing an important role in shaping the future of the site and its ability to mobilize its membership. It will be important to see whether or not this stabilization encompasses the netroots movement and the role of the Internet in political organization and behavior.

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Notes

1. Yochai Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Aaron Shaw and Yochai Benkler, "A Tale of Two Blogospheres: Discursive Practices on the Left and Right," *American*

Behavioral Scientist 56, no. 4 (2012): 459-487. David Karpf, *The MoveOn Effect: The Unexpected Transformation of American Political Advocacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). David Karpf, "Understanding Blogspace," *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 5, no. 4 (2008): 369–385.

2. Eszter Hargittai, "Digital Na(t)ives: Variation in Internet Skills and Uses among Members of the 'Net Generation'," *Sociological Inquiry* 80, no. 1 (2010): 92–113; Matthew Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008); Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady, "Weapon of the Strong? Participatory Inequality and the Internet," *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 2 (2010): 487–509; Cliff Zukin et al. *A New Engagement? Political Participation, Civic Life, and the Changing American Citizen*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

3. Kenneth T. Andrews et al., "Leadership, Membership, and Voice: Civic Associations That Work," *American Journal of Sociology* 115, no. 4 (2010): 1191–1242; Rodney Dean Benson and Érik Neveu, *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field* (New York: Polity, 2005); Dana R. Fisher, *Activism Inc.: How the Outsourcing of Grassroots Campaigns Is Strangling Progressive Politics in America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Michael Schudson, "The Sociology of News Production," *Media, Culture & Society* 11, no. 3 (1989): 263–282; Michael Schudson, "The News Media as Political Institutions," *Annual Review of Political Science* 5, no. 1 (2002): 249–269; Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003).

4. "Daily Kos," http://dailykos.com.

5. Shaw and Benkler, "A Tale of Two Blogospheres."

6. Daniel Drezner and Henry Farrell, "The Power and Politics of Blogs," *Public Choice* 134 (2008): 15–30; Matthew R. Kerbel, *Netroots: Online Progressives and the Transformation of American Politics* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2009).

7. Chris Bowers and Matthew Stoller, *Emergence of the Progressive Blogosphere: A New Force in American Politics*, New Politics Institute (2005), http://www.newpolitics.net/node/87?full_report=1; Drezner and Farrell, "The Power and Politics of Blogs"; Karpf, "Unexpected Transformations"; and Kerbel, *Netroots*.

8. Drezner and Farrell, "The Power and Politics of Blogs."

9. Jerome Armstrong and Marcos Moulitsas Zúñiga, *Crashing the Gate: Netroots, Grassroots and the Rise of People-Powered Politics* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green, 2006); Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*.

10. Jonathan V. Last. "What Blogs Have Wrought," *The Weekly Standard* 10, no. 3 (Sept. 2004), http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/004/640pgolk.asp?nopager=1.

11. Ibid.

12. Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*.

13. Examples of books include Armstrong and Moulitsas Zúñiga, *Crashing the Gate,* and Glenn Reynolds, *An Army of Davids: How Markets and Technology Empower Ordinary People to Beat Big Media, Big Government, and Other Goliaths* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006); Columnists include Ross Douthat (*The New York Times*); Mickey Kaus (Slate.com); Andrew Sullivan (*The Atlantic Monthly*); and Kevin Drum (*Mother Jones*).

14. Data collected through the examination of archived copies of these blogs on the Internet Archive's "Way Back Machine," http://wayback.archive.org.

15. These were originally two separate questions, the first about incorporation and the second about organizational structure. In total, 62 out of 155 (40 percent) were (part of) an incorporated organization and 77 (50 percent) involved a formal hierarchy of some sort. Details of the sampling, coding, and analysis techniques can be found in Shaw and Benkler, "A Tale of Two Blogospheres." For both questions, Krippendorff's α reliability coefficient was ≥ .7.

16. Subsequently, several bloggers also played a role in supporting and building momentum around the Tea Party movement, although it is not clear that the political blogosphere has constituted a more important component of the Tea Party than broadcast media, informal social networks, or existing advocacy organizations.

17. Matt Bai, *The Argument: Billionaires, Bloggers, and the Battle to Remake Democratic Politics* (New York: Penguin Press, 2007); Karpf, "The MoveOn Effect"; Kerbel, *Netroots*.

18. Such dynamics of stabilization following disruptive technological innovations appear consistent to those observed in other organizational fields. See Neil Fligstein, *The Architecture of Markets: An Economic Sociology of Twenty-First-Century Capitalist Societies,* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

19. The data comes from Karpf's Blogosphere Authority Index (BAI), described in David Karpf, "Measuring Influence in the Political Blogosphere: Who's Winning and How Can We Tell?" *Politics and Technology Review* (George Washington University: Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet March 2008), 33–41. http://www.asiaing.com/politics-and-technology-review-march-2008.html. Using Wilcoxon Rank Sum tests, I found that all differences between left and right on every metric are significant $p ≤ 0.001$. The BAI is available at: http://blogosphereauthorityindex.com.

20. Correlations calculated using Pearson's r, all $p ≤ 0.01$. For the aggregate BAI correlation test between first and last month rank for all sites, $r = 0.75$.

21. Shaw and Benkler, "A Tale of Two Blogospheres"; Karpf, "The MoveOn Effect."

22. For example, see chapters 6 and 7 of Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*, and Clay Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008).

23. E.g., Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, "Weapon of the Strong?" and Hargittai, "Digital Na(t)ives."

24. Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*.

25. Paul S. Adler. "Market, Hierarchy, and Trust: The Knowledge Economy and the Future of Capitalism," *Organization Science* 12, no. 2 (2001): 215–234; Gina Neff and David Stark, "Permanently Beta: Responsive Organization in the Internet Era," *Society Online: The Internet in Context*, eds., Philip N. Howard and Steve Jones (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004):173–188; William G. Ouchi, "Markets, Bureaucracies, and Clans," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (1980): 129–141; Walter W. Powell. "Neither Market Nor Hierarchy: Network Forms of Organization," *Research in Organizational Behavior,* eds., B. M. Staw and L. L. Cummings, Vol. 12. (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1990): 295–336.

26. E.g. Siobhán O'Mahony and Fabrizio Ferraro, "The Emergence of Governance in an Open Source Community," *Academy of Management Journal* 50, no. 5 (2007):1079–1106.

27. Yochai Benkler, "Coase's Penguin, or, Linux and the Nature of the Firm," *Yale Law Journal* 112, no. 3 (2002); Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*; Josh Lerner and Jean Tirole, "Some Simple Economics of Open Source," *The Journal of Industrial Economics* 112, no. 3 (2002): 197–234; and Steven Weber, *The Success of Open Source* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). The description of these phenomena as "nonmarket" comes from Benkler and is problematic given the prominence of multinational corporations and individuals residing within wealthy, capitalist democracies in these new modes of production.

28. Garret Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons" *Science* 162 (December 13, 1968): 1243–1248; Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965). Explicitly or not, such arguments drew on the strategy pioneered by Ostrom in her analysis of institutional solutions to managing common-pool resources (CPRs). Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

29. O'Mahony and Ferraro, "The Emergence of Governance in an Open Source Community"; and Siobhán O'Mahony and Fabrizio Ferraro, "Managing the Boundary of an Open Project," *Market Emergence and Transformation,* eds., W.W. Powell and J. Padgett (Forthcoming).

30. Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, trans. Eden Paul and Cedar Paul (New York: Hearst International Library Co., 1915); Jo Freeman. "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 17 (1973): 151–165.

31. Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*; Pablo J. Boczkowski, *News at Work: Imitation in an Age of Information Abundance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*; Shirky, *Here Comes Everybody*.

32. Karpf, "The MoveOn Effect."

33. Benson and Neveu, *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*; Schudson, "The News Media as Political Institutions."

34. Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*, Chapters 6 and 7; Boczkowski, *News at Work*; Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*.

35. Kurt Lewin, "Frontiers in Group Dynamics: Concept, Method and Reality in Social Science; Equilibria and Social Change," *Human Relations* 1, no. 1 (1947): 5–41.

36. David Manning White, "The 'Gatekeeper': A Case Study in the Selection of News," *Journalism Quarterly* 27 (1950): 383–390. Schudson,"The Sociology of News Production" speaks to the broader significance of this issue.

37. Karine Barzilai-Nahon, "Toward a Theory of Network Gatekeeping: A Framework for Exploring Information Control," *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 59, no. 9 (2008): 1493–1512; Karine Barzilai-Nahon, "Gatekeeping: A Critical Review," *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology* 43 (2009): 1–79; Steven E. Clayman and Ann Reisner, "Gatekeeping in Action: Editorial Conferences and

Assessments of Newsworthiness," *American Sociological Review* 63, no. 2 (1998): 178–199; Pamela J. Shoemaker and Tim P. Vos, *Gatekeeping Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

38. For example, see Barzilai-Nahon, "Toward a Theory of Network Gatekeeping"; Barzilai-Nahon, "Gatekeeping: A Critical Review"; and Brian Keegan and Darren Gergle. "Egalitarians at the Gate," *Proceedings of the 2010 ACM conference on computer supported cooperative work - CSCW '10* Savannah, Georgia (2010): 131–134.

39. Boczkowski, *News at Work*.

40. Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*.

41. Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks;* Shaw and Benkler, "A Tale of Two Blogospheres."

42. On relational work and boundary work, see: Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999); Charles Tilly, "Relational Origins of Inequality." *Anthropological Theory* 1, no. 3 (Sept. 2001): 355–372; Charles Tilly, *Why?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Viviana A. Zelizer, *The Purchase of Intimacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 34–35. On status closure, see Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978).

43. See Tilly, *Why?* especially 19–21.

44. Freeman, "The Tyranny of Structurelessness"; Michels, *Political Parties*; O'Mahony and Ferraro, "The Emergence of Governance in an Open Source Community."

45. Exceptions include Cliff Lampe and Paul Resnick. "Slash(dot) and Burn: Distributed Moderation in a Large Online Conversation Space." *Proceedings of the ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI),* Vienna: ACM Press, (2004): 543–550; as well as Cliff Lampe, Erik Johnston, and Paul Resnick, "Follow the Reader: Filtering Comments on Slashdot," *Proceedings of the ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI),* San Jose, CA: ACM Press, (2007), both of which look at practices of distributed moderation within Slashdot. In addition, Karpf, "Understanding Blogspace"; and David Karpf, "Macaca Moments Reconsidered: Electoral Panopticon or Netroots Mobilization?" *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 7, no. 2 (2010): 143–162 offer a number of salient insights particular to the internal dynamics of Daily Kos. See also, Barzilai-Nahon, "Toward a Theory of Network Gatekeeping"; Barzilai-Nahon, "Gatekeeping: A Critical Review"; and Keegan and Gergle, "Egalitarians at the Gate."

46. Barzilai makes a related point, but she is more concerned with shifting the focus of analysis (to "the gated") rather than the idea that gatekeeping itself may have decentralized as well as centralized forms. See Barzilai-Nahon, "Toward a Theory of Network Gatekeeping" and Barzilai-Nahon, "Gatekeeping: A Critical Review."

47. As I explain below, using C & J comment threads as a data source also fixes a number of potential confounding factors, such as posting time of day, post content, and subcommunity norms.

48. The script was written in the Python 3 programming language by Andrew Korzhuev, a student in the Information Sciences Department at the Saint Petersburg State Institute of Technology, in March 2010. The script is licensed under the GNU GPL v3 and I am happy to share it along with the data it collected. This data collection was possible because the

Daily Kos site maintains an open, publicly searchable archive of posts, comments, and recommendations, all of which are licensed by the site owners for reproduction and reuse.

49. This operational definition builds on the arguments of Clayman and Reisner, who argued that gatekeeping encompassed both the process by which gatekeepers managed the flow of a given resource (e.g., publication in a newspaper) as well as the criteria that determined patterns of selection (e.g., "newsworthiness"). See: Clayman and Reisner, "Gatekeeping in Action," especially 179-180.

50. Shaw and Benkler elaborate on this point as well as its implications for political blogging in the networked public sphere in "A Tale of Two Blogospheres." See also, Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*.

51. Note that I define each of these variables as well as the statistical methods used for this analysis in greater detail later in the paper.

52. This is substantially less than major news outlets like Huffington Post (980 million page views, 35 million unique visitors) or The *New York Times* (400 million page views, 2 million visitors), but neither of these sites offer anything close to the participatory infrastructure that Daily Kos does. What is more, in years of congressional and presidential elections, traffic to Daily Kos typically surges. Page view and visitor data taken from Google AdPlanner on October 2011, http://google.com/adplanner. Regarding the history of Daily Kos, see Armstrong and Moulitsas Zúñiga, *Crashing the Gate*.

53. For more on the netroots, see Kerbel, *Netroots*. Also, on Daily Kos, see Karpf, "The MoveOn Effect." It bears note that several of the site editors have publicly repudiated the idea that the site is truly radical. In a personal communication about this paper, Laura Clawson, a contributing editor to the site since 2006, underscored this point to me.

54. For a comparison of collaborative practices on the left and right of the U.S. political blogosphere, see Shaw and Benkler, "A Tale of Two Blogospheres."

55. The platform, called "Scoop," was originally developed by Rusty Foster for the "Kuro5in" (pronounced "corrosion"), discussion forum, which is geared towards computer programming and related interests, http://www.kuro5in.org, accessed April 3, 2010.

56. Armstrong and Moulitsas Zúñiga, *Crashing the Gate*.

57. At the beginning of 2011, Daily Kos deployed a completely transformed interface—dubbed "DK4"—that incorporates a number of new features. As this article was already under review at that time, I do not incorporate any discussion of the DK4 features into my analysis.

58. User data from http://dailykos.com. During 2008, the site generated between 500,000 and 2 million hits daily. Traffic data from aggregate statistics collected by "The Truth Laid Bear," http://www.ttlb.com and Nielsen's "Blogpulse" service, http://www.blogpulse.com. The mean daily traffic at this time was around 600,000 hits.

59. "About Daily Kos," accessed March 27, 2010, http://dailykos.com/special/about2.

60. Armstrong and Moulitsas Zúñiga, *Crashing the Gate*; and Marcos Moulitsas Zúñiga, *Taking on the System: Rules for Radical Change in a Digital Era* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

61. Several examples of this arise in the threads discussed below. See, in particular, Moulitsas' post in response to the writers' strike. Also, this kind of rhetoric emerges repeatedly in

Moulitsas' books: Armstrong and Moulitsas Zúñiga, *Crashing the Gate*; and Moulitsas Zúñiga, *Taking On the System*.

62. I am not aware of any means by which site participants can "recall" an editor from her position.

63. The Scoop platform computes whether users are trusted using an algorithm customized by Moulitsas and the site's chief technical officer, Jeremy Bingham. The details of this algorithm are secret to prevent users from gaming the system and acquiring trusted status too easily.

64. Definitions of gatekeeping can be found in Barzilai-Nahon, "Toward a Theory of Network Gatekeeping"; Barzilai-Nahon, "Gatekeeping: A Critical Review"; Clayman and Reisner, "Gatekeeping in Action"; Lewin, "Frontiers in Group Dynamics: Concept, Method and Reality in Social Science; Equilibria and Social Change"; Shoemaker and Vos, *Gatekeeping Theory*.

65. Thomas F. Gieryn, "Boundary-Work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-Science: Strains and Interests in Professional Ideologies of Scientists." *American Sociological Review* 48, no. 6 (1983): 781–795; Clayman and Reisner, "Gatekeeping in Action."

66. The site elites were far from unanimous in their support for Obama. Of the (at the time) 26 individuals identified as site elites, at least one publicly endorsed Hillary Clinton and another voted for John Edwards in the primaries. See: http://www.dailykos.com/storyonly/2008/1/1/428108/-My-Vote-1-8-08; and http://www.dailykos.com/storyonly/2008/2/5/450060/-Im-For-Hillary-Clinton. Thanks to Laura Clawson, one of the Daily Kos editors, who pointed me to this information in a personal email exchange.

67. "Writers' Strike at DailyKos," accessed December 17, 2010, http://www.dailykos.com/story/2008/3/14/20827/4727/132/476843.

68. "The Clinton civil war," accessed December 17, 2010, http://www.dailykos.com/storyonly/2008/3/17/12417/1285/527/478498.

69. See Karpf, "The MoveOn Effect," for an example where Moulitsas banned users for promoting the idea that the U.S. government had been behind the September 11 attacks.

70. The full comment thread, including all quotations I use below, can be found at: http://www.dailykos.com/story/2008/5/13/85118/7425 (accessed April 28, 2012).

71. "Cheers and Jeers: Tuesday," http://www.dailykos.com/storyonly/2005/4/5/104652/3850.

72. joan reports has participated since 2004, contributing thousands of comments and diaries.

73. I use Bonacich centrality in this case because it operationalizes a relational concept of influence where the value of someone's attention or recommendation is measured in turn by who recommends their contributions. For more on the measure, see: Phillip Bonacich, "Power and Centrality: A Family of Measures," *The American Journal of Sociology* 92, no. 5 (1987): 1170–1182. Approximating eigenvector centrality scores, I set the attenuation parameter equal to 3/4 the inverse of the maximum eigenvalue of the user-recommendation adjacency matrix. In this case, that value $\beta = 9.85 \times 10^{-6}$. The use of such small, positive β results in centrality scores that slightly reward individuals whose comments have more recommendations from individuals whose comments have also received many recommendations.

74. The logic of inquiry guiding these analyses follows Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust, *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications* (New York: Cambridge

University Press, 1995); as well as Carter T. Butts, "Social Network Analysis: A Methodological Introduction," *Asian Journal Of Social Psychology* 11, no. 1 (2008): 13–41.

75. On quantile regression, see: Roger Koenker, *Quantile Regression* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Roger Koenker and Kevin F. Hallock, "Quantile Regression," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 15, no. 4 (2001): 143–156.

76. Lada Adamic and Bernardo Huberman, "Power Law Distribution of the World Wide Web," *Science* 287 (2000): 2115; and Jean Laherrère, "Distributions de type "fractal parabolique" dans la Nature," *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Sciences, Série II a: Sciences de la Terre et des Planétes* 7 (1996): 535–541.

77. For the purposes of interpretation, note that I use the natural logarithm of the dependent variable as well as several of the independent variables. These results are robust to the inclusion of interaction and quadratic terms.

78. Tilly, "Relational Origins of Inequality": 362. Tilly makes this argument in a discussion of how the emergence of credit made reputation "crucial to commercial viability" (356).

79. Eszter Hargittai and Aaron Shaw, "Weapon of the Strong Revisited? The Internet, Young Adults, and Political Engagement," *Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association (MPSA),* Chicago, 2011; and Jen Schradie, "The Digital Production Gap: The Digital Divide and Web 2.0 Collide," *Poetics* 39, no. 2 (2011): 145–168.

80. This sort of "benevolent dictatorship" is a common organizational structure in online collectives. See Weber, *The Success of Open Source* on the role of Linus Torvalds in history and organization of the Linux kernel development. As Weber argues, strong norms of meritocracy as well as the strict technical demands of creating a functional computer operating system are reasons this autocratic mode of governance retains legitimacy, despite its obvious contradictions with the egalitarian and communitarian ethos underpinning open source and online collaboration.

81. Eric Lawrence, John Sides, and Henry Farrell, "Self-Segregation or Deliberation? Blog Readership, Participation, and Polarization in American Politics," *Perspectives on Politics* 8, no. 1 (2010):141–157; Aaron Smith, *The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008*, The Pew Research Center, Internet & American Life Project (2009), http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/6--The-Internets-Role-in-Campaign-2008.aspx; and Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, "Weapon of the Strong?"

82. Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks*; Shaw and Benkler, "A Tale of Two Blogospheres."

83. Discussions of this process can be found in both Judd Antin and Coye Cheshire, "Readers are not free-riders," *Proceedings of the 2010 ACM conference on computer supported cooperative work - CSCW '10* (2010):127–130; and Jennifer Preece and Ben Shneiderman, "The Reader-to-Leader Framework: Motivating Technology-Mediated Social Participation," *AIS Transactions on Human-Computer Interaction* 1, no. 1 (2009): 13–32.

Bio

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