Twenty Years, Thirty-five Countries: Digital Media Effects on Civic and Political Participation

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Overview of Presentation

- Literature Review
  - Digital media across time
  - Digital media across countries

- Methods
  - Meta-analysis
  - Profile of 300 studies
  - Standardized effects

- Findings
  - Effects across countries
  - Trend lines

- Discussion
  - Positive effects increasing across time
Digital Media Across Time

- Expectation of increasing effects:
  - Diffusion of technology
  - Changes in types of use

- Existing findings about effects:
  - Election-focused
  - Non-linear changes

Key Sources: Bimber et al., various works; Karpf, 2016; Xenos & Moy, 2007
Digital Media Across Countries

- How do digital media effects differ cross-nationally?
  - Is the USA distinctive?
  - Political context (democracy index, Internet freedom) affects the connection between digital media use and participation.

Key Sources: Vaccari, 2013; Gainous et al., 2015; Wagner & Gainous, 2013
Methods

- A meta-analysis is a statistical synthesis of data on a topic.

- Meta-analysis can overcome limitations of any single research design and helps us see the big picture.

Key Sources: Borenstein et al. 2009; Ellis, 2010
Methods

- **Digital media use** includes campaign or news websites, email, social networking sites, blogs, chatrooms, petition-signing websites, mobile apps, etc.

- **Offline engagement** in any kind of civic or political activity **offline**, including voting, volunteering, boycotting, and participating in street marches.
Methods

- Profile of studies, 300+ studies, 35+ countries
Methods

- Effects are averaged at the study-level, then inserted into the calculation, as per Lipsey & Wilson, 2001

- Effect = standardized coefficients, but there are many studies that do not report (or provide info to compute)
Findings

- There are some cross-national differences, but the average effects do not differ
  - by type of political system
  - for the USA compared to other countries
Findings

- Pooling all countries, the average effect size fluctuates, but in general, the effects are positive and there is an **upward trend**.
For USA and non-USA countries, the effects are moving upwards, but with different peaks, e.g., 2003, 2011.
Discussion

- The USA is not distinctive in the relationship between digital media use and participation in civic and political life.

- Clearly, a positive relationship with an upward trend, which may be explained by:
  - Social networking sites
  - Online tools for political participation
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Questions?

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