Political Science

G. R. Boynton's New Media and Politics

University of Iowa 10-15-2010

The Global Political Popular Culture

Miranda J. Nielson* Andrea Bunting†
Kaitlin Davies‡

*University of Iowa, miranda-nielson@uiowa.edu
†University of Iowa, andrea-bunting@uiowa.edu
‡University of Iowa, kaitlin-davies@uiowa.edu

This paper is posted at Iowa Research Online.
http://ir.uiowa.edu/polisci_nmp/181

The Global Political Popular Culture

Miranda Nielson, Kaitlin Davies, Andrea Bunting

People across the globe are taking note of what is going on with American politics. News organizations abroad often report on American political policies and actions. Many people have ideas about what America is doing who do not vote in our elections or reside in our country. Our research examines two recent events involving President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton in Afghanistan. We examined the context of these events, the number and patterns of tweets, and the languages used. We also looked at how many tweets were informative announcements instead of personal opinions.

The first event relating President Obama to Afghanistan began on November 11, 2009, when he called together a war counsel to discuss how best to end America's involvement there. On December 1, 2009 he gave a speech listing his goals and explaining why more troops were necessary and how he would turn the fight over to the Afghani government. President Obama hopes to begin withdrawing troops next summer and completely ending the war in 2013. Meanwhile, 30,000 more troops will be sent in to counter Taliban activity and help the Afghan army and police take over responsibility.

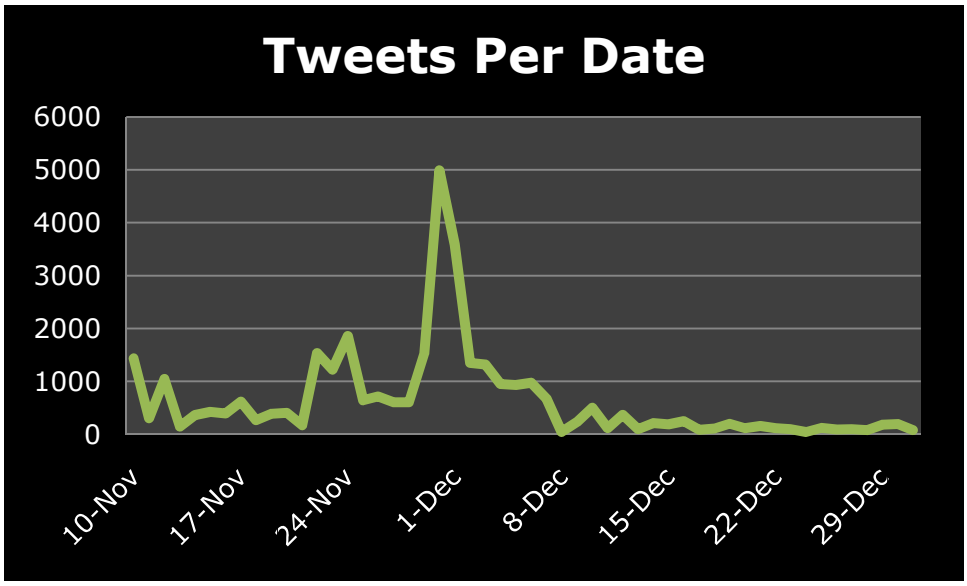
- http://blogs.abcnews.com/george/2009/11/obama-looking-for-offramps-out-of-afghanistan.html
- http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/dec/01/barack-obama-speech-afghanistan-war

Data for this report was gathered from November 11, 2009 to January 1, 2010. Approximately seventy-five percent of the 33,422 tweets were announcements of new developments in the story. Tweets spiked each time a new development was issued during the later part of November and the month of December, peaking with 4,988 on December 1, 2009 – after President Obama's speech announcing the surge. The majority of these tweets were in English. Of our sample of 2,391 tweets, we had only 6 in other languages.

Language	Number of Tweets
English	2,385
Malay	3
Vietnamese	2
Italian	1

Date	Number of Tweets	% of the Total
1-Jan	82	0.002
31-Dec	198	0.006
30-Dec	186	0.006
29-Dec	78	0.002
28-Dec	96	0.003
27-Dec	92	0.003
26-Dec	121	0.004
25-Dec	44	0.001
24-Dec	97	0.003
23-Dec	114	0.003
22-Dec	158	0.005
21-Dec	117	0.004
20-Dec	203	0.007
19-Dec	113	0.003
18-Dec	87	0.003
17-Dec	249	0.007
16-Dec	189	0.005
15-Dec	214	0.007
14-Dec	100	0.003
13-Dec	370	0.011
12-Dec	114	0.003

11-Dec	503	0.015
10-Dec	230	0.007
9-Dec	41	0.001
8-Dec	671	0.02
7-Dec	977	0.029
6-Dec	931	0.028
5-Dec	953	0.029
4-Dec	1317	0.039
3-Dec	1351	0.041
2-Dec	3586	0.107
1-Dec	4988	0.132
30-Nov	1534	0.046
29-Nov	608	0.018
28-Nov	607	0.018
27-Nov	718	0.021
26-Nov	645	0.019
25-Nov	1858	0.056
24-Nov	1225	0.037
23-Nov	1538	0.046
22-Nov	171	0.005
21-Nov	405	0.012
20-Nov	391	0.012
19-Nov	266	0.008
18-Nov	621	0.019
17-Nov	397	0.012
16-Nov	424	0.013
15-Nov	363	0.011
14-Nov	145	0.004
13-Nov	1046	0.031
12-Nov	301	0.009
11-Nov	1432	0.043

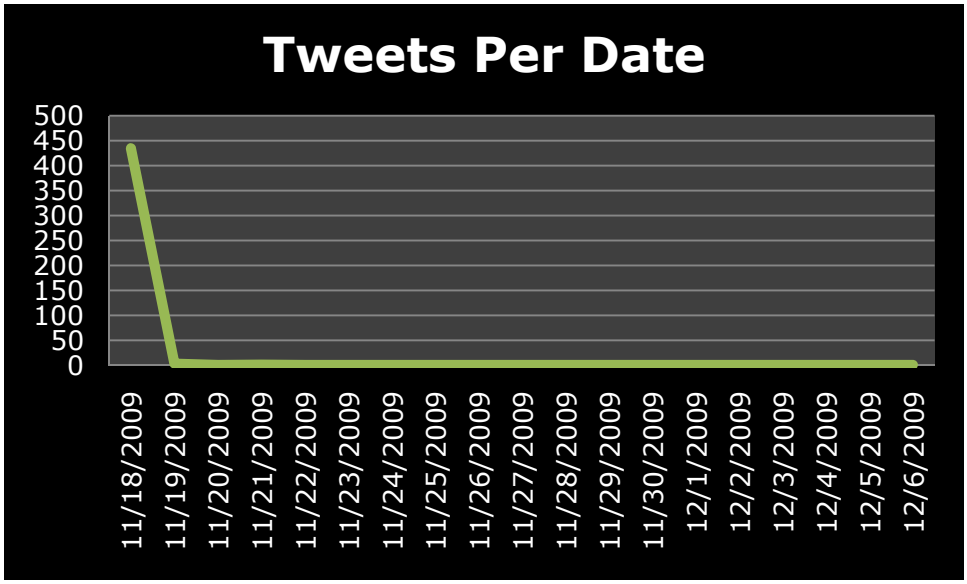


On November 18, 2009, Secretary of State Clinton arrived in Afghanistan in a surprise visit. She met with US Ambassador Eikenberry and Gen. McChrystal, the commander of US forces in Afghanistan, to discuss the potential surge. That night she had dinner with the newly elected President Karzai. The next day she attended his inauguration to show US support of the new administration.

- http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2009/11/18/hillary-clinton-makes-surprise-visit-to-afghanistan/

Our data for tweets in response to Secretary Clinton going to Afghanistan was collected between November 18, 2009 and December 6, 2009. After November 18, the number of tweets drastically declined. This is because it was a single event, and there were no further developments of the situation to discuss. Of the 444 tweets collected, nearly all of these tweets, 99.3 percent or 441 tweets to be exact, were announcements. Only one of these was not entirely in English – it was half English-half Japanese.

Date	Number of Tweets	% of Total
11/18/09	435	97.973
11/19/09	4	0.009
11/20/09	1	0.002
11/21/09	2	0.005
11/22/09	1	0.002
12/6/09	1	0.002



The lack of foreign language tweets in response to these events leads us to believe that these two events did not attract very much international attention. In comparison to the data collected by our classmates, Obama's new policies in Afghanistan were nearly as internationally popular as those discussing the attack of a NATO base, the Kabul bombings, the eight troops who were killed, and Gates visiting Afghanistan. Searching tweets for content relating to Afghanistan in general uncovered much more international interest, but specific events such as Secretary Clinton going to Afghanistan, Secretary Gates going to Afghanistan, and Kandahar attracted nearly or no interest from non-English speaking users. In these cases, we concluded that the global political popular

culture did not take a large interest in our events. It remains to be seen what people will think of Obama's surge in Afghanistan, but it likely to develop into something of international relevance.

	Afghanistan	Base Attack	Kabul Bombing	Obama Afghanistan	Clinton Afghanistan	Kandahar slower or longer	Karzai corruption	8 troops	Gates to Afghanistan
Ar Arabic			1						
AF Afrikaans	4		3						
AZ Azerbaijan	1								
BR Breton	3								
CY Welsh	1								
Da Danish	7								
De German	100		5						1
En English	3887	2386	3785	2385	444	629	257	317	930
ES Spanish	9								1
FIL Filipino	5								3
FR French	103								
GL Galatian								1	
HU Hungarian	1								
ID Indonesian	22							1	1
IT Italian	70			1					

JP Japanese					1			5	2
KU Kurdish	1								
LT Latvian								1	
MS Malay	23	3		3					
NI Dutch	30							2	
NO Norwegian	30								
PT Portuguese	1							2	
RO Romanian	7								
SQ Albanian	6								
SU Sudanese									1
SV Swedish	16								
TR Turkish	1								
UZ Uzbek	4								
VI Vietnamese	8	2		2					