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Public and private engagement online

This article examines two historically distinct understandings of privacy and their relationship to online protest. Using a contemporary view of privacy, which focuses on information secrecy and disclosure, the author examined the development of 'private protest' in which both the identities of protesters and even the number of participants are concealed. Empirically, she traced this by tracking both the percentage of protest-related websites that include privacy policies and the percentage of online protest actions that report or estimate participation figures. Using a much older view of privacy, which focuses on controlled access to private property, she examined the implications of online protest occurring on private servers (e.g. Facebook, YouTube). Offline protesters have increasingly had to choose between protesting in venues that enjoy substantial free speech protections or protesting in venues where large numbers of people gather; she argued that online protesters face a similar dilemma but with less recourse to protesting in legally protected spaces. By examining both definitions of privacy, this article offers a rich understanding of the privacy dilemmas facing online protest organizers and participants.

The rise of new information technologies has led scholars across a range of areas to consider the implications for privacy. For instance, scholars in surveillance studies have discussed the massive rise in data accumulation and mining that allows governments, corporations, and employers to track individuals and their habits and preferences in strikingly refined ways (Marx 2007; Marx & Muschert 2007). New information technologies make both the collection and analysis of such data possible. In communication, there has been substantial interest in how definitions of personal privacy may be changing as social media become more embedded in everyday life (Metzger 2009) and in what privacy expectations Internet users carry with them (Metzger 2007) and act upon

(Metzger 2009). Legal scholars have also asked about the legal evolution of privacy in the face of pervasive Internet usage and substantial new media adoption in Western legal states (Posner 2008).

This article considers how the rising use of new media by protest organizers and protesters may be changing the relationship between protest and privacy in several fundamental ways. Specifically, this article traces two alternative visions of privacy and their changing relation to protest in the age of the Internet. First, I examine a vision of privacy that fits with the contemporary focus on personal privacy, which involves how public or non-public activity is (Metzger 2009). To do so, I analyze the development of online protest forms that allow for private, and sometimes anonymized, protest participation, and the adoption of privacy policies. I also examine public representations of collectivity for online protest actions. Second, I examine a much older vision of privacy that returns to privacy's initial relationship to private property (Warren & Brandeis 1890). There, I focus on the private ownership of online spaces to argue that online protest and social movement activity increasingly happens in places owned, operated, and controlled by private actors who are able to regulate public access to protest, mirroring trends in offline protest (McCarthy & McPhail 2006). I trace the important implications of this trend. Together, these reflections on privacy, protest, and the Internet provide a fuller sense of the promise and problems that protest faces in the Internet age.

Private protests: an oxymoron turned reality

A contemporary understanding of privacy often centers on an individual's right to control access to information about themselves. Full privacy involves an embargo on public access to information about oneself, while invasions of privacy involve undesired access to information about oneself. This very modern understanding of privacy assumes that people give up some level of privacy when they interact publicly – for instance, the paparazzi photograph celebrities in public spaces, news agencies publish photographs of 'perp walks', and government agencies monitor public activity using closed circuit television cameras.

A hallmark of protest has traditionally been its very public nature. Indeed, the 'power in movement' that Tarrow (1994) discusses is power generated by the spectacle and persuasive power that public protests can create. Of course, this power has come at some price: the public nature of protest loosens restrictions on privacy, allowing authorities and adversaries to target protest organizers and protest participants for repression. But, whatever the risk-reward balance has been at a given moment for protest, the 'publicness' of protest has been unshakable. Certainly, foot dragging, vandalism, and graffiti are individual weapons of the weak and may remain hidden or obfuscated (Best & Andreasen 1977; Scott

1990; LaNuez & Jermier 1994; Martin & Meyerson 1998), but collective action that is *public* has been central to the history of social movements. Whether the protest involves large numbers of people coming together to publicly call for environmental change, small numbers of very committed activists weathering the fury of white supremacist violence during the Freedom Rides, or local candlelight vigils that are peaceful calls for alternatives to war, people have historically publicly associated themselves with a movement through action during protests. Although there have been occasional exceptions – such as a small number of radical groups whose violent or illegal methods lead them to operate in secrecy, or activists who operate covertly because of fear of government surveillance and repression – it nonetheless seems that in general the idea of private protest has been an oxymoron in the literature on social movements.

However, there are indications that this may be changing as online protest increases. Earl and Kimport (2011) demonstrated two major shifts: (1) the extent to which people can engage in protest without a public trace of their identity has substantially increased with the rise of online protest; and (2) online protest requires that organizers choose how to publicly represent protest levels (since aggregate participation is not typically directly observable to people who are not targets or organizers). I discuss each here using newly available data.

Public versus anonymized participation

In discussing the first shift, Earl and Kimport document the wide variety of ways in which websites create substantial controls over the public accessibility of participation information. For instance, online protest sites can be organized in ways that allow non-public, but still collective, participation. The strategic voting movement, studied by Earl and Schussman (Earl & Schussman 2003, 2004; Schussman & Earl 2004), worked in this way: although counts of overall participation were available from many sites, the identity of individual voters was not publicly available. Many kinds of 'hacktivism', which is politically motivated hacking, also involve private participation – while one can publicly see a website become inaccessible from a denial of service action, for instance, the identity of the machines causing the outage (and people associated with those machines) is often obfuscated. A much more mundane example describes a kind of 'private' protest that is quite common: many online petitions are hosted by specific organizations that do not publicly publish the list of petition signers. In these actions, signers click to indicate their participation, the organization internally records participation, and the final petition delivered to the target indicates individual participants, but there is no ability for bystanders, journalists, or other interested parties to view the names of signatories. Even public spaces for online petition gathering, such as petitiononline.com, have allowed petition creators to choose how information about each signatory will

be displayed: creators can display the name of the participant and answers to required questions (which often focus on geography, e.g. the state in which the participant resides), just the name of the participant, or only publicly show that a signature has been collected without revealing the name of the signer.

Of course, not all forms of online protest are so potentially anonymizing. Some sites require public participation. For instance, Facebook's terms of use requires that individuals use their real identities in applying for accounts and Facebook has been known to either disallow the creation of accounts or cancel existing accounts of users whose names or identities Facebook considers to be falsified. This ranges from the very regular cancellation of accounts created for pets by their owners to much more serious situations in which individuals in authoritarian countries are required to reveal their true identities in order to organize through Facebook (Tran 2011). Google Plus has a similar policy (although Google Plus will allow the name that one uses in daily life if it differs from the name on your government identification, see Watters 2011).

Wherever a website or online protest action falls on this continuum from anonymized to public participation, it is clear that this position is now a decision made by online protest organizers instead of an unavoidable repercussion of coming together collectively to protest. In a sense, the 'publicness' of one's participation in protest has become optional instead of required.

This change occurred at the same time that privacy became a major issue online. In fact, privacy policies become a mark of 'legitimate' websites (Metzger 2007) early in the development of the Web. Interestingly, the prevalence of privacy policies is not due to legal requirements (at least in the United States). In the United States, the only requirements for privacy policies involve websites collecting or storing information about Californians; in those cases, a California state law requires the publication of a privacy policy on the collector's website. Even in that case, enforcement of the California provision does appear to be particularly tight. Instead of representing a legal mandate, privacy policies largely represent a site organizer's consideration of privacy and their decisions regarding privacy as well as norms of legitimacy drawn from the technology sector.

More pointedly, I argue that the adoption of a privacy policy on a protest-related website represents the displacement of protest-related norms by technology-related norms, and signals that, at least online, private protest is no longer an oxymoron. The open empirical question is to what extent have online norms superseded protest norms and transformed private protest from an oxymoron to an everyday occurrence?

Using unique data on online protest from 2006 to 2010, I am able to chart the changing rate of privacy policy adoptions on protest-related websites as a marker of this change. Data are drawn from a five-year study that built both a panel time series and a cross-sectional time series from 2006 to 2010 (see Methodological appendix for more detail). Websites in the initial panel wave, and all

websites in every cross-sectional wave, represent a random sample of 'reachable' websites related to protest in 20 different issue areas (see the appendix for a full list of issue areas). Reachable websites are websites that a user could locate without being given the URL in advance (e.g. by using a search engine or following links from known sites). Populations of reachable websites in each issue area were developed by concatenating the results of multiple automated Google queries for each topic area (see Earl *et al.* 2010 for more on this method), each of which netted the first 1,000 results for a given query. This meant that generated populations typically ranged from 6,000 to 14,000 URLs, which were then randomly sampled. Sampled websites were then locally archived in September of each study year so that all material describes sites as they existed in September of each year. Trained coders then content coded data about each website, and about every protest action hosted or linked to on each sampled website. Coders recorded a privacy policy if there were statements or disclaimers about privacy on a websites; policies typically informed users as to how information about their site activity is recorded, stored, used, and/or shared. Regular inter-coder reliability tests were conducted, with scores ranging from a low of 92 per cent to highs of 98 per cent in several study years.
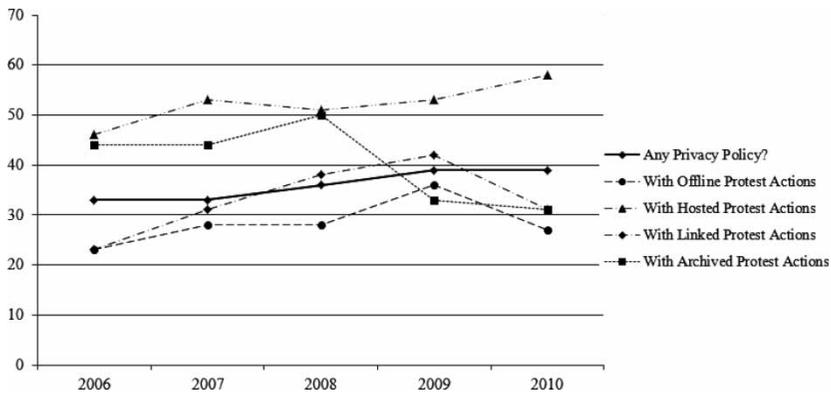
The panel data tracks the same set of websites across the five-year time frame and thus offers a glimpse into how existing sites modify their content over time. The cross-sectional time series re-sampled websites every year, allowing new websites to be at risk of sampling and defunct websites to drop from the sampling frame. Thus, the cross-sectional time series provides a good view of how the overall issue area was changing online across the five-year period.

Table 1 tracks the presence of privacy policies across websites in both the panel dataset (upper part) and the cross-sectional time-series (lower part). The first column in the table reports on the percentage of websites that had privacy policies across all protest-related sites (grouping all 20 issue areas together, which is possible since all were sampled at the same rate). The second column looks at the adoption of privacy policies only within sites that advertised and/or facilitated offline protest; the third column examines only sites that hosted online protest opportunities; the fourth column examines only sites that linked to online protest opportunities; and the fifth examines only sites that archived past protest opportunities. It is important to note that these categories are not exclusive – a site could host an online protest action and facilitate offline protest, and thus the same site may be part of both percentage calculations. Nonetheless, this table gives readers a sense of the types of sites that were higher and lower privacy policy adopters. Figure 1 provides a graphical visualization of the panel data.

In the panel data, overall privacy policy adoption rates rise slightly across time (from 33 to 39 per cent of sites across the five-year time period). Sites that hosted online protest opportunities started with the highest rate of privacy policy adoption and saw substantial increases (from 46 to 58 per cent). This is

TABLE 1   Privacy policy adoption on protest-related websites, 2006–2010.

	Any privacy policy?	Sites with offline protest actions	Sites with hosted protest actions	Sites with linked protest actions	Sites with archived protest actions
Panel (in percentage)					
2006	33	23	46	23	44
2007	33	28	53	31	44
2008	36	28	51	38	50
2009	39	36	53	42	33
2010	39	27	58	31	31
Cross-section (in percentage)					
2006	33	23	46	23	44
2007	35	28	47	32	46
2008	41	47	53	44	56
2009	36	40	51	40	46
2010	31	30	55	35	43

FIGURE 1   Panel data on privacy policy adoption on protest-related websites.

not surprising since these sites tend to be the most technically sophisticated web-sites and hence the websites that are most affected by institutionalization and legit-imization processes from the world of technology and website development. These sites are also the most likely to collect and store personal participation infor-mation. However, sites that archive past actions might also store personal partici-pation information and yet those sites did not see the same spike in the adoption of privacy policies (and, in fact, declined in privacy adoption across time from 44 per cent, peaking at 50 per cent in 2008, and then declining to 31 per cent). It is

notable that sites that facilitated offline protest did not see substantial increases in privacy policy adoptions. This suggests that when the actual mode of participation in protest takes place online, privacy is more explicitly seen as an issue facing participants and Internet norms are more likely to prevail, whereas when protest is facilitated online, but occurs offline, the idea of private protest remains a relative oxymoron.

Interestingly, in the cross-sectional time series, 2008 is a high water mark for privacy policy adoptions, with the rate settling in 2010 a little lower than it started in 2006 (31 per cent in 2010 versus 33 per cent in 2006). The comparison of the panel data to the cross-sectional data may suggest that protest-related sites are more likely to adopt privacy policies as they age, or, that privacy policies are of declining importance to newer site creators. There are some similarities, though. For instance, sites that host online protest opportunities are again the most likely to include privacy policies (except for in 2008, when sites that archived past protest opportunities briefly eclipsed this group's rate).

Representing collectivity: power in numbers?

Earl and Kimport (2011) had also noted that because people could participate without their participation being directly viewed, protest organizers had to decide whether and how to represent collectivity. That is, this moves beyond the identity of individual organizers — it involves larger strategies about how the collectivity of action itself is made public/observable. Data to examine this question are drawn from the same panel and cross-sectional datasets discussed above, although these data are from the content coding of individual protest actions associated with sampled sites. For each protest action, coders determined whether there were reported or estimated participation figures for the action (e.g. 10,000 people signed the petition, or 'thousands' of people signed the participation), or no indication of overall levels of participation (Table 2).

TABLE 2 Participation reported or estimated for protest actions (in percentage), 2006–2010.

	Panel	Cross-section
2006	11	11
2007	31	34
2008	28	30
2009	33	17
2010	22	37

Across the board, reporting or estimating participation was quite uncommon, with only two years in either dataset showing that more than one-third of protest actions including reports or estimates of participation levels (in 2007 in the cross-sectional data, 34 per cent of protest actions reported or estimated participation, and in 2010 cross-sectional data, 37 per cent of protest actions reported or estimated participation). In general, across both datasets, hosted online protest actions most often reported or estimated participation, linked protest actions were second most likely, and offline events were least likely to include participation figures. This suggests that much about the participation in Web-based or Web-facilitated protest actions is hidden from public view. That is, while targets undoubtedly had a sense of how many people had participated in protests, bystanders are less often able to get a glimpse of the size of online mobilizations.

Not on my server: privacy as property

While many people do not see a direct connection between privacy and property today, this has not been true across American history. Indeed, a much older vision of privacy – one that owes back to the founding of the United States – conceptualizes privacy as a right gained through the ownership and control of property. Unlike a contemporary notion of privacy that focuses on the ability to control access to information about oneself, this historical understanding of privacy focuses on the ability to control access to one's property. That is, one gains privacy through ownership and without ownership over property, one can have no expectation of privacy. A century ago laws against trespass provided privacy protection as surely as Americans today see the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act as providing privacy by controlling access to personal medical information.

I argue that this historical conceptualization of privacy is relevant to understanding protest dynamics today because of trends in where protest occurs. McCarthy and McPhail (2006) note crowds increasingly gather in private, instead of public, places. McCarthy and McPhail (2006) draw on public forum law, which is the body of law that governs how the state may regulate the time, place, and manner of protest based on its location, to distinguish between 'traditional public fora' such as parks, streets, and sidewalks, 'limited public fora' such as airports, state universities, and public theaters, 'non-public fora' such as jails and public office buildings that have restrictions against public access, and private property. Each of these four categories of locations feature declining rights to protest: only time, place, and manner restrictions may be placed on protesters, and then only if they are content-neutral, in traditional and limited public fora. But, in non-public fora protesters may have more substantial restrictions placed on their access to the space and

those restrictions can be based on the content of the speech. On private property, there is no legal protection for protest; property owners may, at their discretion, entirely disallow protest without judicial review of those restrictions.

Historically, large numbers of people gathered in traditional and limited public fora, giving offline protesters substantial access to protest in front of the public. However, McCarthy and McPhail (2006) argue that people are increasingly gathering in large numbers on private property where offline protesters enjoy no right of access or speech. In making this argument, they discuss two trends: (1) the move to privatize formally public spaces so that gatherings occurring in the same location may now be unlawful even though they would have been protected under the older property ownership regime; and (2) the growth of crowds in private spaces that have always been private. On the first point, the authors note that gated communities and the business improvement districts that are common in downtowns have restricted access to sidewalks and streets by effectively privatizing these spaces. Moreover, alternatives to sidewalks – such as extensive skyways or underground tunnels that connect office buildings in many downtowns – have grown in popularity, diverting people from public access sidewalks to privately owned and controlled pedestrian thoroughfares. On the second point, McCarthy and McPhail (2006) point to the concentration of crowds in sports arenas, theaters, shopping malls, and outdoor fairs and markets, among other 'private' public spaces. As the authors note, crowds that are orders of magnitude larger gather in these spaces compared to gatherings in traditional or limited public fora. They argue that this has increasingly put offline protesters in a strategic bind: do they protest where the audience is but in doing so guarantee criminal legal action against themselves, or do they protest where they enjoy substantially more legal protections but have a limited direct audience?

Drawing on McCarthy and McPhail's concerns, I argue that as protest has moved online, these trends are being mirrored, and perhaps even worsened. In a very practical way, the virtual spaces in which people socially interact, and sometimes politically organize within, are privately controlled spaces where users enjoy no free speech rights. For instance, Facebook, the second most visited site in the United States and globally – boasting 750 million members – is a private space that can, and has, deactivated protest-related pages. Facebook maintains that it can and will remove pages that urge violence or 'expressions of hate' even if the content is political (Prestin 2011). While calls for violence may be a relatively clear line to draw, what constitutes an expression of hate is a very fuzzy issue that ensures that Facebook will be playing umpire over what is acceptable political speech. What is one person's religious gospel is another person's homophobic hate speech. Similarly, what is one person's pro-Palestinian rant may be another person's anti-Semitic post. In fact, Facebook removed a Palestinian page with over 350,000 followers after Facebook was contacted by Israeli and Anti-Defamation League officials who argued that the page

was advocating hate and violence (Winter 2011). Facebook has also removed non-protest-related pages based on the content of the speech. For example, movie critic Roger Ebert's Facebook page was removed when he made insensitive remarks about the death of a reality TV star. The Facebook take-down notice stated that 'Pages that are hateful, threatening or obscene are not allowed' (as quoted in Bell 2011). After Ebert drew attention to the take-down through Twitter, Facebook reinstated his page saying that the take-down had been an error. It is impossible to know how many pages Facebook has deactivated because it disagreed with the content – scholars only have records when the person or group that experiences the take-down has enough savvy and/or connections to garner media attention.

Other questionable deactivations have also occurred, although Facebook did not claim the deactivations were content-based. For example, in the UK, several dozen protesters and protest groups related to the anti-austerity movement had their accounts deactivated without warning just before a major action. They had been using Facebook to organize. Although Facebook claimed that the deactivations occurred because the pages were registered as individual profiles but were actually representing groups, protesters suspected the Facebook action was related to a larger crackdown on dissent in advance of the royal wedding (Malik 2011).

Facebook has also censored political advertising. For instance, in 2010, there was a marijuana legalization proposition on the California ballot. A main proponent of legalization, Just Say Now, had purchased ad space on Facebook to drum up support for the proposition. After a little over a week of running the ads, Facebook pulled the ads saying that they depicted a pot leaf, and thereby violated the Facebook terms of service. While Facebook claimed that it prohibited ads depicting smoking products, its policy had, in fact, only explicitly prohibited tobacco-related products (Lorber 2010). When another group faced the same problem, Facebook was a little more expansive in its language, with a Facebook representative writing: 'We reserve the right to determine what advertising we accept . . . We do not allow ads for marijuana or political ads for the promotion of marijuana . . .' (Grim 2010). In yet another circumstance, Facebook also initially allowed a medical marijuana ad advertising a public meeting about a Washington, DC city council debate over medical marijuana and then removed it under the same grounds (Grim 2010).

YouTube, which receives 320 million views a day, has also been actively engaged in monitoring and removing content. Most notably, it has been involved in ongoing struggles over pro-Islamist/anti-American videos. Date (2008) discusses one example of these battles in which Senator Joseph Lieberman pressured YouTube to remove over 80 videos that he considered supportive of terrorism. While some allegedly depicted violence, others were videos of speeches by Al-Qaeda members or 'general material intended to radicalize potential recruits' (as quoted by Date 2008).

Although Google now owns YouTube, before it was acquired by Google, it was already in the middle of battles over free speech. For instance, Zeller argued that a video by Michelle Malkin had been removed as 'YouTube continued its recent campaign to spit-shine its image and, perhaps, to look a little less ragtag to potential buyers' by taking 'a scrub bucket to some questionable political graffiti on its servers, including a video entry from the doyenne of right-wing blogs, Michelle Malkin' (Zeller 2006). At the time, YouTube replied by noting that their user agreement forbids the submission of material that is 'unlawful, obscene, defamatory, libelous, threatening, pornographic, harassing, hateful, racially or ethnically offensive, or encourages conduct that would be considered a criminal offense, give rise to civil liability, violate any law, or is otherwise inappropriate' (as quoted in Zeller 2006). One could find examples of censorship at numerous other popular Web destinations (e.g. Second Life), but the overall issues would be the same.

Of course, not all major social media destinations have been as embroiled in free speech debates. Until very recently, Twitter had a relatively strong record of not censoring speech (e.g. see Brito 2011). And, Google and Twitter even teamed up during the Egyptian uprisings to offer a work around for protesters who wanted to tweet about what was happening but could not because Egyptian authoritarians had brought within-country Internet traffic to a stand still (Oreskovic 2011; Perez 2011; Richtel 2011).

Even when private actors use their discretion to support free speech, as Google and Twitter did in Egypt, the larger point remains: speech of all sorts happens online in what is effectively private property. This means that there are no restrictions on the ability of these companies, or others that host popular Web destinations, from removing content that they view as unacceptable for any reason. Free speech becomes discretionary, instead of being a right, in such environments.

One work around to this is to create one's own site, but this has two distinct disadvantages: (1) people are not already on or coming to the site (which is analogous to the problem McCarthy and McPhail pointed out – you can still protest offline in places where people do not gather as often); and (2) as theWikileaks situation made evident, Internet service providers (ISPs) who host websites can refuse to provide services, making it impossible to operate one's own site if or until a willing ISP is found. In the end, this means that political discussion and protest are a spigot-turn away from being inaccessible on the Web.

This is analogous to the larger problem that McCarthy and McPhail pointed out with respect to offline protest: people are gathering in large numbers in private online spaces, which means that protest and political speech can only occur in those spaces at the discretion of website owners and ISPs. Given that there is no equivalent to a traditional or limited public fora in cyberspace, though, I argue that this problem is exacerbated online because there are not public refuges that are required to protect free speech and association. There

is literally no online public space like a park that is always free to access and constitutionally protected in terms of free speech and association. Thus, while the Internet may treat censorship as damage and 'route around', those routes may be circuitous, unpopular, and even hard to discover.

Conclusion

This article examines two major privacy issues that online protesters must confront. Although both issues are ostensibly about privacy, they engage very different understandings of privacy. One views privacy through the classic privacy lens of property and examines the implications of so much online protest occurring on private servers. The same dilemma that offline protesters have begun to face is being remade online: one can protest on accessible and protected property but that property is also where few people gather, or one can try to protest on property where one has no legal right to be but on which many people gather. The tradeoff is clearly between protection and audience and that tradeoff is created by the legal regime of privacy that property ownership creates. Moreover, this dilemma is even more serious online because there are no online equivalents to traditional and limited public fora – there are no online spaces where everyone enjoys full free speech and assembly rights.

   The article also discussed a much more contemporary conceptualization of privacy – one that views privacy as being about control over one's personal information. Here, the focus was on the identification of individual protesters involved in online protest. I measured site owner's concern for privacy (and their embrace of private protest, which has traditionally been an oxymoron) through their publication of privacy policies. While the panel data from 2006 to 2010 showed generally increasing privacy policy adoption, the cross-sectional data did not uniformly trend upward and instead peaked in 2008. This suggests the need for further investigation about the adoption of privacy policies: Why was 2008 such a prominent year for privacy policies? Was the weaker trend evident in the cross-sectional time series due to younger sites being captured in the cross-section, to the changing mix of sites in the overall fields over time and hence captured in each cross-section, or some other set of factors?

   Related to this more contemporary vision of privacy, how aggregated participation in online protest is represented was also addressed since that representation is no longer an automatic repercussion of physical co-presence in offline events. Data show that the majority of sites in both datasets do not report on participation levels of protest actions related to their site. This suggests that while individuals enjoy an ability to protest online without as much risk of identification, this anonymity may carry a price: the public visibility of online protest participation may be diminished.

In addition to further examining the issues raised above, future research should also examine other ways in which the relationship between privacy and protest is being reshaped online. For instance, an examination of how the control and ownership of personal data online affect protest and social movements would be a fruitful avenue for further inquiry. Even though websites do not always publish the identities of participants, individual data traces of participation abound – ranging from tweets, to videos and photos posted online, to status updates. What are the repercussions of such data: Does lingering online data about one's youthful protest participation shape the biographical impacts of protest in ways that prior youth protest has not? Does lingering online data about protest participation have other biographical impacts – no matter the age of the individual involved – such as effects on employment (as online background checks become more common), friendship networks, etc. How does the aggregation and availability of personal data online affect the ability of state and private actors to sanction potential protesters and protesters? These are all critical questions for future scholarship to address.

Acknowledgements

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Methodological appendix

Data were collected using an innovative new method that generates random samples of *reachable populations* of websites on specified topics (see Earl 2006; Earl *et al*. 2010; Earl & Kimport 2011 for more details on this method). A reachable population is defined as the population of URLs that an interested user could locate without being given the URL in advance. As such, it is the set of URLs that could be located through search and by navigating links from known sites. Random samples are produced from these reachable populations, which effectively throws out ranking artifacts from search algorithms.

In this project, 20 different social movement industries were identified, including: abortion politics, civil liberties, civil rights, education reform, environment/green, globalization, healthcare reform, homelessness, human rights, immigration, intellectual property, labor, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender), nuclear power, open source, peace, poverty, privacy, pan-right wing activism, and women's movement. The 20 social movement industries were selected to represent traditional movement areas studied in social movements literature, movements in which mobilization has oscillated widely over time, newer movements, and movements that might be specifically tied to the Internet (e.g. intellectual property or open source).

For each industry, search terms were identified and pre-tested (see Earl 2006 for more on search strings). A Google API was then used to retrieve 1,000 search results per query. For instance, if there were 10 effective search strings, then 10 queries would be run through the API, returning a maximum of 10,000 URLs. For most social movement industries, 8–10 search terms were used, with a minimum of 5 effective search terms used (homelessness) and a maximum of 14 (abortion politics).

In September 2006, these search terms were run through the Google API and search results were concatenated within each social movement industry creating 20 reachable populations (one per social movement industry). Those populations were randomly sampled at a 1 per cent rate. Each sample was then archived and quantitatively content coded. Sites in the sample comprise the panel dataset and were re-archived every September through 2010 (and

those archives were quantitatively content coded). When all 20 samples are con-catenated, the combined panel dataset contains data on 1,234 sites, although fewer sites are analyzed due to exclusion criteria discussed below.

For sites in the cross-sectional time series, new populations were created each September from 2006 to 2010, those populations were then sampled, and sampled websites were archived and quantitatively content coded. The cross-sectional time series has varying numbers of cases based on a 1 per cent sampling rate of each social movement industry's generated reachable popu-lation; total Ns for the 2006–2011 cross-sectional timeseries are: 1,234; 1,318; 998; 1,044; and 1,084.

These data are unique in several ways. First, this technique captures a wide array of online content. Anything that can be found through a URL, including standard websites but also public listserv archives and public social software and media pages such as flickr sites, YouTube videos, and digg lists, can be located using this method. Second, this study is the first to create a generalizable and population-level view of online protest-related websites. Prior studies have relied on case studies, purposive or convenience sampling, and/or sampling from organizational directories. Third, by collecting data on 20 different social move-ment industries, these data offer an important cross-movement perspective. Finally, the longitudinal nature of these data allow a dynamic view of the devel-opment of online protest in the critical period from 2006 to 2010.

Content coding of websites and protest actions

All websites in each of random sample were content coded. Inter-coder reliability tests were regularly conducted, yielding reliability rates ranging from 92 to 98 per cent, depending on the year. Although more variables were coded overall, only coding for relevant site-related and protest action-related variables are discussed here.

First, each site was coded for whether or not it contained contentious pol-itical advocacy, defined as explicit claims-making and/or the opportunity to engage in some form of protest action. Sites that did not were excluded from the analyzes in this paper. Second, when websites contained protest actions, coders also classified the type of actions. The definition of protest actions used is purposefully broad, allowing the dataset to capture simple and complex implementations. Third, coders recorded whether a formal privacy policy was published on the site.

The project also quantitatively content coded any protest actions associated with the site (data on protest actions is presented in Table 2). First, protest actions were coded according to whether they were labeled as archived or past actions. Second, protest actions that were not archived were coded for whether they took place offline (e.g. a rally in front of city hall) or online (e.g. an online petition). Offline actions were operationalized as actions requiring

the co-presence of participants and not requiring an Internet connection to participate. Online actions encompassed protest opportunities that required an Internet connection for at least a portion of participation and did not require that the participant be co-present with others to participate. Third, coders assessed whether any pages associated with the protest action reported on, or estimated, participation data.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics such as relative frequencies were computed using Stata 9 SE.