

# The Online Activism Feedback Loop: A Case Study of SOPA/PIPA

by

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## Introduction

During its early stages many believed that the internet would radically transform political participation allowing for low-cost mass mobilization which would result in overall increased levels of political participation. Research suggests that the internet has failed to live up to these grandiose expectations. Yet, it is abundantly clear that the internet has changed political activism over the years. Despite these changes, there are some existing gaps in current research concerning the effects of the internet on political activism and policymaking. Many scholars have become doubtful of the internet's purported positive effects. In fact, some have argued that internet usage has had a negative impact on political activism.<sup>1</sup>

The most recent critique launched against the effects of the internet on political activism has been that of "slacktivism." Slacktivism has been used to describe online activism that is easily done but ultimately is believed to be ineffective at influencing policymaking.<sup>2</sup> Some critics argue that slacktivism has also replaced the more effective traditional forms of political activism (primarily offline forms, such as making phone calls and mailing letters to local political representatives) thus diminishing overall levels of political participation.<sup>3</sup> Other critics have argued that online activism should not be so quickly dismissed but rather that it should be thought of as supplementary to traditional forms of activism.<sup>4,5,6,7</sup> This thesis intends to evaluate the effects of online activism on policymaking specifically as it relates to internet policy

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<sup>1</sup> Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion the Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: Public Affair, 2012)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Lance Bennett, Christian Breunig, and Terri Givens, "Communication and Political Mobilization: Digital Media and the Organization of Anti-Iraq War Demonstrations in the U.S.," *Political Communication*, 25, no. 3 (2008): 269–289.

<sup>5</sup> J. Woody Stanley, and Christopher Weare, "Effects of Internet Use on Political Participation: Evidence from an Agency Online Discussion Forum," *Administration & Society*, 36, no. 5 (2004): 503–527.

<sup>6</sup> Caroline J. Tolbert, and Ramona S. McNeal, "Unraveling the Effects of the Internet on Political Participation," *Political Research Quarterly*, 56, no. 2 (2003): 175–185.

<sup>7</sup> Pippa Norris, "The Impact of the Internet on Political Activism: Evidence from Europe," *International Journal of*

decision-making.

Internet policy debates over the past 20 years have primarily centered on the issue of copyright enforcement.<sup>8</sup> In recent years, public interest in internet policy has grown and led to the creation of coalitions between digital rights advocacy groups and major leaders in technology such as Google and Amazon.<sup>9</sup> The primary objective of these coalitions is to challenge legislation they believe poses a threat to the internet. Most recently, the proposed Stop Online Privacy Act (SOPA) and the Preventing Real Online Threats to Economic Creativity and Theft of Intellectual Property Act (PIPA) drew not only the attention of the general public but also precisely these sorts of coalition advocacy groups. Proponents of the bills believed the proposed legislation would reinforce and expand existing intellectual property law in order to protect major industries against piracy. Opponents of SOPA/PIPA believed the bills actually threaten free speech and would dissolve existing liability protections granted under the DMCA. Although many of the issues raised and tactics used by opponents were not new, the SOPA/PIPA debate did feature a new sort of online activism strategy. On January 18, 2012, online activism efforts in opposition of SOPA and PIPA culminated in the first massive blackout of hundreds of websites. Shortly after the blackout it was announced that SOPA and PIPA would be postponed.

Many advocates and media outlets immediately attributed the defeat of SOPA and PIPA to the mobilization of the opposition force through online activism. However, there is currently insufficient research analyzing the impact of these online opposition campaigns on the legislative process of SOPA and PIPA to determine the validity of this claim. The SOPA and PIPA protests

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*Electronic Government Research*, 1, no. 1 (2005): 19-39.

<sup>8</sup> Cory Doctorow, "The Coming War on General Computation," *28th Chaos Communication Congress*, Keynote Address, 12/28/2011, Web, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=HUEvRyemK Sg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=HUEvRyemK Sg)

<sup>9</sup> Alison Powell, "Assessing the Influence of Online Activism on Internet Policy-Making: The Case of SOPA/PIPA" (2012): 1, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2031561](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2031561) (accessed).

raise several questions including: Were actions taken by online campaigns in opposition of SOPA and PIPA just another case of slacktivism or did these actions represent effective and meaningful activism? If so, to what extent did these actions influence policy decisions? What was the significance of the involvement of advocacy groups, major actors in tech industry and coalitions of the two? Moreover, what role did each of these actors play in the SOPA/PIPA debate? What was the significance of the use of the online blackout tactic and what is the implication of this new strategy for future online activism campaigns and political mobilization strategies? While these questions are far too broad to investigate in a single study and go far beyond the intended scope of my thesis, answers to them would shed light on the broader questions raised above regarding online activism.

Here, I explore the relationship between congressional actions taken on SOPA and PIPA during the legislative process and actions taken by some of the major online campaigns in opposition of SOPA and PIPA. I define online activism as actions taken by organizations, websites or online communities through the creation of online petitions, websites, posts, and comments that promoted the opposition of either SOPA or PIPA. This specifically includes Reddit, Google, and the White House's online petition platform titled "We the People." Additionally, I define action during the legislative process as any decisions taken by representatives and senators that affected SOPA or PIPA. This includes changing their official position on the bills, consideration by committee, committee action, subcommittee review, publication of committee report, debate, vote, postponement, house floor consideration, senate action, and consideration by the president.

One of the primary objectives of this thesis is to explore the relationship between actions taken by online activism campaigns in opposition of SOPA and PIPA and actions taken during



the legislative process of the bills. Which of these factors drives the other? Or, is the relationship between congressional action on SOPA and PIPA and online activism in opposition of SOPA and PIPA reflective of a feedback loop? To explore this, I began by creating a comprehensive and detailed legislative history of both SOPA and PIPA. Using this timeline, I coded each action taken by legislators on SOPA and PIPA as either in support of, opposition of or simply a neutral action. These results were graphed and then compared with online petition signatures data and user generated content data from Reddit. Co-sponsorship of SOPA and PIPA was also compared alongside online petition signatures data and user generated content data from Reddit. Overall, the data suggests that there exists a feedback loop between congressional action on SOPA/PIPA and online activism in opposition of SOPA/PIPA.

Limitations faced by this study include limited access to Google's custom online petition. This study only includes signatures collected by the petition on the day it was created, January 18, 2012. As a result of this, the total number of signatures for Google's petition reflected in this study will be smaller than figures reported by Google and media outlets. Another limitation of this study came from the Reddit API which limits the number of calls that can be made to it over a certain amount of time. Consequently, the amount of data the script used in this study was able to pull was severely limited by this.

The importance and appeal of understanding online activism and its effects is obvious, but the study of the relationship between legislators and online activism is equally important. There are numerous theoretical arguments regarding the ways in which the internet affects democracy, particularly when it pertains to the effects of online activism. The current lack of research and data regarding the success of online activism campaigns is preventing scholars from addressing the crucial question: Can online activism influence policymaking? Is online activism

effective at influencing policymaking? Additionally, this study will be relevant to policy-makers, digital rights advocacy organizations and online activists concerned with internet regulation and the enforcement of copyright laws online. The current atmosphere surrounding proposed internet regulation legislation makes this study highly topical. In terms of future research, there currently exists a great need for a systematic study of online campaigns specifically analyzing a large sample of individual online campaigns and their distinctive methods of online activism.

## Literature Review

In thinking about the effects of online activism there exist two contrasting schools of thought that discuss the effects of online activism on political decision-making. Here, I assess the relative strengths and weaknesses of the present scholarship on this subject.

The first school of thought contends that online activism is merely slacktivism, which has no effect on political decision-making beyond that of enhancing the feel-good factor for participants.<sup>10,11,12</sup> Slacktivism is defined as political participation that lacks a strong commitment by the participants. Scholars use the term to describe online activism that is easily done but ultimately ineffective at influencing policymaking. The term is not confined to online activities alone but it is most often used to criticize online activism as it allows for participants to become involved easily.<sup>13</sup> Morozov highlights signing online petitions, joining Facebook groups, or participating in short-term boycotts as key examples of slacktivism.<sup>14</sup>

It is debated among scholars whether slacktivism encompasses all forms of online activism. Jordan and Taylor argue that slacktivism does not encompass certain forms of online activism such as politically-motivated internet hacking.<sup>15</sup> Internet hacking and the like are viewed as meaningful and potentially effective forms of political activism due to the commitment and effort they require.<sup>16</sup> Yet, the 2011 Worldwide Infrastructure Security Report found that ideologically-motivated hacking is most readily identified as a DDoS Attack or a

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<sup>10</sup> Stuart W. Shulman, "The Internet Still Might (but probably won't) Change Everything: Stakeholder Views on the Future of Electronic Rulemaking," *I/S: A Journal of Law and Policy for the Information Society*, 1, no. 1 (2005): 111–145.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*, (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion the Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: Public Affair, 2012)

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Coleman, and Jay G. Blumler, *The Internet and Democratic Citizenship: Theory, Practice and Policy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion the Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: Public Affair, 2012)

<sup>15</sup> Tim Jordan, and Paul A. Taylor, *Hacktivism and Cyberwars: Rebels with a Cause?*, (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

Distributed Denial-of-Service Attack.<sup>17</sup> This type of hacking has become quite simple to execute with readily available tools released by “hacktivists” groups, such as Anonymous and Lulzsec, for mass activism. It is because hacktivism requires slightly more effort than other modes of internet activism but not as much effort as off-line activism that hacktivism could be argued is another form of slacktivism.

The case for online activism to be thought of as “slacktivism” as has been made by several scholars, most prominently Morozov, Hindman, Shulman.<sup>18,19,20</sup> However, when thinking about the effects of online activism it is also important to consider how the internet has affected the ways in which modern-day citizens engage in political matters. In 2000, Putnam argued that because the internet is primarily used for entertainment purposes it was likely to have a negative effect on citizens’ political participation.<sup>21</sup> Putnam suggested that citizens are interacting less socially and as a result have become “lonely bowlers” who are unwilling to participate in political matters.<sup>22</sup> Putnam singled out television and the internet as having helped diminish the opportunities for social interaction and thereby the willingness of individuals to participate in political activities.<sup>23</sup> However, whether these findings still hold true today are questionable considering the fact that these data are from the late 1990s.

An alternative argument is made by Bennett, who argues that the internet has actually strengthen traditional forms of political participation by allowing activists to reach a larger

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<sup>17</sup> Arbor Networks, "2011 Worldwide Infrastructure Security Report." Last modified 2011. Accessed March 1, 2012. <http://www.arbornetworks.com/report>

<sup>18</sup> Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion the Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: Public Affair, 2012)

<sup>19</sup> Matthew Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*, (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Stuart W. Shulman, "The Internet Still Might (but probably won't) Change Everything: Stakeholder Views on the Future of Electronic Rulemaking," *I/S: A Journal of Law and Policy for the Information Society*, 1, no. 1 (2005): 111–145.

<sup>21</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

participant pool and making it easier to promote events.<sup>24</sup> However, this argument is not without flaw as it has been argued that in fact, the internet has not increased mass political participation overall. The reason for this is that the internet simply made it possible for the same citizens who had already been participating in political activities offline to also participate in online activities.<sup>25</sup>

Despite the fact that many of the new methods of political participation occur outside of the political sphere and the fact that they may not necessarily target the state they still constitute political participation. Political participation has been defined as “ordinary citizens directed toward influencing some political outcome.”<sup>26</sup> Henrik points out that in this sense the definition of political participation has become a bit ambiguous because it includes a number of various new forms of activities.<sup>27</sup>

Recently, scholars have turned away from the question of whether the internet does activate citizens to participate in political activities to the question of whether these activities have any effect on political decision making. Both Hindman and Shulman contend that despite internet activism’s accessibility, levels of political participation may not be directly affected.<sup>28,29</sup> They also point out that certain forms of internet activism are not as effective as they might seem. Through an analysis of select mass e-mail campaigns, Shulman sets out to provide

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<sup>24</sup> Lance Bennett, Christian Breunig, and Terri Givens, "Communication and Political Mobilization: Digital Media and the Organization of Anti-Iraq War Demonstrations in the U.S.," *Political Communication*, 25, no. 3 (2008): 269–289.

<sup>25</sup> Bruce Bimber, "Information and Political Engagement in America: The Search for Effects of Information Technology at the Individual Level," *Political Research Quarterly*, 54, no. 1 (2001): 53–67.

<sup>26</sup> Henry E. Brady, 1999. "Political participation," In: John P. Robinson, Phillip R. Shaver and Lawrence S. Wrightsman (editors). *Measures of political attitudes*. San Diego, Calif.: Academic Press.

<sup>27</sup> Christensen Henrik, "Political Activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or Political Participation by Other Means?," *First Monday*, 16, no. 2 (2011), <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3336/2767>(accessed March 20, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Matthew Hindman, *The Myth of Digital Democracy*, (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Stuart W. Shulman, "The Case Against Mass E-mails: Perverse Incentives and Low Quality Public Participation in U.S. Federal Rulemaking," *Policy & Internet*, 1, no. 1 (2009), <http://www.psocommons.org/policyandinternet/vol1/iss1/art2/>(accessed March 20, 2012).

evidence for the case of slacktivism.<sup>30</sup> Shulman contends that mass emailing campaigns do not actually achieve their intended results.<sup>31</sup> Shulman observes the effectiveness of the 1000 longest modified mass emails sent from MoveOn.org to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regarding its 2004 mercury rulemaking.<sup>32</sup> Shulman concluded that only a small percentage of the modified emails sent had provided any new relevant information for the EPA to consider.<sup>33</sup> In fact, most of the MoveOn emails were either exact copies of the short letter template provided or variants of a few claims about the incompetence of the rule proposed. As a result, the recipients of these emails could simply filter these emails out of their inbox so as to not read them or even see them.<sup>34</sup> These findings indicate a serious hazard to the alleged influence of mass email campaigns on policymaking.

Morozov goes a step further by suggesting that there is no such thing as virtual politics.<sup>35</sup> Morozov goes about this by analyzing select politically motivated Facebook groups.<sup>36</sup> He recounts an experiment conducted in 2009 by a Danish psychologist, Anders Colding-Jorgensen. The researcher started a Facebook group and invited 125 friends to join the Facebook group in order to save the Stork Fountain in Copenhagen from being demolished. However, the threat was fictitious and a part of the study. The experiment resulted in 27,500 joining the Facebook group. Morozov concludes that there are two ways of interpreting this experiment, the first that there is no way of determining whether or not Facebook-based mobilization will result in true social change and when it does result in political change it is purely accidental.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, this sort of

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion the Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: Public Affair, 2012)

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

activism should be disregarded by policymakers.<sup>38</sup> The second interpretation is that the ease and speed of the growth observed in the experiment is important and that Facebook could prove to be a valuable resource for political activists. However, Morozov then dismisses both of these contrasting interpretations and opts for a more complex one.<sup>39</sup> He turns to Kierkegaard's philosophy as a template for understanding the issues presented by internet activism. He maintains that offline activists and protestors who risk their lives actually make an "authentic" commitment to their political causes but online activists' "shallow" commitments simply support overambitious causes to save the world as a result of peer pressure.<sup>40</sup> Morozov identifies the key problem with internet activism as being the fact that it is motivated by a desire to impress one's friends and not true conviction.<sup>41</sup> In short, Morozov believes that "it doesn't really matter if the cause they are fighting for is real or not; as long as it is easy to find, join, and interpret, that's enough. And if it impresses their friends, it's a true gem."<sup>42</sup>

Morozov then looks at another Facebook group called "Saving the Children of Africa" which was able to get 1.7 million individuals to join the Facebook group but has only managed to raise \$12,000 in a few years since the group's launch.<sup>43</sup> He states that groups that lack a clear agenda on how to reach their goals often times settle for becoming a fund-raising group.<sup>44</sup> But he correctly identifies that not all problems can be resolved by fund-raising. Furthermore, Morozov uses this example to warn of the danger that the popularity of Facebook and other social media tools would encourage activists to tackle problems by collective action when a solution would be

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

achieved much more rapidly if said issues were tackled individually.<sup>45</sup> But Morozov identifies the biggest danger of slacktivism as giving “young people...the wrong impression that another kind of politics--digital in nature but leading to real-world political change and the one underpinned entirely by virtual campaigns, online petitions... is not only feasible but actually preferable” to traditional modes of activism.<sup>46</sup>

In summary, there are several difficulties faced by internet activism and online campaigns. As Coleman and Blumler point out, online networks are not able to influence policy because often times governmental policy is greatly disconnected from online networks.<sup>47</sup> In addition, internet activism efforts can be transient and fleeting and as a result they fail to make their way into the agendas of policymakers.<sup>48</sup> Another problem identified by Coleman and Blumler, is that there exists a multitude of online activities that usually have either an eradivative and nihilistic feature to them, which leads their dismissal as frivolous attempts.<sup>49</sup>

The critique of internet activism as slacktivism targets easy forms of internet activism that are thought to be inadequate at reaching political goals in comparison to traditional forms of activism. Proponents of the slacktivism theory, such as Morozov, are primarily concerned with the lack of heavy involvement that they interpret as lack of a genuine desire to bring about change.<sup>50</sup> Some scholars have said that for them “wearing badges is not enough, and neither is changing your profile picture on your Facebook account for a day, a week, or a month.”<sup>51</sup> Online

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Stephen Coleman, and Jay G. Blumler, *The Internet and Democratic Citizenship: Theory, Practice and Policy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion the Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (New York: Public Affair, 2012)

<sup>51</sup> Christensen Henrik, "Political Activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or Political Participation by Other Means?," *First Monday*, 16, no. 2 (2011), <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3336/2767>(accessed March 20, 2012).



activists who engage in these activities are perceived as reluctant to perform the more commitment intensive and traditional forms of activism and to essentially do what is needed to achieve real political change.<sup>52</sup>

Henrik notes that the widespread accessibility of online activism may lead to the deterioration of high-quality participation.<sup>53</sup> This is due the fact that individuals who would normally become involved through traditional methods of activism will instead choose to participate in online activism misguidedly believing that these online activities are a sufficient replacement to tradition methods. He argues that even if online activities are considered as forms of “legitimate” political participation, they might still be less effective methods in the long run if individuals wish to enact political change.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, Henrik points out that online political activity may have a negative effect on overall levels of political involvement and particularly the success of involvement in obtaining intended effects on policymaking.<sup>55</sup> However, he concludes that these fears are unfounded because numerous forms of tradition political participation do not require high levels of commitment.<sup>56</sup> He states that many of these very tradition forms of involvement are inefficient methods of advancing political interests.<sup>57</sup> He goes on to compare signing petition to signing an online petition, neither of which constitutes an enormous burden and thus performing the very same action online should not devoid it of meaning or effort.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, critics make a distinction between what constitutes a private expression of political demands and what constitutes a public one. This is a distinction that scholars such as Papacharissi and Tufekci argue is inaccurate as it fails to take into account all of the possibilities

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

offered by the internet.<sup>59,60</sup>

Nevertheless, Henrik argues that there is a good reason to remain skeptical when it comes to determining the validity of certain internet campaigns and their participants.<sup>61</sup> Henrik focuses on Facebook groups in particular, stating much like Morozov that the majority of Facebook groups serve mainly to indicate one's preferences rather than actually achieve a political end.<sup>62</sup> He states that the majority of activities Facebook groups conduct never translates into other political activities to achieve the ultimate goal of the group.<sup>63</sup> According to Henrik, the main critiques of online are as follow: firstly, online political activities are ineffective and secondly, that these activities do not generate or spur other activities.<sup>64</sup>

The second school of thought argues that the issue of internet activism is not as simple as the slacktivism theory makes it out to be. This school dismisses the idea of internet activism as slacktivism and instead makes a compelling argument for internet activism to be thought of as simply another kind of activism, one that is legitimate and supplements. It is important to note that many scholars agree that dismissing internet activism as mere slacktivism is not only premature but also, misleading as more research is needed in the area.<sup>65,66,67,68,69,70,71</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Zeynep Tufekci. "New Media and the People-Powered Uprisings." MIT Technology Review, August 30, 2011. <http://www.technologyreview.com/view/425280/new-media-and-the-people-powered-uprisings/> (accessed April 1, 2012)

<sup>60</sup> Zizi A. Papacharissi, *A Private Sphere: Democracy in a Digital Age*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2010).

<sup>61</sup> Christensen Henrik, "Political Activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or Political Participation by Other Means?," *First Monday*, 16, no. 2 (2011), <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3336/2767>(accessed March 20, 2012).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Lance Bennett, Christian Breunig, and Terri Givens, "Communication and Political Mobilization: Digital Media and the Organization of Anti-Iraq War Demonstrations in the U.S.," *Political Communication*, 25, no. 3 (2008): 269–289.

<sup>66</sup> Robert J. Klotz, "Internet Campaigning for Grassroots and Astroturf Support," *Social Science Computer Review*, 25, no. 1 (2007): 3-12.

<sup>67</sup> J. Woody Stanley, and Christopher Weare, "Effects of Internet Use on Political Participation: Evidence from an Agency Online Discussion Forum," *Administration & Society*, 36, no. 5 (2004): 503–527.

<sup>68</sup> Caroline J. Tolbert, and Ramona S. McNeal, "Unraveling the Effects of the Internet on Political

Once again, it is important to look back at how the internet has affected the ways in which modern-day citizens engage in political matters before looking at the effects of internet activism. Contrary to Putnam's argument, it has been argued that what is happening is not a uniform decline in participation, but a diversification of how citizens take part in political matters.<sup>72,73</sup> It is widely accepted that there exists numerous other ways outside of the traditional forms of participation in which individuals participate in political issues. For instance, Micheletti and McFarland argue that citizens have a wide selection of ways to engage in political participation many of which surpass the distinction between the private and the public spheres of life.<sup>74</sup> Along the lines of Dalton's view, Marichal presents the idea of micro-activism as a way to describe the small scale forms of political communication that have recently come about.<sup>75</sup> Marichal argues that the possibilities on the internet have doubled over the last few years.<sup>76</sup> Particularly, new forms of social media such as Facebook and Twitter have increased the potential for sharing information and expressing political interests among individuals in social networks.

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Participation," *Political Research Quarterly*, 56, no. 2 (2003): 175–185.

<sup>69</sup> Pippa Norris, "The Impact of the Internet on Political Activism: Evidence from Europe," *International Journal of Electronic Government Research*, 1, no. 1 (2005): 19-39.

<sup>70</sup> Eulàlia Puig-i-Abril, and Hernando Rojas, "Being Early on the Curve: Online Practices and Expressive Political Participation," *International Journal of Internet Science*, 2, no. 1 (2007): 28–44.

<sup>71</sup> Shelley Boulianne, "Does Internet Use Affect Engagement? A Meta-analysis of Research," *Political Communication*, 26, no. 2 (2009): 193-211.

<sup>72</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

<sup>73</sup> Russell J. Dalton, *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, (Washington D.C: C.Q. Press, 2006).

<sup>74</sup> Michele Micheletti, and Andrew S. McFarland, *Creative Participation: Responsibility-taking in the Political World*, (London: Paradigm, 2011).

<sup>75</sup> Jose Marichal. Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, "Political Facebook Groups: Micro-Activism and the Digital Front Stage." Last modified 2010. Accessed March 14, 2012.<http://microsites.oii.ox.ac.uk/ipp2010/programme/115>

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

Along the lines of Marichal's view, Henrik looks at the Facebook causes application, Petitionsonline.com, and Avaaz.org.<sup>77</sup> All of these aim to mobilize users through micro-activism. He notes that many of these websites claim to have achieved their political goals through virtual activism.<sup>78</sup> Henrik has deliberately selected websites that allow for the possibility of slacktivism. Characteristics of these websites include offering easily accessible activities, aiming to activate the masses without extensive effort.<sup>79</sup> It is important to note that Henrik mentions that this selection is neither representative nor exhaustive simply aiming to address the critiques of slacktivism by showing how these claims are problematic.<sup>80</sup>

Henrik begins by looking at Petitionsonline.com that provides free hosting for online petitions that makes it easier for individuals to sign and share these petitions with large audiences.<sup>81</sup> He notes that this website cites a number of users who claim to have been able to achieve their political goals using the online petition platform.<sup>82</sup> He then turns to Avaaz.org whose main goal is to bring individuals and policy-makers together around the world.<sup>83</sup> He contends that it is unjust to portray Avaaz.org as an example of *slacktivism*, because the website attempts to activate users off-line as well as online thus extending beyond the virtual world.<sup>84</sup> Avaaz.org is primarily concerned with sending newsletters on ongoing petition signings and fundraising on behalf of the causes. Henrik argues that in this respect it is similar to other efforts accused of *slacktivism*<sup>85</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> Christensen Henrik, "Political Activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or Political Participation by Other Means?," *First Monday*, 16, no. 2 (2011), <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3336/2767>(accessed March 20, 2012).

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

In summary, Henrik concludes that despite both of these platforms' eagerness to point out their effectiveness, the evidence they put forward is problematic and essentially unverifiable.<sup>86</sup> He cites the cherry picking of campaigns that were successful and the neglect of those that were unsuccessful as one of the main offenses these sites commit.<sup>87</sup> As a result, it is impossible to calculate the success rate of campaigns on these sites.

Bennett explores the mobilization of citizens through dense individual-level political networks by conducting an analysis of the dynamics of the mobilization process in the case of the 2003 U.S. protests against the Iraq war.<sup>88</sup> After sampling demonstrators selected from the United States protest sites in New York, San Francisco, and Seattle, this study found that individual activists nearest to the different sponsoring protest organizations were more likely to affiliate with diverse political networks and also more likely to depend on digital forms of communication for several types of information and action purposes.<sup>89</sup>

Along the same lines, Klotz explores how U.S. Senate candidates used their websites during the 2004 election to promote political participation.<sup>90</sup> This study focuses on the concept of plagiarized participation, which is where participants are encouraged to use premade templates/messages in support of a cause.<sup>91</sup> This study looked specifically at how these campaign websites encouraged visitors to submit letters to their social networks.<sup>92</sup> To measure plagiarized participation, the study gathered all candidate requests for writing a letter of support that were

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Lance Bennett, Christian Breunig, and Terri Givens, "Communication and Political Mobilization: Digital Media and the Organization of Anti-Iraq War Demonstrations in the U.S.," *Political Communication*, 25, no. 3 (2008): 269–289.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Robert J. Klotz, "Internet Campaigning for Grassroots and Astroturf Support," *Social Science Computer Review*, 25, no. 1 (2007): 3-12.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

not part of a generic list without an icon or additional information.<sup>93</sup> The study identified campaign websites that had the visitors to use a letter template containing words such as “I” as websites proponents of plagiarized participation.<sup>94</sup> Klotz concludes that these campaign websites demonstrated incredible potential for mobilizing citizens.<sup>95</sup> Klotz’s findings indicate that most of the campaign websites promoted traditional forms of activism and that the use of prewritten text only constituted a minority of the communication that occurred with social networks.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, Klotz’s findings also suggest that the preference for grassroots mobilization outweighs the desire for astroturf.<sup>97</sup> Astroturf refers to campaigns that attempt to obscure the sponsors of the campaign message in order to make it seem as though the message stems from an organic grassroots movement.<sup>98</sup> Overall, these findings lend support for the argument that online campaigns can have an effect on political decisions.

Although the research conducted by Bennett and Klotz supports the argument that Internet campaigns can have an impact on political decisions most of their research consists of case studies of campaigns.<sup>99,100</sup> As Henrik suggests, one of the drawbacks of this is that it is not possible to determine the general impact of online activism on policymaking using these methods.<sup>101</sup> This is not to imply that their efforts have no substantial influence but rather that from this it is impossible to confirm conclusively what portion of all online campaigns are

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Lance Bennett, Christian Breunig, and Terri Givens, "Communication and Political Mobilization: Digital Media and the Organization of Anti-Iraq War Demonstrations in the U.S.," *Political Communication*, 25, no. 3 (2008): 269–289.

<sup>101</sup> Christensen Henrik, "Political Activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or Political Participation by Other Means?," *First Monday*, 16, no. 2 (2011), <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3336/2767>(accessed March 20, 2012).

successful and what kind of role they play in achieving their stated political goals. On the other hand, Henrik points out that Bennett's and Klotz's research is unique in the sense that it provides valuable information which can be used by activists to improve the success rate of online activism campaigns.<sup>102,103,104</sup>

Henrik responds to the argument that online activism is a less effective replacement for traditional forms of activism which actually has a negative effect on overall levels of political participation by looking at several studies regarding the effects of citizens participating in online activism as well as in traditional forms of activism.<sup>105</sup> By doing so he is able to present a more complete overview of how online activism affects political participation. Moreover, the combination of different data sets used also lends more credibility to these findings. Henrik presents several examples of studies that bring into question the positive effects of the internet on political participation.<sup>106</sup> He notes that these studies are consistent with the slacktivist account of online political activism because they lend evidence for the argument that online activism does not necessarily translate into offline political participation.<sup>107</sup> As a result, some scholars argue that slacktivism is replacing the traditional forms of activism and thereby decreasing the overall quality of political participation.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Lance Bennett, Christian Breunig, and Terri Givens, "Communication and Political Mobilization: Digital Media and the Organization of Anti-Iraq War Demonstrations in the U.S.," *Political Communication*, 25, no. 3 (2008): 269–289.

<sup>104</sup> Robert J. Klotz, "Internet Campaigning for Grassroots and Astroturf Support," *Social Science Computer Review*, 25, no. 1 (2007): 3-12.

<sup>105</sup> Christensen Henrik, "Political Activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or Political Participation by Other Means?," *First Monday*, 16, no. 2 (2011), <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3336/2767>(accessed March 20, 2012).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

Bimber explores how individual levels of political participation are affected by attaining political information from the internet.<sup>108</sup> He uses survey data collected from 1996-1999 to test for a correlation between the availability of information and political engagement. This study's findings indicate that obtaining information has no substantial effect on the likelihood of voting. Bimber's study also suggests that the connection between obtaining information from the internet and other forms of political engagement is not strong.<sup>109</sup> Bimber's study concludes that gathering political information does not necessarily result in an increase of individual levels of political participation offline.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, this study finds that the availability and costs of political information does not direct political engagement.<sup>111</sup> However, it is questionable whether these findings still hold true today given the fact that these data are quite dated.

Along the same lines, Scheufele and Nisbet compare the effects of different forms of traditional political participation and online political participation.<sup>112</sup> This study consisted of a telephone survey that asked individuals how they use the internet and how often.<sup>113</sup> Scheufele and Nisbet's study indicates that the effect of the internet in promoting political participation is limited.<sup>114</sup> Scheufele and Nisbet contend that traditional forms of media play the primary part in stimulating political participation.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, there is a lack of evidence suggesting that the use of the internet for political activities has a negative impact on traditional forms of political participation. From this Henrik concludes that the arguments that online activism has a negative

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<sup>108</sup> Bruce Bimber, "Information and Political Engagement in America: The Search for Effects of Information Technology at the Individual Level," *Political Research Quarterly*, 54, no. 1 (2001): 53-67.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Dietram A. Scheufele, and Matthew C. Nisbet, "Being a Citizen Online: New Opportunities and Dead Ends," *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 7, no. 3 (2002): 55-75.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.



effect on overall levels of political involvement and is replacing traditional forms of political participation are unfounded.<sup>116</sup>

Although scholars have questioned whether the internet has had a positive effect on individuals' levels of political participation however there is currently no reason to believe that online activism has a negative effect on traditional forms political participation.<sup>117,118, 119</sup>

Interestingly enough, some studies have even concluded that internet use has a positive albeit weak effect on individual levels of political participation.<sup>120,121,122</sup> This suggests that the claim that online activism is replacing traditional forms of political participation is questionable.

Boulianne reinforces the argument for the positive effects of the internet on political participation through meta–studies targeting the effects of internet use on levels of political participation.<sup>123</sup> Boulianne concludes that levels of political participation have been positively affected by internet use.<sup>124</sup> However, Boulianne also concludes that the strength of the effect is weak and also indicates that the impact is growing over time.<sup>125</sup> With this, Henrik suggests that the overall importance of the internet might be increasing as well.<sup>126</sup> In the case of online

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<sup>116</sup> Christensen Henrik, "Political Activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or Political Participation by Other Means?," *First Monday*, 16, no. 2 (2011), <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3336/2767>(accessed March 20, 2012).

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Bruce Bimber, "Information and Political Engagement in America: The Search for Effects of Information Technology at the Individual Level," *Political Research Quarterly*, 54, no. 1 (2001): 53–67.

<sup>119</sup> Dietram A. Scheufele, and Matthew C. Nisbet, "Being a Citizen Online: New Opportunities and Dead Ends," *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 7, no. 3 (2002): 55–75.

<sup>120</sup> J. Woody Stanley, and Christopher Weare, "Effects of Internet Use on Political Participation: Evidence from an Agency Online Discussion Forum," *Administration & Society*, 36, no. 5 (2004): 503–527.

<sup>121</sup> Caroline J. Tolbert, and Ramona S. McNeal, "Unraveling the Effects of the Internet on Political Participation," *Political Research Quarterly*, 56, no. 2 (2003): 175–185.

<sup>122</sup> Pippa Norris, "The Impact of the Internet on Political Activism: Evidence from Europe," *International Journal of Electronic Government Research*, 1, no. 1 (2005): 19–39.

<sup>123</sup> Shelley Boulianne, "Does Internet Use Affect Engagement? A Meta–analysis of Research," *Political Communication*, 26, no. 2 (2009): 193–211.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Christensen Henrik, "Political Activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or Political Participation by Other Means?," *First Monday*, 16, no. 2 (2011), <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3336/2767>(accessed March 20, 2012).

activities affecting youth's levels of political participation, Bakker concluded that there exists a substantial positive relationship between internet use and individual levels of both online and traditional forms of political participation.<sup>127</sup>

As the studies above have demonstrated the effects and effectiveness of online activism have been widely disputed among scholars. Some scholars anticipated that the internet would deeply effect how democracies operate and ultimately completely transform them, but these expectations have yet to be met. As a result of this, many have become doubtful of the internet's positive effects. In fact, some have argued that the internet has had a negative impact on political engagement and democracy. The most recent critique against the effects of the internet has been that online activism is merely slacktivism. Slacktivism has been used to describe online activism that is easily done but ultimately is ineffective at influencing policymaking. Some argue that slacktivism has also replaced the more effective traditional forms of activism thus diminishing overall levels of political participation.

In summary, with regards to the first critique of slacktivism that is concerned with the effectiveness of online activism at influencing policymaking there is simply not sufficient research and data to determine the success or failure rate of online activism campaigns. Thus, any claims that online activism campaigns are or are not able to achieve their stated political goals is unsubstantiated. As Henrik contends, numerous online activism campaigns are charged with being slacktivism are likely unable to achieve their stated political goal but even if this first criticism against the effectiveness of online activism cannot be entirely dismissed as are criticisms that attempt to dismiss the effects of the internet on political participation altogether.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Tom Bakker, and C.H. De Vreese, "Good News for the Future? Young people, Internet Use and Political Participation," *Communication Research*, 38, no. 4 (2011): 451-470.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

As Henrik and Tufekci argue online and traditional forms of activism are not necessarily mutually exclusive forms of political participation.<sup>129,130</sup> This directly contrasts the second criticism against slacktivism, which argues that online activism is replacing traditional forms of activism thereby decreasing overall levels of political participation. However, as recent studies indicate, participating in online activism actually promotes traditional forms of political participation to a certain degree. It is true that studies have also suggested that this relationship is limited. Yet, there exists no evidence which reflects that online activism has had a negative effect on overall levels of political participation. This in turn leads to the conclusion that the second criticism against slacktivism, which suggests that online activism is replacing traditional forms of activism, is also unsubstantiated. In fact, recent studies have found a limited but positive correlation between online activism and increased traditional forms of political participation. Consequently, there is an argument to be made that engaging in online activism does not replace traditional forms of political participation but rather bolsters traditional forms of political participation. Above all, there is a substantial amount of research yet to be done in this area in order to fully determine the effects and effectiveness of online activism.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid

<sup>130</sup> Zeynep Tufekci. "New Media and the People-Powered Uprisings." MIT Technology Review, August 30, 2011. <http://www.technologyreview.com/view/425280/new-media-and-the-people-powered-uprisings/> (accessed April 1, 2012).

# **Congressional Action on SOPA and PIPA**

## **Introduction**

The literature review in the previous section demarcates the two existing schools of thought to explain the effects and role of online activism. The first school of thought proposes that online activism is has no effect on political decision-making serving only to enhance the feel-good factor for participants. The second school of thought contends that the issue of online activism is not as simple as the theory of slacktivism makes it out to be. These scholars dismiss the idea of online activism as slacktivism and instead make compelling arguments for online activism to be thought of as simply another kind of activism, one that is legitimate and meaningful. Most of the research for both of these theories is based on studies of individual online activism campaigns and their respective effectiveness on the policies targeted by each campaign. Although my study also includes individual online activism campaigns, I begin by looking at the legislative process of the targeted bills in order to map out their trajectories and ultimate defeat. In addition, in this section I also look at actions taken by members of Congress in support or in opposition of SOPA and/or PIPA.

## **Background**

The Stop Online Privacy Act (SOPA) and Preventing Real Online Threats to Economic Creativity and Theft of Intellectual Property Act (PIPA) were two congressional bills originally introduced in 2011 and subsequently postponed in early 2012. PIPA was the first of the two bills to be introduced. On May 12, 2011, Representative Patrick Leahy (D-VT) with 11 co-sponsors introduced PIPA. PIPA was a different version of another act proposed in 2010 called the Combating Online Infringement and Counterfeits Act (COICA) which also, interestingly enough, did not pass. PIPA's stated objective was to provide the government and copyright holders with new methods to prevent access to websites containing copyrighted intellectual property and counterfeit goods, particularly those located outside of the United States. PIPA passed the Senate Judiciary Committee by unanimous voice vote. Between May of 2011 and January of 2012, support for PIPA greatly fluctuated. Finally on January 20, 2012 Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid announced that PIPA would be postponed.

SOPA was introduced into the House on October 26, 2011 by Representative Lamar S. Smith (R-TX) with 12 co-sponsors. Much like PIPA, SOPA's stated aim was to give the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) along with copyright holders the right to obtain court orders against websites, not located within U.S. jurisdiction, considered to be permitting or assisting copyright infringement in order to help law enforcement agencies combat online trafficking of copyrighted intellectual property and counterfeit goods. There were two sets of hearings held on SOPA, the last of which ended on December 16, 2011 without completing markup. Also on January 20, 2012, the House Judiciary Committee Chairman, Lamar Smith, announced that SOPA would be postponed.

## **Methodology**

In this study, I examine the legislative processes of SOPA and PIPA by creating a comprehensive legislative timeline of both bills. This timeline includes all congressional action taken and also includes actions taken by members of Congress in support or opposition of SOPA and/or PIPA. To create this timeline, I relied on the SOPA Opera database and SOPA/PIPA Timeline created by ProPublica. Both of these tools were created in the midst of the SOPA/PIPA protests as a way of tracking all actions taken by legislators regarding SOPA or PIPA. One of the advantages offered by ProPublica's database is that it tracked not only official congressional actions taken on SOPA/PIPA but also tweets and Facebook posts made by legislators in support or opposition of SOPA and/or PIPA. Furthermore, ProPublica coded each of these actions as neutral, in support, or in opposition of SOPA/PIPA. ProPublica defines support as: co-sponsoring either bill, voting to move the bill forward in committee, advocating for or defending either bill in public. Conversely, opposition is defined as: speaking out against either bill, withdrawing sponsorship, supporting amendments or alternative legislation that would undermine the bill.

Although ProPublica's database is quite extensive, I found that the database was missing some actions and events. The SOPA/PIPA Timeline created by ProPublica also contained some errors and inaccuracies. As a result, I cross-referenced all of the events listed in the SOPA Opera database with THOMAS, ProQuest Congressional, and Open Congress to confirm the timeline used in this study would capture all congressional actions taken on SOPA and PIPA. Also, I looked at the source of each action listed in ProPublica's SOPA/PIPA timeline to confirm the validity of each listing. Thus, the timeline used for this study contains a direct working link to the source for each event listed. Lastly, I examined each event in the SOPA/PIPA timeline to

confirm that the event had been correctly coded as neutral, in support, or in opposition as defined by ProPublica. As a result, I was able to graph each action taken in support, opposition, or neutral by legislators on SOPA/PIPA over the course of the legislative process.

## **Limitations**

One of the limitations brought about by using ProPublica's SOPA Opera is that the database includes emails and letters constituents received from legislators and even materials legislators sent directly to ProPublica regarding their stance on SOPA and/or PIPA. For example, a constituent would have been able to send in an email they received from their representative after writing to their representatives regarding SOPA and/or PIPA. Although this enriches the database it also proves to be a limitation because the full text of these materials is not made public by ProPublica. As a result, there is no way to verify the authenticity of these texts. However, this only applies to a small number of actions listed on the SOPA Opera database.

Another limitation of this study is that the SOPA/PIPA timeline only captures certain forms of actions taken by legislators on SOPA and/or PIPA. Unfortunately, actions taken by legislators outside the forms listed below are not captured by the timeline used in this study.

Specifically, the timeline includes the following forms of actions:

1. Official congressional action (Co-Sponsorship, votes, etc)
2. Statements, interviews and press releases by members of congress
3. Tweets made by the official Twitter accounts of members of congress
4. Posts made on Facebook by the official accounts of members of congress
5. YouTube videos created by members of congress
6. Emails and letters sent by members of congress



## **Expectations**

Given what is already known about the legislative histories of SOPA and PIPA, I expect to find that feedback loop between congressional action and online activism on SOPA/PIPA exists. If this is the case, then I would also expect to find that increased congressional action on SOPA/PIPA will correlate with high levels of online activism in opposition of SOPA/PIPA. Conversely, decreased congressional action on SOPA/PIPA will correlate with low levels of online activism in opposition of SOPA/PIPA.

That said, another possibility is that feedback loop between congressional action and online activism on SOPA/PIPA does not exist. In such a case, I would expect to find that increased congressional action on SOPA/PIPA will not correlate with high levels of online activism in opposition of SOPA/PIPA. Likewise, decreased congressional action will not correlate with low levels of online activism in opposition of SOPA/PIPA.

A third possibility is that congressional action on SOPA/PIPA occurs independently from online activism on SOPA/PIPA but online activism is primarily driven by congressional action on SOPA/PIPA. Therefore, I would expect to find that high levels of online activism in opposition of SOPA/PIPA will be immediately preceded by increased congressional action on SOPA/PIPA. Yet, increased congressional action on SOPA/PIPA will not be immediately preceded by high levels of online activism in opposition of SOPA/PIPA. Moreover, low high levels of online activism in opposition of SOPA/PIPA will be directly preceded by decreased congressional action on SOPA/PIPA but decreased congressional action on SOPA/PIPA will not be preceded by low levels of online activism in opposition of SOPA/PIPA.

## **Data and Findings**

Overall, the data collected on congressional action on SOPA and PIPA reflects that the majority of congressional action was concentrated on specific days. The SOPA/PIPA Congressional Action Timeline (see Appendix A) demonstrates that the majority of action taken on SOPA and PIPA by members of Congress occurred on January 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of 2012. Congressional action here is defined as any action taken by a legislator regarding SOPA and/or PIPA. Appendix A reflects all congressional action on or relating to SOPA and PIPA that occurred between May 12, 2011 (when PIPA was first introduced) and January 24, 2012 (when the last congressional action occurred on SOPA).

Given that each action listed in Appendix A was coded as neutral, in support, or in opposition of SOPA and/or PIPA I was able to graph these actions over the course of the legislative process of SOPA and PIPA. Figure 1 demonstrates all events in opposition of SOPA and/or PIPA measured negatively and all events in support of SOPA and/or PIPA measured positively. Additionally, Figure 1 reinforces the findings reflected by Appendix A but also shines some light on smaller waves of opposition during late November and early December of 2011 that were obscured by the massive amount of congressional action that happened in early January of 2012. It is interesting to note that the first real demonstration of opposition to SOPA and PIPA by members of Congress does not occur until mid-November of 2011. This could partially be explained by the fact that SOPA was not introduced in the House until late October and legislators might have not fully researched and been aware of the implications of the bill right away. In terms of support for SOPA and PIPA, Figure 1 demonstrates some of the initial momentum PIPA garnered in May when it was first introduced and likewise for SOPA.

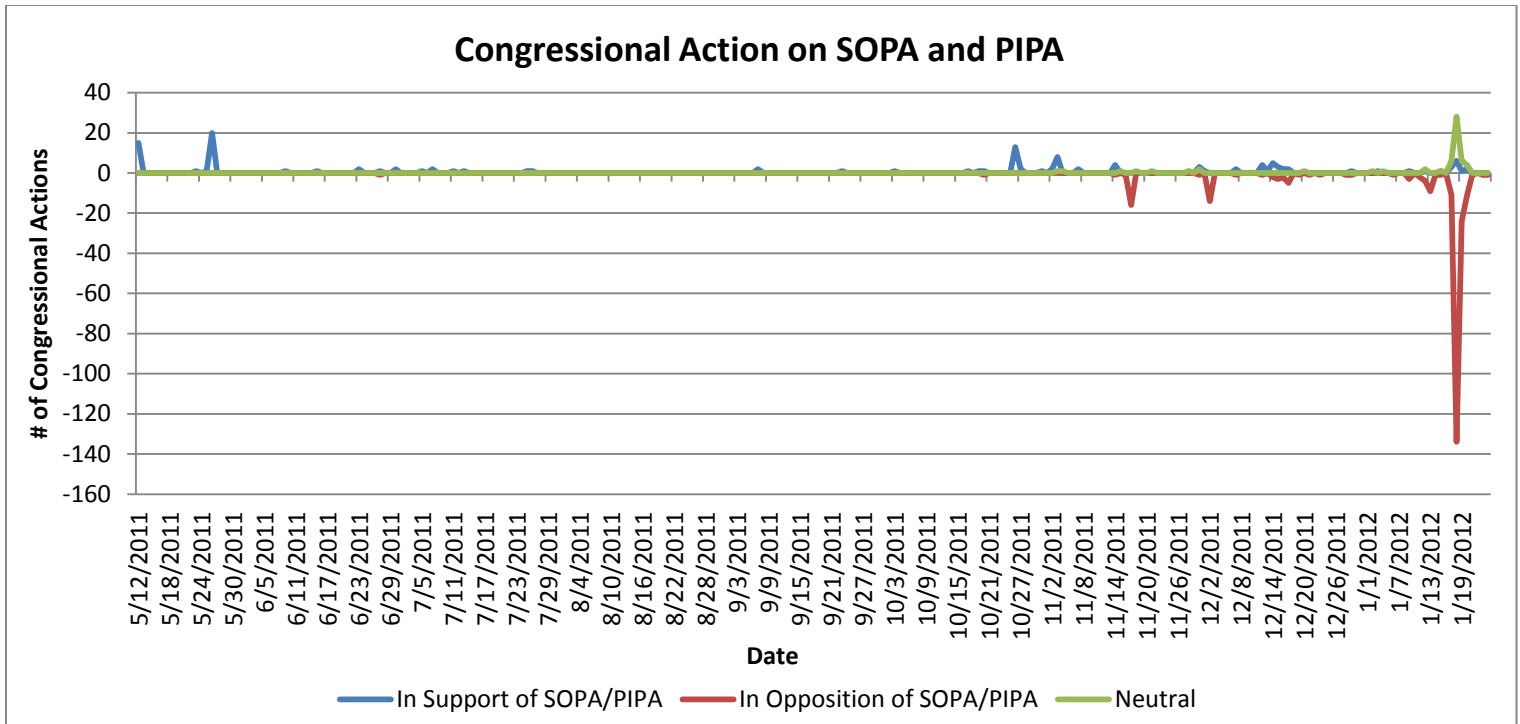


Figure 1. Congressional Action on SOPA and PIPA

In addition to congressional action on SOPA and PIPA, I also looked at co-sponsorship for SOPA and PIPA independently over the course of the legislative process. Interestingly enough, Figure 2 shows that PIPA sustained an upward trend of increasing co-sponsorship until January 15, 2012 where co-sponsorship begins to decrease. This general trend also seems to hold true for SOPA co-sponsorship as demonstrated in Figure 3. This is significant because it indicates that something occurred around this time that caused multiple legislators to change their opinions and officially withdraw their co-sponsorship of SOPA and PIPA.

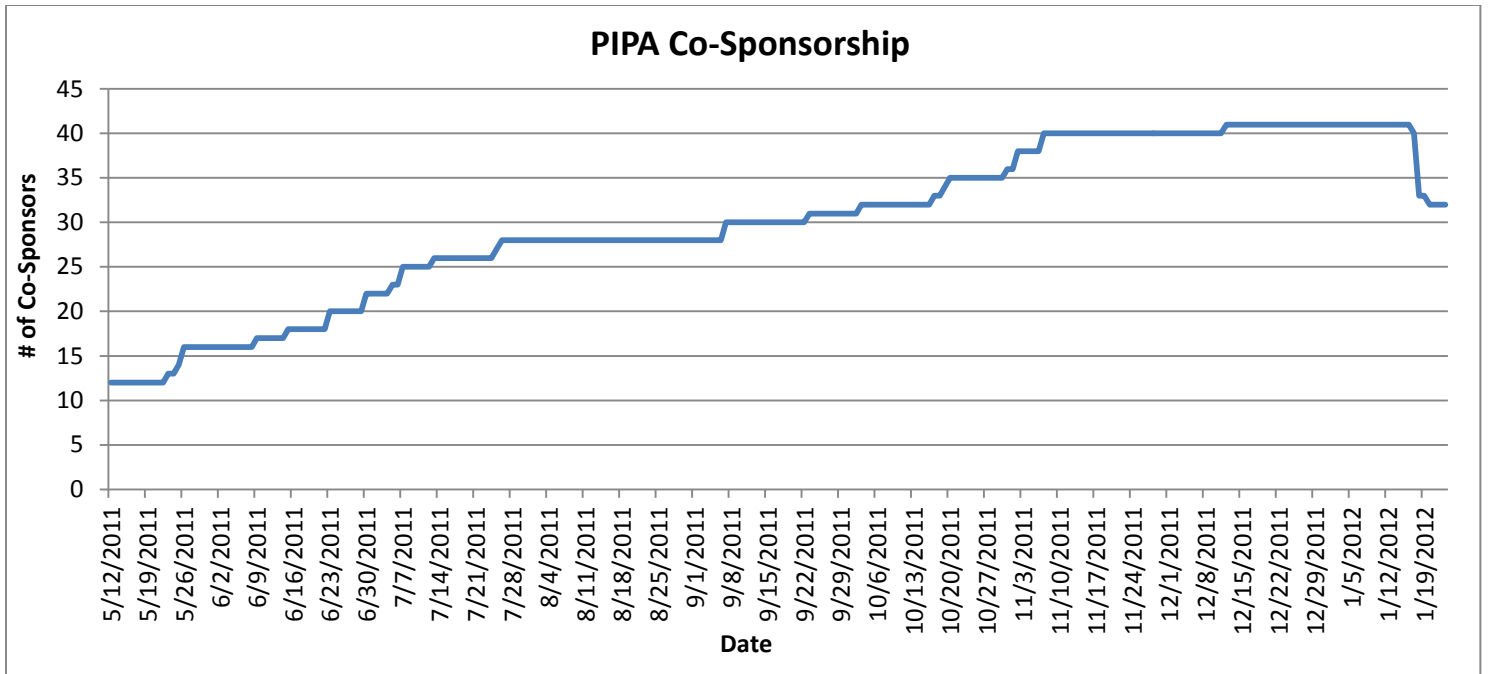


Figure 2. PIPA Co-Sponsorship

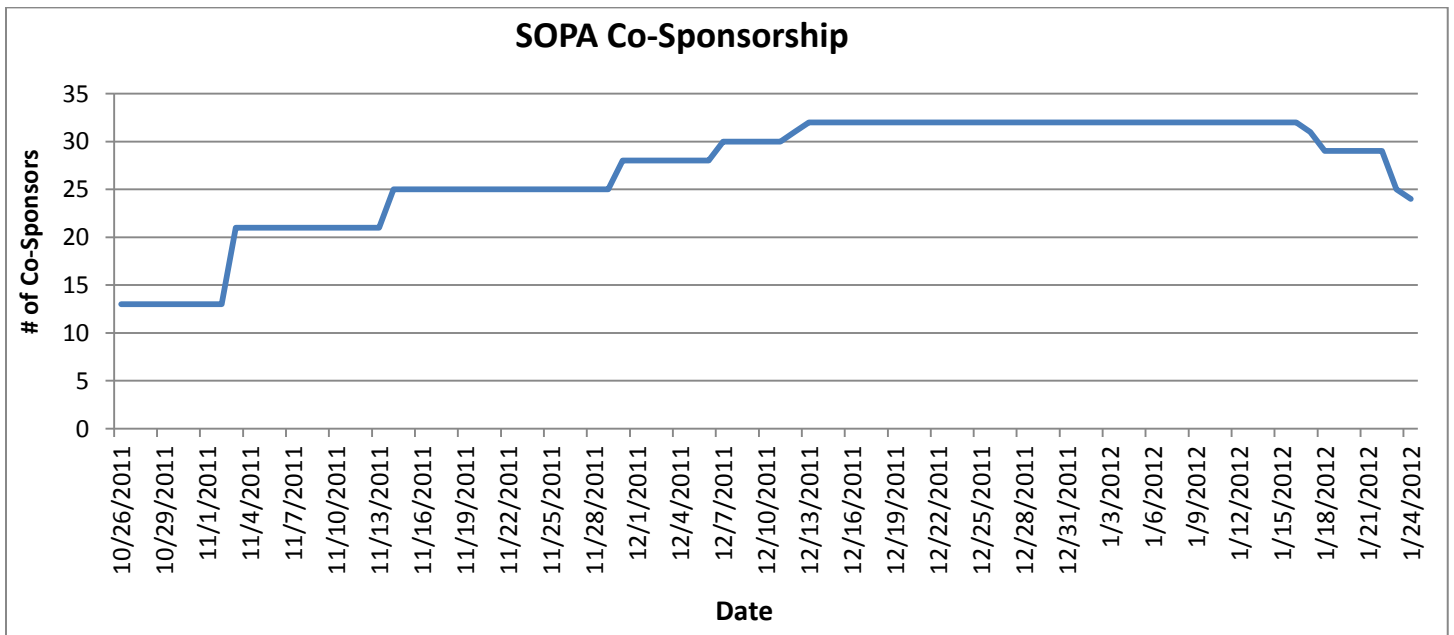


Figure 3. SOPA Co-Sponsorship

## **Summary of Patterns of Congressional Action**

Overall, the data suggests that my initial expectation regarding the distribution of congressional action on SOPA and PIPA was correct. The data reflects that the majority of congressional action on SOPA and PIPA occurred on January 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of 2012. Another interesting finding was the fact that co-sponsorship for both SOPA and PIPA notably dropped on the same day the majority of congressional actions on SOPA and PIPA occurred. However, from these data alone it is impossible to speculate the relationship between congressional action and online activism on SOPA and PIPA. Additionally, further analysis is also needed to see if the same pattern of distribution will hold for the online activism campaign actions in opposition of SOPA and PIPA. The following section aims to provide the data and analysis necessary to explore both of these questions.

# **Online Activism in Opposition of SOPA/PIPA**

## **Introduction**

In the previous section, I explored the distribution of congressional actions taken by legislators in support or opposition of SOPA and/or PIPA over the course of the legislative process of the bills. I included not only official congressional action in my analysis, such as co-sponsorship, but also included statements, tweets, Facebook posts, emails, letters, and press releases issued by members of Congress regarding SOPA and/or PIPA. Ultimately, these data reflect that the majority of congressional action on SOPA and PIPA occurred on January 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of 2012. In this section, I will analyze online activism campaigns' actions in opposition to SOPA and PIPA. Here I will primarily focus on online petitions opposing SOPA and/or PIPA, user generated content regarding SOPA/PIPA on Reddit, and the January 18<sup>th</sup> blackout.

## Background

SOPA and PIPA garnered attention not only from members of Congress but also from numerous tech companies, online communities, nonprofit organizations, privacy groups, and the general public. As a result, many of these groups created online campaigns in opposition of SOPA and PIPA. It is important to note that these groups used a combination of traditional forms of activism and also online forms of activism. Yet, it is interesting that SOPA and PIPA supporters relied mostly on traditional off-line forms of activism. Due to the large number of online campaigns created to oppose SOPA and PIPA it is impossible to capture all of the action that occurred. However, there were key actors and campaigns that led the opposition of SOPA and PIPA. Here, I provide a concise summary of the most important events that occurred.

One of the very first shows of opposition came from a new nonprofit advocacy group dedicated to digital rights, Fight for the Future. On October 25, 2011, Fight for the Future released an anti-PIPA video which garnered more than 4 million views over next 3 months on platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo. Fight for the Future also organized the first online protest against PIPA on November 16, 2011 called American Censorship Day. On this day major websites and internet companies including the Center for Democracy and Technology, Reddit, Boing Boing, Mozilla, Hype Machine, TechDirt, 4Chan, Tumblr, and others agreed to participate in the protest by displaying black banners over their site logos with the words “Stop Censorship.” Moreover, also on November 16, 2011, users on the social news website Reddit created an online community (a sub-Reddit) dedicated to preventing SOPA and PIPA from passing. This community gained more than 10,000 readers in the following few days. The next major event happened on December 22, 2011, when a Reddit user created a post suggesting that individuals transfer domains away from Go Daddy in response to their support of SOPA and PIPA. Go

Daddy is a major web hosting company which had recently stated their support of SOPA and PIPA along with other organizations. On December 23, 2011, Wikipedia joined in and announced that it had transferred all of their domains away from Go Daddy. A few days later Go Daddy issued a statement retracting their support and expressing their full opposition of SOPA and PIPA. On January 14, 2012, the Obama Administration issued a blog post expressing their concerns about SOPA/PIPA in response to the creation of two online petitions opposing SOPA/PIPA on the White House online petition platform “We the People.” The last and undoubtedly the most publicized show of opposition was a 24-hour blackout in opposition of SOPA/PIPA which was scheduled by Reddit for January 18, 2012. Although Reddit was the first to announce their service interruption more than 115,000 ultimately participated in the blackout. Again, this summary is by no means complete but it does offer a small glimpse at some of the most important events and protests against SOPA and PIPA.



## **Methodology**

To explore the many different forms of online activism actions that took place in opposition of SOPA and PIPA I decided to sample a few of the major online activism campaigns and actions in opposition of SOPA and PIPA. Included in this study are: Reddit, Google and the White House's online petition platform: "We the People." Given the multitude and variety of actions taken in opposition to SOPA and PIPA by these campaigns I had to look at various factors such as, online petition signatures, user generated content in the forms of posts and comments, and service interruptions, specifically the January 18, 2012 online blackout.

For the online petition platform "We the People" I looked at the two primary online petitions in opposition to SOPA and PIPA called "Stop the E-PARASITE Act" and "VETO the SOPA bill and any other future bills that threaten to diminish the free flow of information." Each petition signature is saved on the site and contains a user's name and a timestamp. I collected each online signature's timestamp information and graphed when each signature was made. I was able to do so using a web crawling script to collect the timestamps from each petition signature. The data collection process for the online petition created and hosted by Google at <https://www.google.com/takeaction/> was slightly different. Data from Google's petition was collected by a group called Engine Advocacy and published online in the form of an interactive Google map showing action taken against SOPA/PIPA on January 18, 2012 for each state of the U.S. To graph Google's petition signature data I simply downloaded the aggregated petition signatures by state from Engine Advocacy.

For Reddit my primary objective was to collect data regarding SOPA/PIPA, specifically user generated content in the forms of posts and comments. For this, I relied upon a python program that would use the Reddit API to perform a search for certain keywords. The program

grabs the results and processes the data to extract structured json data. The structured data produced contains posts by Reddit users and their associated comments, which contained the keywords given. Metadata including up votes, down votes, and timestamps are included with the structured data generated by the program. I then graph these results to demonstrate the creation dates of these posts and comments in relation to congressional action taken on SOPA and PIPA.

## **Limitations**

One of the limitations I encountered while collecting data for Google's custom online petition was the fact that I could only find access to the signatures collected on the first day of the petition, January 18, 2012. Another limitation of this study came from the Reddit API which limits the number of calls that can be made to it over a certain amount of time. Consequently, the amount of data my script was able to pull was severely limited by this. The API was also unstable and slow at certain times, particularly under heavy traffic.

## **Data and Findings**

### **Online Petition Data**

As previously mentioned this study looks at two online petition platforms, one of these platforms was created by the White House as a general online petition site and the other as a temporary site by Google for the sole purpose of hosting their custom SOPA/PIPA petition. Another important difference between both of these platforms is that all petitions created on the White House's "We the People" are created by, as its name suggests, individual citizens. In total, this study examines three online petitions promoting the opposition of SOPA and PIPA.

#### ***"Stop the E-PARASITE Act" Petition Data***

The first of the three petitions included in this study created was the "Stop the E-PARASITE Act" petition. As a point of clarification, the E-PARASITE Act was just one of the names used for SOPA. This petition was created on October 31, 2011 using the White House's online petition platform, We the People. This petition was created on October 31, 2011 just days after the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) was introduced into the House (October 26, 2011). The Stop the E-PARASITE Act petition was accessible online from October 31, 2011 until January 14, 2012 when the White House closed the petition and issued a formal response to the petition titled "Combating Online Piracy while Protecting an Open and Innovative Internet." I will address the significance of this formal response later in this section. During this time, the petition garnered a total of 52,096 electronic signatures. Figure 4 below is a graph of these electronic signature dates.

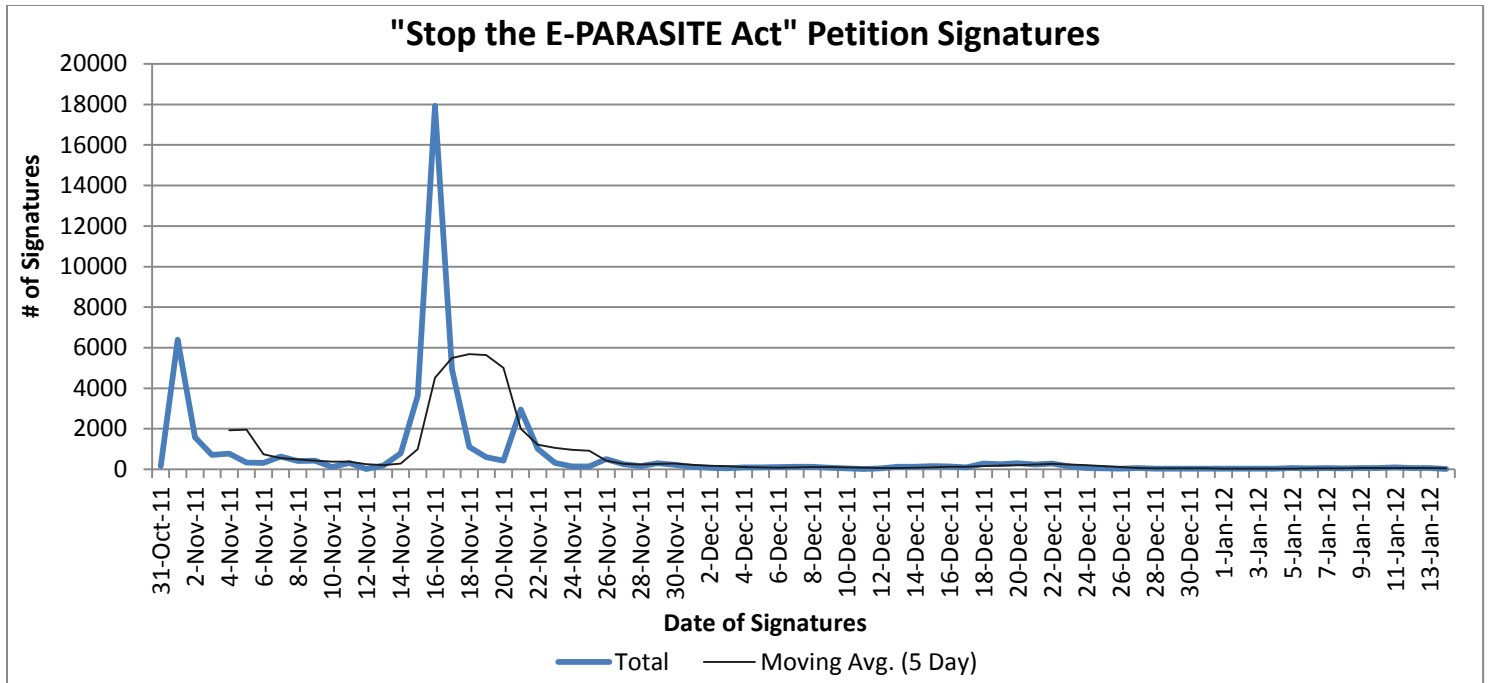


Figure 4. “Stop the E-Parasite Act” Petition Signatures

***“VETO the SOPA Bill” Petition Data***

The second petition created on We the People was the “VETO the SOPA Bill and any other future bills that threaten to diminish the free flow of information” petition. From this point forward, I refer to this petition simply as the “Veto the SOPA Bill” petition. The petition was created on December 18, 2011 and was accessible online until January 14, 2012 when the White House closed the petition and issued the same response it had issued for the “Stop the E-PARASITE Act” petition. The petition was created just days after the House Committee on the Judiciary held a 2 day hearing on SOPA. Additionally, just one day before the creation of the petition the Senate considered a motion to proceed to consideration of the measure and motion for cloture on motion to proceed to consideration of the measure made with the vote to occur on Tuesday, January 24, 2012. One might wonder why the “VETO the SOPA Bill” petition was created if the “Stop the E-PARASITE Act” petition already existed and both petitions opposed the same piece of legislation; however, they were created by different individuals who I

imagined had no contact between each other. The “VETO the SOPA Bill” petition is different from the previous petition in that it was only accessible online for about a month. However, it is interesting that the petition managed to collect just as many electronic signatures as the “Stop the E-PARASITE Act” petition, with a total of 51, 689. The majority of the signatures for the “VETO the SOPA Bill” petition were collected within the first 5 days of the petition’s creation. The data from this petition is mostly reflective of the online mobilization following the House Committee on the Judiciary’s hearings on SOPA. Figure 5 below graphs these electronic signature dates.

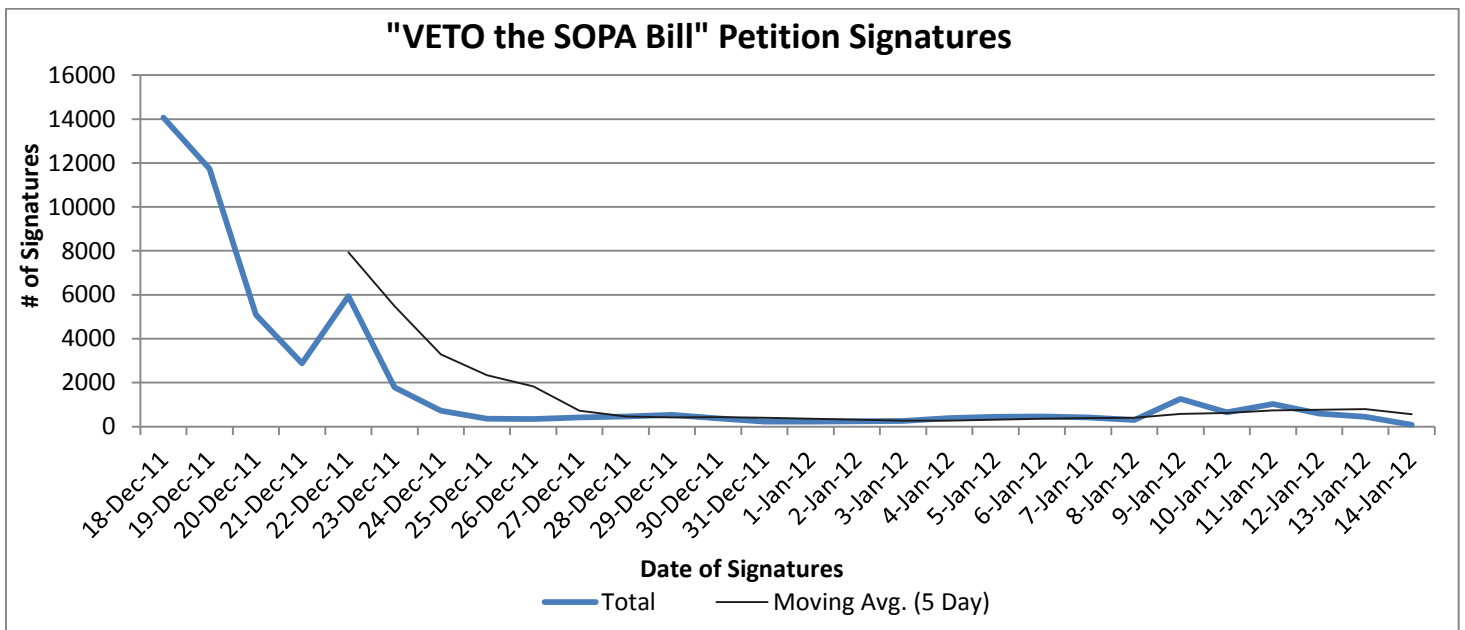


Figure 5. “VETO the SOPA Bill” Petition Signatures

**Google Petition Data**

Google created undoubtedly the most popular and publicized online petition in opposition of SOPA and PIPA. The online petition was created on the day of the SOPA/PIPA blackout protest, January 28, 2012. Although the petition was only accessible online for a few days it garnered more signatures than all other individual online petitions against SOPA and PIPA, with

a total of more than 7 million signatures by January 19, 2012. If anything, this speaks volumes to the importance of the actors involved in the SOPA/PIPA protests and more broadly the key players and organizers of any activism campaign. Moreover, although the final signature count for Google’s petition was more than 7 million this study relies on data gathered by Engine Advocacy which only published data for January 18<sup>th</sup> hence the lower signature total of 6,857,220 used in the figures below. Figure 6 illustrates signatures from all three online petitions against SOPA and PIPA.

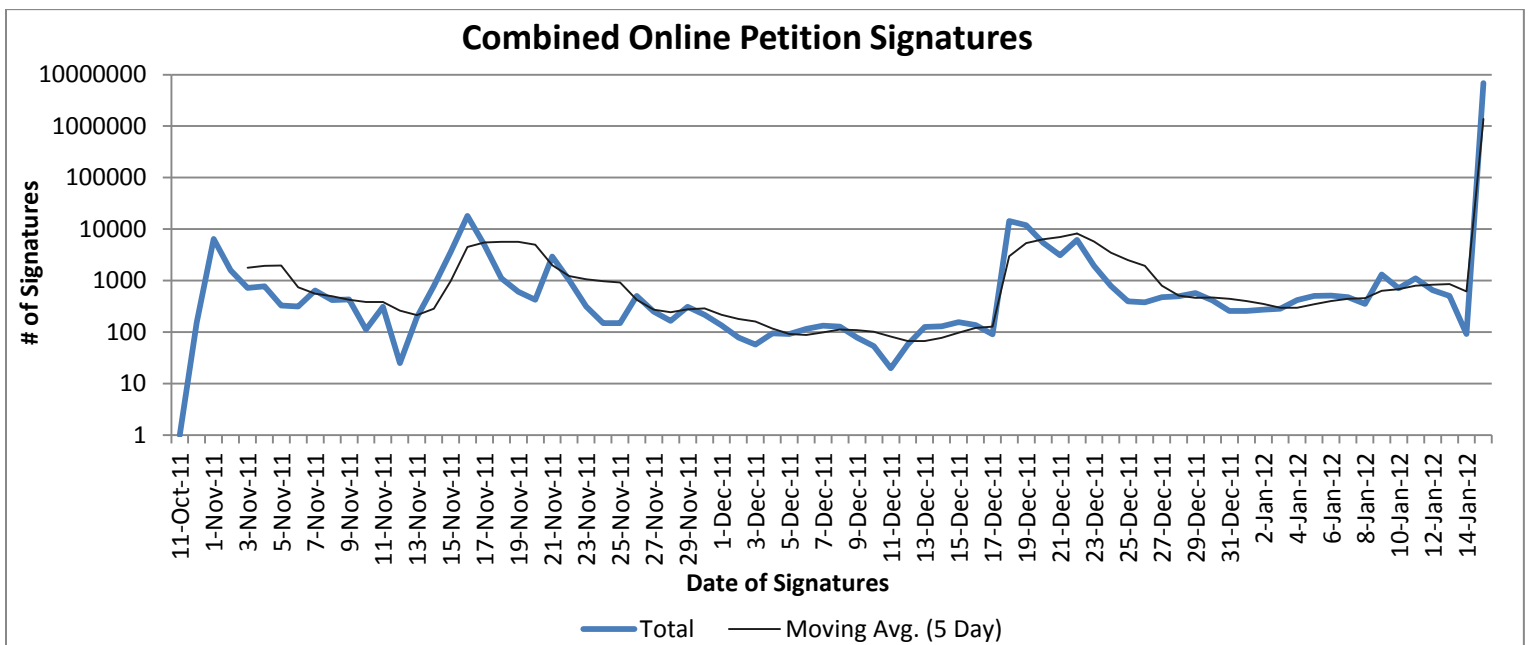


Figure 6. Combined Online Petition Signatures

Although the above data provides an understanding of the extent and scale of one form of online activism that occurred in opposition to SOPA and PIPA it must be taken in consideration along with congressional action on SOPA and PIPA if it is to provide a better understanding of the relationship between online activism and legislative action on SOPA and PIPA. To this end, Figure 7 represents co-sponsorship of SOPA and PIPA individually and petition signatures from all three online petitions included in this study. As reflected in Figure 7 and Figure 8, PIPA co-

sponsorship steadily increased until January 17, 2012 when sponsorship decreased from 40 to 33 co-sponsors and ultimately ending with 32 co-sponsors on January 24, 2012. This pattern holds true for SOPA which saw a steady increase in sponsorship until January 17, 2012 as shown in Figure 7 and Figure 8. After which, SOPA sponsorship decreased from 32 co-sponsors to 24 on January 24, 2012. Figure 9 and Figure 10 show that this decrease in support for SOPA and PIPA comes after months of online activism and thousands of online petition signatures have been collected. It is interesting that these decreases in sponsorship for SOPA and PIPA occur before the most significant event of the SOPA/PIPA protest, the blackout, and before Google launches their online petition but after both of the online petitions on We the People have been closed.

After closing the petitions, the White House issued a formal response on January 14, 2012. The response was written by Victoria Espinel, Intellectual Property Enforcement Coordinator at Office of Management and Budget, Aneesh Chopra, U.S. Chief Technology Officer, and Howard Schmidt, Special Assistant to the President and Cybersecurity Coordinator for National Security Staff. For the most part, the response could be characterized as anti-SOPA/PIPA. The response does recognize online piracy by foreign websites as a serious issue but ultimately concludes that efforts to combat online piracy must be cautious of censoring legitimate content and activity. The statement also directly references the DNS blocking provision in the bills. This particular provision would require ISPs to block access to foreign sites accused of hosted pirated content piracy. The White House's response clearly opposes this provision citing it as not only a cyber-security risk but also ineffective as it would still allow access to contraband goods and services. It is important to note that the DNS provision was removed from both SOPA and PIPA on January 13, 2012.



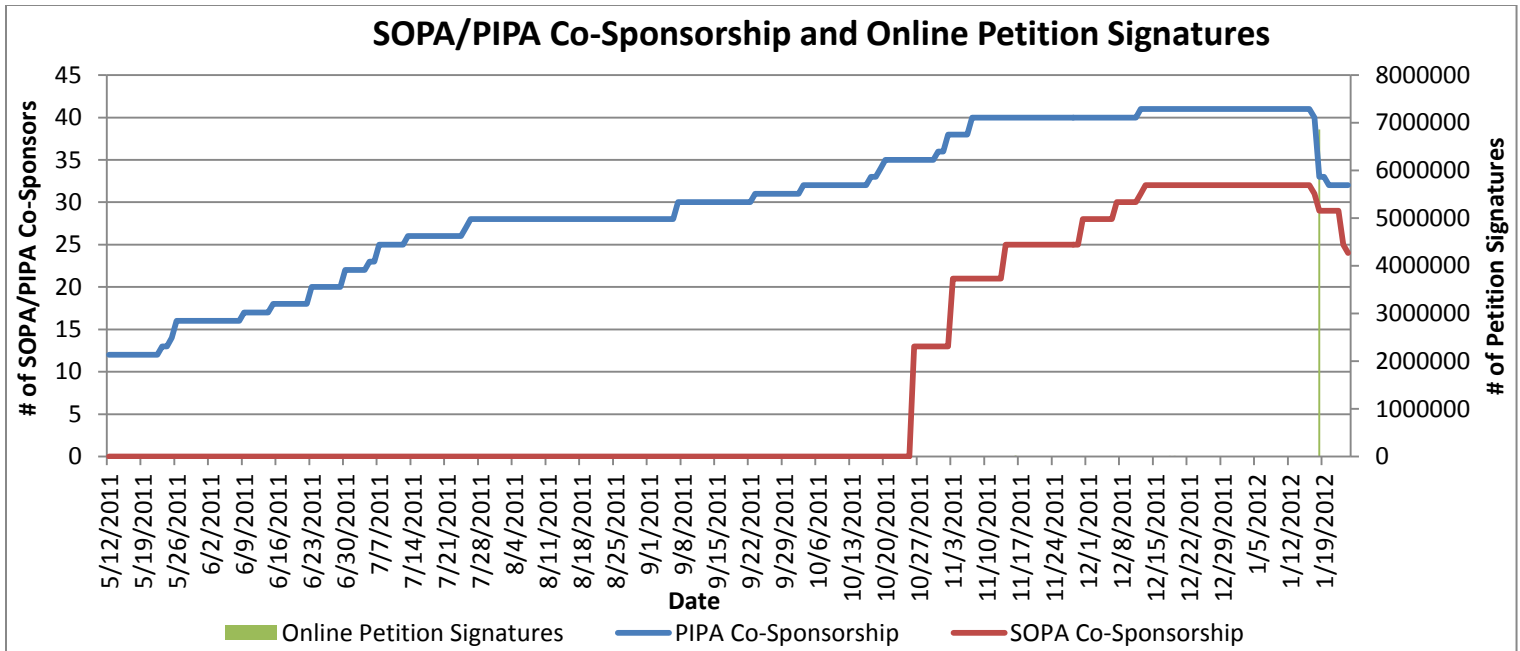


Figure 7. SOPA/PIPA Co-Sponsorship and Online Petition Signatures

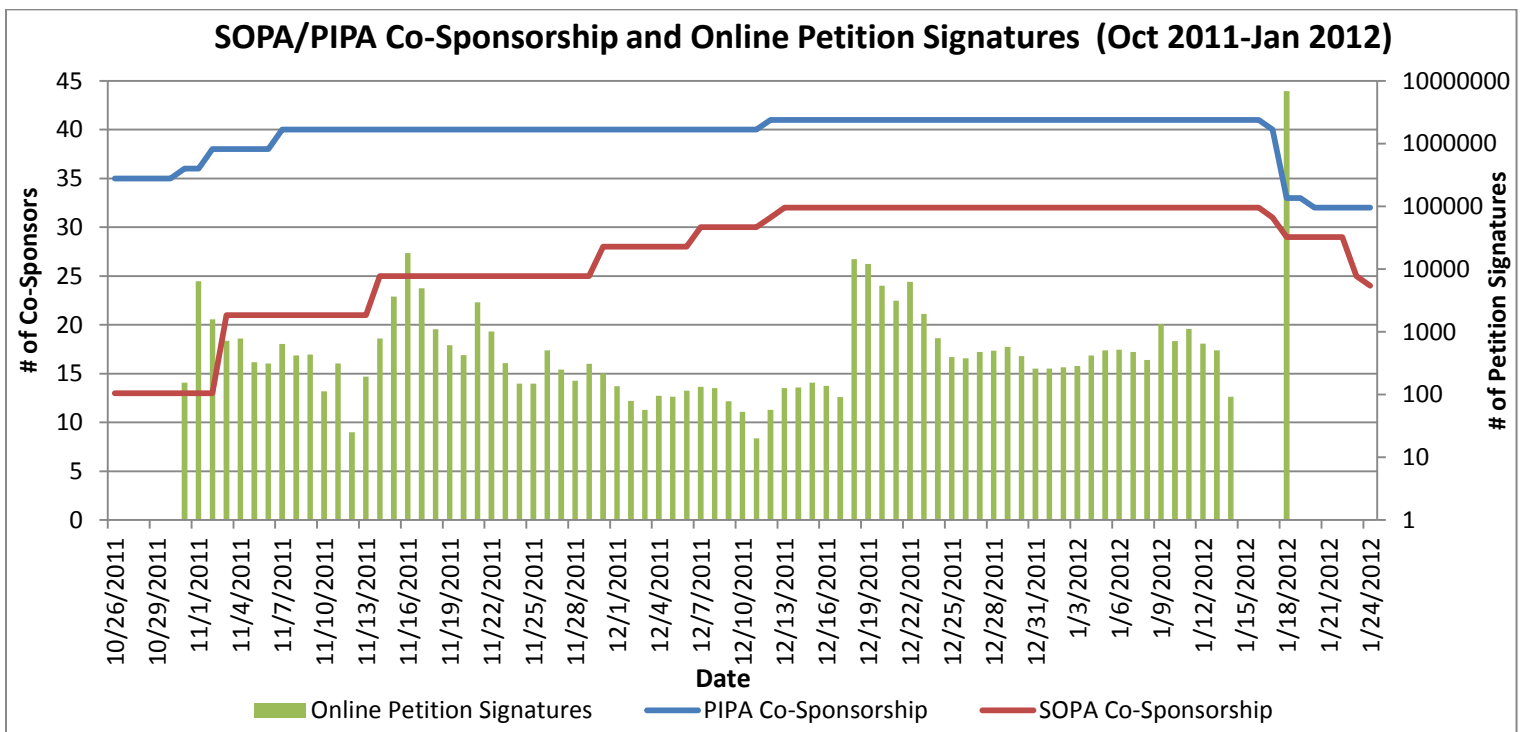


Figure 8. SOPA/PIPA Co-Sponsorship and Online Petition Signatures from Oct 2011 to Jan 2012

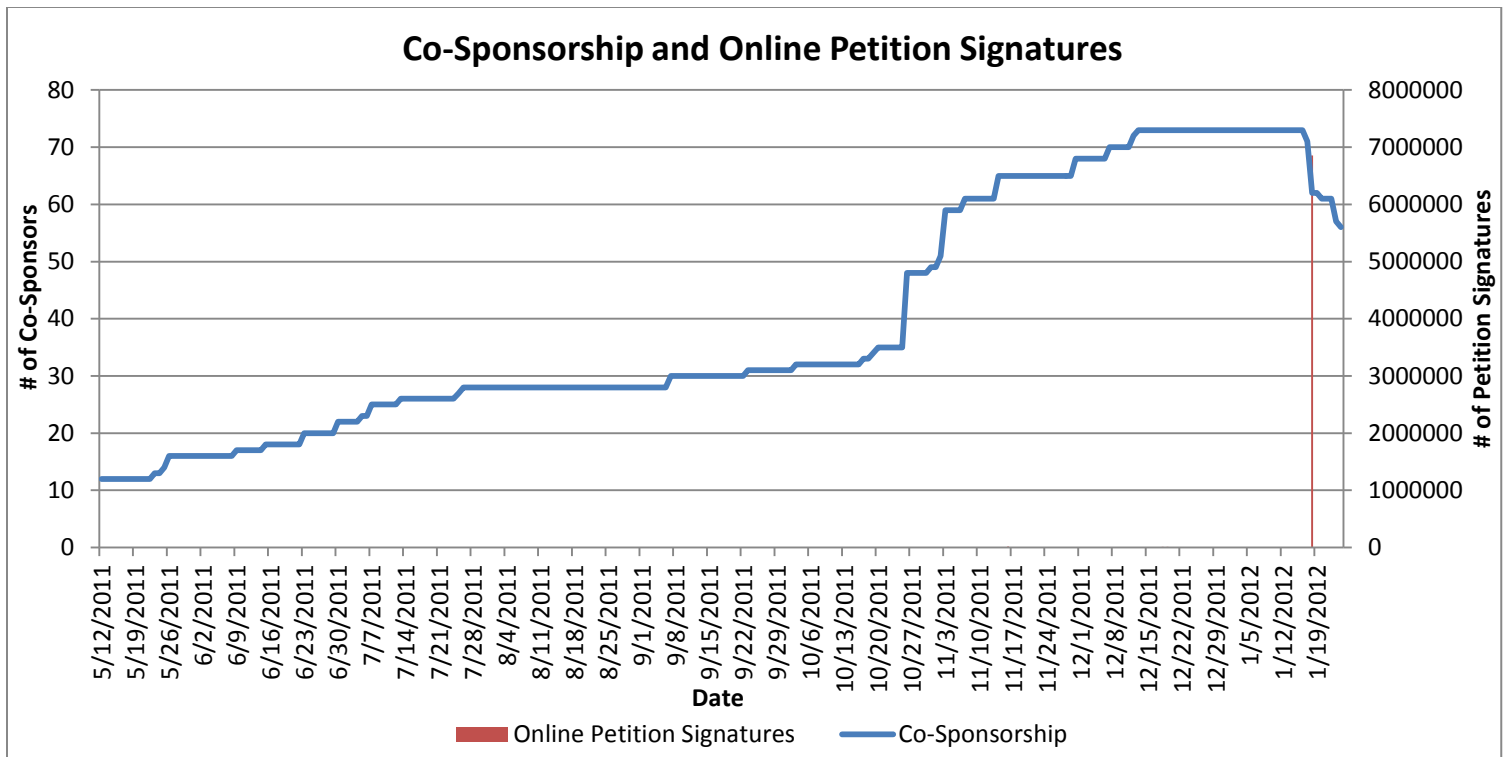


Figure 9. Co-Sponsorship and Online Petition Signatures

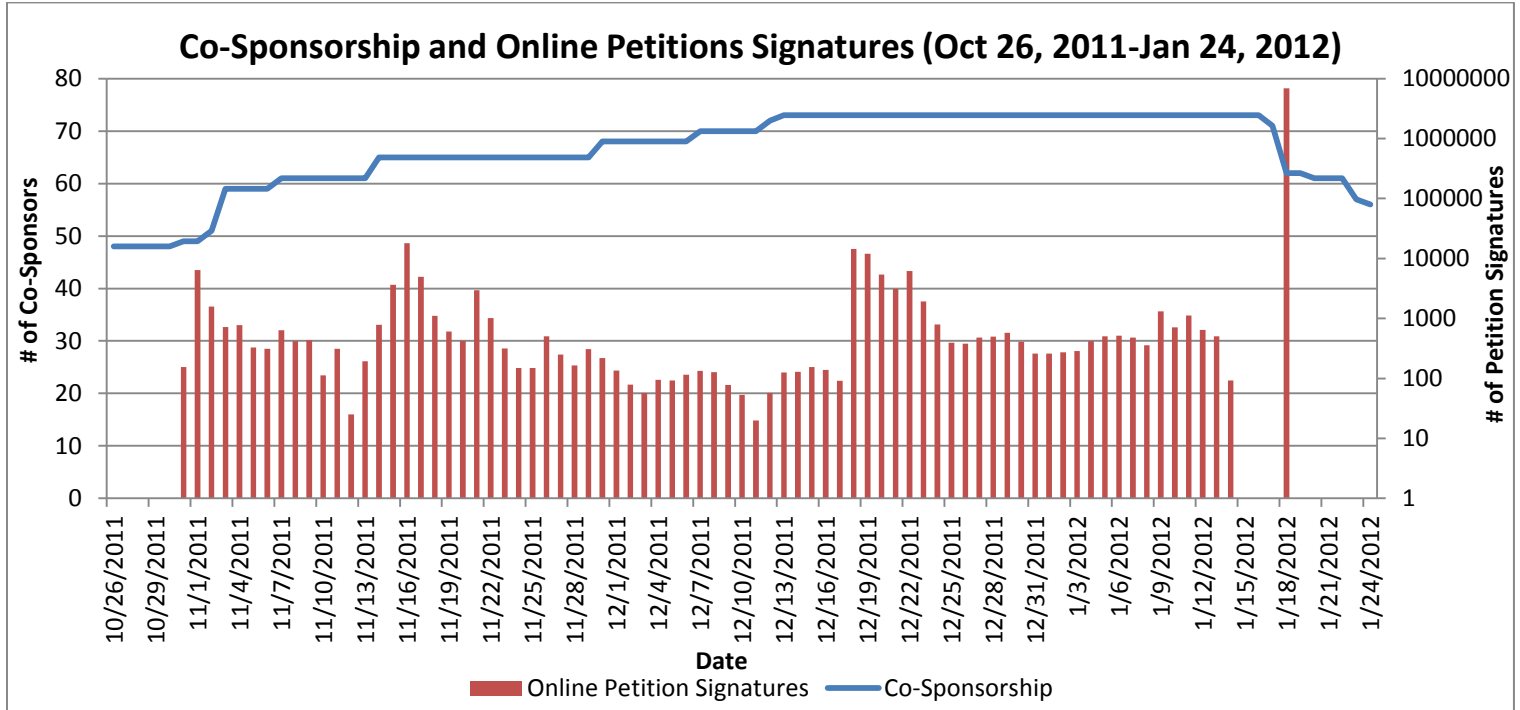


Figure 10. Co-Sponsorship and Online Petition Signatures from Oct 2011 to Jan 2012

In addition to looking at sponsorship of SOPA and PIPA this study explores other forms of actions taken by legislators on SOPA and PIPA including both official congressional action and unofficial actions such as, tweeting their support or opposition for SOPA and PIPA, etc. Using the SOPA/PIPA Congressional Action Timeline (see Appendix A), Figure 11 and Figure 12 below show all action taken on SOPA and PIPA by legislators along with all of the online petition signatures from the three petitions included in this study. The results below help illuminate the relationship between Congress and online activism campaigns in opposition of SOPA and PIPA.

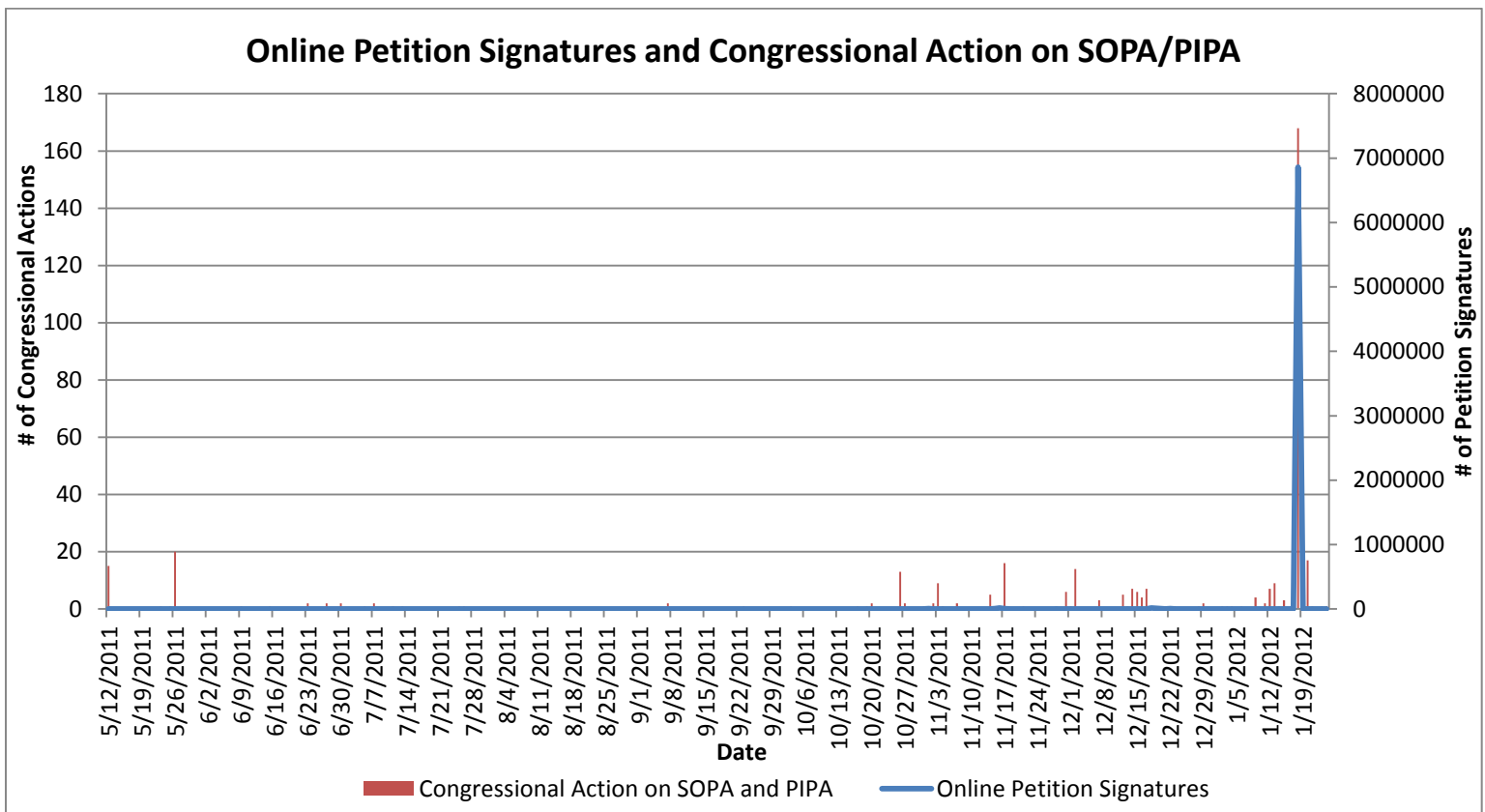


Figure 11. Online Petition Signatures and Congressional Action on SOPA and PIPA

One of the findings illustrated by Figure 11 is that the majority of congressional action occurred after the creation of the first online petition which immediately followed the introduction of SOPA into the House. Not surprisingly, Figure 11 demonstrates that January 18,

2012 was a day of high activity for members of Congress with 168 unique actions taken regarding SOPA and/or PIPA that day. This was the highest number of actions regarding SOPA and/or PIPA for any single day in the legislative process. January 18, 2012 marks not only the online blackout but also the creation of Google’s online petition which explains the abrupt increase in online petition signatures. One of the other sharp increases in online petition signatures occurs between December 15, 2011 and December 22, 2011 which is explained by the initial momentum surrounding the creation of the second online petition, “VETO the SOPA Bill.” However, it should be noted that both of these increases in online petition signatures are preceded by a cluster of days on which congressional action regarding SOPA and PIPA took place.

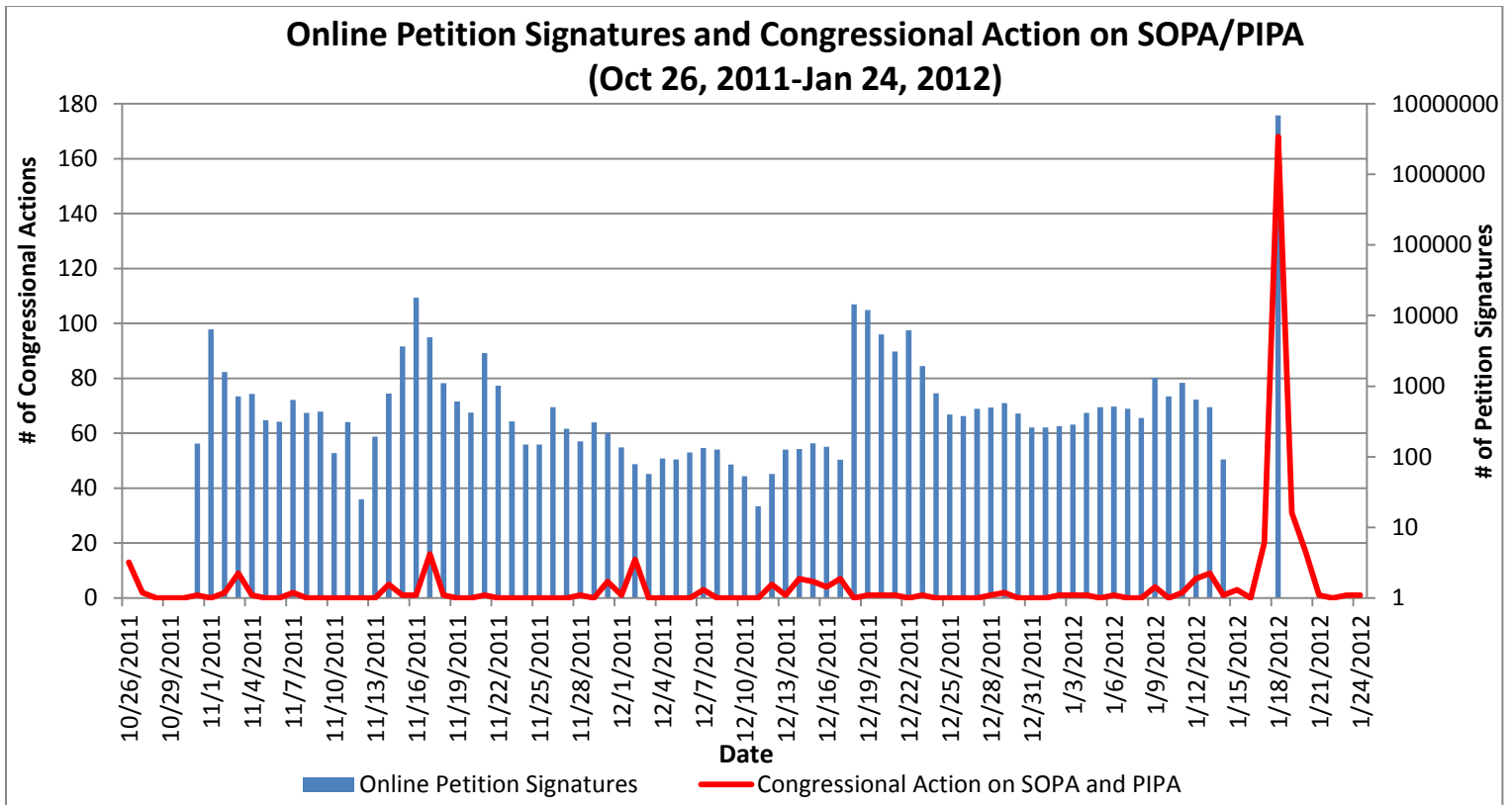


Figure 12. Online Petition Signatures and Congressional Action from Oct 2011-Jan 2012

Figure 12 reflects that the January 18<sup>th</sup> increase follows from a total of 47 unique actions regarding SOPA and/or PIPA taken by legislators between January 6, 2012 and January 17, 2012. Figure 13 shows that the majority of congressional actions prior to January 18<sup>th</sup> were in opposition of SOPA and/or PIPA. Moreover, immediately after January 18, 2012 came the strongest show of opposition to SOPA and PIPA by legislators. It is interesting that this is also when the majority of neutral congressional actions regarding SOPA and PIPA took place.

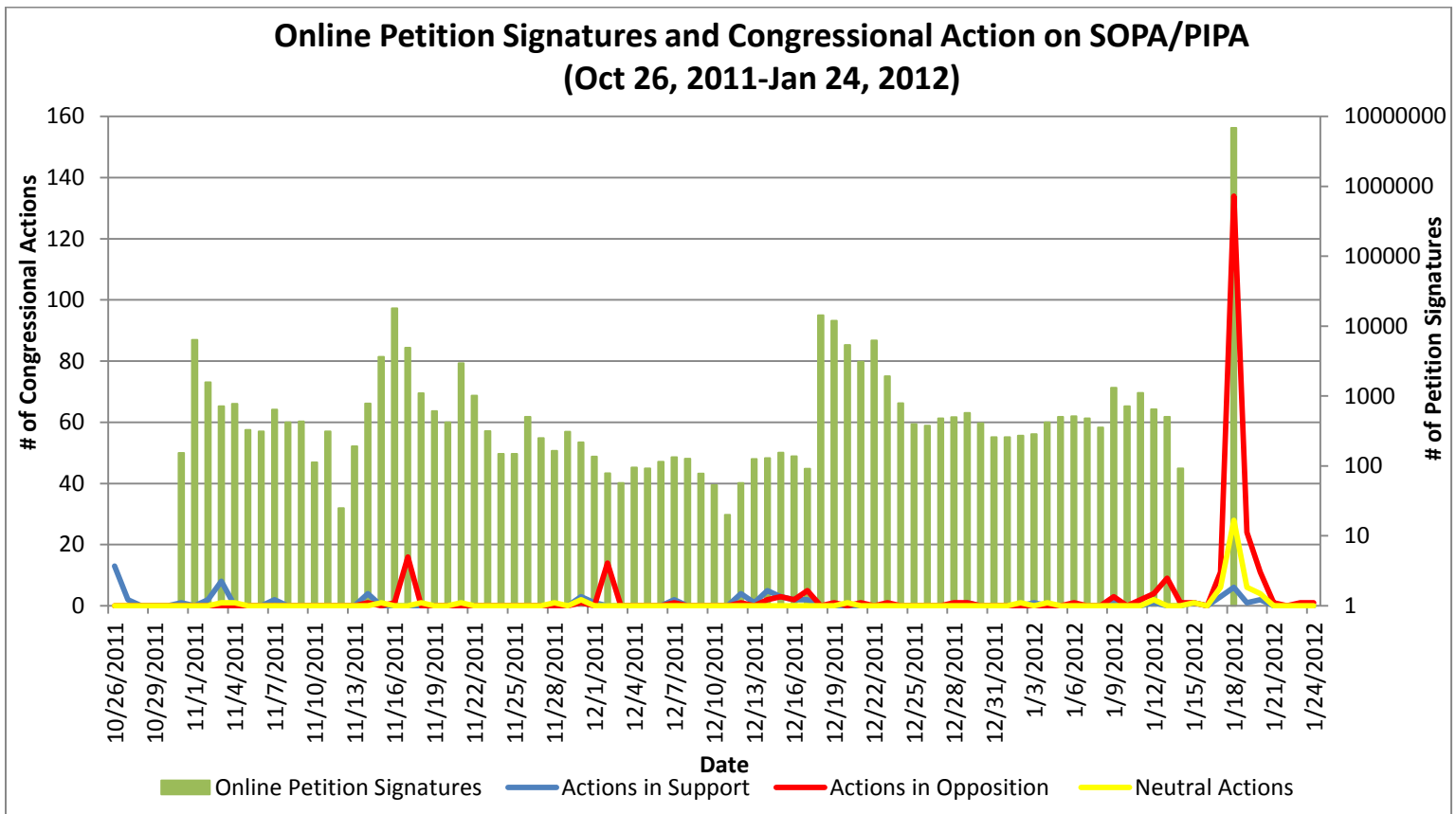


Figure 13. Online Petition Signatures and Congressional Action on SOPA/PIPA

Figure 12 shows that the December 18<sup>th</sup> increase follows from a total of 33 actions taken by legislators between December 7, 2011 and December 17, 2012. Figure 13 demonstrates that the majority of congressional actions that occurred immediately before the creation of the second online petition on December 18<sup>th</sup> were in support of SOPA and PIPA. Another notable increase

in online petition signatures on November 16, 2011 is preceded by 19 unique actions taken by legislators from November 2, 2011 until November 15, 2011. This particular increase coincides with the hearing on November 16, 2011 regarding SOPA by the House Judiciary Committee. Immediately after this, there is an increase in congressional action regarding SOPA and/or PIPA with 16 unique actions taken on November 17, 2011. Figure 13 reflects the fact that all of these actions were in opposition of SOPA and PIPA contrasting the 19 congressional actions in support of SOPA and PIPA which occurred prior to November 16, 2011. This was undoubtedly a crucial turning point in the SOPA/PIPA protests because the actions in opposition of SOPA and PIPA on November 17<sup>th</sup> marked the first joint effort by legislators in opposition to the bills.

## **Summary of Results from Online Petition Data**

Overall, the online petition data collected in this section in combination with the data collected on congressional action suggests that a feedback loop exists between congressional action on SOPA and PIPA and online activism on SOPA and PIPA. This is made evident by the patterns observed decreases of congressional action immediately preceding increases in online petition signatures. Another finding of these data is that congressional action prior to these increases primarily consists of actions by legislators in support of SOPA and/or PIPA while congressional action following said increases is mostly in opposition of SOPA and/or PIPA.

## **Reddit Data**

In addition to looking at online petitions in opposition of SOPA and PIPA, this study explores user generated content on Reddit as another form of online activism. The following section presents data on posts and comments created between May 12, 2011 and January 24, 2012 containing the keywords “SOPA” or/and “PIPA” in the comment text or post titles. This section also includes upvote and downvote data for the comments and posts sampled. An upvote is simply a positive vote for either a post or comment that increases the overall popularity and visibility of that post or comment, a downvote has the reverse effect. It is important to note that Reddit requires visitors to register with the site in order to create posts, comments and vote on these. Consequently, not all Reddit visitors will be captured by these different measurements.

### ***Reddit Comment Data***

As Figure 14 reflects below, comments containing the “SOPA” keyword were not posted on Reddit until November 16, 2011. This might be explained by the fact that the first hearing on SOPA was held by the House Judiciary Committee on this day. As illustrated below, the majority of the comments sampled were created in between December 15, 2011, which marked the beginning of the second set of hearings on SOPA by the House Judiciary Committee, and January 20, 2012. More importantly, Figure 14 suggests that online activism on Reddit regarding SOPA did not begin until after Congress took action. This also holds true for comments containing the keyword “PIPA” as shown in Figure 15. It is interesting to note that although PIPA was introduced in May of 2011, the first comment containing the keyword “PIPA” does not appear on Reddit until November 22, 2011. Perhaps, this is indicative of the fact that the most of the online activism on Reddit was directed towards SOPA, particularly after the first hearing on SOPA occurred in mid-November.



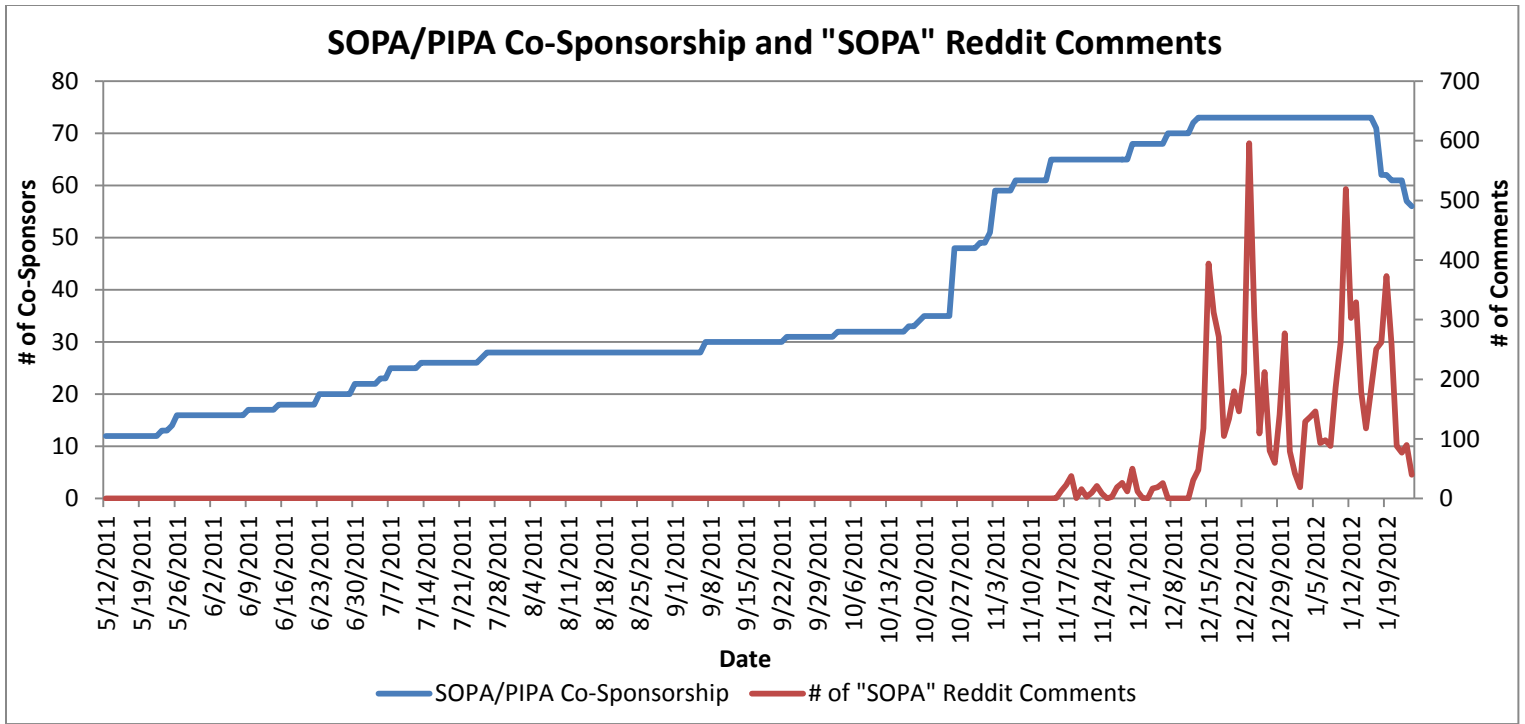


Figure 14. "SOPA" Reddit Comments and Co-Sponsorship

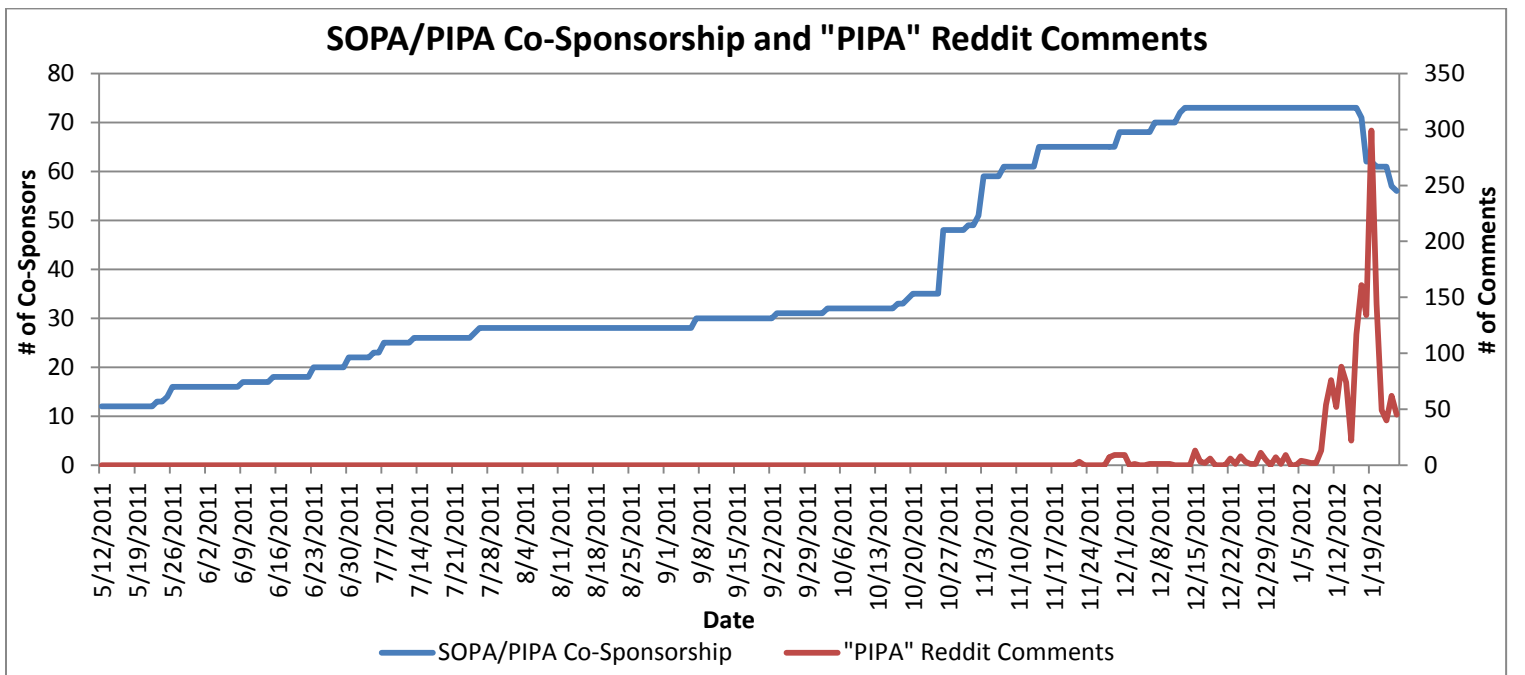


Figure 15. "PIPA" Reddit Comments and Co-Sponsorship

According to Figure 16 which reflects comments on Reddit containing the keyword "SOPA" and congressional action taken on SOPA/PIPA, the comments regarding SOPA were

not written until just before and after November 17, 2011, when legislators a significant number of actions on SOPA/PIPA. Although, comments containing the SOPA keyword continue to appear on Reddit, the next significant increase in comments does not occur until November 30, 2011 immediately after the next increase in congressional action on SOPA/PIPA. Figure 16 shows that this pattern repeats on December 15<sup>th</sup> (2<sup>nd</sup> set of SOPA hearings), December 29<sup>th</sup>, January 9<sup>th</sup>, January 12<sup>th</sup>, and January 18<sup>th</sup>.

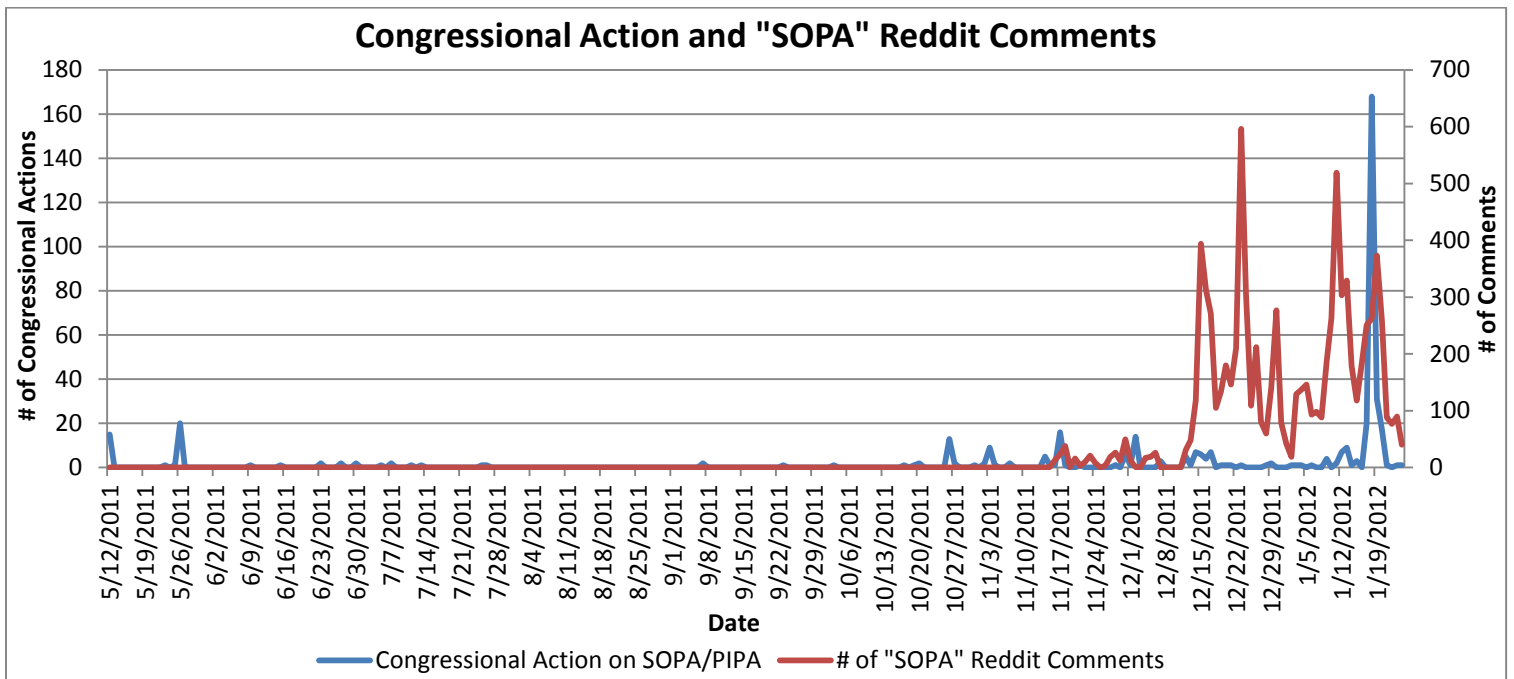


Figure 16. “SOPA” Reddit Comments and Congressional Action

Figure 17 reflects that comments containing the keyword “PIPA” on Reddit also followed the same pattern as those containing the keyword “SOPA.” The graph below illustrates a notable increase in “PIPA” comments and congressional action taken on SOPA/PIPA on December 1<sup>st</sup> followed by a decrease in comments until December 15<sup>th</sup> when Congress once again took significant action. On December 29<sup>th</sup>, Figure 17 demonstrates a small increase in congressional action which is preceded and succeeded by an increase in “PIPA” comments on Reddit. Similarly, the same trend is seen on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>.

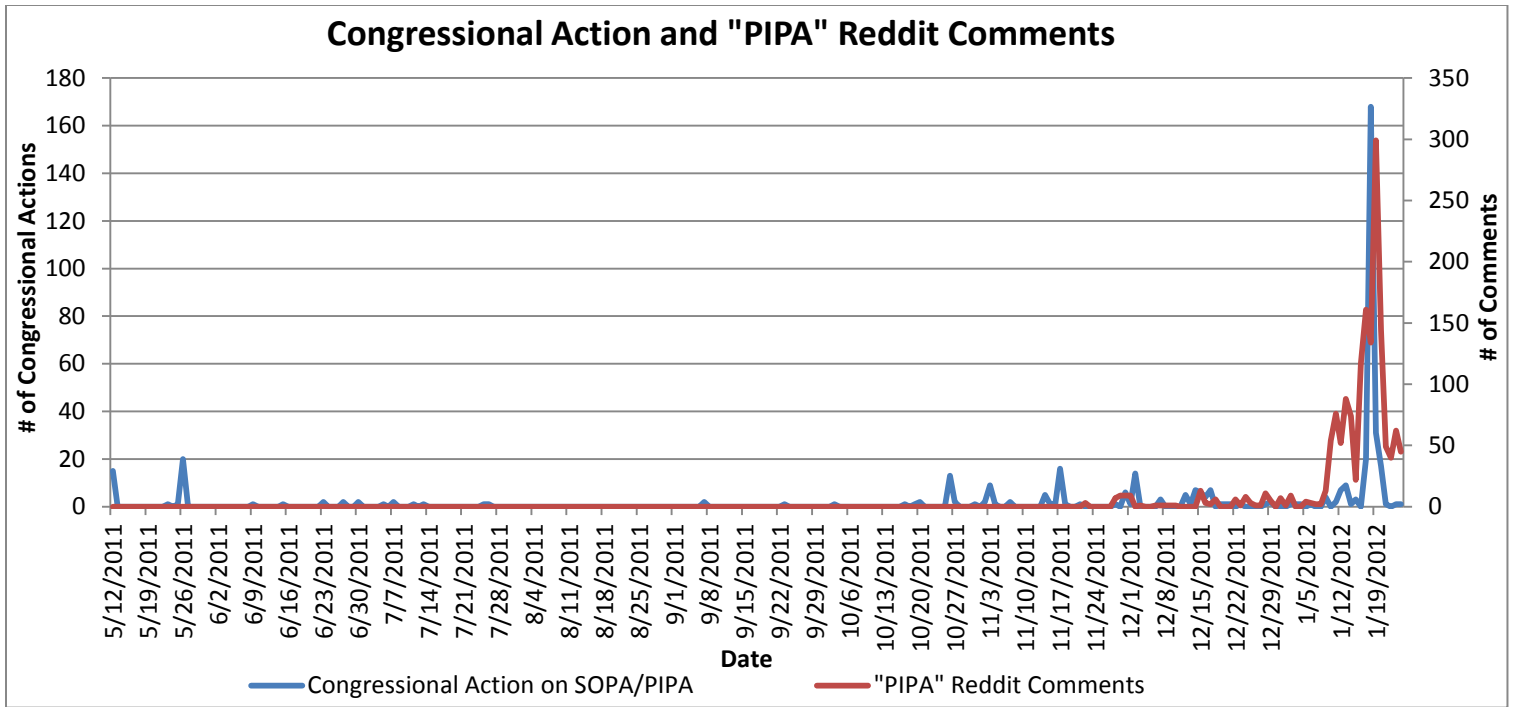


Figure 17. "PIPA" Reddit Comments and Congressional Action

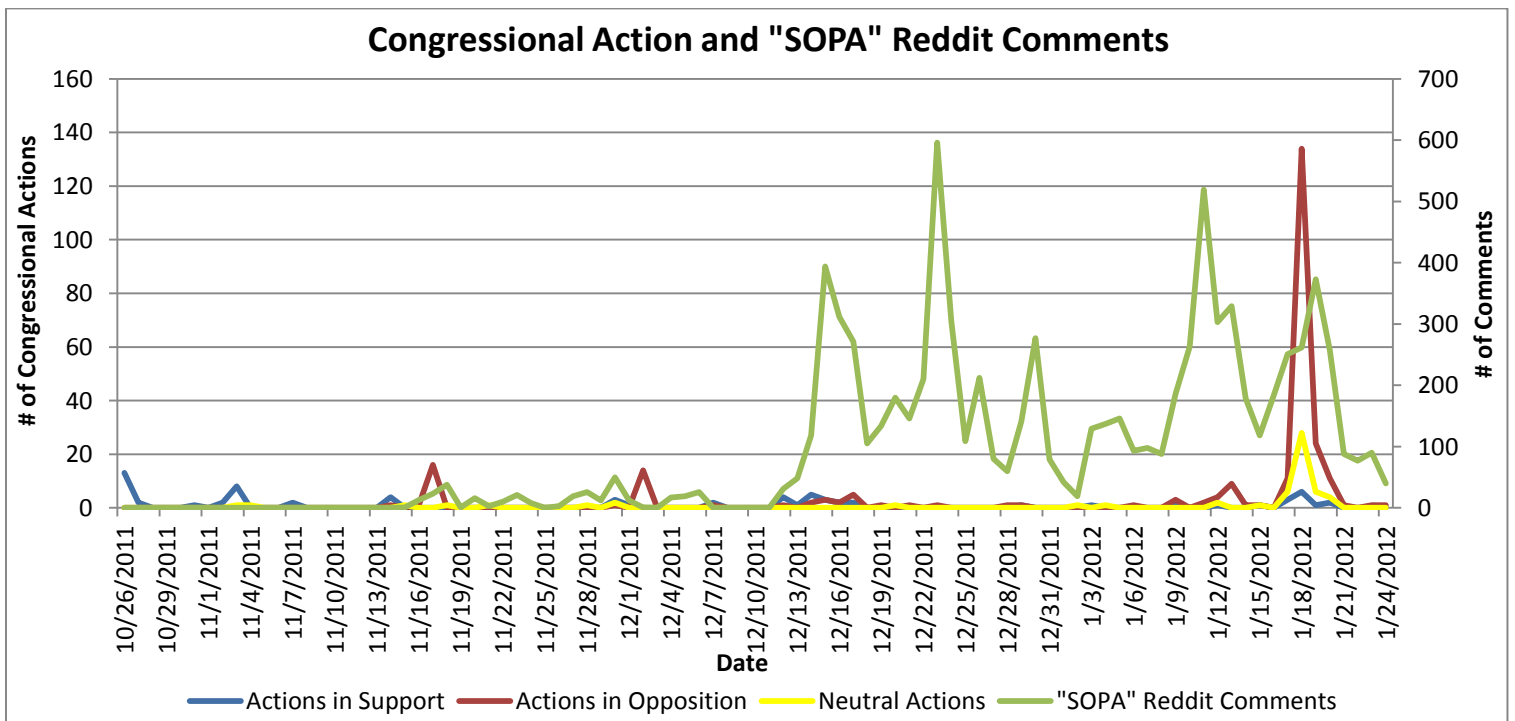


Figure 18. "SOPA" Reddit Comments and Congressional Action

Figure 18 illustrates congressional action coded as either in support of, in opposition of or neutral actions and “SOPA” comments on Reddit. As shown above, the first appearance of comments containing the keyword “SOPA” occurs just before the first demonstration of actions in opposition to SOPA/PIPA by legislators on November 17, 2011. The next significant increase in “SOPA” comments on November 30, 2011 is preceded by congressional action in support of SOPA/PIPA and succeeded by congressional action in opposition of the bills occurring on December 1, 2011. Again on December 12<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Figure 18 shows an increase in congressional action in support of SOPA/PIPA which occurs directly before the second set of hearings on SOPA and is followed by an increase in “SOPA” comments. Subsequently there are increases in congressional actions in opposition of SOPA/PIPA on December 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>. After this point congressional action ceases meanwhile “SOPA” comments increasingly appear on Reddit. On January 8<sup>th</sup> legislators take action on SOPA/PIPA again there is a noticeable increase in congressional actions in opposition of SOPA/PIPA as well as on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>. On January 18, 2012, there is a significant increase in congressional action on SOPA/PIPA not only in support and in opposition but also neutral actions regarding SOPA/PIPA.

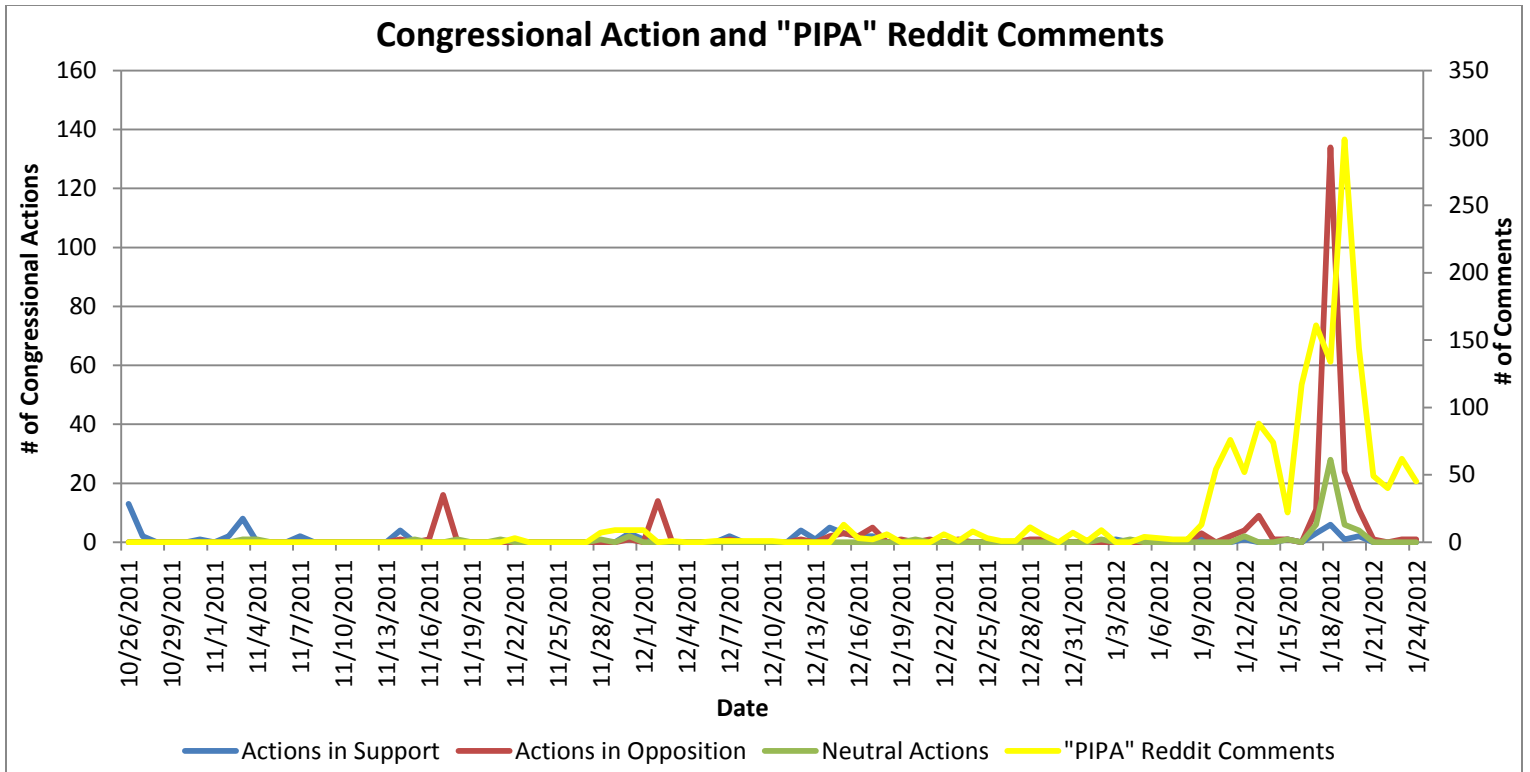


Figure 19. “PIPA” Reddit Comments and Congressional Action

Similarly to Figure 18, Figure 19 presents congressional actions on SOPA/PIPA alongside comments containing the keyword “PIPA” on Reddit. As previously stated, it seems there was significantly less comments regarding PIPA than SOPA posted on Reddit. Despite this, much of the same trend seen between “SOPA” comments and congressional action is also seen in the “PIPA” comment data. For instance, on December 13<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and January 18<sup>th</sup> there is an increase in “PIPA” comments following from congressional action in opposition and prior to congressional action in support of SOPA/PIPA. However, there is some deviation from this pattern on December 12<sup>th</sup> where although there is an increase in congressional action in opposition to SOPA/PIPA, yet there is no presence of “PIPA” comments following.

**Reddit Comment Upvote/Downvote Data**

Most comments on Reddit are voted on by users and these votes are either positive (upvotes) or negative (downvotes). Figure 20 displays an aggregate daily total of upvotes and downvotes for all comments containing the keyword “SOPA” measured as positive and negative respectively. One of the most visible findings of this data is the fact that there are much higher levels of votes on comments than there are comments themselves. This seems to suggest that the majority of users on who took part in the online activism campaign against SOPA and PIPA participated through this form of online activism. This might be explained by the fact that voting on a comment is less time-consuming form of activism than is creating a comment in response to a post or another comment.

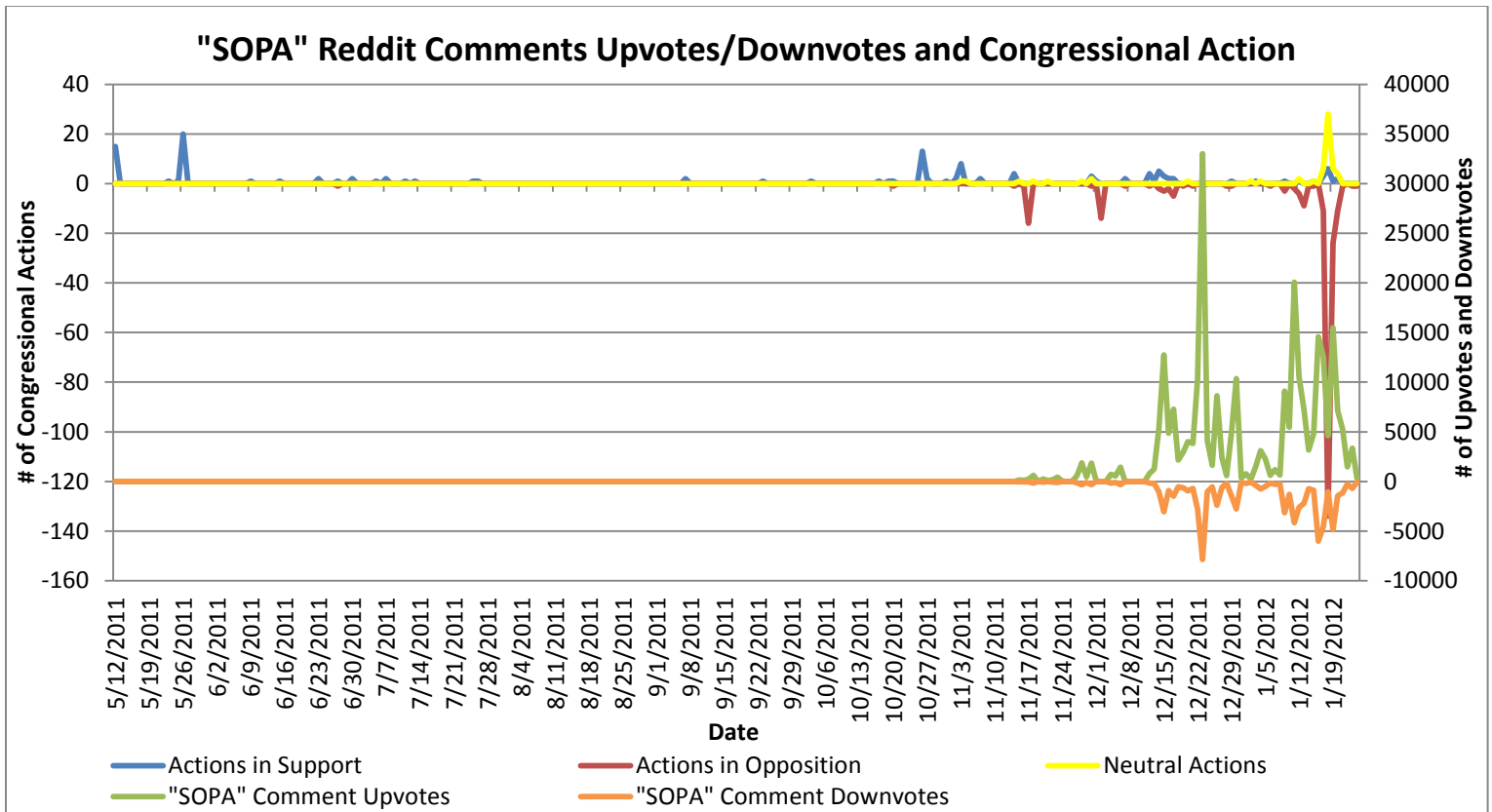


Figure 20. “SOPA” Reddit Comments Upvotes/Downvotes and Congressional Action

Figure 20 and Figure 21 both suggest that the patterns shown by the “SOPA” and “PIPA” comment data hold true for “SOPA” and “PIPA” comment upvote and downvote data as well. Increases in congressional action in opposition of SOPA/PIPA are followed by increases in comment upvotes and downvotes. Moreover, Figure 21 reflects much less activity in regards to upvotes/downvotes of comments containing the keyword “PIPA” which is consistent with the “PIPA” comment data discussed previously.

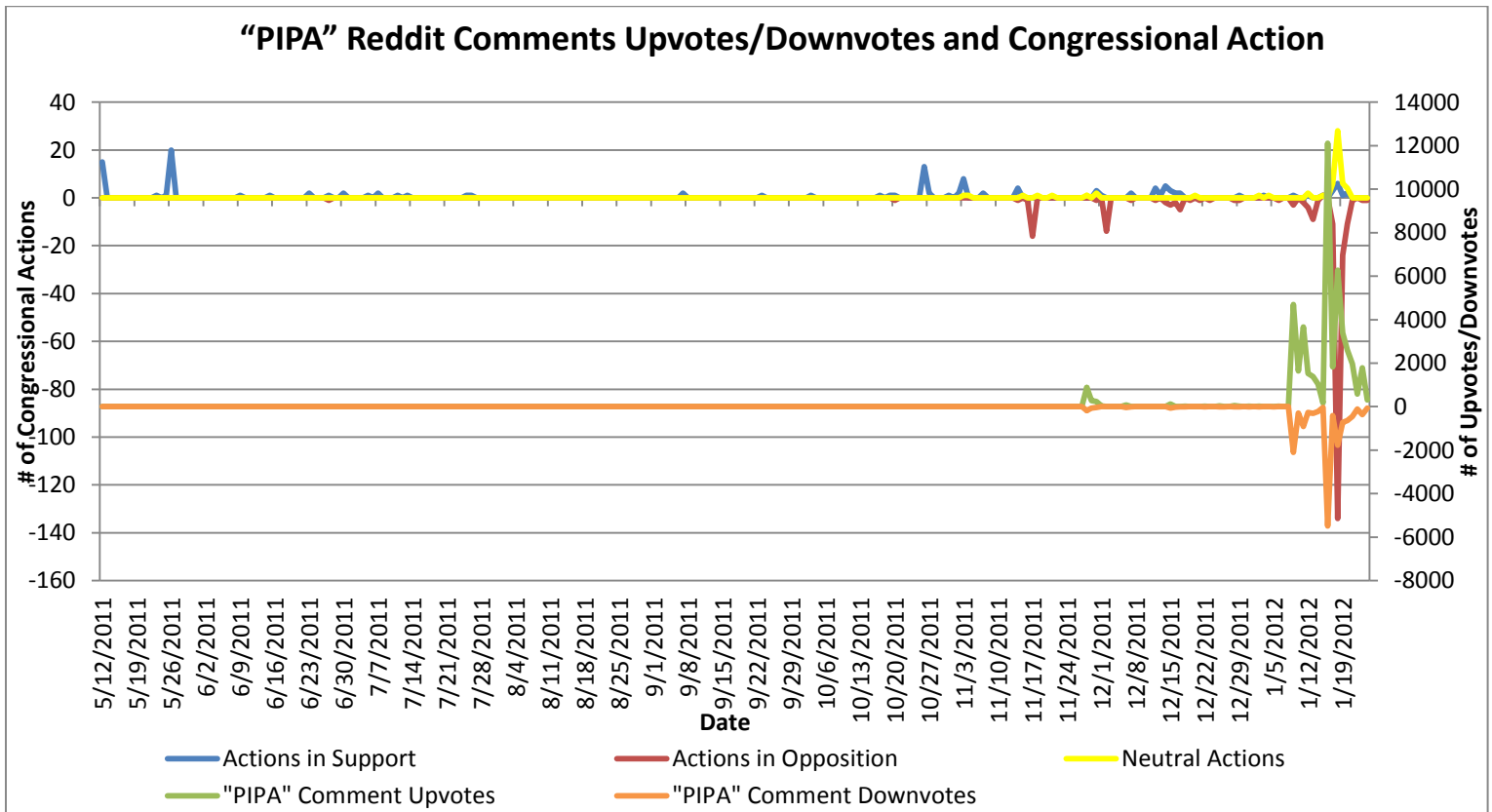


Figure 21. “PIPA” Reddit Comments Upvotes/Downvotes and Congressional Action

Figure 20 and Figure 21 also demonstrate the feedback loop between congressional action on SOPA/PIPA and online activism in opposition of SOPA/PIPA at work. For instance, the first congressional hearing on SOPA occurred on November 16, 2011 (see Appendix A) and on November 17, 2011 occurs the first significant show of congressional action in opposition of

SOPA/PIPA. In response to this, on November 18, 2011 comments containing the keyword “SOPA” start to appear on Reddit. Moreover, these comments are not only created but the are also voted on by users with a total of 606 upvotes collected on November 18, 2011. “SOPA” comments continue to gain upvotes with 1846 upvotes collected on November 30, 2011. This coincides with the first upvotes of comments containing the keyword “PIPA.” Two days later, on December 2, 2011 Congress responded with more congressional action in both support and opposition to SOPA/PIPA as shown in Figure 20. This is directly followed by another increase in “SOPA” comment upvotes on December 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> as seen in Figure 20. Following this, congressional action in both opposition and support of SOPA/PIPA increases with new co-sponsors signing on to support SOPA/PIPA on December 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> (see Appendix A). In reaction to this and the pending second set of SOPA hearings scheduled for December 15<sup>th</sup>, there is an increase in both “SOPA” comments and “SOPA” comment upvotes on December 14<sup>th</sup>. Following the second set of hearings on SOPA, there is a noticeable increase in upvotes of SOPA comments with total of 81,122 upvotes collected between December 15<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> as shown by Figure 20. Some of this increased action can be attributed to the previously mentioned GoDaddy boycott that occurs on Reddit on December 23, 2011. Although Congress then goes on recess, upvotes for “SOPA” and “PIPA” comments continued to increase with over 20,000 upvotes for “SOPA” comments on January 11<sup>th</sup>. On January 14<sup>th</sup>, the Obama Administration issued a blog post expressing their concerns about SOPA/PIPA in response to the creation of two online petitions opposing SOPA/PIPA on the White House online petition platform “We the People.” Finally, Figure 20 and 21 demonstrate that the 24-hour online blackout on January 18<sup>th</sup> received a significant response from legislators in terms of congressional action taken in opposition of



SOPA/PIPA with a total of 134 unique actions taken in opposition of SOPA/PIPA on January 18<sup>th</sup>.

## **Summary of Results from Reddit Data**

Overall, the Reddit comment, upvote, and downvote data collected in this section in combination with the data collected on congressional action seems to suggest that a feedback loop exists between congressional action on SOPA/PIPA and online activism on SOPA and PIPA. This is made evident by the patterns observed increases of congressional action immediately preceding and succeeding increases in both comments containing the “SOPA” and “PIPA” keywords and also upvotes and downvotes for these respective comments. Another finding of these data is that congressional action prior to these increases primarily consists of actions by legislators in support of SOPA and/or PIPA while congressional action following said increases is mostly in opposition of SOPA and/or PIPA.

## Conclusions

Predominantly the data explored in the previous sections suggest that a feedback loop exists between congressional action on SOPA and PIPA and online activism on SOPA and PIPA. This is made evident by the patterns observed in increases of congressional action immediately preceding and succeeding increases in comments on Reddit containing the “SOPA” and “PIPA” keywords and upvotes and downvotes for these respective comments. Moreover, this finding is also supported by the patterns observed in online petitions signature data and congressional actions taken on SOPA and PIPA. Another significant finding of these data is that congressional action prior to these increases primarily consists of actions by legislators in support of SOPA and/or PIPA, while congressional action following said increases is mostly in opposition of SOPA and/or PIPA.

Keeping in mind the theories regarding the effects and effectiveness of online activism discussed in the first section of this thesis, these results support the argument that the effects of online activism are not as simple as the slacktivism theory makes them out to be. In terms of the effects of online activism on political participation, the results of the online petitions explored in this thesis indicate that the key organizers of online activism matter greatly. This is made evident by the fact that although both of the individually created petitions on We the People were available online for much longer than Google’s online petition the petitions did not garner nearly as many signatures. This raises the question of whether Congress would have reacted in the same manner had organizations such as Google and Wikipedia not stepped in. Moreover, the results discussed in the previous sections reinforce the significance of the January 18<sup>th</sup> online blackout. The timing of Congress’ reaction to this show of opposition seems to suggest that the online blackout contributed to the withdrawal of sponsorship for SOPA/PIPA and ultimately, the bills

postponement. However, once again the significance of the actors involved in the organization of online activism must be reiterated because of the fact that the online blackout was not organized by individuals but rather large and powerful actors on the internet who had a vested interest in SOPA/PIPA. This leads to the conclusion that although the study of the effects of online activism on policymaking is of great significance, it is equally important to consider other factors, like the organizers of online activism, which might affect these results.

SOPA/PIPA is in many ways a unique case because of these factors and others which makes it difficult to comment on the implications of the strategies used in this case for future online activism campaigns and political mobilization strategies overall. However, this is one of the areas where future research is needed. Specifically, it would be useful to study a bill like the Cyber Intelligence Sharing and Protection Act (CISPA) which has been opposed by many of the same digital rights advocacy groups that opposed SOPA/PIPA. Additionally, opponents of CISPA have also used many of the same kinds of online activism actions used by opponents of SOPA/PIPA. However, CISPA has not had the same kind of opposition from major technology leaders like SOPA/PIPA faced from Google and various others.

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## Appendix A

### SOPA/PIPA Congressional Action Timeline

Date	Event
5/12/2011	PIPA is Introduced
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Hatch (R-UT)
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Franken (D-MN)
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Klobuchar (D-MN)
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Blumenthal (D-CT)
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Coons (D-DE)
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Kohl (D-WI)
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Graham (R-SC)
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Whitehouse (D-RI)
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Feinstein (D-CA)
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Schumer (D-NY)
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Grassley (R-IA)
	PIPA referred to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary
	Senator Coons Issues Press Release in Support of PIPA
Senator Grassley Issues Press Release in Support of PIPA	
Senator Hatch Issues Press Release in Support of PIPA	
5/23/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Blunt (R-MO)
5/25/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Alexander (R-TN)
5/26/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Rubio (R-FL)
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Gillibrand (D-NY)
	Senator Leahy Issues Press Release in Support of PIPA
	Senator Wyden places a Senate hold on PIPA
	Senate Judiciary committee votes to move PIPA forward
6/9/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Corker (R-TN)
6/15/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Boozman (R-AR)
6/22/2011	Hearing on PIPA by Senate Committee on the Judiciary
6/23/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Cochran (R-MS)
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Moran (R-KS)
6/27/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Ayotte (R-NH)
	PIPA Co-Sponsor Withdraws: Moran (R-KS)
6/30/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Shaheen (D-NH)
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Durbin (D-IL)
7/5/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Hagan (D-NC)
7/7/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Udall (D-NM)
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Lieberman (I-CT)
7/11/2011	Senator Durbin issues letter to constituent in support of PIPA
7/13/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Cardin (D-MD)
7/22/2011	Report filed by Senate Committee on the Judiciary

7/25/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Bennet (D-CO)
7/26/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: McCain (R-AZ)
9/7/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Casey, Jr. (D-PA)
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Enzi (R-WY)
9/23/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Nelson (D-FL)
10/3/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Johnson (D-SD)
10/17/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Landrieu (D-LA)
10/19/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Bingaman (D-NM)
10/20/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Brown (D-OH)
10/26/2011	SOPA is Introduced
	SOPA is referred to the House Committee on the Judiciary
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Conyers, Jr. (D-MI)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Schiff (D-CA)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Terry (R-NE)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Bono Mack (R-CA)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Blackburn (R-TN)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Ross (R-FL)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Chabot (R-OH)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Deutch (D-FL)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Gallegly (R-CA)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Griffin (R-AR)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Berman (D-CA)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Goodlatte (R-VA)
10/27/2011	Rep. Watt Issues Press Release in Support of SOPA
	Rep. Goodlatte Issues Press Release in Support of SOPA
10/31/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Menendez (D-NJ)
11/2/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Isakson (R-GA)
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Chambliss (R-GA)
	SOPA is referred to the Subcommittee on Intellectual Property, Competition and the Internet.
11/3/2011	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Nunnelee (R-MS)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Marino (R-PA)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Amodei (R-NV)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: King (R-NY)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Wasserman Schultz (D-FL)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Bass (D-CA)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Carter (R-TX)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Watt (D-NC)
	Senator Hutchison issues letter to constituent regarding PIPA (Neutral)
11/4/2011	Rep. Sarbanes issues letter to constituent regarding SOPA (Neutral)
11/7/2011	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Vitter (R-LA)
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Risch (R-ID)
11/14/2011	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Owens (D-NY)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Lujan (D-NM)

	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Scalise (R-LA)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Barrow (D-GA)
	Rep. Lofgren speaks out in opposition of SOPA during interview
11/15/2011	Senator Mikulski issues letter to constituent regarding PIPA (Neutral)
11/16/2011	Senator Wyden issues press release in opposition of PIPA
	Hearing held on SOPA by the House Committee on the Judiciary
11/17/2011	11 Representatives sign letter opposing SOPA to Judiciary Committee leadership
	Rep. Ellison tweets opposition to SOPA and PIPA
	Rep. Stark issues letter to constituent opposing SOPA
	Rep. Pelosi tweets opposition to SOPA
	Rep. Pelosi gives statement to The Wrap opposing SOPA
	Rep. Issa gives statement to The Wrap opposing SOPA
11/18/2011	Senator Nelson issues letter to constituent regarding PIPA (Neutral)
11/21/2011	Rep. Hahn issues letter to constituent regarding SOPA (Neutral)
11/28/2011	Rep. Schakowsky issues letter to constituent regarding SOPA (Neutral)
11/30/2011	Rep. Rehberg issues letter to constituent regarding SOPA and PIPA (Neutral)
	Rep. Inslee issues letter to constituent regarding SOPA (Neutral)
	Rep. Issa gives quote to Politico opposing SOPA
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Chu (D-CA)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Holden (D-PA)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Larson (D-CT)
12/1/2011	Rep. Smith Op-ed in National Review in support of SOPA
12/2/2011	Rep. Polis issues press release in opposition of SOPA
	Rep. Lofgren issues press release in opposition of SOPA
	Rep. Eshoo issues press release in opposition of SOPA
	Anti-SOPA/PIPA coalition drafts an alternative to SOPA/PIPA (OPEN Act)
12/7/2011	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Sherman (D-CA)
	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Baca (D-CA)
	Rep. Chaffetz opposes SOPA in YouTube Statement for KeepTheWebOpen.com
12/12/2011	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Cooper (D-TN)
	New PIPA Co-Sponsor: Boxer (D-CA)
	Senator Boxer issues statement to Hollywood Reporter supporting PIPA
	Rep. Schock issues statement to blogger Adam Bockler in opposition of SOPA
	Rep. Gingrey issues letter to constituent in support of SOPA
12/13/2011	New SOPA Co-Sponsor: Quayle (R-AZ)
12/14/2011	(SOPA) Subcommittee on Intellectual Property, Competition and the Internet is discharged.
	Rep. Smith Op-ed in The Hill supporting SOPA and PIPA
	Rep. Blackburn Op-ed in Roll Call supporting SOPA and PIPA
	Senator Watt gives quote to Huffington Post in support of PIPA
	Senator Lieberman gives quote to Huffington Post in support of PIPA
	Senator Feinstein gives quote to Huffington Post in support of PIPA
	Senator Wyden gives quote to Wired in opposition of PIPA
	Senator Paul creates <a href="http://dontcensorthenet.com">http://dontcensorthenet.com</a> and "Kill SOPA" online petition

12/15/2011	SOPA Hearing held by the House Subcommittee on Insurance, Housing and Community Opportunity.
	SOPA Markup held by House Committee on the Judiciary
	Rep. Chaffetz tweets opposition to SOPA
	Rep. Moran tweets opposition to SOPA
	Rep. Jackson-Lee makes statement during House Judiciary committee markup of SOPA opposing SOPA
	Rep. Deutch makes statement during House Judiciary committee markup of SOPA in support of SOPA
	Rep. Smith makes statement during House Judiciary committee markup of SOPA in support of SOPA
	Rep. Chu gives quote to SCPR in support of SOPA
12/16/2011	SOPA Markup held by House Committee on the Judiciary
	Rep. Chaffetz makes Statement during House Judiciary committee markup of SOPA in opposition of SOPA
	Rep. Sensenbrenner states opposition to SOPA
	Senator Franken issues letter to constituent in support of PIPA
	Senator McCain issues letter to constituent in support of PIPA
12/17/2011	Senator Reid Motions for a cloture vote to proceed on a full vote for PIPA
	SOPA Co-Sponsor Withdraws: Quayle (R-AZ)
	Senator Wyden Introduces the OPEN Act S.2029 in opposition to PIPA
	Senator Wyden issues Statement to Senate session reaffirming opposition to PIPA
	New OPEN Act Co-Sponsor: Cantwell (WA)
	New OPEN Act Co-Sponsor: Moran (KS)
	Senator Cantwell issues press release opposing PIPA
	Senator Leahy issues press release in support of PIPA
12/19/2011	Senator Moran issues press release in opposition of SOPA and PIPA
12/20/2011	Rep. Thornberry responds to constituent in video chat regarding SOPA (Neutral)
12/21/2011	New OPEN Act Supporter: Farenthold (TX)
12/23/2011	Senator Paul issues letter to constituent in opposition of PIPA
12/28/2011	Rep. Paul gives speech during campaign rally in Des Moines opposing SOPA and PIPA
12/29/2011	Rep. Smith issues letter to Politico reaffirming support for SOPA and PIPA
	Rep. Amash states opposition to SOPA on Facebook
1/2/2012	Rep. Emerson posts a neutral tweet about SOPA
1/3/2012	Rep. Larson reaffirms support for SOPA
1/4/2012	Rep. LaTourette issues neutral letter to constituent regarding SOPA
1/6/2012	Rep. Langevin issues statement to Politico in opposition of SOPA
1/9/2012	Senator Kohl issues letter to constituent in support of PIPA
	Rep. Ryan issues press release in opposition of SOPA
	Senator Lee issues press release in opposition of PIPA
	Rep. Issa issues announcement in opposition of SOPA
1/11/2012	Rep. Westmoreland issues letter to constituent in opposition of SOPA
	Rep. Polis issues letter to Riot Games CEO in opposition of SOPA
1/12/2012	Rep. Farr issues letter to constituent regarding SOPA (Neutral)
	Senator Murray issues letter to constituent regarding PIPA (Neutral)

	Rep. McCollum issues letter to constituent in opposition of SOPA
	Senator Feinstein issues letter to constituent in support of PIPA
	Rep. Himes tweets opposition to SOPA
	Rep. Issa and Senator Wyden promote OPEN Act as alternative to SOPA and PIPA
1/13/2012	Rep. Smith Announces that DNS blocking will be removed from SOPA
	Senator Cardin issues press release in opposition of SOPA and PIPA
	6 Senators Co-signed letter to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid urging a delay in cloture vote
	Senator Toomey opposes PIPA in interview
1/14/2012	Senator Udall issues press release opposes PIPA
1/15/2012	Senator Reid supports PIPA in interview
	Rep. Issa postpones technical hearing on DNS blocking issue
	Rep. Griffith gives quote to Roanoke Times regarding his stance on SOPA (Neutral)
1/17/2012	PIPA Co-Sponsor Withdraws: Quayle (R-AZ)
	Rep. Ellison tweets opposition to SOPA again
	Senator Grassley supports PIPA in interview
	Rep. Guinta states reservations about SOPA
	Rep. Smith Announces SOPA markup is expected to resume
	Rep. Lowey issues letter to constituent regarding SOPA (Neutral)
	Senator Lautenberg letter to constituent regarding PIPA (Neutral)
	Senator Brown posts opposition to SOPA and PIPA on Facebook
	Rep. Schiff gives quote to Politico supporting SOPA
	Rep. Honda gives quote to Politico opposing SOPA
	Rep. Pelosi gives quote to Politico regarding SOPA (Neutral)
	Rep. Lewis gives quote to Politico regarding SOPA (Neutral)
	Rep. Lungren gives quote to Politico regarding SOPA (Neutral)
	Rep. Speier states intention to co-sponsor OPEN Act as alternative to SOPA
	Rep. Courtney issues press release opposing SOPA
	Senator Bennet posts opposition to PIPA on Facebook
	Rep. McDermott posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook
	Rep. Ryan posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook
	Rep. Hanabusa gives quote to CivilBeat stating concerns about SOPA
	Senator Menendez posts on Facebook regarding PIPA (Neutral)
1/18/2012	SOPA Co-Sponsor Withdraws: Terry (R-NE)
	SOPA Co-Sponsor Withdraws: Holden (D-PA)
	Rep. Flake posts opposition SOPA on Facebook
	Rep. Yoder posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook
	Rep. Walsh tweets opposition to SOPA
	Rep. McCotter tweets opposition to SOPA
	Rep. Rogers posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook
	Rep. Marchant posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook
	Rep. Pingree posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook
	Rep. Braley issues press release opposing SOPA
	Rep. Gosar tweets opposition to SOPA

Senator Inhofe posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. Grijalva posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. Clarke tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. Coffman states opposition to SOPA

Rep. Cravaack posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. Kline states opposition to SOPA

Rep. Paulsen posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. Walz posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Senator Murkowski tweets opposition to PIPA

Rep. Southerland tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. Tsongas tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. McNerney states opposition to SOPA

Rep. Biggert states opposition to SOPA

Rep. Johnson states opposition to PIPA and SOPA

Rep. Manzullo posts opposition to SOPA

Rep. Thornberry posts opposition to SOPA

Rep. Heinrich posts opposition to SOPA

Rep. Turner tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. Israel tweets opposition to SOPA

Senator DeMint posts opposition to SOPA and PIPA on Facebook

Rep. Graves posts opposition to SOPA and PIPA on Facebook

Rep. Connolly posts opposition to SOPA and PIPA on Facebook

Senator Rubio posts opposition to PIPA on Facebook

Senator Hatch tweets opposition to PIPA

Rep. Holt tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. Miller issues press release reaffirming opposition to SOPA

Rep. Moran tweets opposition to SOPA

Senator Lautenberg posts statement on Facebook regarding PIPA (Neutral)

Senator Collins posts statement on Facebook regarding PIPA (Neutral)

Senator Akaka posts statement on Facebook regarding PIPA (Neutral)

Rep. Latta issues press release in opposition of SOPA and PIPA

Rep. Quigley issues press release regarding SOPA (Neutral)

Rep. Michaud tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. Latham tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. Gardner tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. Rascrell Jr. posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. Schrader issues press release in opposition of SOPA

Rep. Fortenberry tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. Smith issues press release in opposition to SOPA and PIPA

Rep. Nugent issues press release in opposition to SOPA

Rep. Blumenauer joins anti-SOPA Internet blackout

Senator Sessions opposes PIPA in Email to ProPublica

Senator Merkley tweets opposition to SOPA and PIPA

Senator Boozman posts opposition to PIPA and withdraws sponsorship on Facebook

Senator Kirk issues press release in opposition of PIPA

Rep. Schakowsky tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. Hultgren tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. Baldwin issues press release in opposition to SOPA

Rep. Price issues press release in opposition to SOPA

Rep. Yarmuth tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. Lee tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. Lewis tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. Kinzinger posts opposition to SOPA and PIPA on Facebook

Senator Holden posts opposition to PIPA and withdraws co-sponsorship on Facebook

Rep. Stutzman posts on Facebook regarding SOPA (Neutral)

Rep. Napolitano posts on Facebook regarding SOPA (Neutral)

Rep. DeFazio posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. Matheson issues press release in opposition to SOPA

Senator Begich posts opposition to PIPA on Facebook

Rep. Akin tweets opposition to SOPA

Senator McCaskill issues statement regarding PIPA (Neutral)

Rep. Degette posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Senator Cornyn issues press release in opposition of PIPA

Rep. Noem tweets regarding SOPA (Neutral)

Rep. Smith gives the New York Times a quote in support of SOPA

Senator Johanns opposes PIPA in interview

Senator Nelson speaks regarding SOPA in interview (Neutral)

Rep. Smith speaks regarding SOPA in interview (Neutral)

Senator Blunt issues press release opposing PIPA and withdrawal of co-sponsorship

Senator Ayotte posts opposition to PIPA on Facebook and withdrawal of co-sponsorship

Senator Vitter gives quote supporting PIPA to New Orleans Times

Senator Landrieu gives quote supporting PIPA to New Orleans Times

Senator Vitter posts opposition to PIPA and SOPA on Facebook

Rep. Bishop issues press release in opposition of SOPA

Rep. Sullivan posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. Capuano posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. McGovern posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. Flores posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. Olver posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. Bishop issues press release in opposition of SOPA

Rep. Labrador issues press release in opposition of SOPA

Rep. Dold issues press release in opposition of SOPA

Rep. Rokita posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. Dent issues press release in opposition of SOPA

Rep. Lance issues press release in opposition of SOPA

Rep. Scott posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. McHenry tweets opposition of SOPA

Rep. Shimkus tweets opposition of SOPA



Rep. Schilling tweets opposition of SOPA

Rep. Renacci posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. LoBiondo tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. Sarbanes issues press release in opposition of SOPA

Senator Lieberman reaffirms support for PIPA

Senator Blumenthal speaks regarding PIPA (Neutral)

Rep. Slaughter issues press release in opposition of SOPA

Rep. Dicks tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. Scott tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. Duncan tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. Broun issues press release in opposition of SOPA

Rep. Jones tweets opposition to SOPA and PIPA

Rep. Jenkins posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. Higgins issues press release in opposition of SOPA

Rep. Andrews tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. McCollum issues press release in opposition of SOPA

Rep. Alexander issues press release in opposition of SOPA

Rep. DesJarlais issues press release in opposition of SOPA

Rep. Lamborn posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. Frelinghuysen issues press release in opposition of SOPA

Rep. Gibson posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. Rothman issues press release in opposition of SOPA

Rep. Huelskamp issues statement in opposition of SOPA and PIPA

Senator Roberts tweets opposition to PIPA and SOPA

Senator Toomey issues press release in opposition of PIPA

Senator Udall tweets opposition of SOPA and PIPA

Rep. Pompeo tweets opposition of SOPA

Rep. Crawford issues press release in opposition of SOPA

Rep. Stivers tweets opposition to SOPA

Rep. Lankford posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. Graves posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

Rep. Scalise posts opposition to SOPA and withdrawal of co-sponsorship on Facebook

Rep. Griffin issues press release in opposition of SOPA and announcing withdrawal of co-sponsorship

Rep. Larsen posts opposition to SOPA and PIPA on Facebook

Senator Pryor issues press release in opposition of PIPA

Senator Bachus posts opposition to SOPA and PIPA on Facebook

Senator Chambliss issues press release explaining and supporting co-sponsorship of PIPA

Rep. Womack posts regarding SOPA on Facebook (Neutral)

Senator Udall posts regarding SOPA on Facebook (Neutral)

Senator Grassley issues press release in opposition of PIPA

Rep. Ross tweets opposition to SOPA

Senator Murray tweets regarding SOPA and PIPA (Neutral)

Rep. Landry tweets opposition to SOPA



1/19/2012

Rep. Murphy tweets opposition to SOPA and PIPA  
Rep. Meehan tweets regarding SOPA (Neutral)  
Rep. Bass issues press release in opposition of SOPA  
Rep. Cuellar posts opposition to SOPA  
Rep. Reyes issues press release in opposition of SOPA  
Senator Lee issues press release in opposition of PIPA  
Rep. Himes posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook  
Rep. Price gives quote to Reuters in opposition of SOPA  
Rep. Boehner gives quote to Reuters regarding SOPA (Neutral)  
Rep. Grimm issues statement in opposition of SOPA  
Rep. Gerlach issues press release regarding SOPA (Neutral)  
Rep. Gerlach tweets regarding SOAP (Neutral)  
Senator Sanders gives quote to Burlington Free Press in opposition of SOPA  
Rep. Welch gives quote to Burlington Free Press in opposition of SOPA  
Rep. Calvert issues press release in opposition to SOPA and PIPA  
Rep. Meehan issues statement regarding SOPA (Neutral)  
Rep. Kildee posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook  
Rep. Duncan Jr. issues letter to constituent regarding SOPA (Neutral)  
Rep. Cicilline issues statement opposing SOPA  
Rep. Tonko issues statement opposing SOPA  
Rep. Chu posts support for SOPA on Facebook  
Rep. Schweikert posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook  
Rep. Inouye retweeted article regarding SOPA (Neutral)  
Rep. McKeon posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook  
Rep. Rivera issues statement opposing SOPA  
Rep. Guinta states issues video response in opposition of SOPA  
Senator Burr issues statement in opposition of SOPA  
Rep. Forbes issues statement regarding SOPA (Neutral)  
Rep. Denham posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook  
Senator Bennet tweets opposition to PIPA  
Rep. Capps tweets opposition to SOPA  
Rep. Blackburn posts opposition to SOPA  
Rep. Poe issues email to constituent regarding SOPA (Neutral)  
Rep. Engel issues email to constituent in opposition of SOPA  
Rep. Bono Mack issues statement regarding SOPA (Neutral)  
Rep. Miller issues press release reaffirming opposition to SOPA  
Senator Bennet posts opposition to SOPA and PIPA on Facebook  
Rep. Altmire tweets opposition to SOPA  
Rep. Johnson tweets opposition to SOPA  
Rep. DeLauro issues statement in opposition to SOPA  
Rep. Roskam issues statement in opposition to SOPA  
Senator Graham issues statement in support of PIPA  
Rep. Benishek issues statement in opposition of SOPA  
Rep. Levin posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook

	Rep. Schwartz issues letter to constituent in opposition to SOPA
	Senator McCaskill tweets opposition to PIPA
	Senator Udall tweets victory over reported PIPA procedural setback
	Rep. Culberson tweets opposition to SOPA
	Rep. Lankford issues letter to constituent regarding SOPA (Neutral)
	Senator Brown issues letter to constituent regarding SOPA (Neutral)
	Rep. Carter posts opposition to SOPA and announces withdrawal of co-sponsorship on Facebook
	Rep. Carson issues statement in opposition of SOPA
	Rep. Hergert posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook
	Rep. Woodall issues statement in opposition of SOPA
1/20/2012	Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid announced that PIPA would be postponed indefinitely
	House Judiciary Committee Chairman, Lamar Smith, announces that SOPA will be postponed
	Senator Schumer issues letter to constituent regarding PIPA (Neutral)
	Rep. Tiberi issues letter to constituent in opposition of SOPA
	Senator Mikulski issues letter to constituent in opposition of SOPA
	Rep. Keating posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook
	Rep. McKeon issues statement in opposition of SOPA
	Rep. Poe issues statement to constituent in opposition of SOPA
	Senator Franken issues blog post in support of PIPA
	Senator Menendez discusses PIPA in radio interview (Neutral)
	Senator Leahy issues statement in support of PIPA in reaction to the postponement of the vote on cloture
	Senator Menendez issues statement in opposition to PIPA
	Senator Chambliss issues statement withdrawing co-sponsorship of PIPA
	Senator Reid issues statement regarding PIPA postponement (Neutral)
	Rep. Maloney posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook
	Rep. Buchanan issues statement in opposition of SOPA
	Senator Wyden gives quote to the New York Times in opposition of PIPA
	Senator Gillibrand posts opposition to SOPA and PIPA on Facebook
1/21/2012	Rep. Lujan posts opposition to SOPA on Facebook
1/23/2012	SOPA Co-Sponsor Withdraws: Scalise (R-LA)
	SOPA Co-Sponsor Withdraws: Lujan (D-NM)
	SOPA Co-Sponsor Withdraws: Griffin (R-AR)
	SOPA Co-Sponsor Withdraws: Ross (R-FL)
	Rep. Black issues letter to constituent in opposition of SOPA
1/24/2012	SOPA Co-Sponsor Withdraws: Carter (R-TX)
	Senator Hutchison issues letter to constituent in support of the decision to withdraw PIPA