

# Research Statement

Jacob A. Long  
*School of Communication, The Ohio State University*  
[long.1377@osu.edu](mailto:long.1377@osu.edu)

---

## *Overview*

My research is primarily in the area of political communication with a focus on social identity. I do not restrict my focus to any particular medium; my work considers mass media, computer-mediated communication, interpersonal discussion, and social networks, sometimes all at once. My methodological approach is predominantly social scientific and quantitative. My work has invariably used one or more of sample surveys, longitudinal designs, or content analysis. Computational tools have been integral to much of my research and figure prominently in my future plans.

## *Background and Current Projects*

First, I review my past and ongoing work, divided into a few, partly overlapping topical areas.

### Partisanship and Identity

A focus of my research is partisan identity and its relationship to communication — how communication affects partisanship and how partisanship affects the quality and quantity of communication people engage in. A study I led, published in *Mass Communication & Society*, showed that strong partisans whose social networks include many members of the opposing party, or live in areas in which members of their preferred party are outnumbered, use more partisan media than strong partisans in friendlier social environments. This study is, in part, the point of departure for my dissertation study.

Another project focuses instead on the consequences of partisan communication. Using evidence from a nationally representative panel survey, my collaborators and I propose a theoretical model in which partisan media promotes misperceptions by increasing hostility towards the other party. This study will be published in the October 2019 issue of *Journal of Communication*. Work has begun on a follow-up study to explore the unique role social media use may have in stoking polarization and promoting the use of partisan news sources.

In the realm of discussion, I am also involved in a project that investigates the motivations for choosing to discuss politics with people. Findings show substantial same-race preferences in addition to a preference for those perceived to be in the same party. One paper from this project is currently under review at *Political Behavior*.

### Entertainment Media

Another area of research I have been involved in is oriented towards the role of entertainment media in political life. In a study I led, published in *Communication Research*, I asked a nationally representative sample of Americans about their values, political views, and music preferences. Using a large-scale content analysis, the paper shows that the values people endorse — including their political orientation — are associated with the values expressed in the lyrics of the music they enjoy.

A paper on which I am the lead author shows that exposure to political satire programs (like *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah*) leads to increased self-efficacy in the domain of politics. This boost to

self-efficacy in turn leads to more participation in the political process, such as making donations to a candidate or door-to-door campaigning. This article recently received a revise and resubmit decision at *Human Communication Research*.

Another, related project addresses a common association observed in cross-sectional studies: people who watch satirical shows are also more likely to talk about politics with people. Evidence for whether the programs promote discussion or simply are watched by people who talk politics has been lacking. This paper provides evidence that satire shows indeed promote political discussion. Importantly, these effects are just as strong for people who encounter the programs on social media rather than deliberately tuning in. This paper is in the process of being submitted to the *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*.

## Computational Methods

Computational skills were integral to my lead-authored publications. To conduct the study published in *Communication Research*, I scraped years of Billboard music charts from the web, paired over 30,000 of those songs with lyrics acquired from other sources, performed an automated content analysis of those lyrics, and released a software tool to help others do the same. I have since replicated these results using a more sophisticated content analytic technique based on what is called word embeddings. For the paper published in *Mass Communication & Society*, I used respondents' self-reported ZIP codes to combine survey responses with contextual geographic data from the Census Bureau and elsewhere.

A more recent project of mine, which won the top student paper award in Communication Theory and Methodology at AEJMC in Toronto, describes a new method for quantifying the extent to which media use is segregated by political party. It is based on methods for social network analysis and I derived a way to perform hypothesis tests using a supercomputer to enable researchers to say whether people are more segregated than expected.

I am also a package developer for R, the statistical software, and several of my packages have achieved broad use within and outside communication and related disciplines. As examples, one ("jtools") has been cited in over 40 academic publications and another ("dpm") plays a key role in Statistical Horizons training seminars on longitudinal data analysis. I recently joined a collaborative project, aptly named "easystats," to create user-friendly interfaces for statistical analysis in R. I also have experience working with databases and the general-purpose programming languages Python and Ruby.

## Dissertation

My dissertation takes the observed stability of partisanship in the U.S. as a theoretical starting point and argues this stability is likely due to the communication environments in which people live rather than completely stable aspects of the person that are invariant to context. My study in *Mass Communication & Society* showed that partisans use more partisan media in social environments hostile to their party, consistent with the notion that people use communication in a way that serves to make their identity consistent over time.

I also argue that although it is unusual for people to change which party they prefer, the *strength* of their identity is subject to more over-time variability and is more easily studied. My expectation is that those whose political communications — media use as well as interpersonal and computer-mediated discussion — are most friendly to their partisan identity will have the most stability in the strength of those identities. These assertions will be tested by measuring the strength of partisan identity, political media use, and political discussion in daily surveys of the same group of people for three weeks to capture fine-grained fluctuations over time. A significant portion of the dissertation

is devoted to describing statistical models that can quantify stability and its causes in a theoretically meaningful way.

## *Plans*

In addition to the in-progress manuscripts mentioned previously, I have several research projects that are well-developed and I anticipate submitting to journals during my first year on faculty. One, which was written up as a chapter for my dissertation but ultimately pulled to simplify the dissertation's already-complex design, uses longitudinal data from the British Election Study to provide a basic test of my theoretical claims about the relationship between political communication and the stability of partisanship. I expect to target this to an outlet like *Political Communication*.

I have two projects in the pipeline that are methodology-focused. A chapter that has stayed in my dissertation discusses in statistical detail the ways in which researchers have tried to quantify the stability of constructs over time. I show claims in the published literature that media exposure is extremely stable are quite possibly in error due to some statistical assumptions behind those claims. I plan to target this to *Communication Methods and Measures* because it is framed largely as a response to an article published there. Another project, for which the analysis is largely complete, is intended as a guide to researchers who want to analyze panel datasets (i.e., repeated measures on the same group of participants). I will discuss common and newer methods of analysis and use Monte Carlo simulations to show how each performs in a variety of common scenarios. If not *Communication Methods and Measures*, I may send this to *Computational Communication Research* or perhaps a journal not specific to the discipline like *Multivariate Behavioral Research*.

Beyond these, I expect to try to expand upon my dissertation study. I do not want to commit in great detail on this front yet, since such a follow-up study will need to be responsive to the results of the dissertation for which I do not yet have data. My preliminary expectation is that the follow-up will either focus on the acquisition of a more diverse sample or improving the measurement of communication variables by, for instance, tracking participants' phone or computer use. I also plan to research the development of less intrusive means of tracking identity shifts over time, such as by analyzing social media data.

I have also gained a reputation within my current institution as a methods specialist, which has resulted in my joining some projects in part to aid in design and analysis. I find this enriching and a way to branch into new areas, so I hope to continue to form productive collaborations on this basis at my next institution.